Needs Assessment: Implementing the Science of Reading in Early Literacy Instruction

This needs assessment was conducted to identify gaps in early literacy instruction among K–3 educators, with a focus on implementing the Science of Reading (SoR) framework. Data was collected through teacher surveys, classroom observations, and student performance data on foundational literacy assessments. The purpose of this needs assessment is to inform the development of a professional learning module tailored to address key instructional needs and improve literacy outcomes.

Data Collection Methods

- Teacher Surveys: A survey was distributed to 22 early literacy educators to gauge their familiarity with SoR principles and confidence in applying structured literacy strategies.
- Classroom Observations: Observational notes from 6 classrooms across K–3 highlighted variability in phonics instruction and lack of consistency in applying decoding strategies.
- Student Performance Data: Assessment data from early literacy screeners (DIBELS, MAP Reading Fluency) showed a 35% proficiency rate in phonological awareness and decoding in K–1 classrooms.

Key Findings

The analysis of the collected data revealed several instructional gaps:
- 68% of surveyed teachers reported low confidence in implementing SoR-aligned strategies.
- Many educators relied on whole language approaches instead of explicit, systematic phonics instruction.
- Students in K–1 showed the largest deficits in phonemic awareness and decoding, suggesting the need for foundational skill intervention.
- Teachers expressed interest in professional development that was both practical and directly applicable to their classroom practice.

Instructional Implications

Based on the needs assessment findings, a professional development module was created to address the following instructional needs:
- Provide educators with a clear understanding of the Science of Reading and its implications for classroom practice.
- Equip teachers with strategies for phonemic awareness, decoding, and fluency instruction.
- Integrate modeling, practice activities, and multimedia tools to reinforce adult learning principles.
- Support ongoing implementation with pacing guides, coaching tools, and access to classroom-ready resources.

Conclusion

This needs assessment confirmed a strong need for targeted professional development in early literacy. The resulting module was designed to fill these gaps by supporting teachers in adopting evidence-based practices aligned with the Science of Reading framework. Ultimately, this will strengthen instructional consistency and improve reading outcomes for young learners.