

# Adapting UFLI Foundations in ESE Classrooms

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## Introduction

- University of Florida Literacy Institute (UFLI) Foundations is a foundational reading program designed for K-2 students that is evidence-based, grounded in research, and practically tested. This multidimensional program offers teachers access to materials that focus on step-by-step instruction in phonemic awareness, linguistic comprehension, decoding, spelling, reading, and more (UFLI, 2022).
- Previous studies have revealed knowledge gaps among special education teachers regarding foundational reading (Trezek & Zepp, 2024), making it crucial to understand how ESE (Exceptional Student Education) teachers are incorporating the UFLI Foundations structure.
- Collecting data on UFLI Foundations, as used in ESE classrooms, fills gaps of broader existing research by narrowing the focus to this specific foundational reading program within a context that requires higher levels of educational need.
- This research is being conducted to examine how ESE teachers are integrating UFLI into their special education classrooms with children who may need more individualized support than is provided through UFLI's K-2 specific structure.
- This study aims to address how teachers are adapting the dosage of UFLI Foundations when implementing the program in a special education context and examine what factors influence these teachers' adaptation decisions.



## Methods

### Participants

- The participants consisted of five ESE teachers from a local school district, teaching one or more students UFLI Foundations in whole or small groups.
- Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and each was compensated with a \$25 Amazon card for each completed study component (i.e., observation or interview)

### Data Collected

- Quantitative measures included forms curated at the Florida Center for Reading Research (FCRR) to record the dosage of overall instruction and individual steps of UFLI Foundations implementation during classroom observations.
- Qualitative measures include semi-structured 60-minute Zoom interviews with the teachers one-on-one to determine what factors influence their adaptation decisions.

### Procedure

- This mixed methods case study was conducted through classroom observations within a special education context, and raw data was recorded on dosage forms, which were later integrated into consensus forms to be entered into a REDCap database.
- One-on-one interviews will be conducted with each of the five ESE teachers, and data will be entered into REDCap via transcripts.

### Data-Analysis

- Data on UFLI Foundations implementation and adaptations will be analyzed through the FRAME-IS (Framework for Reporting Adaptations and Modifications to Evidence-Based Implementation Strategies) scale (Miller et al., 2021).

## Results

- While preliminary, data from the first set of two-day classroom observations revealed that ESE teachers adapted the dosage of UFLI Foundations instruction in their classrooms (e.g., shortening, lengthening, or skipping steps of the program's design), as seen in Figure 2.
- In resource (part-time) and self-contained (full-time) classrooms, students with hearing impairment, mobility difficulties, Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), nonverbal communication, and behavioral problems were observed; teacher responses included providing individual attention, allowing students to stand/move, and writing on whiteboards.
- Present findings illustrate a potential need to modify UFLI Foundations' implementation in special education settings through individualized support and consideration of Augmented and Alternative Communication (AAC).
- This research is ongoing, as observations and interviews continue to be conducted to contextualize classroom circumstances and grasp pressures ESE teachers describe as influencing adaptation decisions.

### UFLI Foundations Steps and Suggested Schedule

#### Day 1

- **Step 1: Phonemic Awareness - 2 minutes**
- **Step 2: Visual Drill - 3 minutes**
- **Step 3: Auditory Drill - 5 minutes**
- **Step 4: Blending Drill - 5 minutes**
- **Step 5a: New Concept - 15 minutes**

#### Day 2

- **Step 5b: New Concept (review) - 3 minutes**
- **Step 6: Word Work - 6 minutes**
- **Step 7: Irregular Words - 6 minutes**
- **Step 8: Connected Text - 15 minutes**

### Figure 1

UFLI Foundations has a two-day structure involving eight steps that target core foundational reading areas (UFLI, 2022).

### References and Acknowledgements



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### Fall 2025: ESE Instructional Dosage by UFLI Foundations Steps

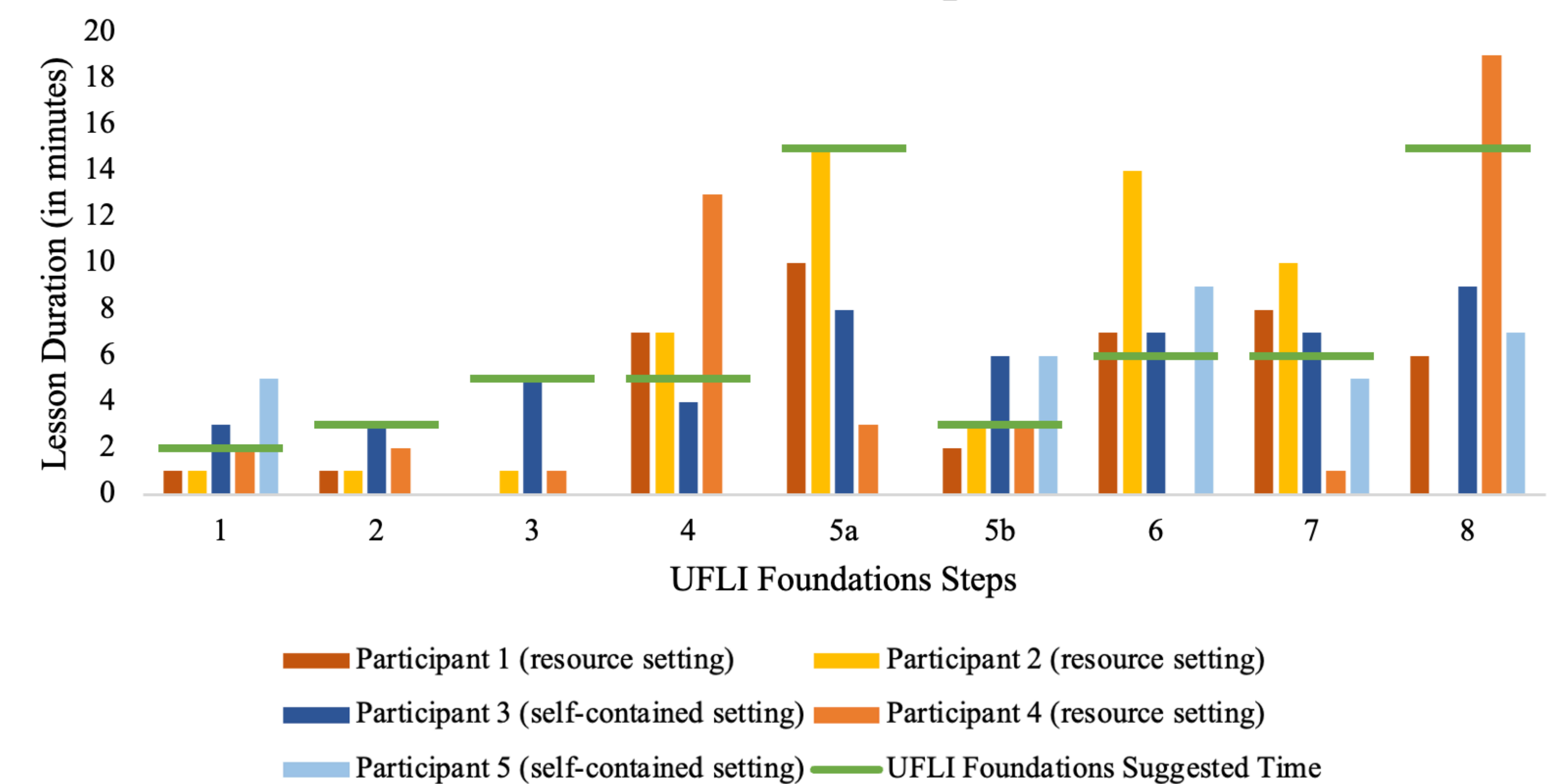


Figure 2

The first set of classroom observations yielded dosage data for each ESE teacher from each of the eight steps of UFLI Foundations. The actual durations of each step are compared to the UFLI suggested times (shown in Figure 1); missing columns illustrate a skipped step.

## Discussion

- The preliminary findings suggest that ESE teachers are adapting the dosage of foundational reading instruction to accommodate diverse student needs, and/or these teachers required more assistance than given through UFLI Foundations.
- According to Trezek and Zepp (2024), there is evidence of a knowledge gap regarding foundational reading among special educators, which could offer an initial explanation as to the fluctuating dosage of instruction.
- Yorke and colleagues (2020) claim that student accuracy improved when foundational reading lessons were intentionally modified for AAC learners, which could underline the need for adaptations in classrooms with nonverbal students.
- Case study observations in a local school district may not be generalizable to all licensed ESE teachers who are implementing UFLI Foundations; however, it is crucial to understand at any level how real teachers are adapting UFLI to contexts for which it was not designed (i.e., special education settings)
- Future studies could address the fidelity of UFLI Foundations instruction in ESE classrooms to assess instructional quality, determining how effectively students with diverse needs are being taught foundational reading skills.
- This project could promote expanded research to compare how UFLI Foundations is being implemented in ESE classrooms in other school districts across Florida, which may inform other special educators on helpful instructional methods.