The Impact of Ability Grouping on Academic Achievement in Elementary Reading

Kristi Bissell

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THE IMPACT OF ABILITY GROUPING ON ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT IN ELEMENTARY READING

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to all the educators who tirelessly strive to motivate and move their students. I would like to acknowledge the Forever Fourth Grade Team for not only being the best educators each and every day for your students, but for being strong supporters and encouragers of this endeavor. You have always been there to push me along. To Dr. Serianni for opening my eyes to education and the art of challenging areas in need of change. You teach your students to be that change, that potential is limitless, and to not be afraid of stirring the pot to elicit change. To my grandmother, although not here physically, I know how incredibly proud you are.

I would also like to dedicate this dissertation to my family. Dear Mom, Dad, and Mandy, thank you for not only being the first ones to believe in me and my ideas, but for being my biggest fans and supporters since day one (literally). You have never allowed me to give up or to stop learning. This dissertation reflects the values you have instilled in me and who you have taught me to be. To the Holland family for always being encouraging and understanding of my time spent on the computer. To Christopher who regularly ensured I was making A’s in my classes and couldn’t wait for the day to call me Dr. Bissell. And lastly, I would like to thank Bracey for making this dissertation grow from a dream to a reality.
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Lisa and Michelle have made this adventure possible. ‘Thank you’ isn’t saying enough for the constant support you’ve been throughout this journey. You have been soundboards and encouragers during this endeavor. This dissertation would not be a reality without your frequent help in finding the perfect wording, providing clarity during moments of fumbling, and for being classmates who grew into friends.

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ABSTRACT

This action research study describes the impact of ability grouping on fifth-grade students’ academic achievement in reading. The theoretical framework that supported this study is embedded in cooperative learning, social learning, social interdependence, and self-efficacy. This study used a mixed methods design to consider the following research questions: “How does ability grouping and the use of i-Ready learning system impact students’ academic achievement in reading in a fifth-grade classroom?” The study also examined the impact that reading had on students’ confidence through a second research question: “What is the impact of ability grouping as it relates to students’ reading confidence?” A third research question was examined to understand the impact of reading had on students’ confidence: “What is the impact of ability grouping as it relates to students’ attitudes toward working in reading groups?” The participants of this study included a class of 27 students. Data was collected through pre-and post-questionnaires, student focus interviews, and i-Ready diagnostic scores.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

As students returned to schools during the COVID-19 pandemic, classrooms experienced significant changes in daily operations. Students and teachers were expected to practice social distancing. Therefore, the method of learning that students and teachers had grown to depend on was no longer an acceptable form of teaching practice. A new challenge was presented to educators across America: how to best teach students while fostering understanding and comprehension in a whole group setting? Until the onset of COVID-19 influenced reading settings, reading curriculums such as Balanced Literacy required the daily implementation of small group instruction. However, school districts in Georgia halted the use of small group instruction as students returned to in-person learning. In classrooms comprised of Gifted, English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), and students served through Early Intervention Programs (EIP), reading instruction was no longer tailored to the needs of specialized learning groups. Consequently, reading instruction was taught as whole group instruction with differentiation absent from instruction.

Before COVID’s changes to the reading classroom, small group instruction was a daily practice and deemed a best practice (Smith et al., 2022). Small groups were formed based on the two most common grouping practices: heterogeneous and homogeneous grouping. Ability grouping, also referred to as homogeneous grouping, or within-class ability grouping, is an increasingly common practice implemented in reading classes and
has been used widely across the field of education for decades (Patrick, 2020). In any
given classroom, it is the norm to see reading groups comprised of students with similar
academic ability working together on new or previously learned concepts (Loveless,
2013). Kulik and Kulik (1982) described ability grouping as combining children in
classrooms with similar abilities.

Historically, teachers have grouped students into reading groups based on reading
levels determined by assessments, standardized test scores, and at the teacher’s discretion
(Schumm et al., 2000). The purpose of reading groups is to tailor instruction to meet the
learning needs and to build on the student’s strengths with the desired outcome of
narrowing the learning gap (Ardasheva et al., 2019). Small group instruction allows the
teacher to individualize instruction, provide support and feedback, accelerate student
learning, and promote social interactions among students (Conradi et al., 2022).

Statement of the Problem of Practice

Reading is the foundation of all academic subjects (Liew et al., 2020). Ability
grouping allows instruction to be better adjusted for students’ needs (Becker et al., 2014).
Data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress reported that as of 2019,
only 35% of fourth grade students were reading at a proficient level or higher and leaving
34% of students reading at a below basic level (Hindman et al., 2020). In 2022, The
Nation’s Report Card, published by the National Assessment of Educational Progress,
reported that reading scores for fourth-grade students across thirty states showed a three-
point decrease since 2019. However, more concerning was that the data unveiled that on
average, in 2022, fourth graders performed lower in reading than in previous years dating
Small group instruction, in this context, is considered to be time dedicated to providing effective reading interventions to students, in groups comprised of three to five students, reading below grade level. During small group instruction, teachers can reteach skills that have not been mastered, and students can receive scaffolded instruction that allows the learner to access the academic content on their learning level. Students learn from one another through alternative explanations offered by peers or mimicking strategies they witness (Pollock et al., 2011). Small group instruction allows students the ability to utilize peer collaboration to construct meaning, increase skill application, and integrate skills and content (Kim et al., 2016).

In December 2022, fifth-grade students in the participating elementary school were given the i-Ready middle of the year reading diagnostic. The diagnostic data placed most of the students reading below a fifth grade reading level. The Problem of Practice arises from the lack of adequate academic support to ensure that students needing reading remediation can receive the level of intervention needed. At the participating school, most students are reading at least two grade levels behind based on i-Ready diagnostic data. This data demonstrated a need for more effective reading intervention for students below grade level. To increase the reading levels of those students reading below grade level, the researcher examined the impact of ability grouping on academic achievement in a fifth grade reading class.

**Research Question**

Given the need for reading support, the following action research questions were designed to guide this study.
RQ 1: How does ability grouping and the use of the i-Ready learning system impact students’ academic achievement in reading in a fifth-grade classroom?

RQ 2: What is the impact of ability grouping as it relates to students’ reading confidence in a fifth-grade classroom?

RQ 3: What is the impact of ability grouping as it relates to students’ attitudes toward working in reading groups in a fifth-grade classroom?

Theoretical Framework

The theories undergirding this action research study include cooperative learning, social learning, and social interdependence. Cooperative learning exists when shared learning goals are accomplished by students working together (Johnson et al., 2000). Cooperative learning is a commonly used teaching practice implemented to promote student socialization (Gilles, 2007). Research has found increases in academic achievement, self-esteem, and student relations between different races through implementing cooperative learning in the classroom (Slavin, 1987).

Vygotsky’s theory stated that mastery of concepts and skills are achieved through peer interactions (Slavin, 1987). In a classroom setting, cooperative learning is often seen implemented through students working in partners or groups where information is being discovered and shared through application and through team activities that require a group of students to work together to achieve a common goal (Baneng, 2020). Additionally, Gilles (2007) concluded that students’ ability to work with others cooperatively and productively is enhanced through the implementation of cooperative learning.
The second theoretical framework that supports this body of research is Bandura’s social learning theory. Social learning theory describes how cognitive and social interactions impact behavior and development (Grusec, 1992). Bandura’s belief is that during learning, human behavior is influenced by three constructs: personal factors and cognitive ability, behavior, and environment (McGregor, 2009). Moreover, Bandura’s belief is that people can attain goals through intentional thoughts and actions (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2019). Based on Bandura’s theory, people only display learned information if the conditions are favorable and desired outcomes can be taught through modeled behavior (Rosenthal & Zimmerman, 1978).

Thirdly, Johnson and Johnson’s social interdependence theory is instrumental in this study. Prior to the popularity of social interdependence, theorists embraced the idea of individualistic learning: students move through a curriculum at their own pace without peer interactions (Johnson & Johnson, 2009). However, researchers found that members of a group gain interdependence when they work with members in a group (Frykedal & Chiriac, 2018). Social interdependence occurs when an individual’s outcomes are impacted by their actions and the actions of others (Johnson & Johnson, 2009).

The theory states that when working in a group, individuals will feel more accountable for contributing their part of the work to enhance the group’s probability of achieving the group’s goal (Frykedal & Chiriac, 2018). Johnson and Johnson (2005) expressed that changes to any group member will ultimately impact the entire group’s success. Social interdependence exists in ability grouping as student’s success is affected by each other’s actions within a group (Johnson & Johnson, 2005).
Lastly, Bandura’s Self-Efficacy theory explores the degree of persistency a person will exert in difficult situations (Bandura, 1977). It is the belief a person has about their capability to determine and achieve goals, change behaviors, and attain the level of mastery when faced with adversity (Maddux, 1995). The theory examines one’s ability to adjust, adapt, and problem solve when problems or difficult situations arise (Maddux, 1995). Hickman and Sherman (2019) described self-efficacy as an individual’s control over their ability to make a conscious effort to work hard and overcome obstacles or to rely on past experiences in their environment and follow the belief that some obstacles are too difficult to defeat.

**Overview of Methodology**

Action research is research that seeks to involve participants in the process of solving a practical problem (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Teacher action research is implemented to improve the teacher-researcher’s practices and become a reflective practitioner (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Action research allows teachers to engage in their study while also developing theories from their practice (Costello, 2011). The current research study utilizes a mixed-methods research design. Mixed-methods research is used to understand research problems by integrating quantitative and qualitative data (Creswell, 2015). A mixed-methods research design provides a whole understanding of a research problem as opposed to a single-method approach (Guest & Fleming, 2015). The study’s quantitative component comprised students’ middle of year and end of year i-Ready diagnostic scores. The study’s qualitative component comprised pre- and post-questionnaires and student-focus surveys.
This action research examined the impact of ability grouping on student achievement through a mixed methods research design in a fifth grade reading classroom located at Reading School K-8 in Savannah, Georgia. The participant selection was based on the researcher being the teacher of record for the fifth-grade class. During the 2019-2020 school year, students at Reading School K-8 attended school virtually with the option to attend via a hybrid model consisting of two days on campus and attend three days virtually. During the 2021-2022 school year, all students were required to attend in-person learning at the Reading School K-8 school building. Many students in the fifth-grade class during the 2022-2023 school year had yet to fully experience a traditional classroom setting since their second-grade year.

As researchers seek to initiate social action or change within the community, a mixed-methods research design is appropriate because a mixed methods research design incorporates quantitative and qualitative data within a single project (Leavy, 2017). In a mixed-methods research study, the qualitative data influences the quantitative data and vice versa allowing for a comprehensive view of the findings (Leavy, 2017). Qualitative research with humans involves making connections and understanding how connections can add or deepen meaning across multiple areas (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015). The qualitative aspect of this study included student questionnaires and focus interviews. The pre- and post-questionnaires were administered to the 27 student participants and designed to gather information on the overall attitudes of students regarding reading and working in reading groups. The focus interviews gathered information from six students in six different reading groups and focused questions on the attitudes and feelings toward reading and working in groups. A qualitative aspect is essential to this study to gather
information regarding how students feel about reading and their views and attitudes toward working in reading groups with their peers.

Creswell and Creswell (2018) described quantitative research as a measuring variable collected from an instrument. In this case, the quantitative aspect of this study stems from the i-Ready reading instrument. The middle of the year i-Ready diagnostic scores were used for placing students into homogeneous reading groups for the duration of the study. Scores from the middle and end of the year diagnostics were collected and analyzed to measure each student’s academic growth. The amount of quantitative and qualitative information each research method provides is limited. However, combining quantitative and qualitative data allows for a mixed methods research study to provide a more holistic overview of how students view reading and how students perform in reading.

Positionality

Understanding a researcher’s position is informative in all areas of research (Herr & Anderson, 2015). An action researcher’s goal is to improve their practice and grow as a professional by understanding their students and the problems facing education (Efron & Ravid, 2020). Herr and Anderson (2015) described an insider as a researcher studying “their own practice or practice setting” (p. 41). As the participants’ reading teacher for the 2021-2022 school year, I served as an insider in this action research study. I have nine years of experience in teaching reading and am certified to teach reading through an added reading endorsement. Additionally, I have spent four years teaching special education and learning instructional practices to teach students with reading disabilities.
As an insider, I carry the bias that I am invested in student achievement growth in reading, as achievement growth is used as an indicator of job performance on the end of the school-year evaluations. I also carry the bias of excelling in reading throughout my school career. Therefore, I share different experiences with students who are performing below grade level reading standards or students who have low reading motivation. As a researcher, I my experiences in reading courses varies significantly from my student participants’ reading experiences.

**Significance of the Study**

This study explored the impacts of homogeneous reading groups on reading achievement in a fifth-grade classroom. Through research, the implementation of this study seeks to debunk the idea that homogeneous grouping is a way to create social inequalities and widen the achievement gap for students (Buttarro & Catsambis, 2019). The beginning of the year i-Ready diagnostic reports indicated that several students were reading one to two grade levels below a fifth grade reading level. Within the participating school, it has been noted that as fifth-grade students prepare to transition to middle school with reading gaps, they risk widening the achievement gap as content grows in difficulty.

The most effective approach to reading instruction continues to be an ongoing debate. Through studies, researchers have found that learning is considerably higher when students are taught communication skills and group work strategies, (Frykedal & Chiriac, 2018). When students collaborate in reading, academic achievement and reading motivation is positively impacted (Kim et al., 2016). Peer collaboration allows students to witness the struggles that other students face; thus, students can relate to one another and feel supported (Kim et al., 2016).
Ability grouping has faced much criticism with claims that ability grouping is not equitable and can become a form of within-class segregation (von Hippel & Canedo, 2021). Bracha and Bechar (2008) have claimed that there is a correlation between students in low level groups and minority students from low-income families. Furthermore, the researchers stated that students placed in lower-level learning groups often face difficulty with social and personal development.

Buttarro and Catsambis (2019) countered the argument. They stated that ability grouping is the best response for teaching students on varied learning levels because ability grouping affords teachers the ability to customize instruction and pacing based on the needs of the students (Buttarro & Catsambis, 2009). McGillicuddy and Devine (2020) cited ability grouping as restrictive to students’ development and a culprit for stifled self-esteem and widened achievement gaps. Bradbury et al. (2021) debunked the notion that ability grouping is detrimental to students’ self-esteem and academic achievement, stating that implementing small groups contributes to filling students’ academic voids, thus increasing academic achievement.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, students no longer engaged in learning through peer collaborations. Instead, students adapted to an asynchronized learning model in which students became dependent on parents and teachers to assist with learning needs (Reimers, 2021). Reimers (2021) reported that the halt of traditional classroom learning led to schools introducing fixed cohorts. Students were assigned to fixed cohorts based on frequent interactions and restricted to who they could work with (Reimers, 2021). Researchers suggested that reading data shows students trending at roughly sixteen weeks
behind in learning loss due to pandemic-related school closures, remote learning, and changes made to classroom learning environments. (Molnar & Hermann, 2023).

In previous school years, the teacher-researcher witnessed the academic benefits of teaching reading through homogeneous reading groups, and the impact that increased reading achievement had on students’ confidence in the classroom. Once COVID-19 hindered teacher’s autonomy to group students by ability, the teacher-researcher witnessed stagnant learning growth in the classroom. The work within this study provides the foundation for improving the reading performance of fifth-grade students. With the information acquired through research, modified teaching practices have the potential to impact future reading scores on the i-Ready diagnostics.

**Limitations of Study**

The study’s limitations include the short period of time data was collected. The quantitative data collected through the middle and end of year i-Ready diagnostic was substantial. However, the qualitative data from the pre-and post-questionnaires was limited due to the number of questions on the student questionnaires. This contention may be attributed to the short six-week duration the study was conducted. If students had been given a pre-questionnaire at the beginning and the post-questionnaire at the end of the school year, the questionnaire responses may have shown more variance.

Student growth cannot be fully captured in six weeks. The reading growth students demonstrated from the beginning of the year to the middle of the year was substantial and impacted the reading confidence of students that may not be highlighted in questionnaire responses late in the school year. Questionnaires at the beginning,
middle, and end of the year could have shown a change in reading confidence and group preferences.

Lastly, it is important to note that the i-Ready learning system is not the sole instructional tool being implemented in the classroom. Therefore, i-Ready diagnostic scores are impacted by the lessons completed in the i-Ready learning system, and the daily instruction being delivered in the classroom. The learning that occurs throughout the school days significantly contributes to students’ acquired knowledge and ultimately impacts students’ i-Ready scores.

Summary

This dissertation in practice (DiP) includes five chapters focused on this research study examining the impact of ability grouping on reading achievement. Chapter One introduces the problem of practice and identifies challenges that could affect the questionnaire portion of the study. Chapter Two lays the foundation through the literature review relevant to this action research study. In Chapter Three, the rationale and implementation for the mixed methods research design are provided. The data and results of this action research are presented in Chapter Four. A review of the research findings and recommendations for practitioners concludes this dissertation in Chapter Five.

Definition of Terms

The terms below are defined and used in the study on the impact of ability grouping on student reading achievement.

Ability Grouping
Students are assigned to homogeneous instructional reading groups (Slavin, 1990).

Action Research
Practitioner research in which participants are involved in the process of solving a practical problem (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

**Cooperative Learning Theory**

A teaching strategy to promote learning and socialization (Gilles, 2007).

**Mixed-Methods Research Design**

Research in which the researcher gathers quantitative and qualitative data and uses information from both sets of data to approach a research problem (Creswell, 2015).

**Non-Ability Grouping**

Students are assigned to heterogeneous instructional reading groups (Slavin, 1990).

**Social Interdependence Theory**

When individual members collectively make up a whole group working towards a common goal (Johnson & Johnson, 1998).

**Social Learning Theory**

The notion that learning occurs through social interactions (Bandura, 1977).
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review evaluated the impact of ability grouping on the academic achievement of fifth-grade students. Ability grouping is a frequently practiced instructional strategy teachers use when assigning students to reading groups (Patrick, 2020). With the demands of increasing student reading achievement, proponents of homogeneous grouping have argued that differentiated instruction that addresses areas of weakness in reading can increase student reading achievement (McCoach et al., 2006).

Purpose of the Study

The study aimed to identify the impact of ability grouping in conjunction with the use of i-Ready learning assessment on student reading achievement. In a traditional, whole-group classroom setting, meeting student needs is challenging. Ability grouping allows students with similar academic deficits to receive content-specific support that is tailored to the specific needs of the students (Conradi et al., 2022). Liew et al. (2020) highlighted that reading is not a natural skill. Specifically for beginning readers, to become proficient in reading, motivation, and persistence are essential for building engagement in reading (Liew et al., 2020).

Hulme and Snowling (2015) expressed that while learning to read is the primary objective in early education, students who have difficulties learning to read may be faced
with lifelong consequences. Kim et al. (2016) explained that students who exhibit reading difficulties often have weak motivation that ultimately prevents the student from engaging in activities that could improve their reading skills. Protopapas et al. (2016) stated that children performing at a lower level in any given skill area will also perform at a lower level in content areas dependent on that skill. Furthermore, Protopapas et al. (2016) explained that compared to their peers, poor readers risk of a reduced rate of growth as reading skills continue to build. Researchers have sought to answer how students can be categorized as readers yet need help to process academic content (Feller et al., 2020). Feller et al. (2020) detailed that many students master the lower-level skills needed when learning how to read. However, students need to gain inferencing skills vital in text comprehension, making content-specific material more difficult to understand as academic rigor increases.

**Problem of Practice**

The identified problem of practice emerges from the ineffective strategies for providing a quality intervention for students reading below grade level. The problem of practice identified in this research examines the academic impact of homogeneously grouping students in a fifth grade reading class. In the fifth grade, students are more in tune and aware of their surroundings. They are at an age in which they can identify which students excel in some subjects and which students require additional support to access the content being delivered. Even further, the students understand how well they can understand the content. Research has found that when students are grouped heterogeneously, the results yield lower-achieving students, creating a learned dependency on higher-achieving students to be academically successful, thus leaving the
higher-achieving students frustrated (Wyman & Watson, 2020). However, the benefits of homogeneously grouped students include increased motivation, organization, social interactions, and self-esteem (Wyman & Watson, 2020).

**Research Question**

Given the need for reading support, the following action research questions were designed to guide this study.

RQ 1: How does ability grouping and the use of i-Ready learning system impact students’ academic achievement in reading in a fifth-grade classroom?

RQ 2: What is the impact of ability grouping as it relates to students’ reading confidence?

RQ 3: What is the impact of ability grouping as it relates to students’ attitudes toward working in reading groups?

**Purpose of the Literature Review**

The literature review discussed ability grouping and its impact on academic achievement in a fifth grade reading class. Additionally, the literature review evaluated the impact of reading achievement on students’ reading confidence and the student’s preference to work in reading groups. This chapter is outlined into the following sections: Literature Review Methodology, Theoretical Framework, Homogeneous Grouping, Research Offering an Alternative Perspective, The Importance of Learning to Read, How Reading Effects Learning, Reading Motivation, i-Ready Learning System, Related Research, and the Conclusion.

**Literature Review Methodology**

This action research study included student participants enrolled in a fifth-grade class at Reading School K-8 during the 2021-2022 academic school year. The students in
this study participated in pre- and post-questionnaires, student focus surveys, and i-Ready diagnostics at the middle and end of the academic school year. An inductive method was used to identify themes that emerged from student responses to the student focus survey questions. The literature review aimed to establish the theoretical framework, research grouping practices, define the importance of reading, and link related research. For the literature review, the researcher analyzed peer-reviewed journal articles, book chapters, dissertations, scholarly articles, and related websites. The researcher located articles through the University of South Carolina library online database and Google Scholar using an author and topic search.

**Theoretical Framework**

The Theoretical Frameworks for this study are embedded in Cooperative Learning Theory, Social Learning Theory, Social Interdependence Theory, and Self-Efficacy Theory. Cooperative Learning Theory can be defined as students working cooperatively in small groups to enhance their learning and the learning of others (Johnson & Johnson, 1993). Gillies (2007) described Cooperative Learning Theory as a teaching strategy used in all subject areas to promote learning and socialization among students ranging from kindergarten through college aged students. Slavin (1980) defined Cooperative Learning as a technique in which students are grouped together by their academic background to achieve a task within a learning group of peers. According to Slavin and Cooper (1999), cooperative learning is a commonly used practice highlighted for showing students’ academic, cognitive, and social benefits for students. Moreover, the literature emphasized that all students have differences such as race, gender, and learning styles, but cooperative learning shifts the focus away from individual differences and achieves the
structuring of positive interdependence (Yusnani, 2008). During social learning experiences, students are allowed to discuss material and share ideas with group members to solidify their mastery of material. Slavin and Cooper (1999) concluded that the benefits of cooperative learning groups include reducing racial stereotyping, discrimination, and prejudice among students and ultimately promoting friendships spanning across ethnic groups.

Cooperative Learning was essential to this study because this well-known teaching practice, used widely in classrooms across the country, has shown success in domains not limited to academic achievement but expanding to the whole child. Cowie and Berdondini (2001) explored the ability of students once identified as bullies to learn appropriate interpersonal skills for communication. Jenkins et al. (2003) reported that the cooperative learning model provided special and remedial education students with improved self-esteem, leading to students viewing their learning environment as a safe place and striving for academic achievement on classroom tasks.

Miller and Polito (1996) stated that the motivational perspective of Cooperative Learning Theory impacts achievement. When a group seeks to achieve a group goal, the importance of individual learning shifts to prioritizing the group’s learning, where the emphasis is placed on all members learning and helping each other achieve the common goal (Miller & Polito, 1996). Additionally, social cohesion, a theoretical perspective on Cooperative Learning Theory, suggests that student achievement is enhanced when students learn how to act and socialize through peer work (Miller & Polito, 1996).

Albert Bandura’s Social Learning Theory (SLT) is a theoretical foundation in education. Social Learning Theory is based on the notion that learning occurs during
social interactions with others (McGregor, 2009). Children learn how to behave and interact based on behaviors and interactions they witness with other children (McGregor, 2009). Bandura (1977) stated that modeled behavior is often learned and replicated. When children frequently witness behaviors, inevitably, children will mimic what they deem as the desirable behavior stemming from adult or teacher affirmation of approval. Bandura (1977) noted that behavior patterns are modified or changed through observations, ultimately resulted in newly formed behaviors.

The Social Learning Theory reiterates that students must be shown the behavior or outcome sought by the teacher for that behavior to be reproduced (McGregor, 2009). Consequently, when undesirable behaviors are displayed, students learn what behaviors to avoid based on the consequences witnessed. In peer groups, students model behavior and variations in thinking or completing tasks, which expands how students think and process material (Bandura, 1977).

Social Interdependence Theory states that the foundation of a group is rooted in the common goals of the group members and their ability to join and work together as a whole (Johnson & Johnson, 1998). As students work together, they learn the imperative concept of working together to attain a unified goal. Working with others to achieve a goal is a practice used not only in academics but also as a life skill. Students are often required to elaborate and express their ideas in the classroom. Students who avoid participating in class, are now held accountable for contributing to the group discussions. Conversely, for those quiet students who are unsure about the lesson content, group work offers a time for students to participate in academic conversations and seek understanding
of the material without drawing attention to themselves in class, thus boosting understanding and confidence (Johnson & Johnson, 2009).

Lastly, Bandura’s self-efficacy theory is the belief that a person’s ability to perform tasks is correlated with cognitive ability, achievement, motivation, self-worth, and the ability to choose activities (Seifert, 2004). Students learn from their experiences. When students have a negative experience in their learning, that negative experience shapes how they view that subject matter or even negatively impacts their view of academics in the future. Students who need more self-confidence will avoid tasks they have self-deemed out of reach and unattainable (Seifert, 2004). When a person’s self-perception of their ability is positive, they are more likely to engage in that activity.

When a task becomes difficult, and we find ourselves exerting more effort to complete the task, we may look for a way to avoid engaging in the undesirable activity (Bandura, 2006). It has become too common in classrooms today to hear a student provide the excuse that they are “bad at reading” or writing is “too hard” at any sign of difficulty. In human nature, when an undesirable stimulus elicits a negative response, the instinct is to avoid the undesirable stimulus (Bandura, 2006).

**Homogeneous Grouping**

Homogeneous grouping also referred to as within-class ability grouping, is described by Patrick (2020) as a method for grouping students based on reading performance and techniques used to target students’ learning. Measures such as benchmark assessments, reading inventories, and diagnostics are used to assess students’ reading levels (Patrick, 2020). For homogeneous groups to be an effective teaching practice, Patrick (2020) expressed that the groups should be small in numbers, and
student placement and needs should be frequently monitored and adjusted accordingly. Doubet (2022) described grouping students as an intentional placement to master specific academic content.

Ability grouping allows teachers to meet the learner’s needs through remediation or enrichment that can be achieved by adjusting learning outcomes, instructional activities, and pacing (Chorzempa & Graham, 2006). McCoach et al. (2006) explained that when students are grouped by their ability level, teachers can appropriately modify the academic content delivery and differentiate the curriculum to increase academic achievement. While the argument has been made that homogeneous grouping primarily addresses academic performance, research has shown that homogeneous grouping environments contribute to increased student motivation and promote participation in collaborative learning (Kim et al., 2006).

**Researchers Offering an Alternative Perspective**

Not all educators are in favor of homogeneous grouping. Ability grouping has been the cause of much debate. Researchers have argued that ability grouping fuels inequity, social injustice, and social disadvantage by providing students in lower groups with basic instruction yet providing students in higher groups with more complex lessons (Spina, 2019). Furthermore, Spina (2019) stated that schools in the United States are based on a social class system where schools in working-class neighborhoods demand less intellect from the students. Schools in more elite areas delve into conceptual and critical thinking, demands of the educational system missing in lower-achieving neighborhood schools.
Heterogeneous grouping is the method of grouping students who are of dissimilar learning levels (Murphy et al., 2017). Teachers utilize heterogeneous grouping under the notion that all learners are benefiting from the learning diversity of the group (Wyman & Watson, 2020). Research has stated that grouping students of varying abilities does not impact fast learners but can help slower learners (Rees et al., 2000). A drawback to heterogeneous grouping has been higher academically achieving students associating more with other higher academically achieving students. In contrast, lower academically achieving students reported feeling left out or behind in class (Tereshchenko et al., 2019). In heterogeneously grouped classrooms, researchers described that lower achieving students tend to favor this model because it eliminates the competitive nature and reduces the stress of the environment (Tereshchenko et al., 2019).

Hodgen et al. (2023) highlighted that historically, research has shown that minority students and students from low socio-economic backgrounds are disproportionately placed in low-achieving ability groups. Moreover, Caucasian students from higher socio-economic backgrounds are more likely to be placed in higher-achieving ability groups (Hodgen et al., 2023). Researchers argued that achievement gaps continue to widen when the grouping of students in low-ability groups versus high-ability groups becomes disproportionate (Hodgen et al., 2023). When students were surveyed about their class grouping, more frequently, lower-achieving students concluded that they preferred mixed-ability grouping practices, while middle to higher-achieving students preferred mixed-ability grouping (Tereshchenko et al., 2019). Tereshchenko et al. (2019) concluded that learning in a mixed-ability environment removes the competitive and stressful environment often evoked by high-achieving learners, provides equity among all
students, and helps lower-achieving students improve their academic achievement (p. 427).

Gabaldon-Estevan (2020) expressed concern for the inequality of educational resources accessible to lower-achieving ability groups versus the quality of resources available to higher-achieving students. Furthermore, the researcher studied the student-student and student-teacher socialization differences between low- and high-achieving groups (Gabaldon-Estevan, 2020). The research found that student-teacher interactions were more positive in higher achieving groups whereas in lower-achieving groups, the student-teacher interactions were more commonly geared toward disciplinary matters (Gabaldon-Estevan, 2020). Additionally, Tereshchenko et al. (2019) expressed doubts regarding teachers’ ability to teach rigorous material to heterogeneously grouped students while maintaining equal expectations for all students.

Researchers have countered these arguments by proposing that inequity, social justice, and poor academic achievement do not cause underperforming classes. In fact, poor achievement results from lower expectations, lower quality curriculums, and less qualified teachers (Gentry, 2016). While the intentions of mixed-ability grouping include valuing the differences of students, research has shown that mixed-ability classrooms benefit less confident learners the most, enhance inequality, increase teacher workload, and decrease student confidence (Lee, 2021).

The Importance of Learning to Read

“Learning to read transforms lives” (Castles et al., 2018, p. 5). In learning to read, early exposure to language and literature is imperative for setting the foundation for successful readers. At just two months, children begin to show interest in the external
environment, at which time exposure to intensive language is optimal (Fisch et al., 1997). By age seven, there is a strong correlation between reading achievement and a child’s exposure to literacy during the early years of their life (Fisch et al., 1997). Research has shown that struggling readers present a higher risk for negative views of education, decreased motivation, and decreased socio-economic status (Clark & Rumbold, 2006).

**How Reading Effects Learning**

Reading engagement and comprehension are naturally enhanced in students are interested in reading text (Kim et al., 2016). Academic content becomes more meaningful when academic content is meaningful, and students have a foundation to build upon (Reading Teacher, 1990). Reading is the foundation for acquiring knowledge, engagement, democracy, and success in school and the workplace (Castles et al., 2018). Reading comprehension can be defined as the interactions and connections between the reader, text, and sociocultural context relevant to the reader (Elleman & Oslund, 2019). When readers begin to read, their understanding of text may be more easily achievable when the text is simple, but as the text increases in complexity, the same reader may begin to struggle (Elleman & Oslund, 2019). As students progress in grade levels from year to year, reading text also increases in complexity. Students lacking a fundamental reading foundation begin to fall behind. Fraumeni-McBride (2017) expressed that a child’s reading enjoyment ultimately impacts their reading success throughout their schooling and into adulthood.

**Reading Motivation**

Reading motivation can be defined as an individual’s goals, beliefs, values, and attitudes toward reading (Kim et al., 2016). Reading motivation declines as students
progress through schooling and into adolescence (Kim et al., 2016). However, researchers have reported that peer collaboration impacts academic achievement and increases reading motivation due to students experiencing support for their learning in a social environment (Kim et al., 2016). Guthrie et al. (2009) stated that when elementary students are reading below grade level, not only are they low in processes related to reading comprehension, but also present low motivation. Paige (2011) explained that extrinsic motivation in reading, often fueled by some form of incentive, typically decreases in children until about the fourth grade, when their extrinsic motivation begins to level out.

Lau (2009) stated that often, younger children exhibit a higher level of motivation in reading due to their limited awareness of their reading competence. However, as students grow older, their reading motivation declines as they gain a realistic understanding of their reading ability (Lau, 2009). Furthermore, Lau (2009) highlighted that student motivation is largely impacted by the classroom practices the student has experienced. Whitney and Bergin (2018) described two components of motivation: one is the view a person has about their competence ability, and the other is the intrinsic value of an activity that a person possesses. Guthrie et al. (2013) stated that when the reading was deemed relevant to the student’s life and instructional practices such as peer interactions were incorporated, motivation for learning increases.

**i-Ready Learning System**

i-Ready is an online learning tool that delivers personalized instruction tailored to the student’s individual learning needs (Curriculum Associates, 2023). The i-Ready adaptive assessment identifies students’ ability levels and creates an individualized
learning path based on the identified skills to help the learner accelerate their learning (Cook & Ross, 2022). The skills and lessons found within the diagnostic assessment are aligned with college and career standards and are designed to provide students with appropriate learning targets and interventions deemed needed by the diagnostic results (Swain et al., 2020). In reading, i-Ready assesses four domains: Phonological Awareness, Phonics, High-Frequency Words, Vocabulary, Comprehension: of Literature, and Comprehension: of Informational Text. Student scores are reported as grade levels for those scoring outside their current grade. However, for those scoring in their current grade band, scores are reported in more detail as Early, Mid, or Late (Curriculum Associates, 2023). i-Ready provides teachers with students’ data for small group placement and resources recommended for the skill levels that need to be targeted. To be an effective instructional strategy, Curriculum Associates (2023) recommends that students spend at least forty-five minutes a week working on lessons in their learning path.

Researchers evaluated if students in grades K-5 who used i-Ready instruction would yield higher reading achievement compared to students who used i-Ready diagnostic only. For the study, the researchers specifically selected a student population related to student achievement: gender, English learner status, special education status, and economic disadvantage status. In the fall, students in the treatment and control groups were given a baseline diagnostic. Students in the treatment group used i-Ready instruction for at least 30 minutes a week for 18 weeks. At the end of the 18 weeks, the spring diagnostic was administered to the treatment and control groups. The data revealed that students in the treatment group who used i-Ready instruction showed higher reading
achievement than students in the control group who did not participate in i-Ready instruction (Swain et al., 2020).

**Related Research**

Differentiated instruction is modifying of the instruction to meet the learners’ various needs, whether in whole-group instruction, small-group instruction, or individual instruction (Magableh & Abdullah, 2021). Magableh and Abdullah (2021) explained that in any given classroom, the caliber of students varies from gifted to struggling learners, and it is the teacher’s responsibility to adjust their instruction in content, delivery, and learning environment to meet the various learning needs. Ability grouping is a flexible grouping of students that allows students to move into different groups as the student demonstrates mastery of new concepts (Matthews et al., 2013). In their research, Matthews et al. (2013) stated that ability grouping benefits students of all learning abilities. When students were grouped homogeneously, academic gains were present in groups of high ability and groups of low ability, concluding that ability grouping does help all learners.

Researchers evaluated the impact of ability grouping on kindergartners from 580 schools to determine if ability grouping impacted student reading achievement. Classrooms were designated as using heterogenous or homogenous grouping practices. The researchers measured the students’ reading growth throughout the academic school year through reading assessments in the fall and spring. The results concluded that ability grouping among kindergarten students had a significant academic impact on reading achievement (Adelson & Carpenter, 2011).
To increase student reading engagement, researchers studied the impact of utilizing Accelerated Reader (AR) as an incentivized reading intervention. AR is a reading comprehension program used in schools to evaluate students’ comprehension of text. Each AR quiz is assigned a point value. When quizzes are passed, the student receives points for that quiz. In the study, researchers used a baseline AR quiz score to group students into three categories: high, middle, and low. As a group, students read books and took AR quizzes to accumulate more AR points than the other two classes. The research results concluded that students in the low group significantly increase reading performance (Skinner & Skinner, 2010).

Park and Datnow (2017) studied differentiated instruction practices of fourth and fifth-grade teachers. They were interested in what data and logic teachers used to form differentiated learning groups. Four public elementary schools participated. Data was collected through teacher interviews, observations, and case analysis. Of the many different grouping possibilities, teachers reported that homogeneous grouping was the preferred grouping method specifically for addressing target skills, interventions, and discussions in reading (Park & Datnow, 2017).

As seen from the National Assessment of Educational Progress, homogenous grouping continues to rise as the preferred teaching method among elementary teachers. It was reported that between 1998 and 2009, the percentage of fourth-grade teachers who group by ability had risen from 28% to 71% (Patrick, 2020). Additionally, through a longitudinal study that followed kindergarten students through elementary school from 1998 to 2010, teachers reported that through ability grouping, reading achievement increased from 41% to 79% (Patrick, 2020).
Conclusion

Throughout the theory and related-research, students reading below grade level are more likely to yield academic gains when placed in homogeneous reading groups. During small group reading instruction, students received remediation in the areas of vocabulary, comprehension of literature, and comprehension of informational text. When students with similar reading deficits are grouped together, they are less likely to feel embarrassed or seek task avoidance when they witness peers with the same struggles. Students may embrace their deficit areas and work to overcome the obstacle.

This action research study was designed to understand the benefits of using ability grouping to increase student reading comprehension. Low literacy rates have been attributed to school inequality (Castles et al., 2018). In the simplest form, reading comprehension can be defined as the reader’s ability to construct mental representations (Davis et al., 2022). However, Davis et al. (2020) described reading comprehension as a complex process shaped by social practices. The goal of the design was to identify if students, when ability grouped, yielded an increase in student growth achievement in reading comprehension as measured by i-Ready Reading assessment. Additionally, this study analyzed students’ increased motivation and confidence to participate in reading class as comprehension scores supported increased reading comprehension skills.
CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY

This action research study examined students’ reading achievement through a mixed-methods design with fifth-grade students to determine how homogeneous reading groups and the i-Ready learning system impacted student’s reading growth and confidence. The researcher’s observations indicated that students at the participating K-8 school were not reading on grade level. Additionally, data from the district benchmark assessment indicated that students at Reading School K-8 scored below the fifth-grade benchmark criteria. Each fall, students take the i-Ready beginning of the year diagnostic. The 2022-2023 fall benchmark indicated that 30% of students were one grade level behind, 30% of students were two grade levels behind, and 7% of students were three or more grade levels behind.

The participant selection was based on the researcher also being the teacher of record for the fifth-grade class. During the 2019-2020 school year, students at Reading School K-8 attended school virtually and they were provided the option to attend via a hybrid model consisting of two days on campus and three days virtual. The following year, during the 2020-2021 school year, all students were required to attend in-person learning at the Reading School K-8 school building. The majority of students in the fifth-grade class had yet to learn in a traditional classroom setting since their second-grade year. As students returned to school full-time, it became evident that the background knowledge that is typically acquired through learning and experiences had been
compromised due to limited exposure to a school environment. Additionally, on-task stamina was severely lacking and consequently, students avoided independent reading time.

After the pandemic, schools were faced with the challenge of effectively addressing the results of learning loss. In grades K-2, students begin learning decoding skills, impacting the development of phonics, spelling, and language comprehension skills (Kuhfeld et al., 2023). Unfortunately, the absence of these skills continued to impact reading fluency as students progressed beyond the second grade (Kuhfeld et al., 2023). Kuhfeld et al. (2023) highlighted that while students have always had the option to opt out of achievement testing, the increased number of students who opted out post the Pandemic limited the availability of tools used by teachers and schools to drive instruction, monitor student learning progress, and eliminated a marker for specialty program admission decisions.

**Research Questions**

The following research questions were addressed in this study:

RQ 1: How does ability grouping and the use of i-Ready learning system impact students’ academic achievement in reading in a fifth-grade classroom?

RQ 2: What is the impact of ability grouping as it relates to students’ reading confidence?

RQ 3: What is the impact of ability grouping as it relates to students’ attitudes toward working in reading groups?

**Research Design**

Action research seeks to involve participants in the process of solving a practical problem (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Using action research allows the teacher-researcher
to become reflective in their practice while gaining new information about the practitioner’s students (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Efron and Ravid (2020) defined action research as a practitioner’s inquiry within their teaching environment to hone their teaching craft and enhance student learning.

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) explained qualitative research as the ability to understand situations based on context and interactions, whereas qualitative research was defined through a numerical representation denoted by quantity. Quantitative research is used to gather data from individuals or groups, and the data collected is analyzed through statistical tests (Efron & Ravid, 2020). Creswell (2015) described mixed-methods research as the integrating of quantitative and qualitative data in which the researcher draws interpretations from the strengths of both research methods to understand research problems. Creswell and Plano Clark (2011) concluded that research problems could be addressed through multiple research methods.

The study took place in the Spring of 2023 over 6 weeks in the researcher’s fifth-grade classroom comprised of 27 students. The study had a mixed-methods design. The researcher first collected qualitative data through participant surveys and observations. Quantitative data was collected through i-Ready diagnostic assessment to explain the qualitative data further.

**Rationale for Methodology**

Action research through a mixed methods design was used for this study. A mixed-methods design was best suited for this study to enhance school performance because a mixed-methods research approach drew on the strengths of qualitative and quantitative research (Efron & Ravid, 2020). Through a mixed-methods design, the
researcher was able to incorporate multiple methods for analyzing various aspects of the research questions (Efron & Ravid, 2020). The researcher collected qualitative data to examine student’s views towards the act of reading and working in reading groups. Furthermore, the researcher used quantitative data to examine students’ reading achievement. Plano Clark and Ivankova (2016) explained the concept of triangulation as the combined use of qualitative and quantitative data to obtain more valid data. The use of qualitative and quantitative research provided multiple perspectives for interpreting study’s data. While questionnaires and interviews provided information on student’s perceptions of reading and the use of reading groups, quantitative data collected from the district benchmark assessment provided the perspective of academic achievement in reading.

**Intervention**

Students at Reading School K-8 were reading below grade level as indicated by the i-Ready district benchmark assessment. i-Ready is an adaptive assessment intended to identify the instructional needs of students (i-Ready, 2022). The i-Ready Diagnostic is an online assessment used to assess student growth in reading and math at the beginning, middle, and end of the school year. The diagnostic adjusts assessment questions based on the success of the student. If the student answers a series of questions correctly, the assessment questions will gradually become more complex. If the student answers questions incorrectly, the assessment will provide more straightforward questions to meet the learner’s learning needs (Curriculum Associates, 2023).

Scores are reported through six placement domains: Phonological Awareness, Phonics, High-Frequency Words, Vocabulary, Comprehension: Literature, and
Comprehension: Informational Text. The i-Ready Diagnostic also provides a scale score for each student and a placement domain (Curriculum Associates, 2023). A student may fall into one of the four placement domains: Above Grade Level, At Grade Level, Approaching Grade Level, and Needs Improvement (Curriculum Associates, 2023). Once students have completed the i-Ready Diagnostic, the online program uses the results to adjust reading instruction on each student’s reading level. Through i-Ready, teachers have the ability to provide instruction that meets each student’s learning needs through lessons that the i-Ready curriculum has designed. Additionally, i-Ready adjusts the lessons based on the student’s success in the lessons.

To address the problem of practice, students were placed in homogeneous ability reading groups. Based on i-Ready scores, students were placed into groups with peers of similar reading ability (Table 3.2). The researcher provided each reading group of students with their reading Lexile range. Next, each reading group was given time to go to the school library to select a book within the designated Lexile range to read as a group. The teacher identified the two lowest-performing reading groups. Each day during the designated 20-minute, teacher-guided reading rotation, the two groups with the lowest reading scores would read with the teacher during one of their daily rotations.

In order to support each group’s learning needs, the researcher used frequent stopping points to check for vocabulary understanding, summarize events, draw inferences, and make predictions. The researcher used open-ended questions that required students to provide answers supported by the text. If students did not know a term, the researcher would search for a picture on the iPad to help students connect with the word.
If students did not understand a concept, the researcher applied a real-world concept that was familiar to the students to solidify meaning.

**Research Context and Setting of Study**

The participating K-8 neighborhood school is located in Savannah, Georgia, and is part of the Savannah-Chatham County School District. Reading School K-8 is a large suburban public school that serves 1,275 students in grades prekindergarten to eighth. The Savannah-Chatham Public School System School Climate report classifies 8% of the student population with disabilities, 14% of the student population is served through the Gifted Education Program (GEP), and 15% of the student population is served through the English to Speakers of Other Languages program (SCCPSS, 2021). The school’s student population is comprised of 48% females, 52% males, and 49% of students enrolled are economically disadvantaged (U.S et al., n.d.). The Savannah-Chatham County School District has 23 elementary schools, eight middle schools, eight K-8 schools, and 11 high schools (SCCPSS, 2021). Reading School K-8 fosters a positive partnership with the community. Reading School K-8 has received National School of Excellence Awards from their family-school partnerships. It has been named a Professional Development School (PDS) due to its partnership with Georgia Southern University.

In fifth grade, all students take the following core classes: Language Arts, Writing, Reading, Math, Science, and Social Studies. Students receive instruction from a team-teaching model. One teacher delivers instruction for Language Arts, Reading, Writing, and Social Studies. Whereas another teacher delivers instruction in Math and
Science. Additionally, students receive services through pull-out classes in ESOL, EIP, and GEP.

**Role of the Researcher**

The teacher-researcher is the lead fifth grade teacher at Reading School K-8 School, where she has worked for the past nine years. The primary role of the researcher is to provide reading instruction to the sample classroom of 27 students. The researcher was an active participant during the research as she created the questionnaires, created the student-focus interview form, distributed consent forms, facilitated daily reading groups, administered the pre- and post-questionnaires, analyzed the questionnaire data, analyzed the student-focused interviews, assessed the students, and analyzed the results of the assessments. The researcher was a full participant in the study as she taught the small group instruction, assessed the students, and recorded all data pertaining to the study.

**Participants**

The action research focused on fifth-grade students at Reading School K-8. The sample included one class of 27 students. Of those 27 students, the breakdown by gender, race, and programs are as follows: 13 students were boys, 14 students were girls, ten students were Hispanic, one student was Asian, seven students were Black, nine students were White, nine students were served through English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), nine students were served through the Gifted and Talented program, and eight students were served through the Early Intervention Program (EIP).

**Table 3.1**

*Demographics and Identification of Participants Interviewed*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Race</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Student</td>
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<td>Race</td>
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<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Black</td>
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<td>Student 9</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Student 11</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student 12</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student 13</td>
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<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Student 24</td>
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</tr>
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</table>
Data Collection Instruments

Philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau claimed that any method implemented to teach reading would suffice so long as sufficient motivation was put forth by the reader (McKenna & Kear, 1990). To investigate if the implementation of ability grouping affected reading achievement in fifth-grade students, the researcher used pre- and post-questionnaires to collect information regarding students’ attitudes and experiences in reading. The researcher also used student-focused interviews to capture the thoughts and feelings of students surrounding ability reading groups. Thirdly, i-Ready reading assessment data was used to describe students’ academic achievement growth. Middle of the year (MOY) i-Ready scores provided a baseline score for each participant. Students were assigned to ability groups as determined by i-Ready diagnostic results. Students with similar assessment scores and areas of need as indicated by the domains measured by i-Ready, were placed in a group together. i-Ready tracked data in the following domains: Phonological Awareness, Phonics, High-Frequency Words, Vocabulary, Comprehension of Literature, and Comprehension of Informational Text. Six ability groups were composed.

Table 3.2
Ability Groups Based on i-Ready MOY Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Group</th>
<th>i-Ready Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>Student</td>
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<td>Score</td>
</tr>
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<td>---------</td>
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<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Group A</td>
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<td>Student 8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student 12</td>
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<td>Student 20</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student 6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student 11</td>
<td>Group B</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student 21</td>
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<td>586</td>
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<td>Student 23</td>
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<td>Student 4</td>
<td>Group E</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student 14</td>
<td>Group E</td>
<td>521</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Pre-Questionnaire. The researcher used a pre-questionnaire (Appendix A) at the beginning of the study to analyze students’ attitudes and experiences in reading. Nootens et al. (2019) stated that students’ attitudes toward reading significantly impacted reading skill development and academic success. Additionally, Kim et al. (2016) expressed that attitudes toward reading become positive after engaging in small group activities because students receive social support in their learning. The researcher created the pre-questionnaire to measure students’ attitudes towards reading. A second pre-questionnaire (Appendix B) was designed to capture students’ responses to questions about working in a small group setting. Tables 3.3 and 3.4 provide the rating scales used. Tables 3.5 and 3.6 provide the interview questions used by the researcher.

Table 3.3
Rating Scale for Pre-Questionnaire Attitudes Toward Reading

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither Disagree or Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Table 3.4
Rating Scale for Pre-Questionnaire Attitudes Toward Small Group Instruction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither Disagree or Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Table 3.5

40
**Attitudes Toward Reading Interview Questions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre-Questionnaire Interview Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I enjoy reading aloud in class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I view myself as a strong reader.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I avoid being called on to read aloud in class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am able to learn from what I read.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I enjoy going to reading class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I like to read books at home.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am able to answer questions about what we read in class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I do not like to read in front of my classmates.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have a hard time focusing on what I read.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I perform well on reading tests.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 3.6**

**Attitudes Toward Small Group Instruction Interview Questions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre-Questionnaire Interview Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I enjoy working in groups with my peers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel confident when I work in groups with my peers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel shy when I am working in groups with my peers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am able to contribute to conversations about what we read in small groups.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I do not feel very smart when I am asked to work in small groups.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would rather work independently.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel more confident reading in small groups.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I like working in small groups with peers who read on a similar level.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In small groups, I feel more confident to ask questions if I am unsure.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small groups are fun because I can talk to my friends.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Student Focus Interview.** The teacher-researcher created and administered a written student-focus interview with three open-ended questions (Appendix D) after the 6-week study. The researcher requested that one student from each reading group complete the survey. The focused interview was designed to gather students’ thoughts
and experiences from interaction with peers during daily reading groups. Table 3.7 provides a list of questions used in the student focus interview.

**Table 3.7**  
*Student Focus Interview Questions*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus Interview Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How do reading groups impact your confidence in reading?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you prefer to work in reading groups with peers who read on a similar level or peers who read on lower or higher levels? Why?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you feel that working in a reading group helps to improve your reading? Why?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Post-Questionnaires.** At the conclusion of the 6-week study, the researcher distributed the post-questionnaires to measure any changes in student responses. The post-questionnaire questions were identical to the pre-questionnaire questions. Changes were recorded on the Reading Attitude Questionnaire Score Sheet (Appendix G). Tables 3.8 and 3.9 provide a list of questions used by the researcher.

**Table 3.8**  
*Attitudes Toward Reading Post-Interview Questions*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Post-Questionnaire Interview Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I enjoy reading aloud in class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I view myself as a strong reader.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I avoid being called on to read aloud in class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am able to learn from what I read.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I enjoy going to reading class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I like to read books at home.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am able to answer questions about what we read in class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I do not like to read in front of my classmates.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have a hard time focusing on what I read.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I perform well on reading tests.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 3.9**  
*Attitudes Toward Small Group Instruction Post-Interview Questions*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Post-Questionnaire Interview Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I enjoy working in groups with my peers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel confident when I work in groups with my peers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel shy when I am working in groups with my peers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am able to contribute to conversations about what we read in small groups.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I do not feel very smart when I am asked to work in small groups.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would rather work independently.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel more confident reading in small groups.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I like working in small groups with peers who read on a similar level.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In small groups, I feel more confident to ask questions if I am unsure.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small groups are fun because I can talk to my friends.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Research Procedure**

The researcher distributed consent letters to all 27 students in her reading class. Students were given two weeks to indicate their participation preference. Baseline data was collected through the MOY (middle of the year) i-Ready reading diagnostic and anonymous pre-questionnaires. Students were assigned to their new reading groups based on their MOY reading diagnostic results. During the 6-week study, each reading group met daily for two 20-minute rotations. Reading groups rotated between reading stations: Read to Self, i-Ready, Skill Review, Writing, Word Work, and Meet the Teacher.

Upon placing students into groups, expectations were discussed prior to the start of reading group rotations. The teacher explained the activity each group would complete during each rotation and the expectations for students while working in groups. Because reading groups have been implemented at each grade level, students understood expectations for working in reading groups. Activities were recorded for each week, along with the group rotations.
**Group A**

Four students were assigned to Group A based on their MOY i-Ready Diagnostic scores. These students scored at the Middle-Late Grade 5 range, with Student 12 scoring in the Grade 6 range. When the researcher evaluated each student’s i-Ready diagnostic results, all members tested out of the domains of phonological awareness, phonics, and high-frequency words. In the domains of vocabulary, comprehension of literature, and comprehension of informational text, each student scored in the Mid-5th grade range or higher.

**Group B**

Five students were placed in Group B. Each student scored in the Early Grade 5 range on the MOY i-Ready Diagnostic.

**Group C**

Five students were assigned to Group C. Each student scored in the Grade 4 range on the MOY i-Ready Diagnostic.

**Group D**

Five students were assigned to Group D. Three of the five students in Group D scored in the Grade 4 range on the MOY i-Ready Diagnostic. Student 5 and Student 25 scored in the Grade 3 range. Student 5 was flagged on the assessment for rushing which may have yielded a score that was not entirely accurate of the student’s reading ability.

**Group E**

Five students in Group E based on their score of Grade 3 level on the MOY i-Ready Diagnostic.

**Group F**
Three students were assigned to Group F. Two of the three students in Group F scored on a Grade 1 level on the MOY i-Ready Diagnostic. Student 17 scored on a Grade 3 level; however, based on classroom observations, interactions with the student, and classroom data, the student would best be served in Group F.

**Week 1**

During week one, all students were given the pre-questionnaires to complete during class. The teacher-researcher reviewed the group rotations from Groups A-F and the activities to be completed at each rotation. Once students began moving through their rotations, the teacher-researcher explained to students in Group D and Group E that they would have a 20-minute, meet-the-teacher rotation every day. The teacher-researcher explained to Group D and Group E that they would receive support in vocabulary, comprehension of literature, and comprehension of informational text. During meet-the-teacher rotation, the teacher would preview upcoming vocabulary from the text, use stopping points to stop and discuss various parts of the text, and pose questions about characters, actions, and outcomes to facilitate discussion among the group members. The teacher-researcher sent the students in Group D and Group E to the school library to select a set of guided reading books based on the designated reading Lexile. Group D was given a Lexile of 600, and Group E was given a Lexile range of 500-550. For both groups, the teacher opted for the students to select a lower-level Lexile book to assess if their Lexile level was accurate and to build confidence in the readers.

Due to reading groups meeting five days a week, students in Group D and Group E could select their Guided Reading book on Monday. On Tuesday, Group D and Group E discussed vocabulary from the text, made predictions based on the book’s title and
cover, and began reading. Reading and book discussions continued through Wednesday and Thursday. Students in Group D and Group E completed their first book in their reading groups.

**Week 2**

On Monday, the teacher-researcher asked the students in Group D and Group E for feedback from the previous week. Each group member reported that the book was too easy, and the teacher-researcher instructed Group D that they may select a book with a Lexile range of 650-700. Group E was instructed to select a book in the Lexile range of 600-650. Both groups were sent to the library to select new books. Once books were selected, vocabulary was reviewed, and each group began reading. Periodic stopping points were selected for text discussion.

**Week 3**

On Monday, the teacher-researcher checked in with Group D and Group E. Based on the lower Lexile of each text, both groups were ready to select new Guided Reading books. Due to the ease of the previous book, Group D was instructed to select a book with a Lexile range of 700. Group E was fluent in their reading, however, the comprehension status of Group E indicated that the group needed more time before they could progress to a longer text. Group E was instructed to select a book close to a Lexile of 650. Both groups were sent to the library to select new books. Once books were selected, vocabulary was reviewed, and each group began reading. Periodic stopping points were selected for text discussion.
Week 4

Group D and E began their Guided Reading group with a comprehension check. The comprehension questions on the Guided Reading cards were used to evaluate each student’s understanding of the material during each group’s designated meeting time. As the teacher-researcher asked the questions, each student wrote their answer on a dry-erase board. The teacher-researcher quickly assessed each student’s comprehension of the text.

Based on the student’s answers, the teacher-researcher either reviewed material that was not mastered during reading or continued reading if the students demonstrated sufficient understanding of the text. Group D and E selected new books as needed. The Lexile range was increased as necessary based on each group’s fluency and comprehension of the book.

Week 5

Group D and E began their Guided Reading group with a comprehension check. The comprehension questions on the Guided Reading cards were used to evaluate each student’s understanding of the material during each group’s designated meeting time. As the teacher-researcher asked the questions, each student wrote their answer on a dry-erase board. The teacher-researcher was able to quickly assess each student’s comprehension of the text.

Based on the student’s answers, the teacher-researcher either reviewed material that was not mastered during reading or continued reading if the students demonstrated sufficient understanding of the text. Group D and E selected new books as needed. The Lexile range was increased as necessary based on each group’s fluency and comprehension of the book.
Week 6

During reading groups, the teacher-researcher showed members of Group D and Group E members the Lexile range of each group from the start of the six weeks. The teacher-researcher then showed Group D and E the Lexile they were reading on at the conclusion of the six weeks. The teacher-researcher asked for both groups to express how they viewed their reading growth and their views toward reading in small groups over the six weeks. All students were given the post-questionnaires to complete during class.

All student information remained confidential throughout the study. Any information that revealed the student’s identity was changed before sharing the research results. The researcher collected data through paper questionnaires in which student names were omitted. Questionnaires were seen only by the researcher. Data was stored by the researcher in Excel and Word documents on a password-protected computer accessible only by the researcher.

Data Analysis

Data Analysis: Qualitative

Questionnaires. The researcher analyzed the results of the pre-and post-questionnaires to determine the students’ overall attitudes toward reading and attitudes toward working in small groups. The pre-questionnaire was administered to students during the first week of the study, and the post-questionnaire was administered to students during the last week of the study. A Likert scale was used for both the pre-and post-questionnaire. The teacher-researcher analyzed each questionnaire to determine how students rated their confidence and attitudes toward working in small groups at the start of the intervention. After of the intervention, the researcher analyzed each questionnaire
to analyze if changes in students’ confidence and attitudes toward reading had occurred. The researcher analyzed the data by calculating each question item’s mean, median, and standard deviation.

**Focus Interview.** The researcher administered student-focus interviews to six students to gather information centered around how reading groups impacted the student’s confidence in reading, the student’s preference for working with students with similar or different reading levels, and if the student’s felt that working in reading groups helps to improve their reading ability. Using inductive analysis, the researcher analyzed the focus interviews to determine how students felt about working in reading group.

**Data Analysis: Quantitative**

**i-Ready District Benchmark.** The school administered the state-wide benchmark assessment during the middle of the year (MOY) and at the end of the year (EOY) during the 2022-2023 school year. The researcher analyzed the quantitative data from the district benchmark assessment to determine the impact of ability grouping on benchmark scores from the MOY to the EOY. The researcher compared student performance on the MOY diagnostic to student performance on the EOY diagnostic to evaluate the effectiveness of ability grouping in a fifth grade reading class.

**Summary**

This dissertation in practice (DiP) followed an action research methodology. The researcher investigated the impact of ability grouping on student achievement in a fifth grade reading class in Savannah, Georgia. The study followed a mixed-methods design as the researcher collected qualitative data through participant questionnaires and teacher-researcher observations. Quantitative data was collected to further expand upon the
qualitative data. Students completed pre-questionnaires at the beginning and post-questionnaires and the end of the study to analyze students’ attitudes and experiences in reading groups. From the student surveys, the researcher identified students with negative feelings and experiences towards reading groups. Chapter 4 will discuss the results of the findings.
CHAPTER 4
PRESENTATION AND DATA ANALYSIS

In education, an understanding of student learning progression is essential, along with an understanding of the teaching practices that facilitate academic achievement (Castles et al., 2018). The purpose of this action research study was to evaluate if ability grouping impacted academic achievement in reading, and if student attitudes toward reading and reading groups impacted. The researcher studied the impact of homogeneous reading groups on students’ reading achievement. The sample included 27 students in the researcher’s fifth grade reading class. To evaluate if ability grouping was impactful, the researcher used the following methods: i-Ready diagnostic scores from the middle and end of the academic school year, pre- and post-questionnaires, and student focus surveys. The study is significant because students’ attitudes toward reading ultimately impact their current and future academic success in reading. Huston and Ripke (2006) stated that by the third grade, a student’s academic achievement strongly predicts their future academic performance. Students who are not proficient readers risk struggling to read in future grades (Vaknin et al., 2018).

This study used a mixed-methods research design to analyze the effectiveness of homogenous reading groups. The collection of qualitative data was used to elaborate on the impact of the quantitative data. The researcher qualitatively analyzed questionnaires and student-focus interviews to measure how students generally viewed reading and their
views toward working in reading groups. The researcher analyzed the quantitative data of the i-Ready assessment scores and the district benchmark assessment, data to measure growth and achievement in reading. The participant-researcher focused explicitly on three domains of the i-Ready computer-based instructional program: Vocabulary, Comprehension of Literature, and Comprehension of Informational Text. The researcher analyzed if the scores improved from the middle of the academic school year to the end of the academic school year.

**Research Questions**

The following research questions were addressed in this study:

RQ 1: How does ability grouping and the use of i-Ready learning system impact students’ academic achievement in reading in a fifth-grade classroom?

RQ 2: What is the impact of ability grouping as it relates to students’ reading confidence? RQ 3: What is the impact of ability grouping as it relates to students’ attitudes toward working in reading groups?

**Findings**

**Questionnaire Data.** Qualitative data was collected from 27 students through pre- and post-questionnaires at the beginning and end of the six-week study. The pre-and post-questionnaires consisted of 10 items measuring students’ attitudes toward reading and small group instruction. At the conclusion of the six-week study, a student-focus interview was administered to one student in each group. Students were selected to complete the focus interview on a volunteer basis. The questionnaires consisted of statements and responses utilizing a Likert scale format. The 5-point Likert scale responses ranged from 1-Strongly Disagree, 2-Disagree, 3-Niether Disagree or Agree, 4-Agree, or 5-Strongly Agree. The student focus interviews consisted of three open-ended questions allowing students to provide their
responses. The researcher calculated students’ responses and identified the mean and median for each question item. Green and Johnson (2010) described the importance of the median as the middle point in a set of data in which half of the scores are above the median and half are below the median. In a distribution, the mean provides the average of all the scores (Green & Johnson, 2010). When evaluating individual scores and the mean of a data set, the standard deviation explains the average distance between two sets of scores (Green & Johnson, 2010).

Table 4.1
Pre- and Post-Questionnaire: Students’ Attitudes Toward Reading

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student’s Attitudes Toward Reading</th>
<th>Pre-Questionnaire</th>
<th>Post-Questionnaire</th>
<th>Mean Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Mdn</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I enjoy reading aloud in class.</td>
<td>3.55</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I view myself as a strong reader.</td>
<td>3.77</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I avoid being called on to read aloud in class.</td>
<td>2.62</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am able to learn from what I read.</td>
<td>4.33</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I enjoy going to reading class.</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I like to read books at home.</td>
<td>3.55</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am able to answer questions about what we read in class.</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I do not like to read in front of my classmates.</td>
<td>2.77</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have a hard time focusing on what I read.</td>
<td>2.33</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I perform well on reading tests.</td>
<td>3.96</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.80</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.2
Pre- and Post-Questionnaire: Students’ Attitudes Toward Small Group Instruction
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students’ Attitudes Toward Small Group Instruction</th>
<th>Pre-Questionnaire</th>
<th>Post-Questionnaire</th>
<th>Mean Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I enjoy working in groups with my peers.</td>
<td>3.74 4 0.90</td>
<td>4.29 4 1.07</td>
<td>0.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel confident when I work in groups with my peers.</td>
<td>3.85 4 0.90</td>
<td>4.29 5 0.91</td>
<td>0.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel shy when I am working in groups with my peers.</td>
<td>2.29 2 1.20</td>
<td>2.18 2 1.43</td>
<td>-0.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am able to contribute to conversations about what we read in small groups.</td>
<td>3.92 4 0.67</td>
<td>4.25 4 0.84</td>
<td>0.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I do not feel very smart when I am asked to work in small groups.</td>
<td>2.03 2 1.09</td>
<td>2.03 1 0.93</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would rather work independently.</td>
<td>2.92 3 1.49</td>
<td>2.77 3 0.93</td>
<td>-0.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel more confident reading in small groups.</td>
<td>3.37 3 1.04</td>
<td>3.98 4 0.72</td>
<td>0.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I like working in small groups with peers who read on a similar level.</td>
<td>3.96 4 1.01</td>
<td>4.44 4 1.47</td>
<td>0.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In small groups, I feel more confident to ask questions if I am unsure.</td>
<td>3.55 4 0.89</td>
<td>4.25 4 1.17</td>
<td>0.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small groups are fun because I can talk to my friends.</td>
<td>3.81 4 1.17</td>
<td>3.98 4 0.86</td>
<td>0.17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Students’ Attitudes Toward Reading Questionnaire**

The researcher calculated the mean ($M$), median ($Mdn$), and standard deviation ($SD$) for all pre-and post-questionnaire items examining students’ attitudes toward reading (Table 4.1).
The median ($Mdn=4$) score was a four on a 5-point Likert scale. A score of four denotes an “Agree” answer response. On average, students selected the answer response “Agree” to most of the questions. After comparing the pre-and post-questionnaire statistics, the data from the pre-questionnaires yielded an increase in the overall mean score from the pre- to the post-questionnaire ($M=3.48$, $M=3.68$). The increase in the overall mean score indicates that students’ attitudes toward reading showed an increase during the duration of the study.

The results of the questionnaire indicated that the following items showed the highest increase over the six-week study:

“\text{I like to read books at home}” showed an increase from the pre-questionnaire ($M=3.55$, $SD=1.42$) to the post-questionnaire ($M=4.22$, $SD=0.93$) with a difference in means of 0.67.

“\text{I enjoy reading aloud in class}” showed an increase from the pre-questionnaire ($M=3.55$, $SD=1.39$) to the post-questionnaire ($M=4.18$, $SD=1.07$) with a difference in means of 0.63.

“\text{I view myself as a strong reader}” showed an increase from the pre-questionnaire ($M=3.77$, $SD=1.08$) to the post-questionnaire ($M=4.33$, $SD=0.91$) with a difference in means of 0.56.

The following item showed a negative amount of change from the pre- to the post-questionnaire:

“\text{I avoid being called on to read aloud in class}” showed a decrease from the pre-questionnaire ($M=2.62$, $SD=1.47$) to the post-questionnaire ($M=2.25$, $SD=1.43$) with a difference in means of -0.37.
“I do not like to read in front of my classmates” showed a decrease from the pre-questionnaire ($M=2.77$, $SD=1.69$) to the post-questionnaire ($M=2.37$, $SD=1.47$) with a difference in means of -0.40.

“I have a hard time focusing on what I read” showed a decrease from the pre-questionnaire ($M=2.33$, $SD=1.10$) to the post-questionnaire ($M=2.00$, $SD=1.17$) with a difference in means of -0.33.

This research study sought to examine the impact of ability grouping on reading achievement and students’ attitudes toward reading. This data was vital because the questionnaire responses showed that students reported an increase in their enjoyment for reading books at home and in class. The data also showed that students reported an increase in their self-view as a reader. Additionally, the data showed that there was a decrease in reading avoidance in class, a decrease in students’ dislike for reading in front of their peers, and a decrease in students’ ability to focus on what is read.

**Table 4.3**

*Comparison of Students’ Attitudes Toward Reading*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>$M$</th>
<th>$Mdn$</th>
<th>$SD$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scores from Pre-Questionnaires</td>
<td>3.48</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scores from Post-Questionnaires</td>
<td>3.68</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.02</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Students’ Attitudes Toward Small Group Instruction**

The researcher compared the difference between the means in the pre-questionnaire and post-questionnaires, evaluating students’ attitudes toward reading. Table 4.3 lists those results. The researcher computed the mean ($M$), median ($Mdn$), and standard deviation ($SD$) for all pre- and post-questionnaire items examining students’ attitudes toward small-group instruction (Table 4.2). Similarly, the median ($Mdn=4$) indicated that on the 5-point Likert scale, a rating of four
correlates with an “Agree” answer choice. The overall mean for the pre-and post-questionnaires increased ($M=3.34$, $M=3.64$). The median scores were valuable to the researcher as they indicated that students’ attitudes toward small-group instruction increased from the beginning to the end of the study.

The results of the questionnaire indicated that the following items showed the highest increase over the six-week study:

“In small groups, I feel more confident to ask questions if I am unsure” showed an increase from the pre-questionnaire ($M=3.55$, $SD=1.01$) to the post-questionnaire ($M=4.44$, $SD=1.47$) with a difference in means of 0.70.

“I feel more confident reading in small groups” showed an increase from the pre-questionnaire ($M=3.37$, $SD=1.04$) to the post-questionnaire ($M=3.98$, $SD=0.72$) with a difference in means of 0.61.

“I enjoy working in groups with my peers” showed an increase from the pre-questionnaire ($M=3.74$, $SD=0.90$) to the post-questionnaire ($M=4.29$, $SD=1.07$) with a difference in means of 0.55.

The following items showed a negative or no increase during the six-week study.

“I feel shy when I am working in groups with my peers” showed a decrease from the pre-questionnaire ($M=2.29$, $SD=1.20$) to the post-questionnaire ($M=2.18$, $SD=1.43$) with a difference in means of -0.11.

“I do not feel very smart when I am asked to work in small groups” showed no change from the pre-questionnaire ($M=2.03$, $SD=1.09$) to the post-questionnaire ($M=2.03$, $SD=0.93$) with a difference in means of 0.00.
This data is significant to the research because it shows an increase in students’ overall reading confidence, their confidence to ask questions of their peers when guidance is required, and an overall enjoyment from working in peer groups. The data also shows a decrease in feelings of shyness when working in groups with peers and a decrease in students’ preference to work independently. Consequently, student responses to feeling smart when working in small groups did not show a change from the pre- to post-questionnaire.

Table 4.4
*Comparison of Students’ Attitudes Toward Small Group Instruction*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>M</th>
<th>Mdn</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scores from Pre-Questionnaires</td>
<td>3.34</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scores from Post-Questionnaires</td>
<td>3.64</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.93</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Student Focus Surveys**

The researcher compared the difference between means in the pre-and post-questionnaires, evaluating students’ attitudes toward small group instruction. Table 4.4 lists those results. During the last small group rotation at the end of the six-week study, the researcher asked each group if a student would volunteer to complete the student focus survey. One student from each of the six small groups completed the survey. The students’ responses indicate their preference for working with peers in small groups. Additionally, all six students expressed that they prefer their group peers to be on a similar reading level. An inductive method was used to identify themes that emerged from the student questionnaires and student focus surveys. The four emerging themes are listed below with the participants’ responses.
Figure 4.1 Observed Student Focus Survey Themes

**Theme 1: Increased Confidence.**

A consistent theme throughout the questionnaires and student focus interview was increased amount of confidence while working in reading groups. Students engaged in daily reading activities within their homogeneous reading groups. Below are the comments students provided regarding their feelings toward working in ability-based reading groups.

- I am more confident and don’t get embarrassed if I make a mistake in my reading group. (Student 2)
- I know I can make mistakes in my reading group, and that group time is to help me learn and grow. (Student 11)

**Theme 2: Reading with Peers.**

A strong theme from the questionnaires and focus interviews was the participants’ preference to work in reading groups with their peers. Three participants who were reluctant to read aloud explained they would read in groups rather than in front of the whole class.

- I would rather read in my group instead of in front of the class. (Student 16)
- I do not like reading in front of the class, but I like reading in my group. (Student 22)
- I only read aloud in groups. I do not like to read in front of the class. (Student 24)
Subtheme 2.1: Similar Reading Levels. The six participants who completed the focus interview reported that they preferred to work with peers who read on either the same or a similar reading level.

I like to read with other students who read on the same level or higher because we can get our work finished quickly. (Student 2)

I prefer reading with peers who read similarly to me. It is hard for me to stay focused when people in my group read lower than me. (Student 11)

I like reading with a group that is close to me. Sometimes some students read too slow, and it takes a long time to finish. (Student 16)

I like to read with students who read close to me or better than me. If they read better than me, it helps me to be a better reader. (Student 5)

I want to read with other students who read how I read so that nobody laughs at me. (Student 22)

I prefer to read with other students who read like me since English is sometimes hard for me. (Student 24)

Theme 3: Improved Reading Performance

Students who were interviewed described their reading as improved because of the help they obtained from their reading group. The following statements provide the students’ perspective on their reading growth through reading groups.

Reading groups have been helpful because my group was able to read a book that was more challenging. (Student 2)

My reading group did help to improve my reading because we read a lot and I wasn’t shy to try words or tell my group I didn’t understand what something meant. (Student 11)
I think my group has helped my reading. We read a lot and I can help other students when they get stuck. (Student 5)

**Theme 4: Peer Groups Offer Support.**

Three participants interviewed conveyed that working in groups provided peer support. Students could support group members by helping with unfamiliar words and understanding of text or concepts.

I need a lot of help reading and my group can help me when I need it. (Student 22)

My reading group has helped me because I sometimes do not know what words mean and they can help me. (Student 24)

Yes. My group helps me, and I help them when we don’t know how to say a word.

(Student 16)

**i-Ready Diagnostic Data**

Quantitative data was collected through students’ end-of-year diagnostic reports that are generated through the i-Ready computer-based instructional program. Table 4.5 presents the MOY and EOY diagnostic scores, the point difference between those scores, the progress toward Projected Annual Typical Growth scale points, and the percent of progress toward Annual Typical Growth for each student.

**Table 4.5**

*MOY and EOY i-Ready Diagnostic Scores*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students</th>
<th>MOY i-Ready Score</th>
<th>EOY i-Ready Score</th>
<th>Difference</th>
<th>Projected Annual Typical Growth Scale Points</th>
<th>Percent of Progress Toward Annual Typical Growth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student 1</td>
<td>513</td>
<td>560</td>
<td>+47</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>235%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student 2</td>
<td>638</td>
<td>629</td>
<td>-9</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student 3</td>
<td>558</td>
<td>610</td>
<td>+52</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>325%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student 4</td>
<td>529</td>
<td>553</td>
<td>+24</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>120%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student 5</td>
<td>526</td>
<td>549</td>
<td>+23</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>115%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>-----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student 6</td>
<td>602</td>
<td>621</td>
<td>+19</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>146%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student 7</td>
<td>549</td>
<td>571</td>
<td>+22</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>138%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student 8</td>
<td>627</td>
<td>623</td>
<td>-4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student 9</td>
<td>448</td>
<td>535</td>
<td>+87</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>335%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>585</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student 11</td>
<td>585</td>
<td>596</td>
<td>+11</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student 12</td>
<td>647</td>
<td>674</td>
<td>+27</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>386%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student 13</td>
<td>567</td>
<td>580</td>
<td>+13</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student 14</td>
<td>521</td>
<td>559</td>
<td>+38</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>190%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student 15</td>
<td>575</td>
<td>616</td>
<td>+41</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>256%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student 16</td>
<td>565</td>
<td>597</td>
<td>+32</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>200%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student 17</td>
<td>513</td>
<td>428</td>
<td>-85</td>
<td>20</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student 18</td>
<td>499</td>
<td>563</td>
<td>+64</td>
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<td>320%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student 19</td>
<td>548</td>
<td>586</td>
<td>+38</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>238%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student 20</td>
<td>613</td>
<td>629</td>
<td>+16</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>229%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student 21</td>
<td>586</td>
<td>600</td>
<td>+14</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>108%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student 22</td>
<td>507</td>
<td>564</td>
<td>+57</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>285%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student 23</td>
<td>592</td>
<td>589</td>
<td>-3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student 24</td>
<td>452</td>
<td>472</td>
<td>+20</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student 25</td>
<td>515</td>
<td>580</td>
<td>+65</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>325%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student 26</td>
<td>580</td>
<td>595</td>
<td>+15</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>94%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student 27</td>
<td>601</td>
<td>593</td>
<td>-8</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

i-Ready Learning System

The researcher analyzed the i-Ready Projected Annual Typical Growth Scale Points to analyze each student’s reading growth at the end of the school year. Typical Growth is the student’s average annual growth at the current grade and placement based on the student’s baseline data collected at the beginning of the year. Projected to Annual Typical Growth Scale Points is the number of points the student needs to score to meet their projected growth by the end of the school year. Out of 27 students, 22 students (81.4%) met their projected growth score. Of the 22 students who met their projected growth, five exceeded their projected growth by 300% or greater. Six students exceeded their projected growth by 200% or more, seven students exceeded their projected growth by at least 100%, and four students exceeded their projected...
growth by less than 100%. Five students scored lower on the EOY diagnostic than the MOY diagnostic and, therefore, did not meet their projected growth in reading for the 2022-2023 school year.

Of the 27 students tested, 22 students demonstrated improvement from their MOY to EOY assessments. The three highest scores improved by 64, 65, and 87 points in their i-Ready score. Student 9 improved their score by 87 points and increased their reading score from a Grade 1 to a Grade 3 reading level. Additionally, the student showed improvement in the following domains: Vocabulary increased from Grade 2 to Grade 3, Comprehension of Literature increased from Grade 1 to Grade 4, and Comprehension of Informational Text increased from Grade K to Grade 3.

Student 25 increased their reading score by 65 points and increased from a Grade 3 to a Grade 4 reading level. The student showed improvement in the following domains: Vocabulary increased from Grade 3 to Grade 4, Comprehension of Literature increased from Grade 2 to Early 5, and Comprehension of Informational Text increased from Grade 3 to Early Grade 5.

Student 18 increased their reading score by 64 points and increased from a Grade 3 to a Grade 4 reading level. The student showed improvement in the following domains: Vocabulary increased from Grade 3 to Grade 4, Comprehension of Literature increased from Grade 3 to Grade 4, and Comprehension of Informational Text increased from Grade 2 to Grade 4.

**Summary**

This chapter sought to answer the following research questions: “How does ability grouping and the use of i-Ready learning system impact students’ academic achievement in reading in a fifth-grade classroom”? The data also set out to answer, “What is the impact of ability grouping as it relates to students’ reading confidence”? and the question, “What is the
The study was conducted through a mixed methods research design and utilized pre-and post-questionnaires, student focus surveys, and i-Ready Reading Assessment middle and end-of-year diagnostic scores. The researcher analyzed students’ Annual Typical Growth score data along with an inductive method to identify themes that emerged from student responses.

**Research Questions**

**Research Question 1**

How does ability grouping and the use of i-Ready learning system impact students’ academic achievement in reading in a fifth-grade classroom? The implementation of ability grouping yielded positive growth as shown by students’ i-Ready scores. Of the 27 participants, 22 participants (81.4%) met their projected Annual Typical Growth Score and increased their reading level.

**Research Question 2**

What is the impact of ability grouping on students’ attitudes toward reading? The mean for the pre-and post-questionnaires showed an increase ($M=3.48$, $M=3.68$) in students’ attitudes toward reading throughout the study. Students reported an increase in their enjoyment of reading books at home and reading aloud in class, and students’ self-views as a strong reader showed an increase over the six-week study.

**Research Question 3**

What is the impact of ability grouping as it relates to students’ attitudes toward working in reading groups? The mean for the pre-and post-questionnaires increased ($M=3.34$, $M=3.64$) in students’ attitudes toward working in reading groups. Students expressed an increase in confidence and enjoyment of working with peers. Specifically, students reported increased
confidence to ask questions, increased confidence to read in small groups, and enjoyment of working in groups with their peers.

The qualitative results suggested that the attitudes toward reading data did show a positive difference in how students viewed reading. Furthermore, the attitudes toward small group instruction data results suggested that using homogeneous reading groups produced a yield an increase in students’ views of ability-based reading groups. Lastly, the results of the quantitative data suggested that the implementation of the homogeneous small-group intervention did have an impact on student achievement in reading.
CHAPTER 5
SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overview of the Study

The researcher used a mixed-methods research design to explore the impacts of ability grouping on academic achievement and attitudes toward reading in a fifth-grade classroom. Using teacher-made questionnaires, i-Ready diagnostic data, and student-focus interviews, the teacher-researcher analyzed students’ reading growth from the middle of the year to the end of the year. The teacher-researcher also analyzed students’ views and attitudes toward reading class and working in reading groups throughout the six-week study. This chapter includes the conclusions and recommendations of the data collected during the research study.

Problem of Practice

Learning to read sets the foundation for students to succeed in all aspects of life (Castles et al., 2018). The level of reading proficiency varies from student to student, and it is the teacher’s mission to differentiate instruction in a method that will accommodate the learner’s readiness to learn (Tomlinson, 2017). When students are homogeneously grouped, teachers are allowed to tailor the curriculum in a manner deemed the most effective and impactful for each group of learners (Hodgen et al., 2022). For small group instruction to be intentional and meaningful, the content and delivery should be adjusted
to directly impact the learner’s specific area of academic need (Megableh & Abdullah, 2021). Ability grouping not only impacts learning achievement but also impacts students’ self-esteem. Hong et al. (2012) expressed that implementing homogeneous grouping increases self-esteem in low-ability students due to the absence of academic stress and competition, thus improving student learning. The middle of year i-Ready diagnostic scores indicated a need for interventions in reading instruction.

**Research Question**

RQ 1: How does ability grouping and the use of i-Ready learning system impact students’ academic achievement in reading in a fifth-grade classroom?

RQ 2: What is the impact of ability grouping as it relates to students’ reading confidence?

RQ 3: What is the impact of ability grouping as it relates to students’ attitudes toward working in reading groups?

**Purpose of the Study**

The study aimed to determine if ability grouping impacted the reading achievement of fifth-grade students. The action research study was designed to understand the impact of ability grouping to increase students’ reading comprehension as measured by i-Ready reading assessment. Additionally, the action research study examined the impact of students’ confidence and motivation to participate in class as reading skills increased and if their attitudes towards working in reading groups shifted as reading skills enhanced.
Overview of the Methodology

An action research study guided this dissertation in practice. Through action research, the researcher identified the academic benefits of homogeneous reading groups in a fifth-grade classroom, the impact of ability grouping on students’ confidence, and the impact of ability grouping on students’ attitudes toward working in ability-based reading groups. The data was collected from the teacher-researcher’s fifth-grade classroom at a K-8 school in Savannah, Georgia. Through the collection of data from i-Ready reading diagnostics, student questionnaires, and student focus surveys, the teacher-researcher concluded that homogeneous reading groups yielded a significant increase in students’ reading achievement and confidence in reading. The teacher-researcher also noted that the implementing ability grouping did not improve students’ attitudes toward reading.

Results and Findings

This mixed-methods action research study included a qualitative and quantitative method for data collection. The results of this research provided answers to the three research questions that drove this action research study. A summary of the findings unveils that in the reading class utilized for this intervention, grouping students by ability and the use of the i-Ready learning assessment positively impacted academic achievement, as demonstrated by an increase in i-Ready diagnostic scores from the middle of the year to the end of the academic school year. The implementation of ability grouping also increased students’ reading confidence. Lastly, students’ attitudes toward working in small groups did show a positive change throughout this study.
Research Question 1

The first research question asked: How does ability grouping and the use of i-Ready learning system impact students’ academic achievement in reading in a fifth-grade classroom? The i-Ready diagnostic provided evidence that students had significant reading gains from the middle to the end of the year diagnostic. The implementation of ability grouping yielded positive growth, as shown by students’ i-Ready scores. Of the 27 participants, 22 met their Projected Annual Typical Growth Score and increased their reading level.

Research Question 2

The second research question asked: What is the impact of ability grouping as it relates to students’ reading confidence? Five themes emerged from the focus group interviews. The five themes were:

1. Increased confidence.
2. Students prefer reading with peers.
3. Students prefer working with students who have similar reading levels.
4. Students viewed their reading performance as improved.
5. Peer groups offer support.

Students reported that working in reading groups contributed to an increase in their reading confidence. Due to the abundance of time spent reading aloud with peers, students learned to use their group members’ help to decode unfamiliar words, clarify unknown terms or concepts, and model reading fluency. The third theme emerged from the focus interviews in which the six student participants reported their preference for reading groups comprised of peers on similar reading levels. The fourth and fifth themes
materialized through student statements of being able to attain the level of help and support needed while offering their group members help and support. It is important to note the change in students’ views as indicated by the results from the pre- and post-questionnaires.

**Research Question 3**

The third research question asked: What is the impact of ability grouping as it relates to students’ attitudes toward working in reading groups? The data from the pre- and post-questionnaires showed that students reported having more confidence when working with peers, reading aloud with peers, and overall enjoyment for working in groups with peers.

**Implications for Future Research**

This mixed-methods action research had a participant sample size of 27 students in a fifth grade reading class. The teacher-researcher selected this sample due to the convenience of being the teacher of record for this class. For future research, it is suggested that a larger sample size be studied across multiple grade levels. This action research study examined participants’ reading growth over a six-week duration.

Increasing the number of weeks in future studies to include i-Ready diagnostic results from the beginning, middle, and end of the school year may capture a holistic snapshot of students’ growth in reading. Including the beginning of the year, i-Ready diagnostic may unveil that some students are achieving reading growth during the first half of the school year (the beginning of year to the middle of year i-Ready testing window) that was not present during the middle of year to end of year testing window. Data from the entirety of the school year should uncover some amount of growth occurring with each student.
Due to the short duration of this study, the researcher may need more data on students’ perspectives of reading groups. Reading groups are fluid throughout the school year; therefore, this study could need more than the students’ yearlong experience in ability groups. This study only captured the students’ most recent views of their current group. This research study collected pre-and post-questionnaire results near the end of the academic school year. A suggestion for future research is to collect student pre-questionnaire data at the start of the school year and post-questionnaire data at the end of the school year.

The impacts of ability grouping require additional research to understand the full impact and the contribution of ability grouping on student reading achievement. Future studies could be more inclusive of yearlong data. The questionnaires and focus surveys’ results demonstrated that ability grouping impacts students’ views toward reading and reading groups. However, the degree of impact ability grouping has on students’ attitudes toward reading and working in small groups requires additional research.

**Action Plan**

The researcher’s action plan is to provide reading instruction using best practices to close the student achievement gap. The qualitative data indicated that implementing ability grouping positively impacted student reading growth over six weeks. The quantitative data indicated that students enjoyed working with their peers during reading groups and viewed working with them as beneficial to their learning and enjoyment. The researcher intends to use this data to drive the decision to continue teaching through homogenous reading groups.
The research results will be shared with colleagues during monthly professional development. This study was conducted in a school district that has granted teachers the autonomy to decide the best method for grouping their students. Because this study was designed to impact reading classrooms, teachers should have this data to help drive their grouping practice decisions. This research data will be shared with the district’s Literacy Task Force. As the district is changing its teaching practices in reading, this data could offer valuable guidance. A representative from the Literacy Task Force is also a teacher in the school where this study was conducted. The teacher-researcher will schedule a meeting to discuss the research data.

Summary

This action research study evaluated the effect of homogeneous grouping on reading achievement, students’ attitudes toward reading, and small-group instruction in a fifth grade reading class. The researcher measured the impacts of homogeneous grouping using i-Ready diagnostic scores, student questionnaires, and student-focus interviews. The data collected concluded that the homogeneous grouping of students positively impact students’ success in the classroom.

This study unearthed an increase in students’ reading achievement. Due to the positive impacts, the teacher-researcher, a reading teacher, shared these findings with the reading teachers in her school and the district’s Literacy Task Force school representative. While additional research is needed to further this area of research, the study’s results will continue to impact the researcher’s current and future reading classes.
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APPENDIX A: PRE-QUESTIONNAIRE

**Attitudes Toward Reading**

**Directions**: Select one of the following responses for each question: “Strongly Disagree”, “Disagree”, “Neither Disagree or Agree”, “Agree”, or “Strongly Agree”

1. I enjoy reading aloud in class.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither Disagree or Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

2. I view myself as a strong reader.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither Disagree or Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

3. I avoid being called on to read aloud in class.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither Disagree or Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

4. I am able to learn from what I read.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither Disagree or Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

5. I enjoy going to reading class.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither Disagree or Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

6. I like to read books at home.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither Disagree or Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
7. I am able to answer questions about what we read in class.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither Disagree or Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

8. I do not like to read in front of my classmates.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither Disagree or Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

9. I have a hard time focusing on what I read.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither Disagree or Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

10. I perform well on reading tests.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither Disagree or Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
APPENDIX B: PRE-QUESTIONNAIRE

**Attitudes Toward Small Group Instruction**

**Directions:** Select one of the following responses for each question: “Strongly Disagree”, “Disagree”, “Neither Disagree or Agree”, “Agree”, or “Strongly Agree”

1. I enjoy working in groups with my peers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither Disagree or Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

2. I feel confident when I work in groups with my peers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither Disagree or Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

3. I feel shy when I am working in groups with my peers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither Disagree or Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

4. I am able to contribute to conversations about what we read in small groups.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither Disagree or Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

5. I do not feel very smart when I am asked to work in small groups.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither Disagree or Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
6. I would rather work independently.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither Disagree or Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

7. I feel more confident reading in small groups.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither Disagree or Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

8. I like working in small groups with peers who read on a similar level.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither Disagree or Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

9. In small groups, I feel more confident to ask questions if I am unsure.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither Disagree or Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

10. Small groups are fun because I can talk to my friends.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither Disagree or Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
APPENDIX C: READING ATTITUDES QUESTIONNAIRE SCORE SHEET

Reading Attitude Questionnaire Score Sheet

Student Name ______________________________

Date Administered __________________________

5-Strongly Agree
4-Agree
3-Neither Agree nor Disagree
2-Disagree
1-Strongly Disagree

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attitudes Toward Reading</th>
<th>Attitudes Toward Small Group Instruction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. _____</td>
<td>1. _____</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. _____</td>
<td>2. _____</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. _____</td>
<td>3. _____</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. _____</td>
<td>4. _____</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. _____</td>
<td>5. _____</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

Score: ______

Combined Score: ________
APPENDIX D: STUDENT FOCUS INTERVIEW

Student Focus Interview

I am going to ask you some questions about your experience and thoughts when working in reading groups.

1. How do reading groups impact your confidence in reading?

2. Do you prefer to work in reading groups with peers who read on a similar level or peers who read on lower or higher levels? Why?

3. Do you feel that working in a reading group helps to improve your reading? Why?
APPENDIX E: POST-QUESTIONNAIRE ATTITUDES TOWARD READING

Attitudes Toward Reading

Directions: Select one of the following responses for each question: “Strongly Disagree”, “Disagree”, “Neither Disagree or Agree”, “Agree”, or “Strongly Agree”

1. I enjoy reading aloud in class.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither Disagree or Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

2. I view myself as a strong reader.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither Disagree or Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

3. I avoid being called on to read aloud in class.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither Disagree or Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

4. I am able to learn from what I read.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither Disagree or Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

5. I enjoy going to reading class.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither Disagree or Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
6. I like to read books at home.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither Disagree or Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

7. I am able to answer questions about what we read in class.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither Disagree or Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

8. I do not like to read in front of my classmates.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither Disagree or Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

9. I have a hard time focusing on what I read.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither Disagree or Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

10. I perform well on reading tests.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither Disagree or Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
APPENDIX F: POST-QUESTIONNAIRE ATTITUDES TOWARD SMALL GROUP INSTRUCTION

Attitudes Toward Small Group Instruction

Directions: Select one of the following responses for each question: “Strongly Disagree”, “Disagree”, “Neither Disagree or Agree”, “Agree”, or “Strongly Agree”

1. I enjoy working in groups with my peers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither Disagree or Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
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</thead>
</table>

2. I feel confident when I work in groups with my peers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither Disagree or Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
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</table>

3. I feel shy when I am working in groups with my peers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither Disagree or Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
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</table>

4. I am able to contribute to conversations about what we read in small groups.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither Disagree or Agree</th>
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APPENDIX G: READING ATTITUDE QUESTIONNAIRE SCORE SHEET

Reading Attitude Questionnaire Score Sheet

Student Name ______________________________

Date Administered _________________________

5-Strongly Agree
4-Agree
3-Neither Agree nor Disagree
2-Disagree
1-Strongly Disagree

Attitudes Toward Reading Attitudes Toward Small Group Instruction

1. _____ 1. _____
2. _____ 2. _____
3. _____ 3. _____
4. _____ 4. _____
5. _____ 5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

Score: ______

6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

Score: ______

Combined Score: ______