A Qualitative Study of Kindergarten Through Grade 6 Tutors' Experiences Implementing Synchronous, One-On-One Online Tutoring as Literacy Intervention

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Abstract
This qualitative study explored the perceptions of 20 online literacy tutors within the United States on the benefits and challenges of implementing synchronous, one-on-one online tutoring for literacy intervention to kindergarten through Grade 6 students and what they feel are elements contributing to success as they engage in this instructional format. Three research questions guided this study. Data were collected via an open-ended, online, confidential Qualtrics questionnaire and analyzed using manual qualitative coding. Findings revealed five themes related to benefits, challenges, and contributors to success, including pedagogy, technology, physical distance, accessibility, and intimacy and familiarity.

Keywords: Intervention, literacy, online, qualitative, synchronous, tutoring

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Instruction has increasingly moved online in the United States and worldwide. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2021), in 2020, 67% of students under 18 enrolled in public or private schools were required to shift to distance learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, the most recent National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) report indicates that 37% of Grade 4 students in the United States scored below basic in reading in 2022, demonstrating the most significant decline in reading scores since 1990 (NCES, 2022). The negative academic impact resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic was more significant for Black, Hispanic, and low-income students, further widening an already-existing achievement gap (NCES, 2022).

Research surrounding one-on-one or small group literacy intervention in the form of tutoring has overwhelmingly suggested positive outcomes (Gersten et al., 2020; Pace Miles et al., 2019). Research examining online instruction has also shown benefits (e.g., increased access, improved engagement, and learning gains), as well as some challenges (Gregg & Shin, 2021; Guillen-Gamez et al., 2022; U. S. Department of Education, 2010; Weiss et al., 2022). Elements contributing to success have been outlined (Guillen-Gamez et al., 2022; Weiss et al., 2022). Studies devoted to synchronous, one-on-one online tutoring for literacy intervention in grades kindergarten through Grade 6, however, remain rare, with most of the relevant research taking place outside of the United States and focusing primarily on upper grades and higher education, and subjects other than ELA/literacy. As of the completion of this paper in November 2024, little research on this specific facet of online instruction has been peer-reviewed and published. The minimal research that does exist, though, indicates positive effects, specifically for traditionally marginalized students, thereby suggesting the power of online tutoring and its ability to contribute to the closing of existing achievement gaps (Carlana & La Ferrara, 2021; Gortazar et al., 2022).

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, online instruction has sharply increased (Okoro et al., 2021; Pratama et al., 2020). Further, students have experienced a considerable learning loss, thereby escalating the urgency for academic intervention (Engzell et al., 2021; Maldonado & De Witte, 2021). Expansion in the use of online formats for instruction, coupled with the need for academic intervention, increases the necessity to understand online instruction for intervention through research. This basic qualitative study explored tutors' perspectives on implementing synchronous, one-on-one online tutoring as literacy intervention for kindergarten through Grade 6 students across the United States, exploring the benefits, challenges, and elements contributing to success. Further research is necessary to guide and assist tutors conducting synchronous, one-on-one online literacy intervention. Researching this complex phenomenon from the tutors' perspectives may help conceptualize the meaning of the experience, thereby adding to the currently limited understanding (McAleese & Kilty, 2019; Merriam, 2009).

What are the tutors' perspectives on the benefits of synchronous, one-on-one online tutoring for literacy intervention for K–6 learners? What are the tutors' perspectives on the challenges of synchronous, one-on-one online tutoring for literacy intervention with this age cohort? What are the tutors' perspectives on the elements that lead to successful synchronous, one-on-one online tutoring for literacy intervention?

Literature Review

The literature review for this study revealed that there are successful outcomes of in-person, face-to-face tutoring for literacy intervention (Gersten et al., 2020; Pace Miles et al., 2019) and benefits to and generally positive effects of broad online instruction and distance learning (Gregg & Shin, 2021; U. S. Department of Education, 2010; Wisniewski et al., 2020); however, there is little current research exploring the specific area of synchronous one-on-one online literacy tutoring as an intervention for striving readers (de Rosa & Johnson, 2019) in elementary school. The scarce research that does exist is centered primarily on grades beyond elementary, frequently outside the United States, and in subject areas other than ELA. Synchronous one-on-one online literacy intervention furnishes access to valuable and necessary support for students who may otherwise not have the means to secure a qualified and knowledgeable tutor due to factors including, but not limited to, location, scheduling, or transportation (Liu & Li, 2020; Wisniewski et al., 2020).

The research literature review outlines literacy instruction, including a description of evidence-based literacy practice and an encapsulation of the science of reading, a term used to describe the body of research surrounding such practice. Following that is an explication of tutoring consisting of a brief history, an outline of shadow education (i.e., private, for-fee tutoring), and an overview of literacy tutoring. The review concludes with a summary of the research surrounding synchronous, one-on-one online literacy tutoring.

Literacy Instruction

In 1997, Congress assembled the NRP (2000) to gather and judge the effectiveness of various approaches to reading instruction. This comprehensive government review summarized research and outlined five areas of essential literacy instruction: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension (McKenna et al., 2021; Torgesen, 2005). The report specifically outlined the importance of direct and explicit instruction in phonemic awareness to facilitate improvements in reading and spelling and the benefits of systematic phonics instruction (NRP, 2000). The NRP (2000) determinations still stand as necessary and relevant, with current research in cognitive science and neuroscience conducted internationally only adding to and expanding its initial findings. The robust scientific consensus is that explicit, systematic, code-based literacy instruction benefits diverse learners and the general population (Puzio et al., 2020).

The science of reading is a term to describe the accumulation of research from various fields, from many countries, and over numerous years regarding reading development and reading instruction informed by replicated, peer-reviewed studies using the scientific method (Petscher et al., 2020). The science of reading is not a single approach to reading instruction but encompasses a wide range of research contributing to understanding literacy and informing instructional practices (Semingson & Kerns, 2021). It is essential to view the science of reading as dynamic and constantly developing due to continuing research and understanding (Fien et al., 2021).

As both a result of and a contributing factor leading to the examination of reading via the scientific process, the science of reading continues to strengthen as a social movement. Consequently, the call for evidence-based practice to meet the needs of all students, particularly

those who are struggling, is becoming increasingly widespread (Hindman et al., 2020; Solari et al., 2020). Furnishing access to supplemental instruction, or tutoring, to provide scientifically informed intervention to students in need is a natural result of the intense public and national focus on reading and ELA, coupled with the continuing and recently increasing academic struggle students are experiencing.

Tutoring

Tutoring, historically defined as one-on-one or small group interaction between an instructor and student(s) to increase learning of content or a skill (Nickow et al., 2020), originated during the 11th century in medieval Europe and was the primary way to pass on learning and culture outside of apprenticeship (Alesksandrovna et al., 2015; Kudinov et al., 2019). Within the 12th and 14th centuries, European Universities (e.g., Oxford, Cambridge), whose original primary purpose was to educate clergy, employed tutors as mentors (Alesksandrovna et al., 2015; Moore, 1968). Compulsory education, introduced in the 1800s, became widespread by the end of the century (Alesksandrovna et al., 2015; Gardner et al., 2007). This change resulted in tutoring evolving from the primary method of educating pupils to support learning in schools; tutoring became inexorably tied to mainstream education because it began to mimic or shadow mainstream schooling to facilitate students' success within it (Gupta, 2022; Baker, 2020).

Stevenson and Baker (1992) coined the term shadow education to describe a phenomenon emerging in Asia: individual, supplementary education outside of formal schooling purchased by Tokyo parents to support the upward mobility of their high-achieving teens. Shadow education, currently defined as private, supplementary, for-profit tutoring outside of, yet mimicking, the formal education system, has since become a widespread global phenomenon (Gupta, 2022), moving even into the United States, where it is more commonly termed private tutoring. Shadow education contains three common aspects that help define it, including a focus on academic subjects, being provided in addition to and outside of mainstream schooling, and the intention of financial gain for the instructor (Subedi, 2018). Shadow education is ubiquitous, inescapable, and likely to increase in frequency (Baker, 2020). Private tutoring for literacy intervention is one area of shadow education that is important to explore due in part to the United States government's focus on reading and ELA instruction, coupled with the exacerbating academic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, as evidenced in the most recent NAEP scores (NCES, 2022), resulting in a focused interest in literacy tutoring for purposes of academic intervention.

Literacy tutoring significantly improves the learning outcomes of participating students across populations (Gersten et al., 2020; Nickow et al., 2020). One-on-one or small group literacy intervention in the form of explicit, evidence-based instruction consistent with the findings of the NRP (2000) is particularly impactful, even when provided by paraprofessionals, volunteers, or parents (Markovitz et al., 2022). Specifically, interventions are most effective when addressing foundational skills, such as decoding and phonemic awareness, using evidence-based practices (Chan et al., 2022) and when conducted with less than five students at a time for short, intense sessions (Ludwig et al., 2019). Students who received evidence-based reading intervention showed significant gains in foundational reading skills (Bøg et al., 2021; Pace Miles et al., 2019).

Synchronous, One-On-One Online Tutoring

Although the number of current research studies examining synchronous online tutoring is sparse (de Rosa & Johnson, 2019), those that do exist have shown promising evidence regarding its benefits (Dean et al., 2021; Donovan et al., 2022; Weiss et al., 2022). Students engaged in synchronous online instruction demonstrate increased reading rates (Dean et al., 2021; Weiss et al., 2022) and improved focus and attention, generally comparable to the outcomes of face-to-face instruction (Gregg & Shin, 2021; Martin et al., 2021). Positive effects have even been found for students with Down syndrome (Grindle et al., 2019), suggesting the value of synchronous online literacy intervention for students with diverse needs.

Synchronous online tutoring has numerous advantages that do not exist within the traditional, in-person tutoring format, including, but not limited to, access, opportunity, and adaptability (Liu & Li, 2020; Gregg & Shin, 2021; Wisniewski et al., 2020). The online format may facilitate students receiving vital differentiated and 1:1 support they may otherwise find neither available nor attainable (Aslan et al., 2022). Further, caregivers report the online format as feasible and effective, allowing them to observe the tutoring session and learn concrete ways to support their students' learning (Beach et al., 2021).

Obstacles to successful and effective synchronous online tutoring also exist. While some studies report increased engagement, others suggest that students participating in synchronous online tutoring struggle to pay attention, regulate their behaviors and actions, and maintain interest (Lasnumanda & Tarigan, 2020; Okoro et al., 2021). Distance learning minimizes access to attractive and innovative materials and negates students' ability to physically interact with manipulatives, which is often crucial for younger students (Aslan et al., 2022; Liu & Li, 2020; Washburn et al., 2021). The online format tends to lessen visible and audible cues, restricting the tutor/tutee interaction and the ability for the tutor to assess students' emotional states (Aslan et al., 2022; Lambie & Law, 2020).

Additional barriers, unique to an online format, include unreliable internet access, technical troubles (e.g., losing internet, applications not working correctly), and variable sound quality (e.g., difficulty hearing one another, microphone malfunctions) (Bacon & Liu, 2021; Okoro et al., 2021). Access to technology, including hardware and internet service, may be a challenge for some students, particularly those of low income, leading to questions of equity (Johns & Mills, 2021). However, smartphones, public libraries, and schools are all means to internet and online access that may address this issue (Carlana & La Ferrara, 2021; Roschelle et al., 2020).

Finally, the learning curve for teachers engaging in online instruction is steep. Teachers leading synchronous online instruction lack guidance and support, both technological and pedagogical, and are currently left to struggle to figure things out independently, thereby increasing their workload (Aslan et al., 2022; Okoro et al., 2021). Tutors may benefit from increased awareness of the potential challenges and pitfalls of online instruction that may come from collaboration and communication with fellow online instructors (Curwen, 2020).

Research that has found benefits to and generally positive outcomes of synchronous online tutoring has many commonalities in approaches to instruction. Bacon and Liu (2021) described the dynamic nature of teaching as being made even more pronounced when moving

online; therefore, the components that make up strong and effective face-to-face instruction are equally or even more important online. Aslan et al. (2022) concur, referring in their study to the importance of instructors' pedagogical skills. A thread woven throughout studies on synchronous online tutoring, contributing to positive outcomes, is well-designed, evidence-based instruction that is systematic, explicit, structured, and diagnostic, aligned with the science of reading and provided by a trained instructor (Curwen, 2020; Weiss et al., 2022).

It is essential to actively engage students through interaction and resources while maintaining a clearly outlined protocol (Bacon & Liu, 2021; Lambie & Law, 2020). For example, using shared whiteboards as a tool fosters interaction and helps hold students' interest (Johns & Mills, 2021; Lambie & Law, 2020). Responsive pedagogy, including engaging conversations and dialogue, further increases student connection (Lawrence, 2020).

Creating a positive, caring learning environment that nurtures feelings of safety and trust and provides motivation and empathy, further facilitates student success during online learning (Donovan et al., 2022; Washburn et al., 2021), as well as honoring students' humanness and individuality (Lawrence, 2020).

Found benefits also result from actively connecting and engaging with students' caregivers, inviting them into the learning process, and recruiting their support (Aslan et al., 2022; Curwen, 2020; Washburn et al., 2021). The physical presence of the caregiver may support the student's focus and interaction with the instructor and the lesson, and the caregiver's ability to witness the instruction provides them with the means to continue supporting the student's learning beyond that session. The online format facilitates family interaction as the tutor is essentially at home with the student.

Finally, instructors having opportunities for collaboration, support, and training in both subject-area pedagogy, as well as technology navigation and appropriate communication techniques for the online format, in the form of professional development training, workshops, co-teaching groups, or mentorships, is indicated as a vital component of success (Johns & Mills, 2021; Washburn et al., 2021). Tutors must be aware of and attentive to the benefits and challenges of online tutoring for students and instructors and be able to adjust their pedagogy appropriately (Wisniewski et al., 2020). This, coupled with reflective practice on the instructor's part, is pivotal, as it facilitates understanding, meaning-making, and growth, thereby improving practice (Donovan et al., 2022; Liu & Li, 2020).

Method

This research employed a questionnaire approach to create and present a descriptive narrative interpreting tutors' understanding of the phenomenon of synchronous, one-on-one online tutoring for literacy intervention. This basic qualitative study used an open-ended online questionnaire to examine tutors' perceptions regarding the benefits and challenges of synchronous, one-on-one online tutoring and elements contributing to success. According to Eckerdal and Hagström (2017), qualitative questionnaires provide rich, informative, useful information illuminating aspects of everyday life.

Research Questions (RQs)

The research questions underlying this research were:

RQ1: What are the tutors' perspectives on the benefits of synchronous, one-on-one online tutoring for literacy intervention?

RQ2: What are the tutors' perspectives on the challenges of synchronous, one-on-one online tutoring for literacy intervention?

RQ3: What are the tutors' perspectives on the elements that lead to successful synchronous, one-on-one online tutoring for literacy intervention?

Questionnaire Construction

The data instrument for this basic qualitative study was an open-ended online questionnaire. Asynchronous, online qualitative data collection has recently become more common, allowing for a widened available participant population and time- and cost-efficient (Jones et al., 2021). The 15 questions specifically addressed the research questions, reflecting the literature review findings by centering the benefits, challenges, and elements contributing to successful synchronous, one-on-one online tutoring.

To mitigate poor data quality, subject matter experts (SMEs) were used to make an interim assessment of the questions included in the questionnaire, ensuring it is a viable research instrument. All feedback was considered and incorporated into questionnaire revisions. Study participants accessed the questionnaire via Qualtrics, a web-based survey tool, through an emailed link.

Participants

The target population was 20 literacy tutors conducting synchronous, one-on-one online tutoring with kindergarten through Grade 6 students within the United States for literacy intervention. This number was consistent with the effective basic qualitative method recommendation of 15 (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015) and sufficient to provide rich information appropriate to the topic and research questions (Vasileiou et al., 2018). Purposeful sampling was used, in which the researcher chose a sample from which they may learn the most based on a set of selection criteria (Creswell, 2014). Inclusion criteria required that participants were currently tutoring kindergarten through Grade 6 students online synchronously, one-on-one for literacy intervention; were located within the United States; and were willing to complete an online questionnaire elaborately. Participants were recruited through online social media communities of literacy educators and tutors via social media posts calling for participants.

A demographic profile of participants was developed during data analysis. Most participants held master's degrees and completed various literacy-related trainings and workshops. Teaching backgrounds ranged from homeschooling to over 30 years as a professional educator. Most participants indicated that they used Zoom as a tutoring platform, while others used Koala Go, Microsoft Teams, or Google Meet. Individual tutoring sessions lasted 30–55 minutes; no standard protocol or procedure was employed. Participants reported using various resources, including texts, websites, and digital applications. Some participants used and followed a specific program, while others used none.

Data Analysis

Data collected from participants were investigated and interpreted following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six steps of thematic analysis. Coding entailed multiple rounds, including initial review, open coding, revision, and refinement. Manual qualitative coding was employed, which comprised manipulating data on paper and writing codes by hand. Saldana (2021) recommends manual coding for small-scale studies because it gives the researchers more control.

The first step in the thematic analysis process included reviewing the 30-page Qualtrics report and developing preliminary ideas regarding possible code themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Data were read closely for familiarization, highlighting and making notes by hand next to keywords and phrases that stood out as potentially relevant for answering the research questions.

The second step comprised open coding during which all identified keywords and phrases were transferred into a Word document and loose categories were generated leading to initial codes using theoretical analysis based on the research questions. The document was printed and the individual keywords and phrases cut apart, creating 394 individual pieces of data to review and sort by hand, grouping them into categories to form 29 initial codes.

During the third step, links between codes were determined. New codes were established, refined, and placed in a hierarchy where patterns and themes were generated, extending and deepening the data analysis, focusing on meaning, interpretation, and the relationships between categories and subcategories in the search for themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Saldana, 2021). Table 1 outlines emerging themes and lists the initial codes combined and incorporated to create those themes. Some initial codes persisted to become emerging themes.

Table 1

Emerging Themes and Incorporated Codes

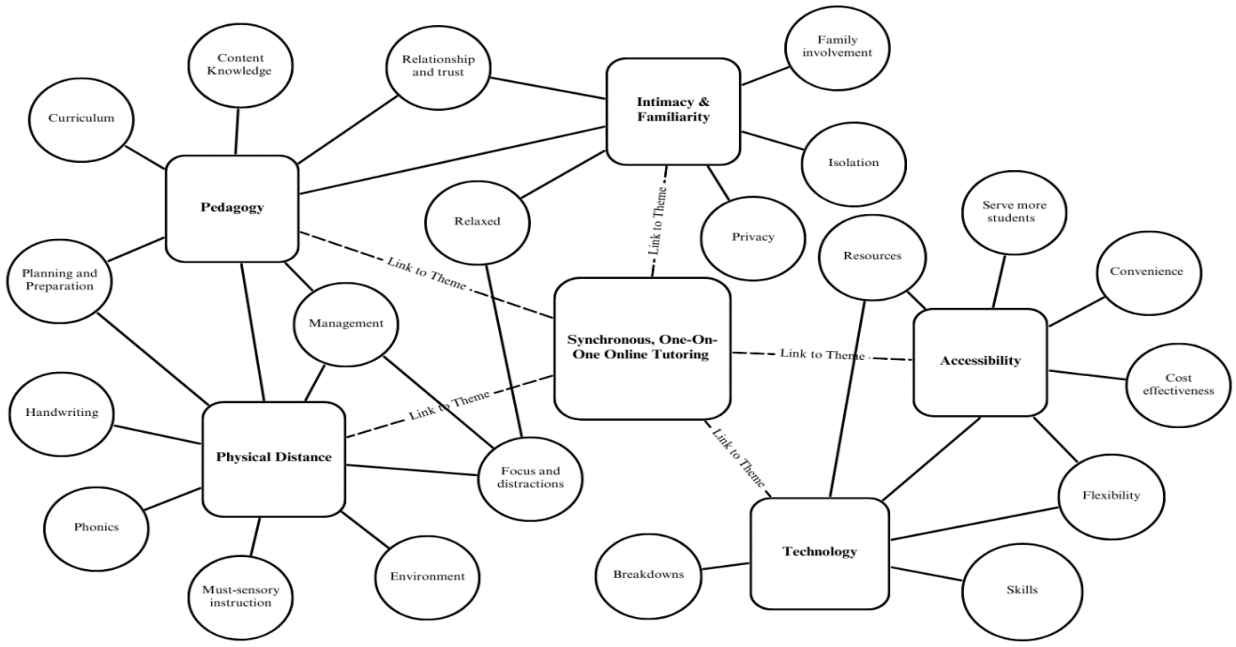
Emerging theme	Incorporated codes
Benefits for students	• Convenience • Privacy • Relaxed and intimate • Family involvement • Continuity
Benefits for tutor	• Number of students served • Convenience • Cost-effectiveness • Access to resources
Flexibility & efficiency	
Accessibility	
Accomplishments & results	

Emerging theme	Incorporated codes
Technology	
Personal	• Preparation time • Isolation • Sedentary lifestyle • Outside perceptions
Attention and distractions	• Focus • Distractions • Particular students
Physical limitations	• Teaching phonemes • Handwriting instruction • Multi-sensory instruction • Particular students
Contextual	• Environment • Reliable technology • Preparedness
Strong instruction	• Preparedness • Content knowledge • Management skills
Relationship and trust	

The fourth step further collapsed the initial categories and emerging themes into five coherent, overarching themes: Pedagogy, Technology, Physical Distance, Accessibility, and Intimacy and Familiarity. This process entailed blending and renaming themes and checking them against the extracted codes. A thematic map, indicating themes, sub-themes, and relationships among them, outlines the analysis (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

Thematic Map



The fifth step finalized the analysis process. The specifics of each theme were clarified and refined, including generating distinct names, definitions, and descriptions (see Table 2). This step also considered how the themes relate to each other and the research questions, and involved reporting and discussing the data analysis.

Table 2

Definitions and Descriptions of Overarching Themes and Research Questions Addressed

Theme Name	Definition	Description	RQs Addressed
1. Pedagogy	Participants' perceptions of their agency and effectiveness resulted from their knowledge of the content area, instructional methods, and materials utilized.	Participants referred to content knowledge, instructional techniques, curriculum, planning and preparation, management, and tutor and tutee relationship and trust.	RQ2 RQ3
2. Technology	Participants perceived technology as both an advantage and a detriment to online tutoring.	Participants described technology issues, including bad connections, lag time, glitches, poor sound quality, and the often-steep learning curve involved. Participants also described the ready access to resources, novel learning experiences, and efficiency provided by technology tools.	RQ1 RQ2 RQ3

Theme Name	Definition	Description	RQs Addressed
3. Physical Distance	Participants perceived the physical distance inherent in online tutoring as limiting their control and effectiveness.	Participants reported struggles with hearing and teaching phonemes, guiding handwriting, providing hands-on learning experiences, and managing student behavior. Participants indicated increased challenges in this area when working with younger students, those with learning disabilities, and those who struggle with attention.	RQ2 RQ3
4. Accessibility	Participants perceived online tutoring to increase accessibility in general — to students, tutors, content, and materials.	Participants detailed the tutor's accessibility to more students, materials, and resources and the student's accessibility to instructors, appropriate content, and intervention. Participants described barriers due to location, time constraints, expense, and transportation as being reduced or removed.	RQ1 RQ3
5. Intimacy and Familiarity	Participants perceived online tutoring as promoting familiarity, trust, and comfort.	Participants referred to the intimacy and privacy of online tutoring in which the tutor and tutee are in the comfort of their homes. The ease and trust created may facilitate learning, while the informality may lead to distractions.	RQ1 RQ2 RQ3

Results

The thematic analysis results from the data gathered were used to explore tutors' perspectives on implementing synchronous, one-on-one online tutoring for literacy intervention in the United States for students in kindergarten through Grade 6. Five overarching themes were determined: Pedagogy, Technology, Physical Distance, Accessibility, and Intimacy and Familiarity. Reliability and validity were ensured by including a clear audit trail, a thick narrative description of data, data triangulation, and personal reflexivity.

Theme 1: Pedagogy

Pedagogy is defined here as everything an instructor does, including planning, teaching, managing, and assessing based on their content knowledge, instructional skills, and management techniques. Pedagogy most often concerns RQ3, focusing on elements contributing to success. According to Participant 8, "My training and confidence in my ability make the leap to virtual less stressful and has worked so well." Participants noted that effective pedagogy leads to solid academic outcomes, solves problems, mitigates challenges, and creates strong tutor/tutee relationships and feelings of trust. As declared by Participant 2, "No amount of razzle-dazzle can make up for ineffective instruction."

Alternatively, some struggles with online tutoring stem from instructors' varying abilities to effectively engage students, often due to the physical distance, which was relevant to RQ2. Participant 9 reported, "It's harder to get those students' attention through a screen," while Participant 12 shared, "It can be monotonous for them to just sit and look at my face." However, according to Participant 6, "[You] just have to be open to using a different set of methods." Participant 13 described, "My lessons are packed tight, and I keep them busy." Pedagogy matters when it comes to managing challenges such as distraction and maintaining focus.

Theme 2: Technology

Participants frequently referred to technology. Technology offers unique challenges due to the learning curve involved, struggles with hardware and software, and instances of internet interruptions and slowdown pertinent to RQ2. According to Participant 13, "The only challenge to synchronous online tutoring has been technology with sound, video, or internet quality."

However, technology also facilitates flexibility and accessibility, enabling quick access to instructors and students, materials, and resources, addressing RQ1, which deals with the perceived benefits of synchronous, one-on-one online tutoring. Some participants noted the value of using technology to incorporate games and digital manipulatives, mitigating the challenge of incorporating multi-sensory instruction resulting from being physically removed from their students when tutoring online, touching on RQ3, concerned with elements contributing to success.

Theme 3: Physical Distance

The physical distance innate in online tutoring was referenced by participants primarily when discussing challenges, addressing RQ2. The physical distance between the tutor and the tutee makes it challenging to manage distractions and maintain the student's focus on the lesson. One participant noted that they did not feel as connected to their students when teaching online as they did in person. Participant 14 noted, "It is difficult not having control over the student's learning environment." Further, physical distance affects pedagogy, creating a barrier to teaching phonemic awareness and handwriting. Multi-sensory and hands-on learning is more challenging from a distance than in-person.

Some participants, however, shared how they adjust for the physical distance by making pedagogical decisions to control distractions and create multi-sensory experiences. Participants described having their students use whiteboards, allowing students to annotate on the screen, and even mailing materials to their students to use during lessons. A few participants reported that physical distance presents less of a challenge than a problem to solve through creativity and effective pedagogy, addressing RQ3, elements contributing to success.

Theme 4: Accessibility

Participants often referenced accessibility as a benefit of synchronous, one-on-one online tutoring relevant to RQ1. For students, online tutoring provides access to teachers and specialized instruction, regardless of locale, distance from one another, and time of day. The use of technology innate in online instruction facilitates convenience and flexibility. Participant 8 shared, "Children and families find it much easier to work appointments into busy schedules, and it takes out the stress of traffic and providing childcare for younger siblings during tutoring."

Additionally, according to participants, online tutoring facilitates tutors' access to resources, material, and students and provides a location for teaching that may otherwise not exist. Using technology for online instruction increases and streamlines instructors' ability to retrieve various materials and resources. According to Participant 6, "One of the biggest benefits is the accessibility of resources… Online, I can get to every resource I use. All the time [sic]." The easy access to resources and materials facilitates and broadens pedagogical decision-making, contributing to success, thereby addressing RQ3.

Further, participants commented on the cost-effectiveness of online tutoring, thereby expanding the number of tutors able to engage in the work and decreasing the cost of tutoring sessions for families, increasing students' access to instruction. Participant 15 reported, "It is a more cost-effective option for families since the overhead of online is much cheaper as a tutor." As stated by Participant 19, due to increased accessibility provided by online tutoring, "There are fewer excuses as to why a student is not being helped."

Theme 5: Intimacy and Familiarity

Participants reported positive effects stemming from the intimacy and familiarity cultivated through online tutoring, addressing RQ1, focusing on the benefits of synchronous, one-on-one online tutoring. According to participants, the tutor and tutee are in the comforts of their homes and are privy to each other's surroundings, creating ease and closeness. The student's family has an opportunity to engage as well. According to Participant 3, "I get to know their families, pets, likes, dislikes in a very intimate way." However, two participants did report that it is more challenging for them to connect, or they feel less connected to their students when tutoring online versus in person. Privacy, a factor related to intimacy, was explicitly addressed by several participants. Participant 1 shared, "This is a very private way to learn to read. Some of my students suffer from anxiety, and it has benefitted them to learn online." This intimacy and familiarity further facilitate trust, an essential pedagogical factor contributing to success, thereby addressing RQ3.

On the other hand, a few participants reported challenges created when students get too comfortable in their own homes, forgetting that they are in a lesson, addressing RQ2. According to Participant 2, "Sometimes students are too relaxed at home—picking their noses, teeth, etc. [sic] when they wouldn't do that in public. Many need to be reminded to put their toys where they are not distracting." Additionally, although working in their home environments facilitates closeness and intimacy for the tutor and tutee, some participants reported loneliness and isolation. Participant 13 wrote, "It is a lonely job, and I miss having coworkers."

Discussion

This study explored the perspectives of kindergarten through Grade 6 online literacy tutors within the United States on the benefits and challenges of implementing synchronous, one-on-one online literacy intervention and what they view as elements contributing to success. Table 3 outlines the results as they answer the research questions. More detailed descriptions follow.

Table 3

Answers to the Research Questions

RQ1: What are the tutors' perspectives on the benefits of synchronous, one-on-one online tutoring for literacy intervention?	RQ2: What are the tutors' perspectives on the challenges of synchronous, one-on-one online tutoring for literacy intervention?	RQ3: What are the tutors' perspectives on the elements that lead to successful synchronous, one-on-one online tutoring for literacy intervention?
Student motivation & engagement	Managing distractions	Explicit, systematic, evidence-based instruction
Flexibility & adaptability	Technological problems and steep learning curve	Active student participation & interaction
Efficiency	Maintaining student attention and focus	Positive/trusting relationship between tutor & tutee
Expanded access to services & students	Teacher loneliness/isolation	Reliable technology and comfort with technological tools
Intimacy &familiarity	Students too at ease	Pedagogical creativity
Privacy	Managing instruction requiring detailed hearing and up-close viewing (e.g., phonics, handwriting) or manipulatives	
Cost effectiveness		

Benefits

This study found technology to provide easy access to endless resources and materials through digital tools and storage of text and materials. Twelve participants from this study shared how digital tools and applications provide novel and appealing learning experiences and activities that facilitate student motivation, focus, and engagement, expanding pedagogical and resource options. This discovery ranged beyond the findings of the literature review.

Flexibility and efficiency are other benefits this study found offered by technology, which agreed with previous studies' findings. Thirteen participants described being able to modify lessons and move from one student to the next swiftly and seamlessly. The reviewed literature similarly outlined the flexibility and convenience provided by technology and the ability to quickly adapt lessons to individuals (Gregg & Shin, 2021; Lasnumanda & Tarigan, 2020).

Participants viewed technology as expanding access to their services, allowing tutors and tutees to come together regardless of time or location. Eighteen participants described tutors being able to reach more students than when working face-to-face and students being able to connect with instructors with the skills and qualifications to provide appropriate support. This finding aligned with the reviewed literature reporting increased access and opportunities provided by online tutoring, mitigating unequal learning opportunities for students (Liu & Li, 2020; Wisniewski et al., 2020).

This study illustrated tutors' perspectives concerning increased accessibility provided by online tutoring. Eighteen respondents detailed their ability to connect with more students in less time. Sixteen participants reported easy retrieval of resources and materials via digital means. Eighteen participants described students' increased ability to access appropriate instruction provided by a skilled practitioner regardless of location. Ten participants highlighted the cost-effectiveness of online tutoring, resulting from neither transportation nor a designated physical location being required, further increasing accessibility. These findings were consistent with the reviewed literature that outlined the increased accessibility facilitated by online tutoring, provided to tutors and tutees, to students, to instructors, and to materials and resources (Gregg & Shin, 2021; Wisniewski et al., 2020).

Seven participants in this study reported on the intimacy and familiarity between the tutor and tutee being facilitated by the online format. Further, privacy was explicitly addressed by some as a benefit, particularly for older students and those struggling with anxiety. These factors were less salient in the literature. In fact, some research reported online instructors feeling disconnected from their students (Liu & Li, 2020; Okoro et al., 2021). Only two of this study's participants reported feeling detached from their students.

Challenges

Eleven study participants described the time and effort it takes to acquaint oneself with and employ the necessary technology and adjust instructional techniques and management styles. This finding was consistent with the research by Aslan et al. (2022) and Curwen (2020), who referenced the steep learning curve involved in online instruction and the struggles of those who are less tech-savvy. Five respondents additionally outlined the extra energy and time needed for the physical preparation that online tutoring requires over face-to-face tutoring. This finding did not appear in the reviewed literature.

Thirteen participants described difficulties keeping and maintaining students' focus and attention and managing distractions when working online due to the lack of hands-on engagement and physical interaction, thereby necessitating additional pedagogical adjustments. This was particularly true with younger students and those with preexisting challenges. This finding was consistent with the literature reviewed (Aslan et al., 2022; Liu & Li, 2020; Okoro et al., 2021).

Seventeen participants described technological challenges, including those related to hardware, software, and internet connection. This finding aligned with those of previous studies that highlighted struggles with internet connection, technology equipment, and sound quality as offering problems and complications for the tutor and tutee and negatively impacting student

learning (Bacon & Liu, 2021; Carlana & La Ferrara, 2021). Four participants additionally noted the loss of academic time due to a lack of technological skills on the part of tutors and tutees, mainly when working with younger students, a finding consistent with the literature (Curwen, 2020).

The reviewed literature additionally addressed individuals' variable access to technology as a challenge, creating equity issues (Johns & Mills, 2021). No participants in this study put forth this factor. This omission does not mean the participants did not consider the digital divide and resulting equity issues; however, they neither discussed nor brought up students' ability to secure devices to access instruction.

Twelve participants revealed student behavioral challenges stemming from the physical distance inherent in online tutoring. Tutors could not gain and maintain students' attention and focus on the lesson through physical touch or control the environment by removing a toy, clearing the workspace, or even preventing a student from leaving. These findings echoed previous studies that detailed physical distance reducing visual and auditory cues that provide information concerning students' emotional states, and restricting interactions (Aslan et al., 2022; Lasnumanda & Tarigan, 2020; Okoro et al., 2021).

Twelve participants additionally outlined challenges in hearing and teaching phonemes and handwriting, consistent with previous research (Aslan et al., 2022; Washburn et al., 2021). Multi-sensory instruction, incorporating manipulatives and physical interaction, is also challenging, particularly noteworthy with younger students, further congruent with the literature (Aslan et al., 2022; Liu & Li, 2020; Washburn et al., 2021).

Three participants reported students getting too comfortable and relaxed at home, leading to distraction, lack of focus, and not taking the tutoring session seriously. Along these lines, the literature addressed student distraction and variable focus when tutoring online (Lasnumanda & Tarigan, 2020; Okoro et al., 2021); however, it did not explicitly link those challenges to the students being comfortable in their environment, but rather to the general nature of online instruction. Challenges stemming specifically from students being too at ease were a finding unique to this study.

Four participants disclosed their feelings of loneliness and isolation resulting from teaching online and not having coworkers nearby. According to participants, limiting one's work environment to the home and computer screen can create a sense of aloneness and have a siloing effect. The reviewed literature did not address this specific challenge; however, it did reference collaboration, support, and relevant training among and for online instructors as contributors to success (Johns & Mills, 2021; Washburn et al., 2021).

Elements Contributing to Success

Eleven participants outlined the value of being prepared, with more than enough engaging and appropriate lessons, material, and resources, digitally organized and easily accessible. This is consistent with the literature, which noted that the elements that make up strong face-to-face teaching, including preparation, result in successful online instruction (Bacon & Liu, 2021; Washburn et al., 2021).

Fourteen participants outlined their chosen program or instructional approach as a factor contributing to success, provided it is explicit, systematic, and evidence-based. This finding is aligned with the previous research that found positive outcomes from online literacy interventions that included explicit, systematic, and diagnostic instruction aligned with evidence-based practice following the science of reading (Petscher et al., 2020; Puzio et al., 2020; Weiss et al., 2022).

Thirteen participants described the management of the tutoring session as an element essential for success. Tutors must incorporate materials and strategies that keep students motivated and engaged, including games, whiteboards, goal setting, and screen sharing, particularly when working with younger students and those struggling with attention. This finding was consistent with the literature highlighting the importance of interactive instructional techniques and students' active participation (Gregg & Shin, 2021; Johns & Mills, 2021).

Ten participants outlined the benefits of a positive relationship and trust between the tutor and student, describing making emotional connections with their students, taking an interest in their lives, and maintaining a patient and positive attitude. This finding was consistent with the literature that detailed the importance of creating a positive learning environment to increase student motivation (Lawrence, 2020; Washburn et al., 2021). Previous research described empathy on the tutor's part as facilitating a caring, trusting, and safe relationship that supports instruction (Donovan et al., 2022; Lawrence, 2020; Liu & Li, 2020).

Seventeen respondents expressed the importance of reliable technology and adequate knowledge of and comfort with technological tools for successful online tutoring. The tutor must be able to manage basic troubleshooting, and the students or caregivers should feel generally at ease with technology. A strong Wi-Fi signal should be available at both locations and an appropriate device should be accessible to the tutor and tutee. These elements for success were consistent with the literature (Carlana & La Ferrara, 2021; Okoro et al., 2021), which additionally suggested the effective use of smartphones when needed (Carlana & La Ferrara, 2021) and technology training for tutors (Johns & Mills, 2021; Washburn et al., 2021).

Methods that work when tutoring face-to-face may not be effective when tutoring online due to the physical distance; however, according to 12 participants, this challenge leads to problem-solving, creative pedagogical techniques, and the use of novel resources, which may be ultimately beneficial. This forward-looking perspective adds to the findings of previous research. However, Wisniewski et al. (2020) did speak to the importance of tutors being aware of and attending to challenges and making appropriate adjustments.

Ten participants reported easy access to resources and materials as an element contributing to successful online tutoring. Fourteen participants highlighted their ability to smoothly pivot instruction and adjust when needed due to the ease of pulling up unlimited digital resources, thereby keeping the tutoring session interesting, motivating, and appropriate to the individual student. Although previous research addressed accessing digital tools to increase the interactivity of online instruction (Johns & Mills, 2021; Martin et al., 2021), it did not highlight the value of accessing novel tools and materials quickly and efficiently to promote success.

Seven participants described creating, developing, and maintaining feelings of comfort and trust as vital for success, increasing student engagement, willingness to participate, and learning ability. Ten participants shared how they take time to learn about their students and have fun with them. The literature surrounding online tutoring supported this finding, outlining a positive learning environment, including praise and positive corrective feedback, as facilitating student motivation (Washburn et al., 2021) and the value of creating tutor/tutee relationships rooted in care, safety, and trust (Donovan et al., 2022; Liu & Li, 2020).

Research Limitations and Future Research Recommendations

The research methodology of this study was qualitative, thereby limiting transferability. Findings were not statistical and did not predict outcomes, but described the phenomenon's nature and, thereby, may be considered less robust. Including a thick, rich narrative description of data that reached saturation helped mitigate this limitation, supporting qualitative research's generalizability (Merriam, 2009). Future studies may employ a mixed-method research design to increase validity and provide a complete picture of the phenomenon.

This study employed a singular method for data collection, an open-ended online questionnaire, which may have caused the results to lack diversity of data and reduce credibility, as well as lead to inconsistencies in the depth and breadth of responses thereby impacting data comparability. Data triangulation was applied, in that 20 participants were recruited from seven social media pages, making up a variety of data sources, future studies should additionally employ method triangulation by including interviews, observations, and focus groups, and implement member checks, further ensuring that the results are an accurate representation of the phenomenon under study.

This study's relatively small sample size of 20 may have also limited the diversity of data, in that the results represent the experiences of the 20 tutors involved and are not grounded within a larger scale data set. Purposeful sampling may have introduced selection bias, potentially skewing results towards those with positive experiences with online tutoring. This study, however, does provide a foundation for future research that may be more expansive.

Further, at the time of the study, the researcher was engaged in synchronous, one-on-one online tutoring for literacy intervention, the phenomenon under study. In order to mitigate the impact of bias, the researcher incorporated reflexive practices, including creating a reflexive journal in the form of a narrative autobiography and a self-interview, and used SMEs to ensure alignment between the questionnaire and the research questions. Future studies should use additional researchers to help code data and review preliminary findings and conclusions to ensure they are appropriate and sound.

Conclusion

Key points from this study on synchronous, one-on-one online tutoring for literacy intervention indicated that participants perceived benefits for tutors and tutees to include factors related to access, flexibility, and the tutor/tutee relationship; challenges included increased effort required, distractions, lack of physical control, and teacher isolation; and elements contributing

to success to include advanced preparation, reliable technology, evidence-based practice, and a trusting tutor/tutee relationship. This study's results were confirmed by and expanded on the reviewed literature. Five recurrent themes emerged through data analysis: pedagogy, technology, physical distance, accessibility, and intimacy and familiarity.

In reflection on the knowledge gained through this study, there are many perceived benefits of synchronous, one-on-one online tutoring for literacy intervention. The tutor's advanced awareness, preparation, and available appropriate tools and resources may mitigate most perceived challenges. Factors contributing to success include effective face-to-face teaching, such as evidence-based instruction, establishing a solid and trusting relationship, and student interactivity, suggesting that online teaching may amplify and compound the effects of one's existing instruction and management.

Practical Applications

The results of this study suggest that explicit, systematic, diagnostic teaching should be employed for online literacy instruction and intervention. Tutors must be mindful of students' cognitive load, seeing that technology does not overload working memory and hamper learning. Instructors interested in online tutoring should be aware of and attend to the potential benefits and challenges, preparing for and adjusting accordingly (Wisniewski et al., 2020).

Educational leaders can use the results of this study to expand access to literacy intervention for students who require additional support. Online tutoring can provide Response to Intervention (RtI) Tier 3 literacy intervention to students, particularly older students who seem less negatively affected by the physical distance and may value the privacy it affords. Students can use school devices and WiFi, negating concerns over access to technology. Leaders can take action to organize online intervention providers towards the goal of more easily matching them with students in need.

Declarations

The author declares no conflicts of interest. Permission to collect data from human subjects was granted from the IRB of the (*author's educational institution*).

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