RECORDING TEACHERS' VOICES: PRESERVICE TEACHERS' USE OF INTERVIEW AS A QUALITATIVE RESEARCH METHOD

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Abstract

Undergraduate research is beneficial to students because it gives opportunities to dialog with experts and deepen understanding of course content. In this article, the author presented the design and implementation of a research-integrated reading course. It included a qualitative research (QR) project, using interview as a data collection method. It was intended that preservice teachers (PSTs) enrolled in the course would interview their cooperating teachers (CTs) in their field observation classrooms. The research question asked was: What are the reading assessment and remediation practices of a school teacher? PSTs completed and earned certificates of the Social and Behavioral Researchers' CITI training modules, formulated interview questions, gathered and analyzed academic literature on reading assessments, performed a mock-interview in class, and transcribed interview recording. Students who acquired consent from their CTs conducted and transcribed interviews and wrote a research report while students who did not acquire consent wrote a brief literature review as an alternative. The author presented the challenges and success of integrating qualitative research in a reading education course. Receiving IRB approval and gaining prospective participants' consent played a crucial role in the effectivity of a research-integrated education course.

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Introduction

The National Council on Undergraduate Research emphasized that undergraduate students from all academic disciplines should experience research, both as a requirement for completion or as a means to engage students in their courses (Wuetherick, Willison, & Shanahan, 2018). Conducting research is beneficial to students because it affords them the opportunities to dialog with experts in the profession and deepen their understanding of course content as they witness how the concepts and skills learned in a course play out in the real, day-to-day world. In doing this, undergraduate students are afforded personal growth and intellectual development, particularly in the area of critical thinking, information literacy, and scholarly writing (Slobodzian & Pancsofar, 2014; Szecsi et al, 2019). However, in the field of teacher preparation, engagement in research and the development of researcher dispositions are not common (Dobozy, 2011; Manak & Young, 2014). In fact, there is a perception among students and teacher educators reported by Baker (2022) that PSTs do not need to develop research skills. It has become evident that the connection between research and the teaching profession is undervalued (West & Meier, 2019).

In my institution, Texas A&M University-Kingsville, undergraduate research is valued as a high-impact practice in promoting active learning environments that help students develop inquiry and critical thinking skills within the classroom (ICARE Grant, 2022). The implementation of undergraduate research would increase contact between students and faculty, both inside and outside the classroom, which in turn may enhance students' development and learning outcomes. In the 2019 spring semester, a call for proposals was disseminated to redesign undergraduate courses to become research-integrated. Faculty

members whose proposals were chosen received a stipend, and students were supported by having access to a research tutor and getting office materials for their research activities. Having completed a course redesign in 2018, I learned the value of engaging PSTs with research (Modesto, Cooke, & Desiderio, 2021) and submitted another proposal. With my background in qualitative research, I wanted to familiarize my students with this approach and provide experience in collecting interview data from their CTs. As Bray and Miller (2014) stated, "preservice teachers can learn extensively from particular teachers who are still excited about teaching and who themselves are still learning from current research and best practice." (Bray & Miller, 2014, p. 5). Towards the end of 2019 spring semester, my course redesign proposal was approved. In this article, I explained the course redesign and its implementation in 2019 fall semester. At the end, I reflected on the success and challenges encountered.

Designing and Implementing the Research-Integrated Course

To engage PSTs in a complete QR process, I redesigned a senior-level course entitled, Classroom Reading Assessment and Remediation. The PSTs attended face-to-face classes and completed 80 hours of classroom observation in elementary schools in South Texas. To apply the research concepts and skills the PSTs were learning, I planned that PSTs interview their CTs about their instructional and assessment practices and produce a research report. I chose interview because it has become the main data collection procedure closely associated with QR, and previous research considered it as a "reflective learning opportunity" (Bray & Miller, 2014, p. 1). Moreover, interviews can be used to collect "snapshots of teacher's careers and extract words of wisdom to support young teachers" (Peters, Robinson, & Ellis, 2014, p. 14). I considered the act of recording classroom teachers' voices would be a way for my students to construct knowledge outside of our college classroom and to see the relationships between reading assessment concepts learned in classroom and the actual work of an elementary reading teacher.

Being that the PSTs were already placed in a classroom to observe, interviewing the CT would be a logical addition to enrich the PSTs' field experience. Additionally, PSTs' purposeful engagement with CTs would address criticism documented in the literature that teacher educators do not have recency of experience in teaching in PK-12 schools (Williams & Sembiante, 2022). In interviewing CTs, my students would be able to document the work of a classroom teacher and connect their findings with course content.

To establish PSTs' knowledge on QR, I taught the following: characteristics of qualitative research, applications of qualitative research on classroom settings, interview as a data collection method, doing manual transcriptions, inductive analysis of interview transcripts, using electronic database to search for academic literature, and the use of APA conventions in writing a report. I taught these topics within five weeks. To give opportunity to practice interviewing, PSTs conducted an interview in class, with their peers as participants, regarding their field observation experiences. PSTs used the voice memo application in their smartphones to record the interview and later manually transcribed the recording. They submitted the transcriptions and reflections about this experience to me. Formative assessments were done via classroom and online discussions, reflections, and individualized progress monitoring.

Because this was the first time PSTs were exposed to QR, sample articles were read and examined in class. I used one of my own published QR as a model. Later, PSTs searched for articles they could use for their study, using the university's electronic database. Table 1 below was used as a guide to understand and discuss QR articles.

Table 1

Questions to Consider in Understanding QR Articles

1. Purpose of the Study:	What was the purpose of the study? Why is the study important according to the authors?
2. Participants:	Who was the author? How was he/she related to the purpose, participants, and study site? Who were the participants (number and characteristics), and how were they selected?
3. Context:	Where did the study take place? Describe important characteristics.
4. Study Procedures:	What were the main steps in the study? Describe or diagram in a flow chart any important relationships among the steps.
5. Data:	What data (field notes, interview transcripts) was collected, and what was the role of the researchers in the process?
6. Analysis:	What form of data analysis was used, and what was it designed to reveal?
7. Results:	What did the author identify as primary results?
8. Conclusions:	What did the authors assert? How did the events and experiences of the entire study contribute to the conclusion?

9. What interesting facts/ideas did you learn from reading the article? Include what was of value to you, e.g., references, instruments, or personal inspiration.

In addition to the existing Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) for this course pertaining to reading, I added the following SLOs relevant to research: (a) gain an understanding of the characteristics and uses of qualitative research in educational settings, (b) complete the student level CITI training requirements for investigators primarily with social/behavioral research with human subjects, (c) develop skills in interviewing as a qualitative data collection method, and (d) apply APA conventions such as the use of in-text citations, references and formatting. The table below shows the interview guide, with descriptive questions (Bevan, 2014), formulated by students collaboratively, with my guidance.

Table 2

Interview Guide to be Used for Cooperating Teachers

A. Questions about the Participant
1. Could you please tell me what grade level you are teaching? How many years have you taught this grade level?
2. How do you feel about teaching this grade level?
3. How are your students like?
4. Could you describe how your typical day as a reading teacher looks like?

B. Questions about Instruction
1. What are your go-to reading instructional practices?
2. Is there a particular teaching strategy or instructional practice that you find most effective?
3. Is there a particular teaching strategy or instructional practice that you find to be most ineffective?
4. Do you determine the reading levels of your students? If yes, how and when? And if not, why?
5. Do you group students for instruction? If yes, how do you group students with varying reading levels?

6. How do you differentiate your instruction to target the different reading levels of your students?
7. What accommodations do you implement for ELs and special education students?

C. Questions about Assessment
1. What assessments do you do to determine your students' reading progress?
2. How do you organize or document your data from the assessment?
3. How involved is your district when it comes to assessing the students?

D. Questions about Remediation
1. Could you please tell me about your remediation processes?
2. How do you address the needs of your struggling readers?
3. Are there remediation practices that you have done that you think is more effective than others?

The research activities and qualitative research paper comprised 20% of the final grade. Included in these instructional activities was the completion of the Social and Behavioral Researchers' CITI training modules which needed to be submitted for the blanket IRB protocol application. All students completed this task, and I submitted the IRB application in September 2019. Presented below is the rubric I designed for grading the research report:

Table 3
Rubric for Grading the Research Report

	Excellent 4 point	Good 3 points	Fair 2 points	Poor 1 point	Comments
1. **Overall Quality**					
2. **Writing Mechanics** (e.g., active voice; sentence structure, smooth flow of ideas from one section to the next, correct spelling, capitalization, and punctuation)					
3. **Overall adherence to APA style and standards** (in-text citations and reference list)					
4. **Introduction** (Did you provide a clear introduction about reading instruction, assessment and remediation? Did you review at least three articles that talk about your topic? Overall, does the reader fully understand how the literature informed the author's research and vice versa? Did you state the research question clearly?)					
5. **Context of the Study**					

(Did you adequately explain why you did this study, the situation that prompted the research?)					
6. Methodology and Analysis (Did you clearly explain how you collected data--when, where, how many times, how much? Did you provide a discussion about how you analyzed data and the rationale for your decisions?)					
7. Results (Did you explain, with support, what you found out, i.e., the answer to your research question, based on your data analysis?)					
8. Conclusion (Did you revisit the literature you referred to in your introduction and then discuss how the study's findings complement, add to, and/or contradict it?)					

Success and Challenges of Research Integration

Success

Qualitative research is an appropriate inclusion in an education course because of its descriptive nature (Creswell, 2009). It was intended that data collection and analysis would allow students, as investigators, to gain an understanding of the assessment and remediation practices of their cooperating teachers and the reasons behind these practices. Four out of 21 students acquired consent from their CTs and submitted research reports. (See Appendix for a sample interview transcription.) Those who did not interview wrote a literature review about current reading instruction and assessment practices. Thus, four basic qualitative research papers were produced and 16 students wrote a literature review. One student stopped attending the class.

One of the goals of my institution in calling for a course redesign was to help increase student engagement and critical thinking skills through experiential learning initiatives. This goal was achieved as evidenced by the following: (a) Twenty students successfully conducted a mock, recorded interview in class and submitted their transcriptions, (b) They received CITI training certificates which were included in the IRB application, and (c) They submitted discussion board requirements regarding research articles they searched using the university's electronic database. Overall, students gained basic knowledge and skills about gathering research literature, were given opportunities to read and analyze the literature, and understood interviewing as a qualitative research data collection method. The table below provided examples of students' reflections in conducting research.

Table 4

Examples of Student Reflections

Student 1:

> After interviewing Mrs. T, I learned that scaffolding students' learning by using different strategies such as graphic organizers or asking questions can be excellent examples of how to aid students' learning. Mrs. T was my CT, and I saw her use different strategies to support her student's learning. Using graphic organizers were a daily thing in her class, and I had some idea as to why, but after conducting this research, I see why they are so important for students.

Student 2:

> Conducting the interview enabled me to learn in-depth how a reading teacher thoroughly plans for her students' reading enrichment. I aspire to take on some strategies from Mrs. C to improve students' reading comprehension and fluency. Teachers are encouraged to consistently find new strategies that will suit a student's learning style. I had the privilege of working closely with Mrs. C, and as she was answering my questions, I was recalling the strategies that she was discussing in the interview. I was able to help in her classroom by working with a small group of students and going over different reading strategies that best suited the students' learning styles. Something I will take from this research and my field observation hours is the commitment that a reading teacher will be entrusted in, to aid all students in every way possible through a plethora of resources.

Student 3:

> The learning that I took away from this experience is completing a qualitative research paper, interviewing an elementary reading teacher, and transcribing an interview. I learned what researchers have to say about how to teach, assess, and give remediation through the literature review. I learned from an elementary reading teacher how to teach, assess, and remediate reading in a third-grade classroom. This experience has educated me on what reading instruction, assessments, and remediation practices to use and teach in my elementary classroom. My new knowledge has helped me better understand how I can help my elementary students become good readers, develop comprehension, fluency, and understand what the text means in their reading level.

The PSTs' reflections illustrated that integrating research in an education course allowed for meaningful connections between course content and real-world experiences. This is supported in the literature on undergraduate research. According to Devore and Munk (2015), reflection on what was learned throughout the research experience reflects best practices in teacher preparation. The learnings by PSTs transcended the current focus and pressures of teacher licensure/certification (Baker 2022). They realized the required commitment to the profession, the reasons behind using a specific instructional strategy, and the amount of planning needed to ensure students' literacy development—all of which occur outside the discussions for licensure test preparation.

Challenges

It was a challenge to implement a research-integrated course within a short period of time. I submitted the IRB protocol application for this course in September 2019 and received approval only on

December 2, 2019. This put tremendous pressure on me and my students. Because of the delay, it was challenging for the PSTs to gain consent from their cooperating teachers to participate in the interviews. The cooperating teachers were busy wrapping up the semester and did not want added tasks. Only four out of 19 students were able to interview and write a research report. Those who did not interview completed an alternative project, a brief literature review on reading assessment and remediation. This situation was disappointing to the PSTs. After being instructed on how to interview, transcribe and analyze data, majority of them were not able to apply what they have learned.

Another challenge was gaining students' buy-in for the research activities. Not everyone was on board and enthusiastic about carrying out the project. To illustrate, one student wrote in the course evaluation: "She (the instructor) insists on making this a research-based course; however, I don't see how that will benefit us in any way as classroom teachers." This sentiment is supported by the literature. Previous research has documented that PSTs dislike research and do not see the value or connection between research and the teaching profession (West & Meier, 2019). To add, there is an existing perception by PSTs and teacher educators that teacher candidates do not need research skills (Baker, 2022). This situation reflects the current focus of teacher preparation on getting PSTs certified and the lack of emphasis on developing critical thinkers and producing students who knowledge-consumers rather than knowledge-producers (Kalsoom, Qureshi, & Imran, 2021)

Additionally, I felt and saw students' anxiety and lack of confidence in carrying out the research activities as they have never done research of this nature in their college careers. I had to become emphatic and intentional in explaining the benefits of doing research as PSTs, but I was uncertain if the PSTs genuinely appreciated the process, especially that the majority did not get their CT's consent to participate.

Recommendations

Based on my experience of redesigning an education course to be research-integrated, I recommend that application for an IRB protocol begin before the semester starts. The students' CITI training certificates can be later added to the application after approval is obtained. This will ensure that students will have enough time to work with prospective research participants in gaining consent. It is also important for teacher educators to be open to students' feedback during the semester, especially regarding their doubts in the value of research in teacher preparation to ensure that students are meaningfully engaged in the research process.

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Appendix

Below is the interview transcript of a PST with her CT.

PST: Hello, Mrs. C. Thank you for taking the time to be with me today and for agreeing to be a participant of this study. I shall ask you several questions about your experiences and practices in teaching and assessing reading. Please answer the questions honestly. If there is any question you do not wish to answer or a question you would like me to explain, please let me know. Do you have any questions before we begin? If none, let us start.

PST: Could you please tell me what grade level you are currently teaching? How many years have you taught this level?

CT: I'm currently teaching fourth-grade, and this is my second year teaching fourth-grade.

PST: How do you feel about teaching this grade? How are your students like?

CT: I actually like it. I was in fifth-grade before, but fourth-grade students seem to be more interested in the learning and more naïve, more willing to do their work and less…rebellious than the fifth-graders that I had previously, so I really enjoy working with them.

PST: Could you describe how your typical day as a reading teacher looks like?

CT: On Mondays, I introduced my objective, the vocabulary, the story of the week, preview the story, teach the skill that we are targeting for the week, and if we have a chance, we start we the shared reading. On Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday, we start off with reviewing the objective, reviewing the skill, reviewing the I do and we do, doing the you do for the skill, and then finish up the shared reading as we're done with that, the students go into groups and they do their class work. It's either a vocabulary activity, an activity regarding the skill of the week, comprehension skills, independent reading, and then on Fridays we do the assessments.

PST: How do you teach reading?

CT: I first have to model the objective, the skill that we are teaching, I use videos, songs, games. After I model, we do the activity together which is called the we do. We do it a couple days, depending on how the students are grasping the concept, and then they are off on their own doing the you do which is their independent activity for the skill through the week.

PST: What are your go-to reading instructional practices?

CT: This year we got the Pearson anthology. We have a lot of resources such as the education galaxy, Istation, AR, Cor2 epic where the students can read online books. Then we have resources here in hand that we can use with them as games from teachers' pay teachers, activities from task cards.

PST: Is there a particular teaching strategy or instructional practice that you find most effective?

CT: I've noticed that when I teach in small groups, it is easier for the students to grasp the concept because I'm more focused on them. and teaching it two three times to them will work more than just teaching it once or reviewing it.

PST: Is there a particular teaching strategy or instructional practice that you find to be most ineffective?

CT: I think when you just do direct instruction and you don't involve the students, that's when they get lost or bored and they don't really retain the information. They have to be involved--participate, collaborate with others work in teams, reteach, teaching others in paired group--that's when the learning takes place.

PST: Do you determine the reading levels of your students? If yes, how and when? And if not, why?

CT: Yes, we determine it by administering the IRI using the Fountas and Pinnell kit that is provided by the district, and we do it every six weeks.

PST: Do you group students for instruction? If yes, how do you group students with varying reading levels?

CT: I have different reading levels, different groups in the class, so I have four different team. For example, learning team A are my students that are below level like the 3.2 P; team B are my students that are maybe closer to what the reading goal should be; team C would be my students are on-reading level, and team D are above, not just my GT students but students that could handle more challenging assignments.

PST: How do you differentiate your instruction to target the different reading levels of your students?

CT: We do the differentiate by using guided reading groups, by providing different activities to the learning teams, depending on what learning team the students are in. I give them different assignments for the same skill either more challenging or an assignment that can be scaffolded to my below-level readers so that they are able to succeed in that objective even though they do it in different ways.

PST: What accommodations do you implement for ELs and special education students?

CT: Providing extra time, graphic organizers, visuals, vocabulary words, scaffolding for them so that they don't feel stressed out and don't feel like they can't succeed in class.

PST: What are the assessments you do to determine your students' reading development or progress?

CT: We do the weekly assessments from the Pearson website that we get online. We do that for vocabulary and comprehension. We also do a skill assessment, so we can know if they comprehended the skill that was taught. And then from there, I can see what students retained the information and what students need the extra help.

PST: How do you organize or document your data from the assessment for each student?

CT: I usually do it on Google drive, using Google sheets and from there, I have the reading level, Istation assessment monthly, Lexile levels, and CBA or benchmark data. And from there I can see where is it that the students are improving or a difficult time so that I can go ahead target those students and see where the problem is.

PST: How involved is your district when it comes to assessing the students?

CT: This year, I was involved in the PLC which is a committee that gets together. It's one reading teacher per campus for each grade level…we don't create the CBA or the benchmark assessment, but we were part of the committee where we see the assessment and we see where the students had weaknesses last year, on that same assessment so that we can fix the problem. It could be maybe an instructional problem not if a lot of students missed a question, for example so from there we can use that data to come and make changes in the classroom.

PST: Could you please tell me about your remediation processes?

CT: I go back to reteaching, regrouping. Last year we had power hour, and from there we formed different groups. I do learning teams by levels, and from there we do different activities with the teams depending on how they are approaching the skill and where is it that they are having difficulties. When I do the guided reading, I also have them by reading level and from there I can ask them more detailed questions, or I can try and have them develop more on their answers when I am asking them a question if they don't comprehend what the question is asking them. So there's different ways to help them not only with reading comprehension but with fluency as well.

PST: For students who continue to struggle, what methods do you use try and fix the issue?

CT: Right now what I'm doing is they're getting the data from CBA. They have a sheet that they can go on a daily basis. For example, if they are having trouble with inferencing, summarizing, or main idea, they can always go back and education galaxy has lessons by skills, so they go and search up the skill that they are having trouble with, and they can do a lesson on education galaxy based on what they are lacking or missing on the CBA. I also have task cards per objective which they can use during power hour, during extra instructional time, or any time that they need where they can target the skill that they are having difficulty with, if I'm not there to work with them one-on-one if I'm working with a different team.

PST: Are there reoccurring remediation that you have done that you think is more effective than others?

CT: Right now what I'm using is a lot of graphic organizer, I have anchor charts. Students have their notes in their reading interactive journals, but I'm also providing them with a small visual as I'm doing the small group tutoring where I can always go back and reteach that before we do an assignment or activity on that specific skill that I'm covering or trying to help the students target that skill by using those graphic organizer… their like mini anchor charts that I keep in a binder… just flip through them as we review. That's something that I've been using this year and hopefully it becomes a little more effective.

PST: Thank you for answering my questions. The recorded interview will be transcribed, and I will show it to you so that you may read it. You can tell me if the transcription is accurate. Again, I appreciate your time.