

THE EXPERIENCES OF TIER 3 EARLY READING INTERVENTION PROVIDERS THREE
YEARS AFTER A SCHOOL CLOSURE: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

by

Sue Ellen Washington

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

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APPROVED BY:

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Abstract

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the lived experiences of Tier 3 early reading intervention providers at the Urban Independent School District in Texas three years after a school closure. The central research question was, what are the lived experiences of Tier 3 early reading intervention providers in the Urban Independent School district three years after a school closure? Sub-questions explored early reading intervention providers' beliefs, attitudes, mental states, and actions three years after a school closure. This study was guided by two central theories: the Vygotskian sociocultural theory of human learning and Bandura's self-efficacy theory. Moustakas' transcendental phenomenological model was used to identify the phenomenon's essence. Data were collected and triangulated using participant interviews, letter writing, and open-ended questionnaires. Data were analyzed and synthesized into six themes and 17 subthemes. Participants believe that students were negatively impacted academically and socially by the Covid-19-related school closure but generally have a positive attitude about changes implemented by UISD as a response to the school closure. Upon returning to in-person learning, participants expressed that their mental state was in a state of anxiety and tension as the needs of students were significant. The actions of intervention providers had to be intentional in meeting the needs of the students. Overall, intervention providers at UISD want a systematic approach to interventions and believe their work is essential. This study brings an awareness of the importance of the role of Tier 3 intervention providers after a school closure.

Keywords: multi-tiered system of support, Tier 3 reading interventions, intervention provider, school closure

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to God, who loved me enough to offer me eternal life through Jesus Christ and strengthened and encouraged me through this doctoral journey.

To my husband, Keenan, and my children, Kalia and Kaden, who were willing to share me with this work. Because of them, I chose to persevere through the difficult parts of this program.

To my parents, Dan and Itzel Plair, who inculcated a love of learning in me and taught me that education liberates us from generational bondage.

To my family and friends who always had uplifting words, understood the commitment necessary to this work, and provided continuous support.

Thank you for your prayers. You are all loved and appreciated. It is because of you that I am who I am. I pray that you experience God's love every day of your lives.

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List of Abbreviations

Coronavirus disease of 2019 (Covid-19)

Data-based individualization (DBI)

Division for learning disabilities (DLDD)

Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA)

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Measures of Academic Progress Test (MAP)

Multi-Tiered system of supports (MTSS)

Response to intervention (RTI)

Urban Independent School District (UISD)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

This chapter introduces a phenomenological study focused on the lived experiences of Tier 3 early reading intervention providers at Urban Independent School District in Texas three years after a school closure. In this written work, a school closure refers either to the virtual continuation of instruction or no schooling when physical schools are closed and traditional face-to-face learning cannot occur. School closures negatively impact students emotionally, socially, and academically. Therefore, mitigating efforts must be employed after a school closure to address student needs. A critical component of addressing student needs is providing necessary interventions to help fill in the academic, behavioral, and social-emotional gaps created or exacerbated by the school closure. This chapter includes historical, social, and theoretical background for the study. In addition, the problem and purpose statement will be addressed along with the study's significance, research questions, definitions of key terms, and a chapter summary.

Background

As natural disasters and infectious diseases increase, so is the likelihood that schools will be required to shut down either due to damage caused or as a mitigating strategy to slow down the spread of viruses. However, school closures, regardless of length, negatively impact students' academic achievement (Haeck & Larose, 2022; Maldonado & De Witte, 2022; Zierer, 2021). In addition, students who, prior to the school closure, demonstrated reading difficulties are likely to experience some degree of learning loss (González & Bonal, 2021; WHO, 2022b). Therefore, the work of Tier 3 early reading intervention providers is of utmost significance. This section describes the background for this study, will include a summary of the most relevant literature,

and will provide the historical, social, and theoretical concepts that will guide it.

Historical Context

According to Berlemann (2016), many natural disasters have plagued the earth affecting every country at one point or another and causing schools to close for an extended period. For example, on March 11, 2011, a devastating earthquake hit Great East Japan that destroyed a significant part of the Sanriku Coastal area (Tatsuta et al., 2015). Schools were closed in the Sankiru Coastal area for about a year and a half because schools were used to house refugees displaced by the earthquake. Between 2013 and 2016, there was a mass outbreak of Ebola in West Africa (Meyers & Thomasson, 2017; Rohwerder, 2020) that affected ten countries and had a 55% fatality rate (Gostin et al., 2014; Smith, 2021). This outbreak caused the region to isolate, quarantine, and socially distance, ceasing public gatherings including but not limited to shopping, sporting, entertainment, and closures of schools (Gostin et al., 2014; Meyers & Thomasson, 2017; Smith, 2021). Schools in Guinea and Sierra Leone were closed between seven and nine months, depending on how specific locations were affected (Meyers & Thomasson, 2017; Smith, 2021).

Other prominent historical school closures were seen during the polio epidemic of 1916 (Meyers & Thomasson, 2017); from 1918 to 1919, there was the Spanish flu (Smith, 2021), and Hurricane Mitch in Honduras in 1998 destroyed 4,835 classrooms, closing schools (Smith, 2013). In 2009, H1N1 (Meyers & Thomasson, 2017) "swine flu" crossed the boundaries of eight countries (Smith, 2021), and in 2017 there were Hurricanes Irma and Maria in Puerto Rico (Finucane et al., 2020). This is not an exhaustive list of events that caused prolonged school closures. Most recently, the world was impacted by Covid-19, causing worldwide school closures (Anderson, 2021).

Berlemann (2016) explained that natural disasters are not new and are expected to increase in years to come. According to CRED (2022), 432 natural disasters were recorded in the worldwide Emergency Event Database in 2021 alone. This number marks a substantial increase in catastrophic events, as the annual average, from 2001-2020 was 357 (CRED, 2022). Floods and storms (including hurricanes and tornados) make up most of the catastrophic events (CRED, 2022). Floods and storms can cause schools and/or school districts to temporarily or permanently close, depending on the severity of the damage incurred.

A school closure, whether instruction continues virtually or ceases altogether, causes teachers to implement lower levels of literacy instruction (Crosson & Silverman, 2022). This is critical, as the foundations for reading are set in the early grades, kindergarten through second-grade. This is where students learn to read, which is a prerequisite to reading to learn. Foundational reading skills include phonological awareness, decoding, and word recognition (Petscher et al., 2020). Crosson and Silverman (2022) reported that 24% of the 50 teachers in their study spent less time providing small-group instruction during a closure caused by Covid-19. Those who continued instruction did not perceive the effectiveness of the instruction to match that of face-to-face instruction. A reported challenge was the need for more opportunities to model stretching out the sounds in words because teachers' faces were reduced when screen sharing virtually (Crosson & Silverman, 2022). However, even when schools resumed in-person learning, the ability to model sound stretching was inhibited by mandated or self-selected options to wear masks (Georgiou, 2022; Grieco-Calub, 2021).

Social Context

Although there may be apparent, direct effects of natural disasters, according to Berlemann (2016), individual well-being factors, such as happiness, overall satisfaction, and

safety in the home, are often ignored or neglected in the literature (Campbell, 2020). The increased number of natural disasters equates to increased instances of confusion, death, and pain (Matsubayashi et al., 2013). Aside from the death count, those who survive the natural disaster may lose their homes, jobs, and in some cases, be forced to leave their homes, causing additional physical and mental distress (Campbell, 2020; Hoke et al., 2022; Matsubayashi et al., 2013). Berlemann (2016) agreed that health, employment, and income are issues that may be negatively impacted and contribute to a decrease in happiness and overall satisfaction. Shanahan et al. (2022) described the Covid-19 pandemic as the perfect storm where people experienced increased levels of uncertainty and loss of control that led to elevated emotional distress (Hoke et al., 2022; Ncube & Motalenyane, 2020). Matsubayashi et al. (2013) found that when a natural disaster is significant, suicide rates increase immediately after and for years after (WHO, 2022a). Despite the negative social implications of natural disasters, community social ties and a willingness to help others may help prevent future suicides (Matsubayashi et al., 2013).

Theoretical Context

When it comes to learning to read, there are several theoretical approaches. How the child learns and the role of the teacher comes to play in each one. According to Petscher et al. (2020), the best way to teach students to read has been debated for over 100 years. A constructivist view advocates for children to be immersed in print-rich environments where they can make meaning through their experiences because learning to read is a natural process (Goodman, 1967; Smith, 1971). Constructivists believe children can guess the meaning of printed words using their graphic, semantic, and syntactic knowledge (Goodman, 1967; Paige, 2018). In a constructivist model, the role of the teacher is to design print-rich classrooms and embed many opportunities for speaking, listening, reading, and writing in their lessons (Bowers, 2020). Teachers are to

provide opportunities for children to engage with high-quality books; students will organically learn to read when they are ready (Solity, 2022). The constructivist view advocates that teachers adhere to a child-center approach by which the teacher is guided by the student's interests and experiences that shape their reading readiness (Solity, 2022).

On the other hand, the positivist view argues that reading skills should be explicitly taught, making connections between symbols and spoken language (Chall, 1967; Flesch, 1955; Moats, 2020). Gough and Tunmer (1986) created a simple view of reading model in which decoding and oral language comprehension are viewed as equally important to gain meaning from text (Moats, 2020; Ray et al., 2021). Although decoding skills and oral language are necessary for reading comprehension, there is a heavier emphasis on decoding in the early reading year (Moats, 2020; Ray et al., 2021); as children mature in their reading, the need for linguistic comprehension increases (Lonigan et al., 2018). Young children learning to read need explicit and systematic instruction on the foundational skills required (phonological and phonemic awareness) to access written text (Moats, 2020; Petscher et al., 2020). Teachers should ensure that students have appropriate decodable books that will allow students the opportunity to practice the skills that have been explicitly taught (Solity, 2022). The key idea is that students will not be able to understand a text they cannot yet decode; therefore, decoding precedes meaning (Solity, 2022). However, teachers are encouraged to provide opportunities for students to listen to the text they cannot read independently through poems, read-aloud, and audible books (Solity, 2022).

When teachers understand learning theories, they can better support their students. In both the constructivist and positivist views of reading, students depend on the teacher to facilitate their learning. Learning happens through social interactions (Botes et al., 2022). The Vygotskian

sociocultural theory of human learning provides a lens by which the importance of the student-teacher relationship can be better understood. The Vygotskian theory of learning explains that humans develop knowledge through social interactions (Bipath, 2021; Lantolf & Poehner, 2014;). The absence of social interaction stifles learning for young children because children rely on capable adults to model new behaviors that can then be replicated (Bandura, 1977b; Vygotsky, 1978). However, for teachers to be effective models, they must see themselves as such (Bandura, 1993). Bandura's self-efficacy theory highlights that teacher motivation rises when they believe their actions can positively impact student outcomes (Bandura et al., 1996; Erdem & Demirel, 2007).

Problem Statement

The problem is that Tier 3 students identified as having reading difficulties are negatively impacted emotionally, socially, and academically by disasters or environmental outbreak-related school closures (Haeck & Larose, 2022; Maldonado & De Witte, 2022; Zierer, 2021). In addition, any extended school closures, whether caused by infectious outbreaks, natural disasters, or inclement weather (Smith, 2021), negatively affect school-age children during and after the closure (Rohwerder, 2020). According to Meyers and Thomasson (2017), there may be long-term effects on academic performance for students affected by even short-term school closures. Lai et al. (2019) agreed that school closures put students at risk for underperforming in essential skills such as critical thinking, phonics, inferring, comprehension, and mathematical word problems. In addition, Lai et al. (2019) highlighted that school closures due to extreme weather, such as hurricanes, caused schools to reduce by 5-15% in meeting standards for growth.

Natural disasters have been linked to lower academic performance affecting how many days students attend school (Smith, 2021). During school closures, children engage in more

screen time, experience irregular sleep patterns, eat an unbalanced diet, have decreased social interactions, and experience learning difficulties (Almeida et al., 2022). Therefore, there is an increased need for early reading interventions, and schools must leverage intervention structures such as a multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) to address those needs (Wyse et al., 2020). However, according to Yakut (2021), very little research addresses providers' experience after school closures due to disasters or environmental outbreaks. Providers' experiences are critical because they are tasked with providing interventions for students most in need. If intervention providers are not well prepared emotionally or professionally to deal with the aftermath of catastrophic events or do not believe they can address students' reading gaps, then students may not receive the most effective interventions that are most desperately needed considering that the needs before the event are magnified after a school closure.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the lived experiences of Tier 3 early reading intervention providers at the Urban Independent School district in Texas. In this research, the lived experiences of Tier 3 early reading intervention providers are generally defined as their beliefs, attitudes, mental state, and actions regarding providing interventions three years after school closures. The theories that guided this study were the Vygotskian sociocultural theory of human learning (1978) and Bandura's (1977a) self-efficacy theory. These two theories helped understand early reading student needs and how practitioners see themselves as capable of addressing those needs three years after a school closure.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant because students learn through interactions with skilled adults (Kerem & Cihan, 2022; Vygotsky, 1978). Therefore, this study aims to shed light on the experiences of trained reading interventionists who, through their interactions, help close reading gaps for young students most in need three years after a school closure. When students have difficulty with reading, they are more likely to get frustrated and become reluctant to do so, further delaying their reading acquisition (Stevens et al., 2017). In addition, students who struggle to learn how to read are more likely to develop negative self-perceptions that can follow them into adulthood (Herman et al., 2008). Poor self-perception can lead students to drop out of school (Schunk, 2020) or fall into depression (Herman et al., 2008).

Additionally, when schools close due to natural disasters or infectious diseases, students learn more slowly, even when instruction continues virtually (Anderson, 2021). Rohwerder (2020) posited that any school closure, regardless of the cause, has adverse effects on school-age children during and after a school closure. Cauchemez et al. (2009) added that school closures have long-term effects on academic achievement. Students who were already struggling before the school closure are more likely to experience learning loss, which can mean that they might regress or learn at an even slower pace (Anderson, 2021; WHO, 2022b). Anderson (2021) posited that during the school closures due to Covid-19, on average, students lost one-and-a-half months of learning to read. However, early reading interventions can establish a strong foundation that will have long-term positive effects throughout a student's educational career (Bratsch-Hines et al., 2020; Moats, 2020). Petscher et al. (2020) agreed that early reading interventions could reduce the long-term negative consequences of reading failure (Moats, 2020). Considering the high stakes of not addressing students' needs, those tasked with

providing interventions are vital to a student's academic career and overall life. Therefore, it is significant to consider their experiences in providing Tier 3 early reading interventions after a school closure.

Empirical Significance

The effects of school closures on students' academic, social-emotional, and behavioral well-being have been well-documented in the literature (Haeck & Larose, 2022; Maldonado & De Witte, 2022; Zierer, 2021). However, students are not the only ones affected by school closures; there is a noticeable gap in the literature concerning the perspective of those tasked with providing interventions to affected students (Yakut, 2021). This study helps narrow the gap in the literature by bringing to light the lived experiences of early Tier 3 reading intervention providers. This study aims to add to the professional body of knowledge on the effects of school closure, the impact of natural disasters and disease outbreaks, and the experiences of intervention providers.

Theoretical Significance

The Vygotskian theory of learning has been applied to many educational discourses, such as teacher learning teams (Hargreaves & Elhawary, 2020), second language development (Poehner et al., 2018), and cognitive development (Ohreen et al., 2022), among many others. This study extends the application of the Vygotskian theory of learning to include the perspectives of Tier 3 early reading intervention providers. Exploring the lived experiences of intervention providers through the lens of the Vygotskian theory of learning provides a new application of how people acquire new learning and sharpen their existing understanding. Similarly, Bandura's self-efficacy theory is another well-respected learning theory (Schunk, 2020). There is a reciprocal relationship between human behavior, environment, and self-

efficacy (Bandura, 1977b). Self-efficacy influences how a person behaves, what tasks they engage in, how much effort they employ, and how long they persist when things are difficult (Schunk, 2020). However, the environment in which the person engages in the task affects the person's self-efficacy (Schunk, 2020).

Additionally, a person's behavior influences their environment (Schunk, 2020). There is constant interaction between the three factors. Exploring the lived experiences of Tier 3 early reading intervention providers after a school closure through the lens of Bandura's self-efficacy theory adds to the body of literature by providing examples of the reciprocal relationship between behavior, environment, and self-efficacy.

Practical Significance

The results of this study may have empirical and theoretical significance, as well as benefit the participants. This study gives voices to a group of underrepresented people in literature. Intervention providers' beliefs, attitudes, mental states, and actions directly impact how well they execute their job duties. Additionally, seeking input from the interventionists can help them feel like their input matters and their thoughts are being considered. A valuable by-product of this study might be the creation of innovative and impactful professional development geared to address the needs of intervention providers after a school closure. Additionally, providing intervention providers with an opportunity to share their experiences had therapeutic benefits, as it allowed them to reflect on and process their experiences (Perry & Bigelow, 2020).

Research Questions

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to give a voice to Tier 3 early reading intervention providers and provide an outlet for them to share their lived experiences of providing interventions three years after a school closure. This study is rooted in

the Vygotskian theory of learning, which stresses the need for collaboration between student and teacher, and Bandura's self-efficacy theory which addresses the provider's feelings of aptitude in addressing students' reading needs. During a school closure, the connection between student and teacher may be severed, causing a learning loss. Therefore, the work of a Tier 3 early reading intervention provider is critical after a school closure; their perspectives provide a unique lens of the additional consequences of school closures due to natural or environmental disasters.

Central Research Question

What are the lived experiences of Tier 3 early reading intervention providers in the Urban Independent School district three years after a school closure?

Sub-Question One

What are the beliefs of Tier 3 early reading intervention providers about how the school closure has affected their students academically and socially?

Sub-Question Two

What are the attitudes of Tier 3 early reading intervention providers on what could have been or was done differently during the school closure and/or upon returning to in-person learning?

Sub-Question Three

What is the mental state of Tier 3 early reading intervention providers about how they have personally experienced the challenges of returning to in-person learning after the school closure?

Sub-Question Four

What are the actions of Tier 3 early reading intervention providers three years after a school closure?

Definitions

1. *Attitude*- Mental representation that mediates stimulus evaluation; that is, that allows stimuli to evoke evaluative responses (De Houwer et al., 2021).
2. *Beliefs*- Mental model's component that captures what people hold to be true about the world (Richert et al., 2022).
3. *Coaching*- Bridge between knowing and doing that provides an opportunity for expert modeling, the opportunity to practice new skills, and feedback (Freeman et al., 2017).
4. *Data-based individualization (DBI)*- Teachers select goals and practices that align with student needs (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2017).
5. *Decode synthetically*- Readers say the sound corresponding to the letters and then blend them together to pronounce the words (Ehri, 2020).
6. *Epoché*- Researcher refrains from judgment (Moustakas, 1994).
7. *Fluency*- Reader is able to read with automaticity (Stevens et al., 2017).
8. *Imaginative variation*- Researcher seeks to explain how the experience came to be (Moustakas, 1994).
9. *Learning loss*- Students know less than they did prior to the pandemic or continue to learn during a school closure but at a slower rate than they would have if the instruction were in person (Anderson, 2021).
10. *Mental state*- Emotion or condition that significantly influences an individual's thought process at a moment in time (Spacey, 2020)
11. *Multi-tiered system of support (MTSS)*- Framework for tiered instruction that encompasses the whole child; it includes academic, behavioral, and social-emotional interventions (Freeman et al., 2017).

12. *Phenomenological reduction*- Researcher describes textual qualities such as size, sound, temperature, movement, height, pressure, feeling, shape, space, time, and color (Moustakas, 1994).
13. *Phonological awareness*- Reader has the ability to identify and manipulate units of oral language, which include words, syllables, onset and rime, and phonemes (Bratsch-Hines et al., 2020).
14. *Progress monitoring*- Tool that aids in gauging the effectiveness of the intervention and provides data used to guide instruction (Gustafson et al., 2014).
15. *Response to intervention (RTI)*- Framework through which schools can provide early intervention for students experiencing academic and behavioral difficulties (Hughes & Dexter, 2011).
16. *School closures*- Strategy employed to reduce the spread of infectious diseases (Kishimoto et al., 2021).
17. *Sight word reading*- Readers read a word as a unit and not as individual sounds that come together to make the word (Ehri, 2005).
18. *Social constructivism*- Complexity of participants' views and meanings that are socially and historically constructed (Creswell & Poth, 2018).
19. *Synthesis of meaning and essence*- Textual and structural descriptions are combined to derive the essence of the experience (Moustakas, 1994).
20. *Tier 1*- Instruction that all students receive (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2017; Gustafson et al., 2014; Hughes & Dexter, 2011).

21. *Tier 2*- Instruction for students not successful in Tier 1 and need additional help mastering grade-level content (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2017; Gustafson et al., 2014; Hughes & Dexter, 2011).
22. *Tier 3*- Interventions for students who perform far below grade level (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2017; Gustafson et al., 2014; Hughes & Dexter, 2011).
23. *Universal screener*- Tool used to identify students with a high likelihood of having learning difficulties (Hughes & Dexter, 2011).

Summary

Chapter one has provided an overview of this study that includes historical, social, and theoretical contexts. The problem is that students at risk for reading difficulties suffer from school closures. As a result, these students are more likely to struggle academically and are at higher risk of dropping out of school and suffering from long-term depression. However, early reading intervention, especially after a school closure, can help mitigate the adverse effects of the closure. Therefore, the purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the lived experiences of Tier 3 early reading intervention providers at the Urban Independent School district. Although there is extensive research on early reading intervention, there is a noticeable gap in the literature on the experiences of early Tier 3 reading intervention providers (Yakut, 2021).

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

A systematic review of the literature was conducted to explore how Tier 3 students who have been identified as having reading difficulties are negatively impacted emotionally, socially, and academically by disasters or environmental outbreak-related long-term school closures and the experiences of those tasked with providing mitigating reading interventions to address the exacerbated gaps. This chapter presents a review of the current literature related to the topic of study. The first section discusses the Vygotskian theory of learning and Bandura's theory of self-efficacy as the foundation for this study. Next, a synthesis of recent literature is presented regarding phases of reading, the MTSS (multi-tiered system of support) framework, early reading interventions, and big ideas of reading. Finally, the literature concerning providers' perceptions of reading interventions and the effects of interrupted schooling are discussed. However, there is a gap in the literature concerning Tier 3 early reading intervention providers' experiences after a school closure.

Theoretical Framework

According to Creswell and Poth (2018), all research must be grounded in theory so that an agreed-upon theoretical framework is used to interpret research results. Although this study focuses on the experiences of early reading (kinder, first, and second-grade) Tier 3 intervention providers, it is essential to understand, at least in part, how school closures affect young children. Therefore, this study was guided by the Vygotskian sociocultural theory of human learning (1978) and Bandura's (1977a) self-efficacy theory. The first highlights students' need for social interactions as part of their learning. The latter focuses on how intervention providers see themselves as capable of addressing student needs after a school closure and how those views

affect their efforts, successes, and, ultimately, student achievement. These two theories are necessary to paint a complete picture of the intervention providers' experience providing Tier 3 reading interventions once schools return to in-person learning.

Vygotskian Sociocultural Theory of Human Learning

The Vygotskian learning theory advocates that social interaction develops human understanding (Bipath, 2021; Lantolf & Poehner, 2014; Vygotsky, 1978). This theory can help explain the learning loss experienced by students in the early grades during school closures or virtual learning, as the lack of social interactions inhibits students' academic growth (Kerem & Cihan, 2022; Vygotsky, 2012). Collaborative interactions between students and teachers are necessary for learning because logical memory and concept formation are first developed at the social level (interpsychological) through human interactions, and then the learning is internalized in the child (intrapsychological) (Bipath, 2021; Hargreaves & Elhawary, 2020; Vygotsky, 1978). When students and teachers interact, both parties can make new connections and use their prior knowledge to develop a new understanding (Hargreaves & Elhawary, 2020; Tuyay et al., 1995). During a school closure, even when a school or school district opts to continue education virtually, social interaction is stifled, and the lack of expert modeling that children can emulate translates to diminished levels of learning.

Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory

After a school closure, reading intervention providers are charged with helping students close academic gaps exacerbated partly by the lack of direct teaching and social interactions necessary for learning. Although intervention providers want to successfully address students' deficits, unless they feel their actions will have a meaningful impact, they have little motivation to act (Bandura et al., 1996; Erdem & Demirel, 2007). According to Bandura (1993), "perceived

self-efficacy is defined as people's beliefs about their capabilities to produce designated levels of performance that exercise influence over events that affect their lives. Self-efficacy beliefs determine how people feel, think, self-motivate, and behave" (p.71).

Additionally, levels of efficacy can predict how much effort a person is willing to give and how long they will be able to endure difficult situations (Bandura, 1977a; van Dinther et al., 2011). Resilient and persistent people are better equipped to face obstacles and challenges (Yost, 2006). Strong levels of self-efficacy lead to better overall performance (Sitzmann & Yeo, 2013). Among teacher characteristics, teacher self-efficacy is the most impactful factor contributing to students' achievement (Andreou et al., 2022; Ross, 2013). Bandura (1977a) identified experiencing mastery, social models, verbal persuasion, and emotional arousal as four factors that influence self-efficacy (Eden & Kinnar, 1991; Palmer, 2006; van Dinther et al., 2011).

Even though self-efficacy is a predictor of how well a person will perform in the future, it is important to understand that high levels of self-efficacy are a byproduct of how well a person has performed in the past (Bandura, 1977a; Betz & Hackett, 2006; Mori & Kudo, 2022; Sitzmann & Yeo, 2013). People learn and modify their thoughts and behavior based on the results of their actions (Bandura, 1977a). If a person's actions produce positive outcomes, they become motivated to reproduce those behaviors, believing they will continue to experience success (Bandura, 1977b; Heydarnejad et al., 2022; Mori & Kudo, 2022). Confident people who are secure in their ability to do their job are more likely to feel motivated to be solution driven rather than be overcome by the problems they face (Gielnik et al., 2020; Yost, 2006).

Verbal persuasion is a tool used to help guide behavior by suggesting to people that they can be successful at specific tasks (Bandura, 1977b; Bouffard-Bouchard, 1990; Eden & Kinnar, 1991; van Dinther et al., 2011). However, despite the positive effects of verbal persuasion,

Bandura (1977a) warned that a significant limitation is that if the person is unsuccessful, the persuader will be discredited, and the recipient's self-efficacy may be negatively impacted. Therefore, for verbal persuasion to be most effective, in addition to simple encouragement, the persuader should provide provisional aids necessary for success (Bandura, 1977a).

Self-efficacy is also influenced by emotional arousal or stress associated with the task or situation a person must overcome (Bandura, 1977a). High-stress levels often lead to fear and lower performance (Bandura, 1977b; van Dinther et al., 2011). However, watching a model can enhance self-efficacy and reduce dysfunctional fear by providing examples of behaviors that can help overcome difficult situations (Bandura, 1977a). Developing self-efficacy requires a growth mindset geared toward personal improvement and not the comparison of others (Bai et al., 2021; Dweck, 2006; Samuel & Warner, 2021). Therefore, positive thinking and successful experiences are key factors in motivation and the development of self-efficacy (Dawkins et al., 2015).

Related Literature

A major goal for educators is to ensure that students in primary grades become competent readers (Nilvius et al., 2021). Unfortunately, school closures, including those that continue instruction virtually, cause students to experience learning loss or to learn at a slower pace, widen academic gaps for many students and stifle the acquisition of fundamental reading skills for young learners (Anderson, 2021; Kerem & Cihan, 2022; WHO, 2022b). However, multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) is a structure that could be leveraged to mitigate the academic impact seen after schools resume in-person learning after a school closure or period of virtual learning (Sullivan et al., 2020). MTSS could also decrease the academic, social-emotional, and behavioral needs of students affected by virtual learning during the Covid-19 school closures (Sullivan et al., 2020). This section includes a review of related literature that includes the MTSS

and RTI framework and its encompassing tiers, the impact of early reading intervention, risks associated with low reading skills, five big ideas of reading, providers' perception of reading intervention, school closures and their impact on students, early reading, and providers.

Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) and Response to Intervention (RTI) Framework

The introduction of the No Child Left Behind Act in the early 2000s gave way to Response to Intervention (RTI) as a means to provide support for students who struggled with reading and math (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2017; NCLB, 2002). RTI is intended to prevent academic failure and over-identification in special education (Nilvius et al., 2021). Through RTI, struggling students are identified early, and interventions are provided instead of waiting for the student to fail before support is provided (Nilvius et al., 2021). In 2006, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) of 2004 was amended to change the conditions of severe discrepancy in special education and, instead, mandated that individual states make RTI mandatory or at least permissible in their respective states (Braun et al., 2020; Choi et al., 2020; Gersten et al., 2020; Zirkel, 2018). This law allowed states to develop intervention models (Zirkel, 2018). Most states have since created legal parameters for prereferral or general interventions (Zirkel, 2018).

More schools and school districts are now adopting an MTSS framework that extends beyond RTI (Coyne et al., 2018; Gersten et al., 2020). MTSS is the overarching framework for tiered instructions encompassing the whole child; it includes academic, behavioral, and social-emotional interventions (Freeman et al., 2017). RTI is the academic component of the MTSS framework (Choi et al., 2020; Coyne et al., 2018). Additionally, RTI has proven to substantially affect the diagnosis of reading deficits in struggling students (Gustafson et al., 2014).

There are four essential components of MTSS: universal screeners for academics and behavior, the use of research-based instruction in the classroom, frequent progress monitoring, and the use of multiple tiers that increase by level of intensity of the interventions (Choi et al., 2020; Coyne et al., 2018; Field et al., 2019; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2017; Gustafson et al., 2014; Hughes & Dexter, 2011; Wang et al., 2021; Zirkel, 2018). In a multi-tiered system of interventions, as students move up the tiers, the instruction becomes more targeted and individualized (Gustafson et al., 2014). MTSS is composed of three tiers: Tier 1 is the instruction that all students receive; Tier 2 is specialized supplemental instruction for students not successful in Tier 1 and need additional help mastering grade-level content; and Tier 3 is for more intensive and individualized interventions for students who perform far below grade level (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2017; Gustafson et al., 2014; Hughes & Dexter, 2011). Generally, 75-80% of students will do well with good Tier 1 instruction, 10-15% will need more support through Tier 2 interventions, and the students left will need Tier 3 to succeed (Field et al., 2019).

A critical component of MTSS is using universal screeners to identify students at risk for learning difficulties (Hughes & Dexter, 2011). Early identification of possible deficits coupled with early interventions increases the likelihood of targeting and closing academic gaps (Hughes & Dexter, 2011; Moats, 2020; Wu et al., 2019). In addition, universal screeners are imperative in accessing foundational reading skills such as phonological awareness, letter-sound correspondence, and decoding (Aceves et al., 2020; Moats, 2020). The universal screener should be used at the beginning, middle, and end of the school year (Hughes & Dexter, 2011). All students should participate in the universal screener (Hughes & Dexter, 2011).

Another component of RTI is ongoing progress monitoring at different intervals depending on the tier (Freeman et al., 2017; Gustafson et al., 2014; Hughes & Dexter, 2011). The

more intensive the intervention, the more frequent the progress monitoring (Wang et al., 2021). Progress monitoring aids in gauging the effectiveness of the intervention and providing data that guides instruction (Gustafson et al., 2014; Wang et al., 2021). Through progress monitoring, data-based decisions can be made surrounding a new skill, such as the need to reteach, halt or modify the new skill to fit the students, teachers, interventionists, campus, or district (Freeman et al., 2017).

Coaching is a key to the effectiveness of any MTSS model as it serves as a bridge from knowing to doing (Freeman et al., 2017; March et al., 2020). Coaching is effective because it provides opportunities for modeling and allows space for practice and feedback (Freeman et al., 2017; March et al., 2020; Vygotsky, 1978). These practices allow abstract ideas to move into practice in real classrooms and permit generalization into other educational contents (Freeman et al., 2017). MTSS coaching can be a change agent that improves the probability that new procedures will be exercised and utilized with fidelity over time (Freeman et al., 2017; March et al., 2020). When teachers are coached, they engage in reflective practices that lead to increased knowledge and improved expertise that translate to better student outcomes (Correnti et al., 2021). When teachers' knowledge increases, so does their self-efficacy, and in turn, so does student performance (Lee et al., 2022). For coaching to be effective, the coach should be a person that is knowledgeable in the content of the intervention and has the communication skills required when guiding other adults (Freeman et al., 2017; Vygotsky, 1978).

Intervention programs used during MTSS that proved to be most effective were researched based and employed a targeted approach that aligned with students' needs, including adding a high weekly dosage that supplements core instruction, were implemented with fidelity, were developmentally appropriate, and were administered in a small-group or one-on-one

settings (Coyne et al., 2018; Wang et al., 2021). For intervention programs to meet their highest potential, schools must invest in interventionists' professional development and ensure that interventions occur with profound levels of fidelity and intensity (Coyne et al., 2018; Field et al., 2019; March et al., 2020).

Early interventions provided in non-restrictive settings, where parents, administrators, and teachers have developed relationships built on trust, lead to more excellent academic and social advances (Wanzek et al., 2018). When parents trust teachers, they believe that teachers have the best interest in the well-being of their children (Neuenschwander, 2020). Trust gives teachers the agency to make decisions in the student's best interest; teachers can then choose appropriate assessments, develop intervention plans, and set the frequency and duration of interventions that will best serve the students (Wanzek et al., 2018).

Tier 1

Evidence-based core instruction at Tier 1 is critical to an MTSS model (Hughes & Dexter, 2011; Nilvius et al., 2021; Paige, 2018; Swanson et al., 2017). Tier 1 is the instruction that occurs in the general classroom and meets the needs of a diverse student population by providing high-quality pedagogy and differentiating instruction to match student needs (Nilvius et al., 2021; Swanson et al., 2017). Tier 1 is the core instruction that all students receive in a general education classroom setting (Paige, 2018; Petersen et al., 2022). Tier 1 instruction happens in a whole group setting, and instruction is provided by the classroom teacher (Petersen et al., 2022). Good Tier 1 instruction aids in narrowing down causes for inefficient progress (Hughes & Dexter, 2011). Effective Tier 1 instruction reduces the need for additional support for at risk students (Kent et al., 2017).

Universal screeners and progress monitoring are tools used for all students to measure the effectiveness of Tier 1 instruction and identify students who may need additional support (Petersen et al., 2022). In addition, effective early reading Tier 1 instruction should include foundational reading skills that include decoding and fluency instruction (Paige, 2018). However, teachers often need to be better trained in foundational reading instruction, creating or exacerbating reading gaps as children move from grade to grade (Paige, 2018; Wu et al., 2019).

Tier 2

Tier 2 intervention is specialized small-group instruction for students not successful in Tier 1 (Hughes & Dexter, 2011; Nilvius et al., 2021). Tier 2 interventions supplement grade-level Tier 1 instruction but do not replace it (Coyne et al., 2018; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2017). Tier 2 interventions must include ongoing progress monitoring to assess its effectiveness; if students make adequate progress, they may return to solely Tier 1 instruction; on the other hand, if the student is not making appropriate progress, they may be considered for more intensive interventions (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2017). The high instructional intensity in Tier 2 can yield positive results for phonological awareness and decoding ability (Coyne et al., 2018). In addition, Tier 2 interventions can positively impact students' overall reading ability when they are supplemental to Tier 1 instruction and are provided with high intensity, consistency, and fidelity (Coyne et al., 2018).

Tier 3

Tier 3 interventions are the most intensive level of interventions (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2017; Johnson et al., 2006; Nilvius et al., 2021) for students who perform far below grade-level expectations; they are often referred to as remediation (Hughes & Dexter, 2011). Tier 3 interventions are characterized by individualizing instruction tailored to student needs (Field et

al., 2019; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2017). An exemplar model of Tier 3 is data-based individualization (DBI), where teachers select goals that align with student needs (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2017). Progress monitoring at the Tier 3 level is used to determine how a student is progressing but also how the interventions need to be modified to meet the student's needs; it may also serve to determine if the student can return to less intensive tiers or if they need further evaluation if the interventions are not being effective (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2017). A test-teach-test process can help providers create effective intervention plans for struggling students (Fuchs and Fuchs (2017)). Students who receive Tier 3 interventions can make substantial growth compared with students who do not receive the interventions, reducing gaps for struggling students (Austin et al., 2017).

Barriers to Implementation

One barrier to implementing interventions through RTI (the academic branch of MTSS) is a need for more understanding of the models (Zirkel, 2018). Zirkel (2018) conducted a study in which a poll was taken at RTI regional conferences in different parts of the United States. The poll evaluated participants' legal knowledge of RTI under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Although the poll participants were special education teachers or administrators with a higher level of pertinent RTI knowledge than the average educator, the overall average score was 40%. The conclusion was that there are significant professional misunderstandings regarding RTI (Zirkel, 2018). Other barriers are that schools may not have designated blocked time or staff to provide interventions consistently, there may not be adequate training or coaching for providers, and even in cases where there are dedicated interventionists, they may be pulled for other duties such as covering classes which hinder the fidelity of implementation (Coyne et al., 2018).

In addition to high variability in the implementation of RTI across schools and districts in the United States, there is also modest or incomplete implementation, even in schools that claim

to have high levels of adoption (Coyne et al., 2018). Many schools are not implementing RTI as research and policy dictate (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2017). Some inconsistent variables are that students identified as needing interventions may not always receive those interventions, interventions are replacement and not supplemental to Tier 1 instruction, the fidelity of dosage and intensity may not be sufficient, and there may or may not be the use of research or evidence-based program used for interventions (Coyne et al., 2018; Maki & Hammerschmidt-Snidarich, 2022). For tiered interventions to be effective, districts must invest in building capacity within the school to implement interventions with intensity and to establish systems and structures for implementation with fidelity (Coyne et al., 2018; Maki & Hammerschmidt-Snidarich, 2022). However, although professional development increases educators' knowledge, more is needed to lead to a change in practice, and more coaching is necessary to bridge training and implementation (Freeman et al., 2017; March et al., 2020). Successful RTI models are implemented with ongoing support and are rooted in research (Reynolds & Shaywitz, 2009). In addition, a simpler RTI model could increase the fidelity of implementation of the most critical components of interventions (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2017).

Early Reading Interventions

Teaching children to read is the most salient responsibility of schools worldwide (Moats, 2020). Children's ability to read translates into their quality of life into adulthood (Kirkøen et al., 2021). However, there is a high population of students identified as being at risk or are diagnosed with a reading disability; therefore, these students are in desperate need of intensive reading interventions (Kirkøen et al., 2021; Wanzek et al., 2018). Early interventions prevent immediate and long-term reading difficulties (González-Valenzuela & Martín-Ruiz, 2017; Moats, 2020). When interventions are provided early on in a child's life, there is the benefit of optimizing the

brain's plasticity and tapping into an increased developmental potential (Perez-Johnson & Maynard, 2007). The malleability of the young brain makes it more adept at receiving information and helps set the foundation for future knowledge acquisition (Dweck, 2006; Perez-Johnson & Maynard, 2007). Interventions provided early in a child's life help close educational gaps before they become increasingly more challenging to address (Perez-Johnson & Maynard, 2007). Early identification of academic difficulties is a preventative tool that increases the probability of at risk students gaining adequate academic skills (Hughes & Dexter, 2011; Moats, 2020). Although there is extensive evidence that early intervention has long-term positive effects on children, it is still an underutilized resource (Chan et al., 2021).

Morgan et al. (2019) conducted a longitudinal study of how early student performance could predict future outcomes. Morgan et al. concluded that how students perform in reading, math, and science in kindergarten correlates to their second-grade performance. Furthermore, students who experience difficulties will likely struggle academically throughout their school years (Kirkøen et al., 2021; Wanzek et al., 2018). Due to the increased focus on interventions, the Office of Special Education Programs now offers technical assistance to districts to boost their intervention programs (Wanzek et al., 2018). In addition, the Office of Special Education Programs provides tools to help evaluate intervention programs, offer students assessment instruments, and guide implementation approaches (Wanzek et al., 2018).

Additionally, the Division for Learning Disabilities (DLD) recommends that at risk students and students with learning disabilities receive interventions, accommodations, and modifications to benefit from general classroom instruction (Wanzek et al., 2018). The younger a child is, the more opportunities he or she has to participate in early interventions and allow for more frequent progress monitoring (Chan et al., 2021). For example, many students are at risk of

developing reading difficulties, but these difficulties can be addressed through early reading interventions (Wanzek et al., 2018). Interventions should be provided early in a child's life because education gaps get more significant as time goes by (Perez-Johnson & Maynard, 2007). During early childhood, the brain is more adept at receiving information that sets the foundation for future knowledge acquisition (Perez-Johnson & Maynard, 2007). Students who receive early interventions have better outcomes than those later placed in a remedial course because their deficit becomes more severe, making them harder to address (Perez-Johnson & Maynard, 2007).

To help students most in need, interventions may be intensified by increasing the frequency and duration of the interventions and decreasing the student-to-teacher ratio (Maki & Hammerschmidt-Snidarich, 2022; Wanzek et al., 2018). One-on-one interventions may be most effective because the teacher can provide interventions most aligned with student needs and provide more opportunities for the student to practice and receive more frequent feedback (Wanzek et al., 2018). For example, the most effective reading interventions included instruction of basic foundational reading skills such as phonological awareness, phonics, letter and word recognition, and fluency (Wanzek et al., 2018). However, the delivery of instruction and teacher-student interactions must be of high quality to ensure that intervention programs are successful (Kerem & Cihan, 2022; Vygotsky, 1978).

Risks Associated with Low Reading Skills

Approximately ten to 15% of students have reading difficulties (Fluss et al., 2009). However, early reading interventions are needed beyond academics (Moats, 2020). How well a student reads impacts their experience, emotions, and behaviors at school (Turunen et al., 2021). Students with reading difficulties are at a higher risk of being bullied at school (Turunen et al., 2021). Herman et al. (2008) also conducted a longitudinal study that analyzed the correlation between academic competence and depression and noted that poor academic performance led to

negative self-perception. Poor self-perception leads to depression that continues to adulthood (Herman et al., 2008). If a student has untreated mental issues in addition to academic deficits, then learning will be delayed, and it is suggested that before academic remediation begins, interventions must focus on mental health improvement. Struggling readers are more likely to internalize their failures, and the perception of others (such as teachers and peers) affects students' perception of themselves (Herman et al., 2008). In addition, how students view themselves as learners impact how they see themselves as social beings (Herman et al., 2008). Schunk (2020) illustrated the dangers of low self-worth by explaining a scenario where a student who experienced several failed courses may eventually drop out of school. Early identification of academic deficits coupled with early intensive interventions may reduce future depressive cognition and symptoms (Herman et al., 2008; Moats, 2020).

Impact of Early Reading Interventions

Working memory, cognitive flexibility, and inhibitory control are three executive functions that impact academic performance and classroom behavior, of which inhibitor control has the strongest correlation (Morgan et al., 2019). However, early interventions can support and even prevent impediments to cognitive development (Chan et al., 2021). Early identification of academic risk gives students the best chance at success (Moats, 2020). Students who receive early interventions have better outcomes than those later placed in remedial courses because their deficits become more severe, making them harder to address (Perez-Johnson & Maynard, 2007). Campbell and Ramey (1994) analyzed the long-term effects of early interventions. They concluded that at risk students for academic failure (based on socio-economic status and mother's IQ) who were provided early interventions could outperform those who did not receive any intervention. Students who receive early intervention can maintain higher IQs even after interventions stop and have a lower likelihood of being retained (Campbell & Ramey, 1994). The

success rate of the early reading interventions depends on the length of treatment and starting early in infancy (Campbell & Ramey, 1994). The earlier interventions are provided, the higher the level of academic performance can be (Campbell & Ramey, 1994; Moats, 2020). Early interventions are vital for closing academic gaps and increasing schools' success rates (Gersten et al., 2020; Moats, 2020; Perez-Johnson & Maynard, 2007).

Some associated factors of higher probability of developmental delays are race, socio-economic status, and medical insurance access (Chan et al., 2021; Kirkøen et al., 2021; Moats, 2020). Children in poverty greatly benefit from intense early interventions (Moats, 2020; Perez-Johnson & Maynard, 2007). Early reading interventions even the playing field for students with low social-economic status; students who receive early interventions can compete or at least keep up with other students (Kirkøen et al., 2021; Moats, 2020; Perez-Johnson & Maynard, 2007). Despite the effects of poverty and maternal IQ, students who received interventions could outperform students who did not receive any intervention (Campbell & Ramey, 1994).

Although the long-term effects of academic deficits can be severe, students who receive early interventions can change their academic course and be more successful in school and adulthood. Early interventions that target executive functions, mainly inhibitory control, will positively affect students who struggle academically and behaviorally at school (Morgan et al., 2019). Evidence supports that rigorous interventions improve reading performance for striving readers in kindergarten through third-grade (Wanzek et al., 2018). When students are at risk and early interventions are provided, the risk factors diminish, and thus, students gain the ability to grow up to be contributing members of society (Wanzek et al., 2018). Early intervention sets the foundation for the rest of students' educational careers and beyond (Wanzek et al., 2018).

Big Ideas of Reading

Learning how to read is not a single act but rather the coming together of smaller skills that include phonological awareness, decoding, encoding, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension, and writing (Gersten et al., 2020; Moats, 2020). The general focus of reading instruction can be broken down by grade level (Gersten et al., 2020). Big ideas targeted in kindergarten include pre-reading skills such as listening comprehension, rhyming, and phonemic awareness (Gersten et al., 2020; Moats, 2020). From first to third-grade, the focus becomes learning how to read, focusing on phonics (decoding), fluency, and comprehension (Gersten et al., 2020; Moats, 2020; Ray et al., 2021). Fourth and fifth-grade focus on learning by reading and focus heavily on comprehension, vocabulary, and fluency and less on decoding (Gersten et al., 2020; Moats, 2020).

Most students at risk for reading difficulties struggle with word recognition, vocabulary, and phonological awareness, skills covered in the early grades (Bratsch-Hines et al., 2020; Gersten et al., 2020). The first step to grasping how children learn to read is understanding that readers learn to recognize text accurately and automatically (Ehri, 2005; Ray et al., 2021). Understanding the big ideas of reading helps providers address and help close reading gaps by differentiating instruction for struggling readers (Bratsch-Hines et al., 2020; Moats, 2020). Essential reading skills be provided in the early grades to establish a strong reading foundation (Bratsch-Hines et al., 2020; Moats, 2020; Petscher et al., 2020). However, these skills should not be taught in isolation; providers should find concrete ways to integrate all or most of the big ideas of reading (Bratsch-Hines et al., 2020). A comprehensive approach can strengthen reading instruction for at risk students (Bratsch-Hines et al., 2020). When struggling readers do not

master foundational reading skills, the discrepancy between reading ability and on-level students widens and expands as students continue in school (Moats, 2020; Paige, 2018; Wu et al., 2019).

Phonological Awareness

Phonological awareness is a prerequisite to acquiring reading skills and literacy development (Lee, 2020; O'Brien et al., 2018; Wang et al., 2021) and is the most consistent predictor of how well a young student will read later in life (National Early Literacy Panel, 2008). Well-developed phonological awareness helps early readers learn how to accurately decode (read) and encode (write) words (Vander Stappen & Reybroeck, 2022). Additionally, phonological awareness and decoding skills are vital to the develop other reading skills as students move from learning to read and then transitioning to reading to learn (Coyne et al., 2018). Phonological awareness refers to identifying and manipulating oral language units, including words, syllables, onset and rimes, and phonemes (Bratsch-Hines et al., 2020; Vander Stappen & Reybroeck, 2022). Effective phonological awareness instruction begins with large units of sounds, like words, and gradually moves to smaller units of sound, individual phonemes (Anthony & Lonigan, 2004; Lee, 2020). Students' phonological awareness improves when they have opportunities to manipulate language, have authentic experiences with text, and receive high-quality instruction (Snow et al., 1998).

Phonics

Systematic phonics instruction benefits beginning and advanced readers (Castles et al., 2018; Ehri, 2020; Moats, 2020). Students who do not develop strong phonetic skills in the primary grades are more likely to continue to struggle for years to come (Wanzek et al., 2018). Therefore, phonics instruction must be prioritized, especially in the primary grade (Nilvius et al., 2021). Traditional phonics programs require students to decode words synthetically, meaning they say the sounds corresponding to the letters and then blend them to pronounce the words

(Castles et al., 2018; Ehri, 2020; Moats, 2020). Although single graphemes do not activate meaning (Ehri, 2005), when students can match grapheme to phoneme, meaning letter to sound, they can decode and make connections necessary to gain meaning from text (Castles et al., 2018; Ehri, 2020; Moats, 2020; Ray et al., 2021). Readers can decode words by saying individual sounds and then blending those sounds into words, or they can look at groups of letters and blend syllabic units into words (Ehri, 2005; Moats, 2020).

Sight Words

Children can access text by using their phonemic knowledge to decode words or context clues to help decipher words; however, reading words by sight or with automaticity is the most effective way to gain comprehension of texts read (Ehri, 2005, 2020). Reading by sight applies not only to high-frequency or irregular words, but all words can be committed to memory and read by sight (Ehri, 2005, 2020; Moats, 2020). Understanding the letter-sound relationship that make up words is the glue that helps children secure written words to their memory (Ehri, 2005, 2020; Moats, 2020). When words are seen and heard, the sound-letter relationship helps students memorize them (Ehri, 2020). When phonemic awareness is coupled with an understanding of the alphabetic system, they form a mnemonic system that helps readers attach spelling to their memory (Ehri, 2005; Ray et al., 2021). Once readers have committed the words to memory, they no longer must decode the word or guess what it is; they know it (Ehri, 2020; Moats, 2020). When readers read by sight, they read the word as a unit, not as individual sounds that come together to make a word (Ehri, 2005; Moats, 2020). When people read by sight, they are not making a conscious or strategic decision; they simply do, and it happens automatically (Ehri, 2005). In contrast, when readers read by decoding, analogizing, or prediction, they are conscious of the reading task itself and are distracted from the meaning, which may temporarily affect

comprehension (Ehri, 2005). Therefore, learning to read by sight is key to being a successful reader that can gain meaning from text (Ehri, 2005; Moats, 2020).

Fluency

Fluency refers to the ability to read with automaticity; this automaticity reduces the cognitive energy required to access text yielding higher levels of comprehension (LaBerge & Samuel, 1974; Stevens et al., 2017; Wu et al., 2019). Therefore, reading fluency is an essential skill that all students must acquire (Maki & Hammerschmidt-Snidarich, 2022; Wu et al., 2019). However, when students struggle to decode words, they focus more on matching letters to sounds, and their cognitive load is at maximum capacity; therefore, comprehension suffers (Maki & Hammerschmidt-Snidarich, 2022; Stevens et al., 2017). In addition, when reading is too laborious, struggling readers become frustrated and are more reluctant to want to read, which further delays their reading acquisition (LaBerge & Samuel, 1974; Stevens et al., 2017). Some instructional practices that help improve fluency are reading text multiple times, listening to fluent readers, reading accessible texts, reading with a peer, interventions that address more than one reading skill at a time, and listening to audiobooks (Maki & Hammerschmidt-Snidarich, 2022; Stevens et al., 2017).

Vocabulary

Vocabulary development is a complex process involving other reading components (Ehri, 2005; Moats, 2020). When students are proficient with spelling words, they can better memorize vocabulary words and read them by sight (Ehri, 2020). In addition, there is a dynamic relationship between vocabulary and phonological awareness, as vocabulary development positively affects students' phonological awareness, which is a crucial component for learning to read (O'Brien et al., 2018). A strong alphabetic understanding also strengthens readers' vocabulary (O'Brien et al., 2018). Readers can then use their existing vocabulary to help them

access unfamiliar words through analogizing (Ehri, 2005). Students with vocabulary skills who are provided with reading interventions can also improve their decoding skills (Bratsch-Hines et al., 2020). To improve vocabulary, providers must be mindful to not only focus on decoding words but also provide opportunities to discuss and talk about the usage of the word in context and have students use the new words and make personal connections (Bratsch-Hines et al., 2020).

Comprehension

Comprehension is the product of the ability to decode and understand oral language (Cervetti et al., 2020; Meneses et al., 2018). While reading, readers must have the cognitive flexibility to combine the semantic and word-level features of words to extract meaning from text (Cartwright et al., 2017). Reading comprehension is at the heart of all other academic disciplines, including science, social studies, and mathematics (Taboada Barber et al., 2020). Although comprehension is the goal of reading, it is difficult for struggling readers to achieve (Ray et al., 2021; Stevens et al., 2020). The difficulty is partially due to ineffective vocabulary instruction, lack of building background knowledge, and insufficient time for students to read and engage in text discussions (Stevens et al., 2020). A predictor of how well students will comprehend what they read is how much academic language they possess; the higher their vocabulary, the more likely they will understand what they read (Meneses et al., 2018). Academic language is also known as the language of school, which may differ from that spoken at home (Meneses et al., 2018). Another critical factor of comprehension is fluency; when students are not cognitively loaded with decoding words, they can spend more mental energy on comprehension (Meneses et al., 2018; Stevens et al., 2017; Wu et al., 2019).

Gough and Tunmer's (1986) simple view of reading (SVR) outlines how the ability to decode words along with oral language comprehension is foundational to the development of

reading comprehension. However, more recently, the RANS Reading Group (2002) argued that a more comprehensive view of reading is needed that goes beyond the SVR and created the RRSR framework (Taboada Barber et al., 2020). The RRSR framework highlights that reading happens within a sociocultural context in which comprehension is influenced by the reader, the text being read, and the reading activity in which the reader is engaged (RANS Reading Group, 2002; Taboada Barber et al., 2020).

Reading comprehension is a challenge for students and, therefore, should be a high priority for educators (Meneses et al., 2018; Turunen et al., 2021). If students are provided early reading interventions while their brains are still malleable, adequate reading comprehension will positively influence their academic retention, success, and resilience (Diamond, 2013). A robust MTSS model geared to addressing student deficits, including reading, is critical to helping struggling readers achieve their highest potential in school and beyond.

Providers' Experience with MTSS

Providers have been challenged to implement MTSS models for over a decade (Braun et al., 2020). Although MTSS is a familiar idea, the lack of consistency leads to a lack of understanding of the model (Braun et al., 2020). A barrier to the successful implementation of interventions is that providers often need more understanding of the model and are tasked with making instructional decisions for at risk students that need specialized instruction (Bratsch-Hines et al., 2020). A lack of understanding leads to lower levels of self-efficacy (Kuok et al., 2022; Taormina & Bauer, 2000). Providers with low self-efficacy are less likely to engage in effective academic interventions with their students because they lack confidence that they could impart effective interventions (Marsh & Seaton, 2013). Providers' self-efficacy is directly related to how students perform and ultimately impacts the self-efficacy of the students (Tschannen-

Moran & Hoy, 2001). Providers with a greater sense of self-efficacy are better at lesson planning, more comfortable with changes in the educational field, and are willing to take educational risks when exploring new methods to help their students perform better (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001).

A coaching model focusing on making instructional decisions and providing interventions can increase providers' self-efficacy, perception, and practice (Glover, 2017). However, providers believe that the high turnover in education is the root of the misunderstandings surrounding interventions because there is a constant change in the MTSS process (Braun et al., 2020). Although changes are constantly being made, the communication of those changes is slow to trickle down to those tasked with carrying out the interventions (Braun et al., 2020). There is a great need for ongoing professional development for providers to stay abreast of recent changes to the models and legislation (Greenwood & Kelly, 2017).

Providers expressed the need for more resources for students who do not respond to the interventions (Braun et al., 2020; Washburn et al., 2022). In addition, the lack of clear protocols to transition students to other tiers made it difficult to move students to more appropriate interventions (Braun et al., 2020). Overall, providers felt frustrated by the lack of consistency and resources necessary to help at risk students be successful (Braun et al., 2020; Washburn et al., 2022). In contrast, providers that expressed positive associations with MTSS attributed the positive experience to the allotted time for collaboration with other providers, where they shared assessment data, engaged in problem-solving, and reflected on outcomes (Greenwood & Kelly, 2017; Washburn et al., 2022). Opportunities for collaboration also allow practitioners to share their experiences and teaching practices improving practitioners' capacity and positively affecting student growth (Yan & Cai, 2022).

School Closures

Although the Covid-19 pandemic has been an unprecedented global emergency, it is not the first-time education has been put on pause as people deal with extenuating forces placed on the societies in which they live (González & Bonal, 2021). Throughout history, other health and natural emergencies have caused schools to close, thus forcing many children to have interrupted schooling (Smith, 2021). For example, schools have had to close because of infectious outbreaks, natural disasters such as earthquakes and volcanos, inclement weather, and gun violence (Smith, 2021; Stuart et al., 2013; Wong et al., 2014). Although school closures are not limited to only infectious outbreaks, school closures have been defined as a non-pharmaceutical mitigating intervention considered during national pandemic plans; therefore, it is a practice that is implemented at the first signs of an outbreak (Cauchemez et al., 2009; Jackson et al., 2013; Ncube & Motalenyane, 2020). School closures influence educational outcomes (Smith, 2021).

Two key features that set the Covid-19 pandemic apart from the previously mentioned school closures are that the closure's length and breadth far surpassed those experienced before (Smith, 2021). At the heart of Covid-19, on average, schools worldwide were closed for seventy days (Anderson, 2021). Since April 2020, about 1.725 billion children in over 95% of countries have been affected by school closures due to Covid-19 (Smith, 2021). As a result, many students experienced learning loss, which can mean that they know less now than they did at the beginning of the pandemic or continued learning at a slower pace than they would have if they were learning in person (Anderson, 2021; Kerem & Cihan, 2022; WHO, 2022b).

The World Health Organization (2022b) recommends the implementation of school closures to help mitigate transmission and reduce the spread of the disease during an infectious disease outbreak (Cauchemez et al., 2009; Hoke et al., 2022; Kishimoto et al., 2021). In addition

to reducing the total number of infected cases because of the decreased rate of transmission, school closures provide time for the creation of a vaccine, lower the number of cases at the peak of the pandemic, reduce stress on the healthcare system, and increase community resiliency (Cauchemez et al., 2009; González & Bonal, 2021; Hoke et al., 2022; Stuart et al., 2013). Therefore, during Covid-19 closing schools was one of the first actions taken at the onset of Covid-19 (Kishimoto et al., 2021).

However, school closures caused by infectious outbreaks, natural disasters, or inclement weather (Smith, 2021) negatively affect school-age children during and after the closure (Rohwerder, 2020; UNICEF, 2020). Even after schools begin to reopen, parents may find it difficult to send their children back to school based on fear; this, in turn, continues to expand the effects of interrupted schooling (Rohwerder, 2020). Although there are clear benefits to closing schools during a crisis, closures strain economics, society, healthcare, and education (Cauchemez et al., 2009; Rohwerder, 2020). Many environmental incidents have caused schools to close worldwide; the following section will discuss how school closures affect students and providers.

Impact of School Closures on Students

Schools are places of continuous social interactions; therefore, it makes sense that they would be first to be considered for closure during an outbreak that threatens people's health (Cauchemez et al., 2009; Kishimoto et al., 2021; Viner et al., 2020). However, school closures, lockdown restrictions, and home confinement affected the students' academic and social-emotional well-being (Brooks et al., 2020). Schools are essential infrastructures (Lai et al., 2019). Therefore, school closures affect students on many levels, starting with the social issue that schools have become a place that meets many students' needs like nutrition and daycare (Cauchemez et al., 2009; UNICEF, 2020; WHO, 2022b). Although schools meet many community needs, especially during a disaster, their focus is still on education, and

unfortunately, disasters have long-term effects on academic achievement (Lai et al., 2019). The ripple effect of school closures is vast, and children are disproportionately affected (Ncube & Motalenyane, 2020; WHO, 2022b).

Impact of School Closures on Students' Social-emotional Needs. School closures have caused students to experience increased physiological damage and emotional stress (Ncube & Motalenyane, 2020; WHO, 2022b). Children are more likely to experience physical and emotional abuse when schools are closed because they are socially isolated (Campbell, 2020; UNICEF, 2020; WHO, 2022b). Furthermore, school closures can cause students to feel lonely (Anderson, 2021). Lack of social interaction might cause increased levels of stress and depression coupled with lower levels of self-esteem and aspirations (Campbell, 2020; Ncube & Motalenyane, 2020). Additionally, children's reading ability impacts their social and emotional health (Moats, 2020). Therefore, when schools return to in-person learning, children should receive mental health and academic support (González & Bonal, 2021; Ncube & Motalenyane, 2020; UNICEF, 2020).

Impact of School Closures on Students' Academic Needs. During school closures, students have decreased opportunities for peer interactions, including tutoring, support, cooperation, and competitive learning, which are vital pedagogical practices necessary for student success (Ncube & Motalenyane, 2020; Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky (1978) stressed the need for community and social interactions for young children as it is through those connections that meaning is created and learning occurs. Covid-19-related school closures brought unprecedented challenges as schools and districts transitioned to remote learning that required knowledge and expertise that teachers did not possess (Sullivan et al., 2020).

There may be long-term effects on academics for students affected by even short-term school closures, including the virtual continuation of school (Meyers & Thomasson, 2017; Ncube & Motalenyane, 2020). For example, the year-and-a-half closure of schools in the Sanriku coastal area in Japan resulted in decreased intellectual abilities that included vocabulary, basic math, and verbal IQ, among others (Tatsuta et al., 2015). School closures put students at risk for underperforming in essential skills such as critical thinking, phonics, inferring, comprehension, and mathematical word problems (Lai et al., 2019). In addition, school closures due to extreme weather, such as hurricanes, caused schools to reduce by 5 to 15% in meeting standards for growth (Lai et al., 2019). Students found learning from home difficult because they lacked adequate family support (Ncube & Motalenyane, 2020). This may be partly because a lack of social interaction stifles the cognitive development that would traditionally occur during guided learning within the zone of proximal development as students and teachers co-construct knowledge in the classroom (Shabani, 2016; Vygotsky, 1978).

However, school closures do not affect all students equally (Lai et al., 2019); they disproportionately affect students from underprivileged backgrounds (Cauchemez et al., 2009; Ncube & Motalenyane, 2020) and exacerbate social vulnerabilities (Ncube & Motalenyane, 2020; Stuart et al., 2013). The main factor when identifying students at risk for academic failure is their family's low socio-economic status (Campbell & Ramey, 1994). Furthermore, students who receive free breakfast and lunch have difficulty getting those meals during school closures (Cauchemez et al., 2009). In addition, the disparity in how students were affected academically by the Covid-19-related school closures was partly due to the differences in learning opportunities in homes of different socio-economic statuses (Aurini & Davies, 2021; González & Bonal, 2021). How children spend their non-school time directly impacts academic achievement

gaps (Downey, 2020; Ncube & Motalenyane, 2020). Although the MTSS framework can help mitigate the academic gaps formed during school closures, it does not address equity and social justice (Sullivan et al., 2020).

Economically disadvantaged students struggled with remote learning during school shutdowns caused by Covid-19 because of limited access to technology and the internet (Anderson, 2021; Ncube & Motalenyane, 2020). This digital divide goes beyond just not having a computer and internet, low socio-economic students also lack the skills necessary to navigate remote learning, and their parents often cannot help (Anderson, 2021; González & Bonal, 2021). School closures during the Ebola crisis caused students from low socio-economic backgrounds to drop out at alarming rates; 17,410 more students dropped out than expected before the Ebola crisis (Smith, 2021). It is anticipated that 24 million children will drop out of school due to Covid-19 (UNICEF, 2020), and social inequalities will widen (Smith, 2021). The academic field has never been even for all children, and school closures only highlight and expand the divide (Ncube & Motalenyane, 2020; UNICEF, 2020; WHO, 2022b).

Impact of School Closure on Early Reading. Primary school-age children are impacted the most during school closures because they depend on teachers' guidance to compensate for their cognitive disadvantages and lack of self-regulation (Kerem & Cihan, 2022). Students need self-regulated learning skills to be motivated and feel a sense of self-efficacy when learning new things (Zimmerman, 1990). Lack of solid teacher instruction during school closures leads primary students to lose focus and delay learning new skills (Kerem & Cihan, 2022). In primary schools, a central focus is literacy, meaning helping students read, write, interpret, and comprehend written text (Kerem & Cihan, 2022). Due to school closures during the Covid-19 pandemic, students, on average, have lost one-and-a-half months of learning in reading

(Anderson, 2021). Reading instruction for early students must include engaging and playful activities because the concept of reading at that age is still too complex and abstract (Bipath, 2021; Kerem & Cihan, 2022). Teachers' ability to be playful and concretely interact with students was dramatically diminished by Covid-19-related school closures, causing students to develop wider reading gaps (Kerem & Cihan, 2022).

Impact of School Closures on Providers

During Covid-19, most schools in the United States and worldwide had to quickly adapt and turn to virtual learning (Anderson, 2021; González & Bonal, 2021). With very little training, teachers were asked to change the way they taught entirely and therefore experienced high levels of stress (Anderson, 2021). In addition, during school closures, providers had to remain flexible and adjust to the changing landscape while simultaneously meeting the needs of students (Minkos & Gelbar, 2020). Similar challenges occurred after an earthquake in Turkey when providers admitted that they were unprepared or equipped to deal with the aftermath (Yakut, 2021).

During the Covid-19-related school closures, teachers faced increasing demands as they were expected to continue teaching virtually despite their varying levels of expertise in the most effective instructional technologies and how to differentiate instruction with the new teaching model (González & Bonal, 2021; Ncube & Motalenyane, 2020). The sudden transition to virtual learning affected teachers' self-efficacy (Andreou et al., 2022). Bandura's (1977a) self-efficacy theory includes the notion that a person's emotional and physiological state affects that person's self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997). During a typical school year, intervention providers experience constant high-intensity contact with students and adults, which makes them more susceptible to

stress and emotional exhaustion; this was exacerbated during Covid-19-related school closures and when schools resumed in-person learning (Kuok et al., 2022; Zhang & Sapp, 2008).

Burnout is “a syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment that can occur among individuals who work with people in some capacity” (Maslach et al., 1996, p. 4). The increased workload during virtual learning and when instruction returned in person caused teachers to experience increased levels of stress that influenced their self-efficacy (Kuok et al., 2022; Pressley, 2021). In addition, according to Bandura’s (1977a) self-efficacy theory, a teacher’s mastery experience, their perceived ability to complete a task, can increase or decrease their self-efficacy in that task. Therefore, teachers with minimal experience with technology had lower self-efficacy regarding effectively teaching online during virtual learning (Andreou et al., 2022; Baroudi & Shaya, 2022; Ogodo et al., 2021).

In addition to the work-related effects of school closures, there are substantial negative psychological impacts because of widespread quarantine efforts (Brooks et al., 2020). For example, the psychological ramifications of isolation include post-traumatic stress, confusion, and anger (Brooks et al., 2020). One example of this is that during the SARS outbreak of 2003, people who were quarantined experienced negative psychological effects due to boredom, lack of essential supplies, lack of information, financial instability, and fear (Wu et al., 2009). “During Covid-19, instability in daily life is accompanied by constant risk of contamination and death. Therefore, teachers’ perception of disease risk could be among the factors that may influence their self-efficacy” (Andreou et al., 2022, p. 2).

Early reading is a critical component of children’s development that affects all future learning (Dunlap et al., 2021). However, about 30-40% of children will have difficulty with reading (Binks-Cantrell et al., 2020), and classroom teachers do not feel capable of addressing all

their students' needs (Serry et al., 2022). In addition, Covid-19-related school closures exacerbated students' emotional and academic needs, and further reduced teacher self-efficacy in meeting student needs (Andreou et al., 2022). However, MTSS provides a multi-tiered approach for addressing students' academic, behavioral, and social-emotional needs that ultimately lead to student success (Sailor et al., 2021). As part of MTSS, Tier 3 early reading interventions can help struggling students close achievement gaps and prevent future academic struggles (Austin et al., 2017).

Summary

Reading is a fundamental life skill that all students should acquire. However, as early as first-grade, many students are identified as being at risk for reading difficulties. In addition, interrupted schooling for at risk students exacerbates reading gaps. MTSS and RTI are designed to address students' needs early on. Recent research suggests that early reading interventions are vital for helping students close reading gaps and alleviate the potential long-term effects of ineffective reading. Vygotskian theory of learning helps set a framework for effective reading interventions. Effective reading interventions should align the phase in which students are presently performing to the big ideas of reading: phonological awareness, phonics, sight words, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension.

Although the research on reading interventions is broad, there needs to be more research on providers' experience with Tier 3 early reading interventions. School closures are not a unique mitigating strategy used during the Covid-19 pandemic. School closures have been used worldwide when environmental emergencies such as natural disasters and infectious outbreaks occur. The more extended the school closure is, the higher the negative impact on students and providers. There is a noticeable gap in the literature on the experience of Tier 3 early reading

intervention providers three years after a school closure.

In recent years there has been an increase in the number of research studies conducted on reading interventions which suggest increased interest and importance, making this study timely and relevant. However, according to Yakut (2021), very little research addresses intervention providers' experience after school closures due to disasters or environmental outbreaks. Bandura's self-efficacy theory can aid in understanding how intervention providers see themselves as capable of providing effective Tier 3 early reading interventions necessary to close academic gaps for struggling students and how their self-perception is linked to student outcomes. Providers' experiences are meaningful because they are tasked with providing interventions for students most in need. If they are not well prepared emotionally or professionally to deal with the aftermath of catastrophic events, then students will not receive the most effective interventions that are most desperately needed considering that the needs before the event will be magnified after a school closure.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the lived experiences of Tier 3 early reading intervention providers at the Urban Independent School District (UISD) three years after a school closure. Moustakas' conceptual, methodological framework guides this study. The transcendental phenomenological design focuses on human experiences and identifies the meaning and essence of those experiences through first-person accounts. This chapter expounds on how data was collected and analyzed to identify the phenomenon's essence. Data was collected and triangulated in the following order: participant interviews, open-ended questionnaires, and letter writing. In addition, this chapter discusses the research design and questions that guide the study. The setting and participants are described, as well as my positionality and role in the research. This chapter addresses philosophical assumptions, detailed procedures, trustworthiness, and ethical considerations. The chapter concludes with a summary.

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative methodology. A qualitative approach can examine human experiences in ways that quantitative methods cannot because they focus on the holistic nature of experiences and not just the measurable parts (Moustakas, 1994). In addition, a qualitative methodology can contribute to a knowledge body by providing the perspective and experiences of those often excluded from research that utilizes quantitative methods (De Villiers et al., 2019). Since the focus of this study was understanding the essence of the Tier 3 early reading intervention experience three years after a school closure, the qualitative approach best suited to address the research problem was phenomenological research (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

A phenomenological study aims to describe what and how individuals experience a phenomenon, then reduces the individual experiences to a universal essence by looking at what all experiences have in common (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 1990). There are two types of phenomenology studies: hermeneutic phenomenology (van Manen, 1990) and transcendental phenomenology (Moustakas, 1994). Hermeneutic phenomenology focuses on interpreting the nature of lived experiences, and transcendental phenomenology focuses on describing those experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 1990). Moustakas' (1994) transcendental phenomenology research design was most appropriate for identifying the essence of how early reading intervention providers experienced interventions three years after a school closure.

Moustakas (1994) was inspired in part by the work of Edmund Husserl (1931) and his belief that empirical knowledge is secondary to expertise derived from intuition and essence. The first step to acquiring knowledge is to study the thing itself (Moustakas, 1994). Moustakas argued that things could be perceived with fresh new eyes without the weight or barriers that come from preconceived notions or customs from a transcendental point of view. A transcendental design was most appropriate as it helped to paint a picture of the experiences of intervention providers with a fresh outlook. This design helped describe what all early reading intervention providers had in common as they experienced providing interventions three years after a school closure while understanding that each perspective had individual merit.

Research Questions

This study was guided by one central research question. The central question aimed to provide a more detailed description of the participants' experiences with providing early reading Tier 3 interventions after a school closure. In addition, four sub-questions were used in this study

to aid in a deeper interpretation of the experiences with the phenomenon.

Central Research Question

What are the lived experiences of Tier 3 early reading intervention providers in the Urban Independent School district three years after a school closure?

Sub-Question One

What are the beliefs of Tier 3 early reading intervention providers about how the school closure has affected their students academically and socially?

Sub-Question Two

What are the attitudes of Tier 3 early reading intervention providers on what could have been or was done differently during the school closure and/or upon returning to in-person learning?

Sub-Question Three

What is the mental state of Tier 3 early reading intervention providers about how they have personally experienced the challenges of returning to in-person learning after the school closure?

Sub-Question Four

What are the actions of Tier 3 early reading intervention providers three years after a school closure?

Setting and Participants

This section explains why and how the setting and participants were selected for this study. This study was conducted at a single site with participants who have experienced the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Therefore, the characteristics of the participants were

comparable and aided in identifying similarities in their experiences, emerging themes, and the “overall essence of the experience for all participants” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 153).

Setting

This study was conducted at a premier school district in Texas. The pseudonym for this district is Urban Independent School District (UISD). UISD was selected as the setting for this study because of its proximity and convenient access to the participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In addition, UISD is a large school district that focuses on early reading interventions. All elementary campuses are expected to include early reading interventions as part of the best practices implemented at each campus. In addition, UISD has a dedicated MTSS department created in response to the school closures caused by Covid-19 that oversees the intervention programs.

UISD is a large district that serves approximately 33,000 pre-kindergartens to twelfth-grade students of diverse backgrounds. UISD has over 4,000 employees dispersed over its 37 school campuses and one administrative building. There are three pre-kindergarten campuses, twenty kindergarten to fifth-grade elementary campuses, eight sixth to eighth-grade middle campuses, and six ninth to twelfth-grade high school campuses, making it the 39th largest school district in Texas. The focus of this study was the experiences of early reading intervention providers. Therefore, the option to participate in the study was extended to all early reading providers at all 20 elementary campuses. All elementary schools have at least one designated interventionist tasked with providing early reading support for students at risk for reading difficulties. In addition, UISD’s MTSS department oversees the implementation of all academic, behavioral, and social-emotional interventions.

Participants

Participants include intervention providers from UISD tasked with providing Tier 3 early reading interventions. In addition, participants experienced the phenomenon of providing interventions after a school closure. Participant demographic information, such as age, was collected during the data collection phase of the research. Dukes (1984) recommended that a phenomenology study include at least ten participants. This is aligned with the minimum requirement of ten participants established by Liberty University. Therefore, this study included ten participants that experienced the phenomenon of providing Tier 3 early reading interventions three years after a school closure.

Researcher Positionality

My positionality, beliefs, and philosophical assumptions were critical in guiding my study, as they influenced which theories were at the center of my research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). According to Merton (1972), the researcher's positionality refers to the link between the researcher's psychological and sociocultural stance and what is being studied. In addition, there is a distinction between those inside and those outside of either culture or phenomenon (Merton, 1972). In my case, I am both an insider and an outsider to the phenomenon being studied. Like my study participants, I have served as an early reading Tier 3 intervention provider. However, I never had to provide interventions after a school closure, the phenomenon being studied. Therefore, my lens when studying the phenomenon is inherently different from my participants. The following section will include the interpretive framework that served as the foundation for the study, the philosophical assumptions that describe my personal views, and my role as the researcher in this study.

Interpretive Framework

I consider myself a social constructivist because, as a former reading interventionist and current intervention coordinator, I am invested in all things related to academic interventions and understand that providers' perspectives help me understand the current realities of what is happening with our students at risk for reading difficulties. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), social constructivists are interested in understanding the world in which they live. Therefore, this study explored the lived experiences of early reading intervention providers three years after a school closure. There is great emphasis on the participant's views. However, meaning was co-constructed as my subjectivity impacted my findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A constructivist approach aligns with phenomenological studies as they provide an outlet for individuals to describe and share their experiences (Moustakas, 1994).

The experiences of intervention providers are essential because they are tasked with providing interventions for students most in need. If intervention providers are not well prepared emotionally or professionally to deal with the aftermath of catastrophic events, then students will not receive the most effective interventions that are desperately needed considering that the needs before the event are magnified after a school closure. Social constructivism focuses on the complexity of participants' views and meanings that are socially and historically constructed (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Although my research focused on the opinions of intervention providers, I was aware that my interpretation of the data gathered partly depended on my experience and background as a former interventionist and currently the person who develops intervention frameworks (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Philosophical Assumptions

Philosophy is “the use of abstract ideas and beliefs that inform our research” (Creswell &

Poth, 2018, p. 16). Philosophy is vital because it guides the development of research goals and, consequently, the study's outcomes (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Philosophical assumptions can be evident by reflecting on which participant quotes are highlighted, the researcher's biases, and how the essence is abstracted from the data collected (Creswell & Poth, 2018). However, this section will explicitly describe the ontological, epistemological, and axiological assumptions that guided this study.

Ontological Assumption

According to Creswell and Poth (2018), ontology answers the question, "What is the nature of reality?" (p. 20). Qualitative studies assume that researchers, study participants, and readers have different realities (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The goal of a qualitative researcher is first to identify the other realities that arise while themes emerge from the data and, secondly, to report those realities (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Although I believe that God's truth is a singular reality, as a social constructivist researcher, I believe that perception is reality. Personal experiences and interactions shape what we believe to be true. Since no two people go through life the same way, I can easily believe that different realities exist. Therefore, it was critical that, as the human instrument in my study, I kept subjectivity at bay because although each participant experienced providing interventions after a school closure, they did not experience it the same way. My job was to fully describe each reality and find commonalities while honoring their differences.

Epistemological Assumption

Epistemology refers to how the relationship between the researcher and study participants influences what is considered knowledge and how those pieces of knowledge are justified (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This research focused on intervention providers' experiences three years after a school closure. Before becoming an intervention coordinator at a different district in

Texas, I served as an early reading intervention provider for three years. However, I have been removed from the on-campus setting for five years. Therefore, my previous experience as a Tier 3 early reading intervention provider radically differs from those currently tasked with providing Tier 3 early reading interventions. The beliefs, attitudes, mental state, and actions of current Tier 3 early reading intervention providers have significantly been affected by the Covid-19-related school closures. Even though I have not experienced the phenomenon of providing Tier 3 early reading interventions after a school closure, my experience as a former intervention provider helped me better understand my participants' experiences. As a result, we co-constructed the realities that emerged through my research.

Axiological Assumption

Axiology addresses the role of values in qualitative research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Although the goal of my study was to gain insight and interpret the meaning other interventionists have about their work, my positionality was essential. Understanding my positionality as a former interventionist and my personal, cultural, and historical background was critical in my study. My closeness to the work of the participants in my research made me an insider of their culture. Consequently, I had to be aware of my values and position to ensure effective bracketing as I sought to make sense of the experiences of others. Being transparent about my values and experiences will help readers of my research make sense of my findings and paint a picture of how I interpreted the data.

Researcher's Role

As the human instrument in this study, I developed all data collection tools, collected all data, and conducted rigorous data analysis to arrive at the phenomenon's essence (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Participants of this study were selected from a school district where I was previously employed and served as a Tier 3 early reading intervention provider. However, I have

not served as a Tier 3 early reading intervention provider for the last five years, and I am not currently employed at UISD, where my research took place. While serving as an intervention provider, I may have worked with some participants. Even though I may have worked with some of my study participants, my role was never evaluative in nature; therefore, bias is reduced, and credibility is added to the study.

My experience as an intervention provider impacted how I interpreted the data. However, I remained transparent about my positionality and bracketed myself during the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). In addition, I strived to remain objective as I analyzed and interpreted the accounts of my participants (Moustakas, 1994). My previous work as an intervention provider catalyzed my interest in the perspectives of other intervention providers. Being an interventionist is often an isolated role on campus. Consequently, there are limited opportunities for interactions with others who serve in the same capacity. I became interested in knowing how others in the same position dealt with the problems I was facing, did they experience the same issues, and how our experiences were similar or different.

My interest peaked when the world was affected by Covid-19, and school closures were in effect in most, if not all, parts of the United States, and virtual learning was the primary mode of instruction. The education gaps were evident once we returned to in-person learning and the need for interventions was magnified. Through a universal screener, students identified as needing interventions skyrocketed to unprecedented numbers. The pressure to close academic gaps was palpable, and I wondered how intervention providers were affected by it. Their perspectives and lived experiences are worth listening to; that is why the transcendental phenomenological qualitative framework is best suited to share the experiences of early Tier 3 reading intervention providers three years after a school closure.

Procedures

This section extensively outlines the steps taken to conduct the study to ensure that the study can be replicated and increase transparency. First, procedures for obtaining the necessary IRB and site permissions will be discussed. In addition, data collection, triangulation, and analysis will be explained.

Permissions

The first step before data could be collected from participants was to obtain written site permission, which was then submitted with my IRB application. I then obtained permission to conduct the study from the IRB of Liberty University. Once IRB approval was granted, an email was sent to all Tier 3 early reading intervention providers at UISD. The email stated the purpose of the study, why they were chosen to participate, participant expectations, statement of confidentiality, and their right to abstain from participation and ability to drop out of the study at any time (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The email also contained the consent form that participants were asked to print, physically sign, and return to me as a scanned attachment via email, mail, or take a picture with their phones and text it to me. Some participants preferred a hard printed copy, which was made available to them, and they signed in person. Consent from participants was obtained before any data was collected.

All interviews were conducted via Zoom. After the interview, the link to the questionnaire was provided in the Zoom chat feature. Participants were asked to access the link while on Zoom. However, then I ended the Zoom meeting to allow the participant an opportunity to complete the questionnaire in private without the added pressure of me being present. The participants filled out the questionnaire through the Google Form application, where I had automatic access to their responses. I then sent a thank-you email in which participants were

thanked for participating. At that time, the letter writing prompt and instructions were provided. The participants had two weeks to email me their letters. After the interviews were transcribed, a copy was provided to the participants to allow for review and correction of any of their responses.

Recruitment Plan

The sampling strategy used for this study was criterion sampling because all participants have experienced the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The selection criteria for this study was that the participant is currently a designated Tier 3 early reading intervention provider at UISD. Currently, there are 37 interventionists assigned to elementary campuses, with a minimum of one at each campus. On average, least two persons are assigned to conduct reading interventions. Intervention provider positions are funded through Title 1 funding and are therefore hired and assigned tasks at the discretion of campus leadership. Not all 37 elementary intervention providers offer early reading interventions. For example, some intervention providers may serve as coaches, some may support higher grade levels, and others may focus on math interventions. However, all 20 elementary campuses must to have at least one Tier 3 reading intervention provider.

An additional criterion for participation is that the intervention provider must serve either kindergarten, first, or second-grade students at risk for reading difficulties based on the district's universal screener, the Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) test. In addition, the students they service must have been identified as needing Tier 3 reading interventions. Tier 3 interventions are the most intensive interventions (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2017) for students who perform far below grade-level expectations, often referred to as remediation (Hughes & Dexter, 2011).

Interviews are recommended to include 5 to 25 individuals who have experienced the

phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Therefore, this study included ten individuals. When selecting participants, I was aware that the purpose of my study was to “describe the meaning of the phenomenon for a small number of individuals who have experienced it” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 161).

Data Collection Plan

Data triangulation in a qualitative study provides multiple sources of evidence necessary to reveal the phenomenon’s complexity and gain a more comprehensive understanding of the participants' experiences (Jentoft & Olsen, 2019). I chose interview questions, questionnaires, and letter writing as my data collection strategies to answer the research questions. I started with participant interviews to build rapport with participants (Jentoft & Olsen, 2019). As trust was built, participants were able to share their experiences candidly. The second data collection strategy was a questionnaire. Participants filled out an online questionnaire independently without my presence which provided additional data that may not have been freely shared in the one-on-one interview. This study's last data collection strategy was letter writing. Writing a letter to hypothetical future Tier 3 early reading intervention providers allowed the participants to describe their experiences and tell their stories more freely without the constraints of following a protocol (Schalkers et al., 2015).

Individual Interviews

Participant interviews were the first method utilized because interviews can effectively elicit information from participants (Bazen et al., 2021; Jentoft & Olsen, 2019). In addition, starting with interviews helped me build trust with the participants (Jentoft & Olsen, 2019). Once trust was established, participants could open up and candidly share their experiences (Moustakas, 1994). Rowley (2012) defined interviews as "face-to-face verbal exchanges in

which one person, the interviewer, attempts to acquire information from and gain an understanding of another person, the interviewee" (p. 260). Therefore, data in this phenomenological study was collected through informal and interactive long interviews to elicit a thorough description of how the participants experienced the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994).

As Moustakas (1994) suggested, I created a relaxed environment to foster trust with the participants. Trust during interviews enabled the participants to disclose their experiences comprehensively. Therefore, I ensured a comfortable and trusting environment to begin the interview as a social conversation. An additional way that I established trust was to engage in the epoché process, as it allowed me to present myself as non-judgmental of the participant and their experience (Moustakas, 1994). The questions were formatted as semi-structured, open-ended questions and focused on answering the central question and sub-questions. I used a prepared interview protocol that I piloted with my first participant to ensure clarity (Creswell & Poth, 2018). However, no changes were needed, and the same protocol was used for all subsequent participants.

The semi-structured interviews in this study were conducted using the videoconferencing platform, Zoom, where the participants chose an environment where they felt safe to share their experiences. Participants were in their classrooms, offices, and bedrooms. Zoom allowed for video and audio recording, allowing for the recording of verbal answers to questions and nonverbal cues such as facial expressions (Heath et al., 2018). In addition, Zoom was an ideal tool for my qualitative research because it was relatively easy to use, flexible, inexpensive, and has robust data management and security features (Archibald et al., 2019). Zoom can record and securely store the sessions without third-party software (Archibald et al., 2019). In addition, after the Zoom sessions were closed, the Zoom platform automatically generated a full video

recording, an audio recording, a record of the chat feature, and a preliminary transcript of the session that facilitated data analysis.

Individual Interview Questions

1. Please describe your background and what led you to begin your career in education.
CRQ
2. When and how did you transition from the classroom to intervention provider? CRQ
3. Please describe your current position as an intervention provider. Please include all grades and subjects you service. CRQ
4. How has your role changed, if at all, since your district experienced the school closures? SQ1, SQ4
5. What actions do you take as an early reading intervention provider to address the academic gaps created or exacerbated by the school closure? CRQ, SQ4
6. How would you describe your experience as a Tier 3 early reading intervention provider three years after the school closure? SQ1
7. Please describe your challenges when providing Tier 3 early reading interventions three years after-school closures. SQ1, SQ2, SQ3, SQ4
8. How have Tier 3 early reading interventions changed, if at all, since the school closure? SQ2, SQ3
9. What have you learned about interventions after school closures? SQ2
10. Please describe what you believe are successful Tier 3 early reading intervention strategies after the school closures. SQ2
11. What do you think schools can do to ensure the success of Tier 3 early reading interventions after a school closure? SQ3

12. What do you think districts can do to ensure the success of Tier 3 early reading interventions after a school closure? SQ3
13. What do you think the state of Texas can do to ensure the success of Tier 3 early reading interventions after a school closure? SQ3
14. What else would you like to add to our discussion of your experience with Tier 3 early reading interventions two years after a school closure? CRQ

In addition to addressing the research question, the purpose of questions one, two, and three was to establish rapport between myself and the participant, allowing them to feel comfortable sharing their experience. Questions one through three set the tone for a relaxed social conversation, leading to a richer discussion of the remaining questions based on established trust (Moustakas, 1994). Questions four, five, and six were designed to allow the participants to describe their roles as Tier 3 early reading intervention providers three years after a school closure. Questions seven, eight, and nine allowed intervention providers to reflect on their beliefs about Tier 3 early reading interventions after school closure. Questions 10, 11, and 12 enabled the participants to identify what supports they believed were necessary to make Tier 3 early reading interventions most effective. Finally, question 13 allowed participants to add anything not addressed in the conversation.

Individual Interview Data Analysis Plan

Moustakas' (1994) transcendental phenomenological design is founded on four key pillars: "epoché, phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, and a synthesis of meaning and essences" (p. 41). Moustakas argued that awareness, understanding, and knowledge could be obtained through these four pillars. The first critical component of a transcendental phenomenological study is acknowledging that epoché, or judgment refrain, is necessary to see what is presented before it can be described (Moustakas, 1994). This research design must be

approached from a place of openness. Therefore, I was receptive to hearing the stories of the participants who have experienced the phenomenon being studied, and I let go of what I thought I already knew. Epoché was difficult because it required me to be transparent to myself and set aside what has been ingrained in me by "science or society, or government, or other people" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 86). Simply put, epoché lets the thing be the thing and nothing else, and although I suspended preconceived notions, I remained present, conscious, and with a pure mind (Moustakas, 1994).

Although a phenomenological study aims to reduce experiences to the essence of a phenomenon, it is also critical to consider each experience as a singular case on its own; this is what Moustakas referred to as Transcendental-Phenomenological Reduction. The task was to describe the experience with textual qualities: size, sound, temperature, movement, height, pressure, feelings, shape, space, time, and color. Then, by relying on textual evidence, I moved to the pure ego, where the phenomenon could be perceived with the freshness of looking at things for the first time. "Ultimately, through the Transcendental-Phenomenological Reduction, we derive a textual description of the meanings and essences of the phenomenon, the constituents that comprise the experience in consciousness, from the vantage point of an open self" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 34).

The third pillar is imaginative variation (Moustakas, 1994). Whereas phenomenological reduction aims to describe the experience, imaginative variation seeks to explain how the experience came to be. Using imagination, I sought varying perspectives of possible reasons for the origin of the experience. I kept in mind that there can be more than one path that leads to the essence and meaning of the experience of the phenomenon.

The final pillar of Moustakas' (1994) transcendental phenomenological design is the Synthesis of Meaning and Essence. In this step, textual and structural descriptions are combined to derive the essence of the experience. However, "essences of any experience are never totally exhausted" (Moustakas, 1994. p. 100) because they are contingent on my time, space, and perspective. Moustakas's last point is that there needs to be an awareness that nothing exists in isolation and that my participants and I coexist and affect each other mutually. To understand what is being studied, I had to first understand myself; only then could I attempt to understand something or someone else (Moustakas, 1994).

Individual interviews were analyzed through what Creswell and Poth (2018) referred to as the data analysis spiral. The data analysis spiral explained that the path from data collection to account findings is circular, not linear. Data collection, analysis, and report writing happened simultaneously and spiraled until the research project had been completed.

After collecting the data from individual interviews, the first step was transcribing all the recordings. To be time efficient, I maximized the use of the embedded transcription feature in the Zoom videoconferencing platform. I then verified the accuracy of the transcriptions by listening to the recordings of the interviews while reading the transcripts and correcting mistakes. After transcriptions were completed accurately, I began the data analysis spiral that starts with organizing the data in ways that data can be accessed and analyzed quickly. To facilitate data organization, I used ATLAS.ti software. ATLAS.ti software facilitated the organization and retrieval of data, helped me look closely at the data, and helped present codes and themes visually (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Once data was entered into the ATLAS.ti system, I read the transcripts several times to get a feel for the big picture before focusing on the more minor details.

While reading, I annotated thoughts, reactions, or questions that came to mind. Memoing was a reoccurring act that continued until the completion of my research. After reading and memoing, codes were formed. A code is a word or short phrase that helps interpret the data (Saldaña, 2021). Coding is at the heart of qualitative research because it is through codes that researchers make sense of the data. Codes were then narrowed into smaller, more manageable categories, referred to as themes (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Next, I used lean coding to help me combine and reduce the data into six overarching themes that helped describe the phenomenon's essence. After describing and classifying codes into themes, I interpreted the data. Interpreting the data involved making sense of the data and going beyond codes and themes to gain a deeper understanding. The final spiral in Creswell and Poth's (2018) data analysis was to create a visual representation of the data. All these steps helped me understand the thematic essence of the phenomenon.

Questionnaire

The second data collection strategy was a questionnaire. A qualitative questionnaire allowed the participants flexibility in reporting their experiences and perception and helped explore complex relationships and interactions (Maguth & Yamaguchi, 2020). In addition, the questionnaire in this study allowed participants to share their beliefs, attitudes, mental states, and actions in Tier 3 early reading interventions three years after a school closure (Maguth & Yamaguchi, 2020).

Part of the questionnaire included questions adapted from Schwarzer and Jerusalem's (1995) General Self-Efficacy Scale (GSES). The GSES was originally a ten-item questionnaire that helped measure the extent of how a person felt about their ability to navigate unexpected difficult situations (Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995). The questionnaire asked participants to select

statements that best applied to them and used a 4-point Likert scale (1- Not at all, 2- Hardly true, 3- Moderately true, 4- Exactly true).

Maguth and Yamaguchi (2020) suggest that the questionnaire be completed either handwritten or typed. In this study, the platform Google Forms was used to collect participants' responses. The online questionnaire that participants filled out independently without my presence provided additional data that may not have been freely shared in a one-on-one interview. In addition, using a "web-based platform had cost and time efficiency advantages in terms of reduced travel and data transcription costs. It also provided participants flexibility and space, allowing them more time to consider and respond" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 160). This questionnaire was another piece of the puzzle used to find emerging themes of participants' lived experiences (Tyler et al., 2021). Participants were asked to respond by providing as many details as possible (Maguth & Yamaguchi, 2020). In addition, participants were notified that I would follow up with additional questions if clarification of any of the responses was needed (Maguth & Yamaguchi, 2020).

Questionnaire Questions

Please select the statement that best applies to you.

1. What age group do you belong to?
 - a. 25 and younger
 - b. 26-35
 - c. 36-45
 - d. 46 and older

2. How many years of teaching experience do you have?
 - a. 0-5
 - b. 6-10

- c. 15-20
- d. 21 or more

For questions three to eight, please use the following 4-point Likert scale (1- Not at all, 2- Hardly true, 3- Moderately true, 4- Exactly true).

3. I believe I am the best person to support my Tier 3 early reading students after the school closure. SQ3
4. I am confident that I can efficiently deal with unexpected events, such as unexpected school closures. SQ3, SQ4
5. Thanks to my resourcefulness, I am able to provide adequate reading interventions to my Tier 3 early reading students after a school closure. SQ3, SQ4
6. If I invest enough effort, I can solve most problems related to providing Tier 3 early reading interventions after a school closure. SQ3, SQ4
7. I can remain calm when facing difficulties associated with providing Tier 3 early reading interventions after a school closure because I can rely on my coping abilities. SQ3
8. When confronted with a problem associated with providing Tier 3 early reading interventions after a school closure, I can usually find several solutions. SQ2

The following are open-ended questions. Please answer as thoroughly as possible.

9. How do you believe students were affected by the school closure? SQ1
10. How prepared were you to provide Tier 3 early reading interventions after the school closure? Please explain. SQ3, SQ4
11. What are your beliefs and attitudes about Tier 3 early reading interventions three years after the school closure? SQ1, SQ2

12. What additional information do you want to share with other educators about the experience of providing Tier 3 early reading intervention after-school closures? CRQ

Questions one and two were designed to complete the participants' demographic and work history information. Questions three to eight aimed to assess participants' self-efficacy with providing Tier 3 early reading interventions three years after a school closure. Questions nine to 11 were open-ended questions that aimed to provide a complete picture of the lived experiences of Tier 3 early reading providers three years after a school closure.

Questionnaire Data Analysis Plan

Questionnaires were completed through Google Forms; therefore, transcribing was unnecessary. I used the charts and table features on Google Forms to calculate participants' responses to questions one to eight. The questionnaire's open-ended answers to questions nine to 12 were uploaded into the ATLAS.ti system. I read through all answers with no coding the first time, similar to the data analysis process used for letter writing. I then reread the questionnaire responses by employing memoing and coding techniques that facilitated the retrieval of commonalities in the participant's responses. The codes were then analyzed and synthesized to yield thematic categories. Finally, I created visual representations of the data to aid in painting a complete picture of the participant's experience with the phenomenon and lead to the overarching essence.

Letter Writing

The final data collection strategy was letter writing. From the individual interviews, participants gained a clearer understanding of the purpose of the study. They were asked to write a letter describing their experience providing early reading interventions three years after a school closure. Writing a letter allowed the participants to describe their experiences and tell

their stories more freely without the constraints of following a researcher's protocol (Schalkers et al., 2015).

Participants were asked to write a letter of at least two to three paragraphs to hypothetical future Tier 3 early reading intervention providers, including giving them advice on how to address intervention after a school closure and sharing the knowledge they acquired through their personal experience with providing intervention three years after a school closure. The writing prompt was given to each participant via email. Participants had two weeks to return their letters via mail, email, or Google doc. Through the participants' letters, I gained a deeper understanding of the experiences of the intervention provider.

Letter Writing Prompt

Think about your experience providing Tier 3 early reading interventions three years after a school closure. Write a letter of at least two to three paragraphs to hypothetical future Tier 3 early reading intervention providers, giving them advice on how to address early reading interventions after a school closure. Be sure to share the knowledge you have acquired through your personal experience providing Tier 3 early reading interventions after a school closure.

CRQ, SQ1, SQ2, SQ3, SQ4

Letter Writing Data Analysis Plan

The purpose of the writing prompt was to elicit an uninhibited description of the participant's experience with providing Tier 3 early reading interventions three years after a school closure. Participants had to reflect on their beliefs, attitudes, mental state, and actions to convey their experience and lessons learned to a hypothetical future Tier 3 early reading intervention provider. Participants submitted their letters electronically, eliminating the need for transcription. The letters were imported to the ATLAS.ti system for easy retrieval and data analysis. I read the letters at least once without coding to see the bigger picture conveyed through

the participants' words. I then reread the letters employing memoing strategies to document thoughts and ideas that emerged as I reflected on the participant's experiences with the phenomenon. During coding, I was intentional about looking for trends in the participants emotions, feelings, and thoughts as they experienced the phenomenon (Saldaña, 2021). Through analytic memoing, I explored common emotions shared by the participants before, during, and after the school closure. After the first coding, I reread all the codes and was reflective in narrowing them down to more prominent categorical themes. Themes were then analyzed to help ascertain the essence of the phenomenon.

Data Synthesis

Data analysis and synthesis followed the seven steps outlined in Moustakas' (1994) modification of van Kaam's analysis method. Although not an explicit action in van Kaam's analysis, bracketing was an essential component of my data analysis. Moustakas explained that complete bracketing of oneself is seldom possible; however, I made a conscious effort to stay aware of my biases and assumptions during data analysis and synthesis to minimize their influence on my research findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Moustakas' (1994) modification of van Kaam's analysis method begins with horizontalizing each participant's statements. According to Moustakas (1994), horizontalizing is when equal value is given to each account and clustered into themes while omitting repetitions. The second step was reduction and elimination. During this step, invariant constituents were identified by ensuring that statements included information that helped understand the experience with the phenomenon and that the expression could be labeled. Finally, expressions that did not enhance understanding or could not be labeled were eliminated, leaving only "invariant constituents of the experience" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 121).

The third step was to cluster related expressions into themes. The clustered themes provided textual and structural descriptions of the participants' lived experiences (Moustakas, 1994) as a Tier 3 early reading intervention provider three years after a school closure. The fourth step required that the selected expressions labeled invariant constituents be validated by comparing them to the entire participant records. A valid expression was expressed explicitly in the transcription, and if they were not explicitly stated, it had to be at least compatible with the transcription. Expressions that were not explicitly stated or compatible were removed from the data set as they were irrelevant to the participant's experience with the phenomenon.

The fifth step was to use verbatim examples of the relevant and validated expressions to develop "individual textual descriptions of the experience" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 121). The sixth step was to use textual descriptions and imaginative variation to develop individual structural descriptions for each participant. The seventh step was integrating textual and structural descriptions to identify the meaning and essence of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). Finally, I used Textual-Structural Descriptions to "develop a Composite Description of the meanings and essences of the experience, representing the group as a whole" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 121). The goal was to synthesize the data from all collection methods into the phenomenon's essence.

Trustworthiness

When qualitative researchers demonstrate that their study has been conducted thoroughly, meaning with precision and consistency, the study can be considered trustworthy (Nowell et al., 2017). In addition, trustworthiness is established through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Ultimately, as the researcher, it was my responsibility to ensure that the study was rigorous and that the research findings met the requirements of trustworthiness (Nowell et al., 2017).

Credibility

Credibility is how well the researcher can accurately and truthfully present the participants' experiences (Tobin & Begley, 2004). Therefore, to enhance the credibility of my study, I was sure to collect and analyze a large amount of data that were triangulated using multiple data sources including individual semi-structured interviews, questionnaires, and letter writing (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Saldaña, 2021). I provided opportunities for the participants to be involved in the process by having them check the transcription of their interview to ensure that I heard their experience accurately. This member-checking practice further increased the credibility of my study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). From the beginning to the end of my research, I practiced memoing to track how my thinking, codes, and themes developed to strengthen my study's credibility (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Transferability

Transferability generalizes the study's results (Nowell et al., 2017). Korstjens and Moser (2018) further explained that transferability refers to applying the study results to other contexts, settings, and respondents. Therefore, I used the data collected to develop a thick description that included ample details of the participant's experience with the phenomenon to ensure that my findings were transferable between myself and the readers of my study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). It was my responsibility to provide thick descriptions, but it will be up to those seeking to transfer the findings to determine if there is enough information for transferability (Nowell et al., 2017).

Dependability

Dependability is how well the findings of the study fair over time (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). "Dependability involves participants' evaluation of the findings, interpretations, and

recommendations of the study such that all are supported by the data as received from the participants of the study” (Korstjens & Moser, 2018, p. 121). To ensure the dependability of my findings, I included an audit trail that provided transparent descriptions of each step in the research process (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). In addition, I used an audit trail to help me document and validate how my thinking process evolved from the beginning to the end of my study (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Confirmability

Confirmability ensures that the researcher's findings are directly linked to the data collected from participants (Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Nowell et al., 2017). To address the confirmation of my data, I used dyadic video analysis for my individual interviews (Saldaña, 2021). Dyadic video analysis led to a deeper description of the participants' experiences with the phenomenon because it provided an opportunity to delve into what the participants were saying and how they said it (Saldaña, 2021). From the audio, I accessed the participants' words and their speech's paralinguistic features, such as tone, rate, volume, and pitch. From the visual recording of the interviews, I accessed participants' non-verbal cues, such as nodding, facial and body expressions, that gave me more insight into how they experienced the phenomenon. Finally, I employed conversation and descriptive analysis to add layers to the confirmation of my data analysis (Saldaña, 2021).

Ethical Considerations

Researchers should have high scholarly integrity by being rigorously ethical in treating participants and collecting and analyzing data (Saldaña, 2021). Although most ethical issues are unexpected due to the nature of lack of foresight of what participants will bring into the research, a way that I tried to mitigate any ethical dilemmas that may have arisen was to use analytic

memos as a way to stay continuously reflective and provide an avenue to creatively problem solve (Saldaña, 2021).

Ethical issues can arise at any point during the study, including before the study begins, at the beginning of the study, during data collection and analysis, when reporting the data, and when publishing the study results (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Therefore, to address foreseeable ethical issues, I obtained approval from my university, the institutional review board, and individual participants before starting my study. In addition, at the beginning of the study, I informed all participants of my study's purpose, shared that their identities would be kept confidential, and explained that they could discontinue their participation at any time during the study.

During data collection, I was mindful of respecting any power dynamics involved, minimized possible disruptions at the site and in participants' schedules, and ensured that all data was secured properly. Data is housed in a password-protected Google Drive and will be kept for three years after the study's conclusion. After the passing of three years, all data will be permanently deleted. I accounted for multiple perspectives as I analyzed the data and used pseudonyms to ensure participants' anonymity. All data is reported honestly, and credit is given whenever someone else's thoughts or ideas are used. After my study is finished, I will provide completed copies to all participants to express full transparency of my work.

Summary

A transcendental phenomenological design was most appropriate to examine the lived experiences of Tier 3 early reading intervention providers in the UISD in Texas three years after a school closure. This study was guided by the process set forth by Moustakas (1994). Following the four major components of epoché, phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, and

synthesis of meaning and essence, data were triangulated through individual interviews, letter writing, and questionnaires. Data was analyzed individually and then synthesized using the seven steps outlined by Moustakas (1994) when he modified van Kaam's analysis method.

Trustworthiness, credibility, dependability, confirmability, and ethical considerations were prioritized before, during, and at the completion of this study.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the lived experiences of Tier 3 early reading intervention providers at the Urban Independent School District (UISD) in Texas three years after a school closure. This chapter includes narrative descriptions and visual representations of the study participants. This chapter also highlights themes and subthemes that emerged from the data analysis collected through interviews, questionnaires, and letter writing. Additionally, findings related to the research questions, noting data outliers, are discussed. The chapter concludes with a summary.

Participants

Ten Tier 3 early reading intervention providers were recruited by criterion sampling to participate in this study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The selection criteria for this study were that the participant is currently a designated Tier 3 early reading intervention provider at UISD and they serve either kindergarten, first, or second-grade students at risk for reading difficulties based on the district's universal screener, the Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) test. In addition, the students they service must have been identified as needing Tier 3 reading interventions.

Recruitment emails were sent to all early reading intervention providers at UISD, and 10 people responded that they were willing to participate. All 10 participants met all the criteria for the study. Participants filled out the initial consent form and participated in all parts of the study, including the interview, questionnaire, and letter writing. Data saturation was observed after data collection from the 10 participants, and no additional participants were needed.

One participant was male, and the other nine were female. Two participants were younger than 35, three were between 36 and 45, and five were 46 or older. There was only one

participant in education less than 10 years, four were between 11 to fourteen years, three were between 15 and 20 years, and two were in education 21 or more years. Two intervention providers are first-time intervention providers, and the most experienced participant has been an intervention provider for 10 years. UISD intervention providers that participated in this story average 3.9 years of experience as intervention providers. Table 1 provides details on the demographics of the participants.

Table 1
Tier 3 Early Reading Intervention Provider Participants

Teacher Participant	Age Range	Years in Education Range	Years as an Intervention Provider	Grade Level
Ana	36-45	15-20	7	Kinder-4 th
Brandi	26-35	6-10	1	2 nd -4 th
Cielo	46 and older	15-20	3	2 nd -4 th
Dana	46 and older	11-14	1	1 st -4 th
Elizabeth	46 and older	21 or more	8	2 nd -4 th
Faith	26-35	11-14	3	Kinder-3 rd
Gabriela	46 and older	11-14	2	1 st -4 th
Hunter	46 and older	21 or more	10	2 nd -4 th
Imani	36-45	15-20	2	2 nd -4 th
Juana	36-45	11-14	2	Kinder-2 nd

Ana

In tenth grade, Ana discovered that she wanted to be a teacher. In college, she majored in history with a concentration in education. Since the start of her career, Ana has always loved teaching. She taught kindergarten and first-grade and found her strength in small-group instruction providing interventions to her students. She moved to a new school, and her new administration noticed that Ana was able to close academic gaps for her students and offered her the intervention provider position. “It was not even halfway through the school year, so she offered it, and I accepted,” Ana explained. Currently, Ana provides reading interventions to students in kindergarten to fourth-grade. She collects and analyzes data to determine who the Tier 3 students are at her school and identifies the areas in which to intervene. Ana narrows the scope of her work by stating, “I’m working on skills and closing gaps.” After the school closures caused by Covid-19, too many students needed Tier 3 interventions, and as a result, Ana has become a support for the classroom teachers at her school. “I also support the classroom teachers by giving them strategies and resources and teaching them how to analyze data, make decisions, and provide interventions to close gaps in the classroom,” Ana noted. She believes that having experienced a global pandemic was very eye-opening, and it helped her become a better intervention provider because it forced her to look at students holistically, be more intentional about her work, and build strong partnerships with classroom teachers and parents.

Brandi

Although Brandi has been in education for seven years, this is her first year as a Tier 3 intervention provider. Prior to being the intervention provider at her campus, she had only taught third-grade. She was departmentalized and taught English Language Arts for the first three years, but for the next three years, she was self-contained and had to teach all subjects. She was eager

for something different and wanted to get back to teaching only reading, which she described as her passion. She explained that the perfect opportunity opened when they created a new interventionist position because of the school's closure, "This is a good place to jump in, not only because I enjoy teaching reading, but also I knew that it would make a big impact on the students who are struggling from those learning gaps caused by the pandemic." Brandi believes that the global impact of the Covid-19 pandemic has made interventions the focus of educational conversations and has made districts look closer at their systems and resources for students with severe academic gaps. Although she was fearful to begin her new position, she enjoyed her first year. This is the first year UISD has implemented its new reading intervention resource SIPPS (Systematic Instruction in Phonological Awareness, Phonics, and Sight Words). She is happy to be in the transitional phase with the more experienced intervention providers, "I'm able to learn the curriculum while everybody else knows else is learning it too," Brandi shared. She believes she has already learned much and will be stronger next year.

Cielo

Cielo has been in education for 15 years, with five of them being a reading intervention provider. Before being a reading intervention provider, Cielo taught all grades between pre-kindergarten and fourth-grade. When she saw the intervention position available, she thought, "I qualify for this. I have the experience, the education, the certifications, so I applied for the job." Cielo loves her job and is happy working with students who need help most. She currently supports students in second to fourth-grade; however, most of her students are reading at a kindergarten level. Since the school closure, the students identified as Tier 3 have risen from 20% of the school's population to 50%. The increase in students needing help has made it challenging for her to accommodate them in her schedule. She reflected, "I wish I had more time

in my schedule to meet the needs of all students.” To help more students, she has decided that for part of the day, instead of pulling a small group, she now pushes into the classrooms. She understands that there is an urgency to her work, “we need to be very strategic and consistent and intentional because, you know, time is precious,” Cielo asserted.

Dana

Dana recalls being seven or eight years old, playing school, and setting up little classrooms. Although she had a heart for teaching, she decided to pursue a bachelor's in fine arts and became a commercial artist. Later, she earned a master's degree in professional counseling and became a mental health counselor. In 2004, she began volunteering at schools through a Junior Achievement Program, and her love for teaching was reignited. She has been a teacher for 13 years; this was her first year as a Tier 3 reading intervention provider. She supports students in first to fourth-grade. She has noticed that students have returned to school from the Covid-19-related school closures with more cracks in their learning, “after the pandemic, it seems to be more gaps, and the gaps are as wide as bridges of probably two years of learning,” she admits. Dana believes that a big part of her job is to help students train their brains because the brain muscles have been severely weakened. Dana believes she is the right person for the job since most of her educational experience has been in first-grade, and she is fluent in the emergent reading process. With her Tier 3 students, she focuses on the foundational skills of identifying the letters in the alphabet and the sounds they make. She teaches her students what a book is, its purpose that we read from left to right, and what it means to be a good reader. Dana also focuses on phonological awareness, phonics, and sight words. However, she believes that students' academic gaps should be addressed. Dana also believes that there should be a focus on meeting the social-emotional needs of students. Dana shared, “I model how to celebrate small successes,

and together we witness how small academic gains add up to bigger successes. Academic growth has a direct connection to behavior and social-emotional stability.”

Elizabeth

Elizabeth always knew she wanted to be a teacher. In college, she double majored in education and psychology. “Through some interesting circumstances, I ended up working in mental health in a mental hospital, but eventually came back to education,” Elizabeth explained. Before becoming a primary teacher, Elizabeth taught adult ESL for nine years. After that, she was a primary grade teacher for six additional years. She taught pre-kindergarten, first-grade, and fifth-grade students, then serviced students with dyslexia for four years. Her love for reading and passion for providing specialized instruction finally led her to become a Tier 3 intervention provider. When she saw the interventionist position posted, Elizabeth said, “That seemed like a good fit for me. That’s actually the only title I’ve ever had that I thought really described what I love to do. I want to intervene.” As a result of the teacher shortage, Elizabeth has had to take on both reading and math intervention in grades second through fourth. Despite the challenges brought on by the Covid-19-related school closures, Elizabeth said, “I think all of us are more grateful. We’re grateful to just be in the room and have resources.” Elizabeth is happy to be back to in-person learning, she shared that she had previously taken for granted the importance of proximity and personal touch, and now she sees how important they are for her students to grow and learn.

Faith

Faith had always wanted to be a school counselor; she loved working with young children and wanted to be a part of their development. She knew that she needed teaching experience and became a kindergarten teacher. During her first year of teaching, she realized

counselors did more administrative work than actual student interactions. Despite being discouraged from becoming a school counselor, she found a passion for small-group instruction. “I found love for small-group reading, and so then, that led me to want to do small-group like all the time, which led me to intervention,” Faith explained. Faith transitioned from the classroom to the intervention provider at the height of the pandemic. When she thought about her experience, she said, “I think my experience may be a little bit different than other people who were doing interventions before the closure. I kind of went into it like, well, this is what it is.” She expected students to be struggling, and they were. She quickly learned that she could not focus on just one thing because the gaps were vast. “We’ve got to work on the foundational skills and reading fluency and comprehension and kind of do all of them at one time,” Faith admitted. She is thankful that her district has recognized the great need and provided a resource focusing on the foundational skills students desperately need. Faith expressed, “I think we are making good changes and good progress.”

Gabriela

Gabriela was born in Mexico and migrated to the United States after getting married. She was determined to learn the language. After seven years in the country, she decided that she wanted to impact children’s lives, so she became a bilingual teacher. She taught six years in pre-kindergarten and another six years in kindergarten before becoming an intervention provider. She was looking for a change since things had become monotonous. She approached her administration requesting to be moved to an upper-level grade, but instead, they offered her the intervention provider position. “They gave me this opportunity, and I think it was a good fit,” Gabriela explained. She primarily serves first-grade students because that is where the most significant need is at her campus. Since the needs of her school are vast due to the school

closure, she also supports teachers in the classroom. She shared that some of her goals are to train, teach, co-teach, and model how to teach students to decode words by learning syllables patterns instead of teaching the old way where students memorize words. Gabriela said, “We have to have a mindset to really teach them in this way, and I think it’s working. We are seeing results.”

Hunter

Hunter was working in another field when he was offered an opportunity to volunteer by mentoring elementary school children. He did not see that as a long-term commitment but stayed for three years because he loved children. He decided to go into an alternative certification program to become a teacher. He started his career in education by teaching bilingual fourth-grade. Then he taught first, second, and third-grade. Ten years ago, he was offered a math interventionist position. He provided math interventions to Tier 3 students alongside his partner, who supported students with reading. Although the needs of students have increased, the teacher shortage has had a considerable impact on the intervention systems at his campus, and one of the intervention positions was eliminated this year. This meant Hunter would now be responsible for providing math and reading interventions for Tier 3 students. Upon returning to in-person learning, Hunter noticed that his students experienced academic and social-emotional losses. He shared, “I had to adjust to the fact that they hadn’t been in school or had been in and out of school. Just the everyday discipline of school was a challenge for them. And that has impacted my teaching.” Hunter shared that his students were coming in not knowing their alphabet, much less the phonetic representation of those letters. He said, “It’s like, wow, we really have to go way back to a lot of the basics that I didn’t have to do before.” Hunter agreed with the other participants that having a resource that addresses foundational skills like phonological awareness

and phonics has been imperative for his students. He described his job as challenging but vital and rewarding.

Imani

For as long as Imani can remember, she has wanted to be a teacher. She loves working with children and has been an educator for 19 years. Previously, she taught second, fourth, and fifth-grade, and was a math coach. When an intervention provider position opened in 2021, Imani felt her experiences made her a good candidate, so she applied. Currently, she serves as a Tier 3 intervention provider for math and reading students in second to fourth-grade. Imani admitted that Covid-19 and the effects of the school closure were big topics at all educational meetings last year. However, “this year I feel like we don’t use that as much, although we know that it is there, that Covid is part of a lot of the learning gaps, but we don’t talk about it as much this year,” Imani explained. Imani believes that the biggest challenge of providing Tier 3 interventions is that the academic gaps are far more expansive than ever, and children need to gain basic foundation skills. Despite the challenges, she agreed that the intervention systems have improved because the district has invested in a department providing guidance and support to the campuses to better address those educational gaps exacerbated by the school closure. Imani added, “I have a program that is more systematic. I have data to back it up, and I know what lessons and different things that I need to work on with students to get them where they need to be.” Imani is confident that interventions positively impact her student’s reading proficiency, leading to students strengthening their self-esteem and improving their overall behavior in the classroom. “I am a firm believer that interventions are critical to a student’s success, especially after a school closure,” Imani concluded.

Juana

Juana is originally from Mexico, where she served as an elementary school teacher for 10 years before migrating to the United States. She taught for 10 years in the United States before transitioning to an intervention provider role. In October 2021, the former intervention provider at Juana's school resigned, and the school's administrator approached Juana about the sudden vacancy. They thought she would do a good job, "they believed in me more than I thought I could do myself," Juana shared. Providing intervention after a school closure has been challenging mainly because students' gaps extend beyond being unable to decode words, "for example, in kindergarten, we have a lot more students lacking fine motor skills, more than usual, and speech is an issue as well." Juana explained. She has had to adjust her interventions to meet the students where they are. Juana describes her role as a very busy one. In addition to providing interventions with fidelity, she is consistently looking at data and progressing monitoring to ensure that interventions are effective. Juana communicates with the classroom teacher and parents, so skills are reinforced outside her reading groups. She sees that although her work is complex, the results are evident, and data proves that providing structured interventions is helping address students' reading deficits. Through interventions after a school closure, Juana has learned that more can be achieved when adults invest in a child's progress and work collaboratively.

Results

I collected data on Tier 3 early reading intervention providers' lived experiences three years after a school closure through individual interviews, questionnaires, and letter writing. All interviews were conducted and recorded via Zoom. At the interview's conclusion, participants were provided the link to the Google Form questionnaire they then completed independently. In

addition, participants were given two weeks to write a letter to hypothetical future Tier 3 early reading intervention providers. Although participants were allowed to return the letter via mail, email, or Google doc, all participants chose to email their letters. All data collected is kept in a password-protected Google Folder and in a password-protected computer for the required three years, at which point all data will be deleted.

Theme Development

I used the transcription feature on Zoom to generate transcripts of all interviews. I reviewed all transcripts and recordings several times to ensure accuracy. After ensuring the accuracy of the transcriptions, I implemented a member-checking process where I sent a copy to each corresponding participant to ensure that the data encapsulated their experience accurately. The questionnaire and letter writing did not need to be transcribed. I used the ATLAS.ti software to help me organize the data. Once all data was uploaded into ATLAS.ti, I began what Creswell and Poth (2018) referred to as the data analysis spiral. I started by creating preliminary codes using ATLAS.ti. I then transferred the data that contained my initial coding and in vivo evidence to an Excel spreadsheet. I read through all the data several times, annotating thoughts, reactions, or questions that came to mind. Memoing was a reoccurring act that continued until the completion of my research. Codes were then narrowed into smaller, more manageable categories, referred to as themes (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Next, I used lean coding to help me combine and reduce the data into six overarching themes and 17 subthemes that helped describe the phenomenon's essence. After describing and classifying codes into themes, I interpreted the data. The final spiral in Creswell and Poth's (2018) data analysis is to create a visual representation of the data. All these steps helped me understand the thematic essence of the phenomenon.

Table 2
Themes, Subthemes, and in Vivo Evidence

Themes	Subthemes	in Vivo Evidence
Satisfaction with Career Choice	The Work of Intervention Providers is Fulfilling	“I love my job. I know I am impacting students. It brings me a lot of intrinsic reward and joy” -Brandi
	Grateful to Return to in-Person Learning	“I think all of us are more grateful. We're grateful to just be in the room and have resources”-Elizabeth
School Closure Effects on the Holistic Development of Young Children	Academic Gaps as Wide as Bridges	“I believe the school closure caused students to lose their supported progression of learning and therefore left significant gaps in early reading foundational skills” -Dana
	Stifled Development of Social-Emotional Skills	“Many students missed out on the development of understanding and managing their emotions, as well as building relationships with adults and other students” -Hunter
Believing in the Efficacy of Self, Work, and Students	Self-Efficacy	“I saw the job requirements, and I said to myself, I qualify for this. I have the experience, education, certification, and the passion for it. So I applied and was offered the position” -Cielo
	Student-Efficacy	“All students, our students, can learn” - Dana
	Intervention-Efficacy	“I believe the interventions can work, and that they do work, that if they are done correctly, you will see growth” - Imani
Tackling Obstacles to Successful Interventions	Not Enough Time to Support All Students and All the Gaps	“I wish I could have more time in the schedule where I could meet all the needs of all of the students that need help” - Cielo
	Intervention Efforts are Strained Due to the Teacher Shortage	“It is hard right now to make sure that intervention providers are able to provide those much-needed Tier 3 interventions because of the teacher shortage, and I feel like interventionists are pulled to cover classrooms, which I understand. But those kids who need the interventions aren't getting them on a consistent basis” -Faith

Being Intentional with Meeting the Needs of the Students	Actions Revolve Around Data	“What I do is I analyze data. I collect that data. I determine who needs interventions, who needs Tier 3 interventions through that data.” -Ana
	Teaching Foundational Skills Explicitly	“Kids need to know phonics and phonological awareness. Kids need to get back to the basics” -Imani
Fostering a Shared Investment in Student Success	Parental Commitment	“Parents need to know who I am, what I'm working on, how they can help at home” -Ana
	Classroom Teachers as Partners	“Gaining the support of the teachers in educating them on Tier 3 interventions” - Dana
	Supportive Campus Leadership	“It helps when you have an administrator that listens to you and understands your work” -Ana
	Responsive District Leadership	“Our district noticed that students needed more intensive support and created the MTSS department, which established a collaborative culture and provided a systematic program that addresses foundational reading skills” -Faith
	Effective State Legislation	“One thing that I know they [the state of Texas] have done, which I think is very, very helpful, is the Reading Academies. I've learned a lot in Reading Academy” - Imani

Satisfaction with Career Choice

Nine of the ten participants in this study expressed that they were satisfied with their career choice. Tier 3 early reading intervention providers at UISD are a specialized group selected based on their expertise and success in the classroom. Most of the study participants stated that they “always wanted to be an educator...and love working with children,” as stated by Imani during her interview. Elizabeth affirmed that returning to in-person learning after a school closure has been challenging, but helping students that need them the most support has made it all worth it. Intervention providers at UISD describe their work as fulfilling and are grateful to

continue their work upon returning to in-person learning after the Covid-19 related school closure.

The Work of Intervention Providers is Fulfilling

Seven out of the 10 Tier 3 early reading intervention providers mentioned that the work of intervention providers is fulfilling. During her interview, Ana confessed, “I’ve always loved teaching, so from the get-go, even like in tenth grade, I really wanted to teach.” That sentiment was not unique to Ana; most intervention providers participating in this study expressed that they had always dreamed of being an educator. Despite their love for teaching, all participants shared that after a few years in the classroom, they “wanted to try something different outside of the classroom,” as Brandi explained. When asked what led her to become an intervention provider, Elizabeth answered,

I love teaching reading, and I love working with small-groups and one-on-one. [In the classroom] I really specialize in addressing what a particular kid needed and meeting their needs. And so that seemed like a good fit for me, and so that’s actually the only title I’ve ever had that I thought really described what I love to do. I want to intervene.

Cielo has been an intervention provider for five years, stating, “I’m really happy because I get to work with students that need the most help.” Brandi, who is in her first year as an intervention provider, added, “I’m really enjoying the position, I’m really enjoying the impact that I’m making and the things that I’m learning. I love my job. I know I am impacting students. It brings me a lot of intrinsic reward and joy.” Faith believes that the work of intervention providers at UISD has intensified and has become more critical “We are trying to catch up all those kids with gaps just to help them learn how to read and be successful in life rather than just

take a test.” In his letter, Hunter concluded that the work “is challenging, but it is a vital and rewarding job.”

Grateful to Return to In-Person Learning

Out of the ten participants in this study, six noted being grateful to return to in-person learning after the Covid-19 related school closures. “Schools don’t close because everything is right and easy in the world...normal [is] taken away from you,” Elizabeth recalled when the world shut down, and we were all forced to quarantine in our homes as a mitigating effort to help stop the spread of Covid-19. In her letter to hypothetical future Tier 3 early reading intervention providers, Elizabeth explained the contrast between living in isolation and returning to in-person learning “You wanted to help your students, but so many of them were not even accessible to you...[now] I think all of us are more grateful. We’re grateful to just be in the room and have our resources.” “When we came back in groups, of course, the students were super happy to see their friends and their support...they were able to receive the services they were missing,” explained Faith. In the questionnaire, Juana shared that it is “joyful” to be in-person learning, “the students are happier and more grateful to be in their small-groups where they get more attention.”

School Closure Effects on the Holistic Development of Young Children

All participants of this study agreed that the Covid-19 pandemic was a worldwide traumatic event that affected young children’s holistic development (González & Bonal, 2021). “The school closure created gaps nationwide, causing teachers to learn an entirely new style of teaching on the go...I believe this sudden change of learning environment caused a lot of inadequacies, especially for students who were already struggling learners,” asserted Brandi. Juana agreed, “Our Tier 3 students, specifically, have been impacted in ways I was not expecting to see after we got back to ‘normal.’” In the questionnaire, Imani expressed, “I believe the school

closure had an adverse effect on students. It affected students academically, socially, and emotionally.” The pandemic “changed the way we see education. We have to be more creative to engage” students and address all of the gaps, concluded Gabriela.

Academic Gaps as Wide as Bridges

All intervention providers that participated in this study declared that the school closure contributed to the widening academic gaps. In a letter to hypothetical future Tier 3 early reading intervention providers, Cielo shared her experience of resuming in-person learning:

Since the nationwide Covid-19 interruption began in March 2020, schools experimented with remote, hybrid, and direct-instruction models. This resulted in significant numbers of students falling behind and becoming disengaged academically during the pandemic.

As schools returned to in-person learning, a substantial group of students was predicted to have large learning gaps that had to be identified and remediated. Covid-19 school interruption resulted in greater losses in learning.

Cielo suggested that “students who underperformed or were disengaged from education during Covid are at risk in two areas: acquisition of new skills...and retention of previous skills.” Those two factors created or exacerbated academic gaps during the school closure. Ana described the experience of returning to in-person school after the Covid-19 school closure as “very hard...everyone was scrambling, trying to find ways to close the academic gaps.” She expressed that the gaps were “bigger and more noticeable.” In her interview, Dana illustrated the academic gaps after the school closure as “gaps as wide as bridges. Students were missing two or three years of learning.” Elizabeth shared her frustration “We’re holding kids accountable to pre-Covid norms, and that is not fair. The pandemic changed education.” Ana agreed that based on pre-closure standards, most students would be identified as Tier 3 students because they were

performing below the 20th percentile on the universal screener. Ana shared that the biggest hurdle was identifying which students should receive Tier 3 interventions from the designated intervention provider. She continued, “All kids needed help closing gaps...everyone wanted me to see every kid...they assumed, ‘Oh, they’re not on grade level, they should see you,’ but I couldn’t see all kids.” It was difficult to explain that Tier 3 students could not be identified solely on the universal screener, as before the school closure, because “it was too many kids,” Ana recounted. During her interview, Elizabeth emphasized that when looking at the initial data, “it was really easy to get discouraged because we’ve got kids who lost two or three years of learning.” Despite the challenge, intervention providers’ efforts did not waver. Elizabeth continued, “Am I gonna close a three-year gap in one year? I don’t know, but we’re gonna try.”

Stifled Development of Social-Emotional Skills

Eight out of the ten participants suggested that the Covid-19 related school closure stifled the development of students’ social-emotional skills. Although teaching children to read is the most salient responsibility of schools worldwide (Moats, 2020), it is also important to “address the social-emotional needs of each individual student,” asserted Dana. Dana expressed that a “direct connection” exists between academic growth and “behavior and social-emotional stability.” Elizabeth agreed that although she has high regard for academic progress, she will never push it “at the expense of someone’s personality or their personal growth... [during the school closure] they’ve missed a lot of social opportunities, and they’ve missed a lot of safety opportunities.” She acknowledged that during the pandemic, students experienced isolation, fear, and pressure that impacted students’ social-emotional health. Gabriela contended, “We still have students that have anxiety and behavior issues.”

In his letter to hypothetical future Tier 3 early reading intervention providers, Hunter urged educators to “understand the importance of the social and emotional aspects of being an intervention teacher.” He argued that the academic gaps created or exacerbated by the school closure may lead to students “feeling like failures” and intervention providers should never “let them feel that way when they are” in their small-group setting and “show them that you care about them, that you believe in them, and get to know them beyond their screener scores or the number of sight words they master.” Faith encouraged intervention providers to build relationships with the students they serve and to get to know them as a whole person before they start addressing academic gaps. Dana acknowledged that the MTSS process is the best way to address the students’ academic, behavior, and social-emotional needs.

Believing in the Efficacy of Self, Work, and Students

All participants of this study have high levels of self-efficacy and believe in the efficacy of their work and their students. “Once schools reopened after the school closure, we noticed that there was a significant number of students that had reading deficits,” Imani confessed in her letter. However, Tier 3 early reading providers at UISD believe they are most qualified to address student deficits created or exacerbated by the school closure. They believe UISD has systems to help mitigate the academic and social-emotional effects of the Covid-19-related school closure. In addition, the participants of this study also believe that their students can and will reach their full potential. Intervention providers at UISD believe in themselves, their work, and their students, which has led them to see the results of their Tier 3 early reading intervention efforts.

Self-Efficacy

All Tier 3 early reading intervention providers that participated in this study have high

levels of self-efficacy. Bandura's self-efficacy theory highlights that teacher motivation rises when they believe their actions can positively impact student outcomes (Bandura et al., 1996; Erdem & Demirel, 2007). This study confirms Bandura's self-efficacy. Despite the challenges brought by the Covid-19-related school closures, intervention providers at UISD see themselves as capable of overcoming the obstacles and ensuring all students progress, demonstrating they have high levels of self-efficacy. In the questionnaire, intervention providers were asked on a scale of 1-4 (1- not at all, 2- hardly true, 3- moderately true, 4- exactly true), how true is the following statement? I believe I am the best person to support my Tier 3 early reading students after a school closure; intervention providers averaged a score of 3.6. Ana sees herself as "an expert of providing solid Tier 3 interventions, analyzing data, of noting what students need in order to help them get better in reading, and teaching those skills that they need." Intervention teachers are often successful former teachers that saw themselves as capable of more. Cielo shared, "When I saw there was this job opportunity, and I read the requirements, I said, you know what, I qualify for this. I had the experience, and first of all, the studies, the certifications, and I applied for the job." During her interview, Imani shared a similar experience "The position opened up, and I had experience, so I applied for it." On a scale of 1-4 (1- not at all, 2- hardly true, 3- moderately true, 4- exactly true), early reading intervention providers, on average, see themselves as able to efficiently deal with unexpected events, such as school closure (average score of 3.3), resourceful (average score of 3.6), problem solvers (average score of 3.6), able to remain calm in difficult situations (average score of 3.8), and able to problem solve when facing difficulty with providing Tier 3 early reading interventions after a school closure (average score of 3.6).

Student-Efficacy

Seven out of the ten study participants believe in student-efficacy. Upon returning to in-person learning, “the main challenge ...was student lack of motivation...they feel they are not able to learn or to read...and they feel like, well, what’s the point? So, I’m not going to try,” explained Juana during her interview. She shared that she quickly learned that before addressing student gaps, she would have to address the lack of motivation and increase student-efficacy. Hunter added that when students returned from the closure, they “hadn’t dealt with being in school and were not learning. They came back to school being behind and knowing they’re behind. I think they’re very sensitive to it.” However, when they participate in their small-group Tier 3 interventions, “students feel safe, they are able to express and share about themselves, and they get a chance to build their confidence. They get to hear their voices and get to be successful,” Dana asserted. Imani noticed how interventions “helped students increase [their] self-esteem and decreased some of the negative behaviors...Reading interventions provide students with the skills and strategies they need to become proficient readers.” In her letter, Dana emphasized that intervention providers must have a growth mindset and believe that “all students have the ability to learn, grow, and glow!”

Intervention-Efficacy

Nine of the 10 intervention providers that participated in this study believe in the efficacy of their interventions. “I think interventions are very important,” expressed Juana during her interview. Conversely, Brandi argued that it was important for all stakeholders, including students, parents, teachers, administrators, district leaders, and the state of Texas, to understand the importance and efficacy of Tier 3 early reading interventions. Cielo noted that the “strategic approach to interventions is working and communicating success should be on the forefront, to

one increase the visibility of our program and two to strengthen our partnerships with other stakeholders.” Dana confessed that when she was a classroom teacher, she “thought interventions were just something extra, like wow, you have to go again? But after the closure and becoming an intervention provider, I now see the brilliance of having a multi-tiered system.” She added, “I really respect the whole system because I see how interventions do close gaps faster and also help children have some of those light bulbs to come on.” In her letter to hypothetical future Tier 3 early reading intervention providers, Faith pointed out that early interventions are successful because they can capitalize on the brain’s malleability. Therefore, closing gaps is more manageable than waiting until the student is older and the gaps are wider. Imani was able to sum up what all of the participants believe about the efficacy of Tier 3 early reading interventions at UISD, “I believe the interventions can work, and that they do work...we are seeing success!”

Tackling Obstacles to Successful Interventions

All participants articulated that upon returning to in-person learning after the Covid-19 school closures, Tier 3 early reading intervention providers at UISD had to tackle many obstacles to successful interventions. Despite their willingness and belief that they could make a difference, they did not have enough time to support all students and all gaps. The number of students who needed support increased during the pandemic and thereafter. During her interview, Gabriela said, “We do not have the time to serve them all.” In addition, the strain of the stress brought on by the school closures pushed teachers to leave teaching, adding yet another challenge to the work of intervention providers as they were expected to fill in the gap.

Not Enough Time to Support All Students and All Gaps

All intervention providers at UISD agreed that upon returning to in-person, the data showed that the number of students who needed Tier 3 early reading support exponentially

increased. They did not have enough time to support all students and all gaps. Cielo shared that about 20% of students fell below the 20th percentile on their universal screener before the pandemic, and three years after the school closure, they still “have more than 50% of students needing support. In the classroom, it can sometimes be an entire classroom that needs intervention.” During her interview, Juana stated, “I stay very busy because we have a lot of students.” Ana confessed that “after the closure...there were so many students performing below grade level, and I was asked to serve all students. I had groups of 10, and they were all at different levels. I wasn’t able to provide skill-based interventions.” Cielo shared, “I just wish I could have more time in the schedule that I can meet...all the needs of the students.” Dana suggested that “because we’re trying to close gaps in different areas of the educational systems...we need to make sure that [students] get adequate time, and within that time we must provide quality lessons.”

Intervention Efforts are Strained Due to the Teacher Shortage

Four of the 10 intervention providers that participated in this study maintained that three years of the school closure, intervention efforts continue to be strained due to the teacher shortage. Research postulates that a critical component of successful Tier 3 early reading interventions is implementation with fidelity (Coyne et al., 2018). Nonetheless, intervention providers are often pulled for other duties, such as covering classes that hinder implementation fidelity (Coyne et al., 2018; Wang et al., 2021). Since returning to in-person learning, there has been an increase in teacher resignations at UISD, Imani shared. Faith believes that school administration should “make sure that interventionists are available to pull their groups. It’s hard right now because of the teacher shortage... but then those students who need the interventions aren’t getting them on a consistent basis.” During her interview, Gabriela complained that she

was pulled to “cover a class for almost a month because [they] lost a teacher, so for a month [she] didn’t do any interventions.” Ana asserted that “meeting with students with fidelity is key to seeing progress and [intervention providers should] be vocal about the importance of [their] position and job description...Tier 3 students need [them] more than ever.”

Being Intentional with Meeting the Needs of the Students

When describing their lived experiences of providing Tier 3 early interventions, all study participants highlighted the need for intentionality. Juana described her work three years after a school closure as “more purposeful,” During her interview, Dana confessed that “my role has changed since the closure because now I try to be more intentional with meeting the needs of the students.” Juana continued to explain that to increase her levels of intentionality, she had to stay focused on her data to provide explicit instruction that targeted exactly what her students needed. Brandi agreed that she had to become more comfortable following the set criteria for identifying students, she wanted to help all students, but the school closure forced her to increase her levels of intentionality when selecting students because nearly all students needed help. Cielo echoed Brandi by stating, “I wish I could meet all of the needs of all students, but it is just impossible. I have to be very intentional with who I select for my groups and then what I do with them during my interventions.” Overall, the two subthemes continually stressed that actions revolved around data and the need for explicitly teaching foundational skills.

Actions Revolve Around Data

All UISD Tier 3 early reading intervention providers that participated in this study understand that they must make data-driven decisions that support their early reading Tier 3 students. Imani stated, “The actions that I take as I’m working with early reading intervention students, or as an early intervention provider, is making sure that I keep the data in front of me

and that I am constantly looking at the data.” UISD has adopted the Measures of Academic Progress Test (MAP) as its universal screener. All students are assessed using MAP. After administration data meetings occur, students who are 20th percentile and below are considered for Tier 3 interventions. On the other hand, Brandi shared that MAP is one of many data sets they use to make those determinations.

Additional data sets considered when deciding whether the student will receive small-group instruction from Tier 3 intervention providers include how the student performs on grade-level standards and teacher observations. In addition to looking at MAP to identify students who will receive Tier 3 interventions, intervention providers at UISD also use data such as additional diagnostic assessments and progress monitoring assessments to identify areas of focus for the interventions, group students according to ability, measure the effectiveness of the interventions, track student progress, and make additional recommendations for students such as the need for a special education evaluation or if the student has met Tier 3 exit criteria. In her letter to hypothetical future Tier 3 early reading intervention providers, Ana shared, “Data is your best aid in identifying those struggling students, tracking their progress, and grouping students.” Gabriela also stated, “Paying attention to the data helps catch learning gaps early on, and consistent progress monitoring helps modify instruction in order to meet student’s specific needs.”

Teaching Foundational Skills Explicitly

Nine of the ten study participants acknowledge that they must teach foundational reading skills explicitly. “We want to target what the student needs,” exclaimed Cielo when explaining why she saw a need for interventions to be intentional. Gabriela attributed her new understanding of the importance of explicitly teaching foundational skills to the Texas Reading Academies.

During her interview, she explained, “Through Reading Academies, we saw a need to teach reading in a different way. We now focus on the science of reading by incorporating decoding and alphabet knowledge routines.” Dana shared that her interventions are proving successful because she zooms in on the foundational reading skills. She stated,

I ensure that any gaps that were an oversight are addressed. I rely on the diagnostic assessment to help me identify where to begin instruction, and I can see where the cracks begin. Once I have a starting point, I feel like I am able to go from one step to the next, then the next, then the next, and sometimes once the students get to a particular spot that was missed, they start moving faster. Once we close those foundational literacy gaps, we can move more swiftly than before.

Hunter noticed that upon returning to in-person learning after the Covid-19-related school closure, “basic phonics and phonological awareness has been a big challenge.” During her interview, Imani agreed that for successful reading interventions, providers “need to get back to the basics and make sure they start building the foundations to get the kids where they need to be.” To help explicitly teach foundational skills, UISD has adopted the Systematic Instruction in Phonological Awareness, Phonics, and Sight Words (SIPPS) program. Brandi believes SIPPS “has the science behind it, and it is proving to work.” Dana shared that the

SIPPS program takes us back to just the basics. We are looking at decoding single consonants, and we are looking at sight words. Sight words make up about 54% of reading, so I have seen that in some cases, even though students may be able to decode, they still can’t read because they don’t know sight words. So, looking at that, I’m able to teach them and meet them where they are with the SIPPS program.

Hunter described SIPPS as a “structured and guided process that follows a logical sequence. It builds on the basics of letters and sounds, then more phonological awareness and phonics with healthy doses of sight words and basic comprehension. I think all those are important.” Gabriela believes that “before, during, and after the pandemic, the most important thing that educators do is teach children to read. Reading sets the foundation for everything. To achieve this, you must start with the foundations, which are phonological and phonemic awareness.” In her interview, Ana shared that “Working on those phonic skills really has made an improvement, not only in their reading but in their attitudes towards reading.”

Fostering a Shared Investment in Student Success

All ten Tier 3 early reading intervention providers that participated in this study believe in fostering a shared investment in student success. After returning to in-person learning, reading gaps for kindergarten to second-grade students were more prominent than ever at UISD, in Texas, and worldwide. Faith exclaimed, “I think trying to incorporate all of the skills needed to fill all of the gaps is hard to do with only seeing them for maybe 30 minutes per day. They need constant support, so we need the help of the classroom teacher, the parents, and everybody else.” Cielo stated, “We need the help from all stakeholders. Anybody and everybody can support us, that would really help.” In her letter to hypothetical future Tier 3 early reading intervention providers, Faith agreed that in order “to help students grow, it takes commitment and accountability from all stakeholders,” including parents, classroom teachers, campus leadership, district leadership, and the state of Texas. “When we work together, we create a shared investment and respect for the services we provide,” claimed Brandi. Dana expressed, “The challenge is understanding how we connect and support each other so that our systems run smoothly.”

Parental Commitment

Five participants affirmed that parent commitment is essential to the work of Tier 3 early reading providers at UISD. MTSS meetings are now an expectation at UISD. “When parents attend the MTSS, they become part of the problem-solving team and commit themselves to the work,” Ana stated during her interview. She admitted that before the school closure, she “wouldn’t talk to parents as much, but now students need extra help. Parents need to know who I am, what I do, and what I’m working on so they can help at home. The school-home connection is so important.” Ana continued, “I know most of my parents, and I’m very grateful that they know me as well. I notice the difference; they talk to me. That relationship really helps.” Dana agreed that “most parents are interested in the learning of their children, so we have to educate parents on what we do and how they can help close those gaps more quickly.” Juana shared, “I meet with parents and ask them for feedback. Are they seeing growth at home? This helps keep them accountable for helping their children at home, and they can hold us accountable for what we do at school.” During the interview, Cielo noted that “it is all about partnerships; parents need to see that we are all working together and they can support us as well.”

Classroom Teachers as Partners

Eight of the ten tier 3 intervention providers maintained that they are not the only people tasked with ensuring students’ success. Ana shared, “I need the extra support from the teachers. They cannot leave everything up to me; they should also provide interventions. We should be double dipping.” Ana understood that students are not the only ones that need support after a school closure; teachers need help too. Therefore, Ana creates partnerships with classroom teachers at her school by training them to make data-driven decisions, group students for small-group instruction based on ability, and provides strategies and resources that reinforce classroom

interventions. During the interview, Juana insisted that “constant communication with teachers is important...I ask the teacher about what they are doing in the classroom, we sit down and work together to create materials, or I provide materials for them.” Imani stressed the importance of classroom teachers knowing what the intervention provider is doing during small-group instruction to reinforce it in the classroom. Dana proposed that “by gaining the support from the teacher and educating them on the work of the intervention provider, teachers understand that [pull-out interventions] don’t take away from the classroom, but rather enhance the student’s ability in the classroom.” Hunter added that “interventionists are partners of the classroom teacher because, without them and us working together, the students won’t grow the way they can, and need to.”

Supportive Campus Leadership

Three years after the school closure, six of the 10 Tier 3 early intervention providers at UISD that participated in this study see the difference in school culture; there is an increased investment in student success due to supportive campus leadership. They attribute this cultural shift to the stronger implementation of the MTSS model. Although the model is a top-down initiative that began at the district level, campus leadership has seen the benefit and is fully invested. “Campus leadership now lead the MTSS meetings and expect collaboration from intervention provider, classroom teacher, parents, counselor, behavior specialist, and anybody else that may support the academic and social-emotional needs of students” stated Gabriela in her letter. Dana added that the MTSS meeting “is not just paperwork anymore, we’re talking about data, we’re unpacking how the student is doing overall, how is the student doing individually, and how we are doing as a school...our administration is a big part of the process.” Juana agreed that having campus leadership lead the MTSS meetings has “increased the number

of people who can problem solve, we now have more eyes and ears looking and discussing the needs of the whole child, and I am seeing the benefits.” In addition to strengthening the MTSS meetings, campus leadership has “ensured that intervention time is included in the master schedule, prioritizing and protecting our time with students was a huge change” acknowledged Elizabeth. Overall, Ana suggested that “principals and assistant principals must create a school-wide plan to ensure that interventions are happening not only in the intervention classrooms, but in all classrooms in the school.” During her interview, Ana admitted that having the support of her campus leadership allows her to be more effective in her role, “It helps when you have an administrator that listens to you and understands your work.”

Responsive District Leadership

Five study participants admitted that their district leadership was responsive to the effects of the Covid-19 related school closure. UISD recognized that closing the wide academic and social-emotional gaps created or exacerbated by the school closure would need to be an all-hands-on-deck scenario. Therefore, the district created a new MTSS department tasked with creating and implementing systems and protocols that would increase the effectiveness and fidelity of interventions at all campuses in UISD. During her interview, Dana described the MTSS process for the district as a “collaborative system that takes into account the whole child.” Tier 3 early reading intervention providers at UISD appreciate the changes implemented by the district. Ana and Faith are excited that the district has invested in a research-based program specifically designed to help address gaps in foundational reading skills. “Before the school closure, we were doing something that didn’t... focused as much on the foundational skills and the phonics part. So I think we are making good changes and good progress,” shared Faith. As a first-year intervention provider, Brandi likes that there is a lot of guidance from the district on

how to implement reading interventions across all campuses effectively, “I recall before the school closures, interventionists would inconsistently pull students whenever their schedules allowed, now we have parameters and guidelines that protect our time, and we can provide interventions with fidelity.” In her questionnaire, Elizabeth shared that with the development of the MTSS department, she has felt supported in her work, “through the training my district has provided, I believe I was well prepared to provide reading interventions after the school closure. We were provided with great insight, background, and curriculum to ensure the students received quality Tier 3 interventions.”

Effective State Legislation

Six of the 10 participants claimed that effective state legislation has helped advance the efforts of Tier 3 early reading intervention providers at UISD. Before the Covid-19-related school closures, the state of Texas began Reading Academies, where classroom teachers in the early elementary grades were required to participate in professional learning geared toward the science of reading. After returning to in-person learning, the state of Texas expanded the scope of Reading Academies, and intervention providers were included. In her interview, Dana stated, “The Reading Academies actually helped us and the classroom teachers learning together at the same time helped a whole lot.” Gabriela added, “When we came from school closing, everything changed. Going through the Reading Academy made it clear that we were moving to a new way of teaching”. “One thing I know that they [the state of Texas] have done, which I think has been very, very helpful, is the Reading Academies. I’ve learned a lot in Reading Academy,” shared Imani. The study participants overwhelmingly shared that they support the effective implementation of state legislation regarding the Reading Academies. However, they believe that more is needed. Imani would like to see additional professional development of the

implementation of the MTSS process, Juana would like the state of Texas to provide additional financial help so districts can provide classroom teachers resources to expand interventions in the classroom, Brandi believes more funds should be allocated to hiring more intervention provider to help serve all of the students requiring intensive interventions, and Dana feels there should be governing laws that require all districts to have an MTSS department.

Outlier Data and Findings

A robust amount of data was collected from interviews, questionnaires, and letter writing. Data was then analyzed, and themes and subthemes emerged that revealed the essence of the phenomenon of the lived experiences of Tier 3 early reading intervention providers three years after a school closure in UISD. Although most of the data aligned with the major themes and subthemes previously mentioned, the unexpected findings that appeared during data analysis that did not align with the research questions are described below.

Outlier Finding #1: The Effects of School Closure on Older Students

A criterion for participation in the study was that the intervention provider must currently serve Tier 3 students in either kindergarten, first, or second-grade. Although district leadership at UISD provides guidelines that establish what interventions should look like at each campus and what curriculum should be used, due to the funding source from which intervention providers are paid, campus leadership has the autonomy to establish how each intervention provider will be utilized on campuses. Therefore, the intervention providers serve multiple grades as determined by the needs of the campus and the direction of each campus administration. All intervention providers, except for Juana, serve students beyond second-grade. During data collection, despite the prompts being guided towards the instruction of early reading for kindergarten through second-grade students, participants also included their experience providing support for older

students.

Juana argued that the students that suffered the most are the current fourth-graders, who were in their second semester of first-grade when the pandemic began. Ana admits, “I currently serve a fourth-grader who has severe speech issues, and I’m having to adjust the interventions to provide whatever the student’s needs are at his specific level.” Hunter and Faith agree that the gaps seen in the current kindergartens through second-grade are expected and similar to the years before the school closure because they should be working on the foundational skills of reading; however, “students in third and even fourth-grade are really performing at first-grade or below so we are having to focus on those foundational skills when prior to the pandemic the focus would be on comprehension,” Hunter explained.

Outlier Finding #2: Dislike of Increased Guidance from District Leadership

Although the Covid-19-related school closures brought extreme challenges for intervention providers, they mostly shared positive attitudes towards the changes in response to the academic and social-emotional gaps created or exacerbated by the school closures. Nine of the 10 Tier 3 early reading intervention providers that participated in the study welcomed the increased guidance from the district leadership at UISD. However, one Tier 3 early reading intervention provider, Gabriela, felt that she was boxed in and limited in what she could do with her intervention groups. She no longer had the flexibility to do what she “thought was best.” During her interview, Gabriela shared, “The way Tier 3 is organized in the district, I have to move groups in a different way because of the results even though I think they need intervention in a certain language, or in oracy, instead of reading.”

Prior to the school closure, Gabriela felt she had more autonomy to be diagnostic and prescriptive, but now “I have to use the specific program even if that is not what my students

need, sometimes they only need to develop that oral language in English, but they force me to focus on literacy in English” Gabriela confessed. She continued to explain that even when she provides Tier 3 early reading intervention in Spanish, she is forced to use the district-designated Spanish resource and admits that “it’s a good program, but it’s not a good fit for every single student. So sometimes I need to tweak a little bit what I know and use other resources.”

However, she then feels conflicted because she sees the value in consistency across the district. She explained, “I need to be consistent with the district and follow what they tell me to do because they are the experts, and I need to follow those procedures and protocols.”

Research Question Responses

This section presents answers to the central question and sub-questions used to describe the lived experiences of Tier 3 early reading intervention providers at the Urban Independent School District in Texas three years after a school closure. Data was collected and triangulated using participant interviews, letter writing, and open-ended questionnaires. Data was then analyzed to formulate answers. This section includes narrative answers to each question and in Vivo evidence from participants’ responses that describe the lived experiences, beliefs, attitudes, mental states, and actions of Tier 3 early reading intervention providers three years after a school closure.

Central Research Question

What are the lived experiences of Tier 3 early reading intervention providers in the Urban Independent School District (UISD) three years after a school closure?

The lived experiences of Tier 3 early reading intervention providers at UISD three years after a school closure have been unique for each participant but expose prominent themes of overcoming the effects of the school closure on the holistic development of young children,

believing the efficacy of self, work, and students, tackling obstacles to successful interventions, being intentional with meeting the needs of the students, fostering a shared investment in student success, and overall satisfaction in career choice. When thinking about being an intervention provider three years after a school closure, in her letter to hypothetical future Tier 3 early reading intervention providers, Elizabeth stated,

Schools don't close because things are right or easy in the world. Suddenly normal doesn't exist. We wanted to help our students, but many were inaccessible. However, when we returned, our work was needed and wanted. It was a tough time but also an exciting time. Students and adults had to relearn how to be social, but we were all grateful to be back.

All intervention providers echoed Elizabeth's thoughts, the mixture of remembering the sorrows faced during the Covid-19-related school closures mixed with the gladness experienced being part of what helps students overcome such a tragic time. The school closures created or exacerbated academic and social-emotional gaps for students increased and intensified intervention providers' workload, and placed stress on the education system, causing an increase in teacher shortage, effects still felt three years after the closure. However, intervention providers are hopeful and confident in the efficacy of Tier 3 interventions in themselves and their students. Hunter shared that "this will be a long agonizing process, as students we work with have significant gaps in their learning and first need to master the basic building blocks of reading, but if we stick with it, we will see progress."

Upon returning to in-person learning, Ana recalled everybody scrambling to find ways to close student achievement gaps but admits that she is happy about the changes that have occurred because of the school closures "Our district has been responsive and has made changes

that have positively impacted my work. The increased guidance, support, and strengthened relationships with all stakeholders positively affect student outcome both academically and socially.” Despite the challenges associated with providing Tier 3 interventions after a school closure, Tier 3 early reading intervention providers at UISD feel grateful to be back in school doing what they are most passionate about, which is to help students succeed. All the intervention providers share a passion for growing students and believe they are the right person to address the academic and social-emotional gaps created or exacerbated by the Covid-19-related school closures. When asked on a scale of 1-4 (1- Not at all, 2- Hardly true, 3- Moderately true, 4- Exactly true), how true is the following statement? I am confident that I can efficiently deal with unexpected events, such as unexpected school closures intervention providers averaged a score of 3.3.

“The school closure has caused the position of the interventionist to be put in the spotlight,” Brandi emphasized. Through providing Tier 3 early reading interventions after a school closure, all stakeholders, including the intervention providers, have gained a greater understanding of the importance Tier of 3 interventions and their impact on students. Gabriela concluded, “The journey of an educator is not an easy task. I predict things in the future may get even more challenging. However, the call to be a teacher is an important one. Our students need us. We can’t give up.”

Sub-Question One

What are the beliefs of Tier 3 early reading intervention providers about how the school closure has affected their students academically and socially?

Tier 3 early reading intervention providers at UISD share the belief that students were gravely impacted by the Covid-19-related school closure both academically and socially.

Intervention providers believe that they must consider the academic and social-emotional effects of the Covid-19-related school closures and how they impact their work even three years after the closures because the effects are still being felt. Imani shared that upon returning to in-person learning, the topic of the effects of Covid-19 on student performance was the focus of all instructional conversations; however, she added, “This year, I feel like we don’t talk about it anymore, although we know that it is there, that Covid-19 is still a big part of student learning gaps, but we don’t talk about it as much anymore.” Three years after the school closure, intervention providers at UISD still see the academic and social impact that the closure had on their students. Intervention providers believe that the academic and social-emotional state of the students is co-dependent. Imani pointed out that students’ self-esteem increases, and negative school behaviors decrease as reading proficiency increases.

Cielo believes that during the school closures, students had difficulty retaining what they had previously learned and acquiring new information. Those two factors contributed to the gaps intervention providers saw in their Tier 3 students three years after the school closure. Hunter argued that younger students might have been impacted the most by the school closure because the “virtual environment was less well suited or adaptable to their needs. The hands-on, kinesthetic aspects that are crucial for early learning were difficult to emulate virtually.”

Upon returning to in-person learning, young students entered schools with educational gaps more significant than previously observed. Dana referred to the gaps as “wide as bridges” because the data showed that students had two to three years of learning loss. Dana described acclimating students back to school as “training the brain because the brain muscles seem to have been weakened.” Elizabeth shared that when faced with data that shows students are two or three years behind, it is easy to get discouraged. However, she reminds herself that she cannot

compare her success or her students' success with pre-Covid standards, as they were set by students who never had to live through the fears and pressures brought on not just in their house but across the world. Instead, Elizabeth focuses on the growth of the students and is encouraged to continue to provide targeted and intensive interventions to help fill the gaps. She added, "Am I gonna close a three-year gap in one year? I don't know, but we're gonna try."

Hunter expressed the importance of intervention providers addressing students' social and emotional needs "Students will come with years of struggles and feeling like failures. We can't let them feel this way when they are with us. We must show them that we believe in them and get to know them beyond their screener scores or how many sight words they know." Dana also shared that when students come to small-group interventions, they should feel safe, a feeling lost during the school closure. "When students feel safe, they are able to express and share about themselves, and they get a chance to build their confidence. They get to hear their voices and get to be successful," Dana asserted.

Intervention providers believe that students' social-emotional needs precede their academic needs. This is especially important after a school closure, as they are often a result of a tragedy affecting the larger community. When thinking about the social-emotional effects of the school closure on children, Elizabeth stated, "They've (the students) already lived through the pressure of I'm gonna die if I go to the park. They've lived through that. My grandma died because she went and got bread. They've lived through that pressure." In her questionnaire, Gabriela acknowledged that students still struggle with anxiety manifesting in outbursts of inappropriate behaviors. Elizabeth passionately agreed that although she has high regard for academic progress, she will never push it "at the expense of someone's personality or their

personal growth...they've missed a lot of social opportunities, and they've missed a lot of safety opportunities.”

Intervention providers believe that the MTSS process has been strengthened after the school closure and are confident that the changes made are making a difference in student outcomes. Juana expressed that at MTSS meetings, they look at the whole child and consider their academic and social-emotional needs to create a plan for students to progress academically and socially simultaneously. When describing her work as a Tier 3 early reading provider, Dana stated, “I see early interventions as extremely important, especially after a school closure. We are closing gaps, but more importantly, we are looking at the whole child and addressing all of their needs.” Gabriela echoes the other intervention providers’ belief that the MTSS umbrella

provides nourishment to the whole child. It allows me to see each student where they are and to share safe conversations that build and restore confidence within them. I celebrate small successes, and together we witness how small academic gains add up to bigger success. Academic growth has a direct connection to behavior and social-emotional stability.

Sub-Question Two

What are the attitudes of Tier 3 early reading intervention providers on what could have been or was done differently during the school closure and/or upon returning to in-person learning?

Although Covid-19 was a tragic event that significantly impacted students’ academic achievement and social-emotional state, Tier 3 early reading intervention providers have a positive attitude about what was done differently in education once schools in UISD returned to in-person learning. Upon returning to in-person learning, the prominent academic and emotional

gaps affected most students at UISD. District leadership saw the need, and Tier 3 early reading interventions were prioritized. Efforts were made to create more structured and intentional systems for interventions. As a result, intervention providers have seen a strengthened shared investment in student success by all stakeholders: parents, classroom teachers, intervention providers, campus leadership, district leadership, and state leadership.

Intervention providers at UISD recognized that district leadership was responsive to student needs when they created the MTSS department as a reaction to the school closure. While interventions were provided before the school closure, the collaborative system of MTSS made interventions more targeted and inclusive. Cielo illustrated the change by stating, “We (intervention providers) were more in a closed system, but with the new system, we actually collaborate with the whole team, teachers, counselors, principals, parents, and we address the whole child including academics, behavior, and social-emotional needs.” Brandi, a first-year intervention provider, was apprehensive when she stepped into the role but the “increased guidance from the MTSS department because of the whole global impact of the pandemic has made our district really honed in on getting guidance for interventions establishing a framework for serving students.”

Intervention providers have a cooperative attitude toward the changes made after returning to in-person learning. Dana shared that; parents are more interested in how they can better support their students at home so gaps can be quickly closed. They are reaching out specifically to intervention providers to learn strategies to address the missing foundational skills. Dana attributes the increased parent involvement to the MTSS process “When we have those meetings, and the needs are shared with parents, it really helps. It works when parents are included in the intervention process.” In addition, intervention providers understand that due to

the Covid-19-related school closures, there are more Tier 3 students than they can service. Therefore, they are working closely with classroom teachers to support the students being pulled for small-group instruction by the intervention provider but also with Tier 3 students that intervention providers cannot see. Imani advocated that “professional development on what does Tier 3 interventions look like be provided to both intervention providers and classroom teachers.”

Additionally, intervention providers are enthusiastic about the partnership with the state of Texas. In June of 2021, the Texas legislation updated House Bill (HB) 3, which states that “all kindergarten through third-grade teachers and principals must attend a teacher literacy achievement academy by 2022-2023 school year” (TEA, n.d.). Although the Covid-19 school closures did not bring on HB3, they have positively impacted intervention efforts at UISD. Reading academies have helped grow classroom teachers in the science of reading. Ana exclaimed, “Thank God we have the Reading Academies. I think it helps ensure that good reading teaching and interventions are happening in the classroom.” Although intervention providers were not required to attend due to the students’ high needs, all intervention providers at UISD attended. “One thing that I know that they (the state of Texas) have done, which I think is very, very helpful, is the Reading Academies. I’ve learned a lot in Reading Academy,” admitted Imani. Despite the challenges brought on by the school closure, intervention providers have a confident attitude about the changes that have affected their work. “I think we are making good changes and good progress,” Faith concluded.

Sub-Question Three

What is the mental state of Tier 3 early reading intervention providers about how they have personally experienced the challenges of returning to in-person learning after the school closure?

All Tier 3 early reading intervention providers at UISD expressed that upon returning to in-person learning, their mental state was in a state of anxiety and tension as they experienced something like nothing the world had seen before. Brandi explained, “The field of education had to shift into uncharted territory while providing strong instruction.” Although providing interventions virtually during the school closures was difficult, Faith was hopeful that once in-person school resumed, she would be able to pick up where she left off before the school closure; however, she “quickly learned that the gaps were larger than anticipated.” Ana confessed that she was “not very well prepared at the beginning. There were no appropriate resources to target all the skills students came lacking after the school closure. I wasn’t prepared for the amount of students I would be servicing as well.”

Although intervention providers felt unprepared for the effects of the Covid-19-related school closures, upon returning to in-person schooling, intervention providers experienced heightened levels of urgency because the needs seemed insurmountable. Once returning to in-person learning, intervention providers had to face the challenges of the high number of students needing interventions, wider gaps than ever seen before, teacher shortages, and social-emotional issues, among many others. Intervention providers described mental states of exhaustion due to feelings of work overload from not having enough time to support all students and all the gaps and exhaustion from strains in the intervention efforts due to the growing teacher shortage. Gabriela expressed frustration when she was pulled to cover a classroom “When we lost a

teacher in the middle of the year, I was pulled to cover her room, so for a month, I didn't do any interventions. The students that needed me the most did not see me for a whole month." Faith agreed that she understands why intervention providers are being pulled to cover those classrooms. However, she shares the fear that "the students that desperately need the interventions are not getting them on a consistent basis, which only makes those gaps wider and harder to close."

Despite a rough return to in-person learning, Tier 3 early reading intervention providers' mental state about how they have personally experienced the challenges of returning to the brick-and-mortar buildings has shifted from anxious to hopeful to now confident three years after the school closure. Dana acknowledged that the shared investment in students' success has transformed how interventions are perceived at UISD "The district now makes sure that intervention time is protected and that there are research-based resources available to address the foundational gaps our students have, as well as enough human resources allocated to help serve our students." Not only do intervention providers believe in the efficacy of the new intervention structure that the district has established, but they also believe in themselves. When asked on a scale of 1-4 (1- Not at all, 2- Hardly true, 3- Moderately true, 4- Exactly true), how true is the following statement? I believe I am the best person to support my Tier 3 early reading students after the school closure. Intervention providers averaged a score of 3.6. Juana shared, "We are constantly working on improving our strategies for interventions, and I feel that we are catching up with our students to the academic level they are supposed to be in and are implementing processes in which students can be successful."

Sub-Question Four

What are the actions of Tier 3 early reading intervention providers three years after a school closure?

The actions of Tier 3 early reading intervention providers three years after a school closure revolve around the theme of being “intentional with meeting the needs of the students,” as Dana explained. Being intentional for the intervention providers begins with looking at data. Due to the high number of students needing reading support after the school closures, intervention providers recognize that data must drive their actions. All intervention providers shared that they use data to identify students they will service, group the identified students according to need, identify the area of focus for the intervention, progress monitor, and check for the interventions’ effectiveness. Imani explained, “My actions revolve around my data, I make sure that I keep the data in front of me, and I am constantly looking at it.” “Assessment and planning work hand in hand and allow the students to demonstrate continued growth through data-driven decision,” Brandi wrote in her letter to hypothetical future intervention providers.

Intervention providers also strive to strengthen the partnership with the classroom teachers. Ana stated, “Not only do your students need us more than ever, but our fellow classroom teachers also need our support as well.” Brandi noted that intervention providers are not the only people on campus contributing to student success. Therefore, a relationship with the classroom teacher is imperative. Imani added to the conversation by explaining, “I use the data to have conversations with the classroom teacher to make sure that we are on the same accord. That the skills I am teaching are being utilized in the classroom as well.” One of Gabriela’s goals this year is to grow classroom teachers’ capacity in providing interventions in the classroom, “so I

train, teach, co-teach, and model a lot how to teach students how to really decode, instead of teaching the old way when they memorized the words.”

Juana stressed that “teaching foundational skills explicitly” is at the core of her work as an intervention provider after the school closure. When students returned to in-person learning, the academic gaps had been exacerbated. Tier 3 intervention providers intentionally used data to pinpoint exactly where the gaps were in reading. All 10 participants agreed that most of the gaps were in basic foundational skills: phonological awareness, phonics, and sight words.

Intervention providers recognized that although the Covid-19 pandemic was devastating, it brought about positive changes in their work, one being stronger partnerships between the district and the campus intervention efforts. The district looked at the data, listened to the intervention providers, and agreed that focusing on the foundational skills would have to be the focus of work of Tier 3 early reading intervention providers, and provided a systematic resource that explicitly addresses phonological awareness, phonics, and sight words. Brandi stated that she loves the new systematic resource because it is based on the science of reading, proving that it addresses students’ gaps.

Faith believed that although intervention providers must provide explicit foundational skills instruction, it is not the number one focus of her work. Her actions revolve around building relationships with her students. Faith suggests, “Take a few minutes each day to learn about them [the students] both academically and about their interests outside of school.” Elizabeth agreed that interventions can only be successful if those relationships are established early on. She proposed to “start by introducing yourself and why you love your job. Help them know that just meeting with them in this moment is making your dreams come true.”

Another critical action of Tier 3 early reading providers at UISD three years after the school closure is establishing strong partnerships with all stakeholders. Aside from the partnership with teachers, intervention providers must collaborate with parents, campus leadership, district leadership, and the state of Texas to address the gaps created or exacerbated by the Covid-19 school closures. “By involving parents and having the support of my campus administration, I have seen success. I’ve seen it, and it works for us when we actually work together, and we get results,” Ana expressed. Brandi agreed that fostering those partnerships “creates a shared investment in the student’s success and respect in the service provided by intervention teachers.”

Overall, intervention providers feel that their actions positively impact students. Juana expressed, “I feel like it’s been working, what we’re doing in our interventions is working because we’re looking at data, and we’re assessing students.” Elizabeth reflected on the actions necessary for the success of Tier 3 early reading interventions three after a school closure. She concluded that intervention providers should celebrate all the small wins along the way, some gaps will close quickly, and others will not. Therefore, the keys are flexibility and creativity. Elizabeth added that although the work of Tier 3 intervention providers is tough, it is worth it for the students and intervention providers.

Summary

Tier 3 early reading interventions are essential to helping students close academic and social-emotional gaps created or exacerbated by school closures. This study explored the lived experiences of Tier 3 early reading intervention providers at the UISD three years after a school closure. A triangulation of data highlighted six main themes and 16 subthemes. Intervention providers are satisfied with their career choice because they believe their work is fulfilling and

are grateful to return to in-person learning after a school closure. School closures affect young children's holistic development as they create academic gaps as wide as bridges and stifle the development of social-emotional skills; therefore, intervention providers must nourish the whole child. Intervention providers have strong self-efficacy and believe in the efficacy of the intervention systems and the efficacy of the students they serve. Intervention providers are tackling obstacles to successful interventions, such as insufficient time to support all students and all gaps and the strain they are experiencing because of the current teacher shortage. Intervention providers are intentionally meeting students' needs by using data to make informed decisions and explicitly teaching foundational skills. Intervention providers believe a shared investment with parents, classroom teachers, campus leadership, district leaders, and state legislators is essential for successful Tier 3 early reading interventions.

The experiences of Tier 3 early reading intervention providers at UISD three years after a school closure have been unique. However, participants shared the belief that students were gravely impacted academically and socially by the Covid-19-related school closure. Although Covid-19 was a tragic event that significantly impacted students' academic achievement and social-emotional state, Tier 3 early reading intervention providers have a positive attitude about what was done differently in education once schools in UISD returned to in-person learning. All Tier 3 early reading intervention providers at UISD expressed that upon returning to in-person learning, their mental state was in a state of anxiety and tension as they experienced something like nothing the world had seen before. Therefore, their actions years after a school closure had to be intentional in meeting the needs of the students. Overall, intervention providers at UISD see their work as meaningful, and data shows that students are progressing despite the challenges brought about by the Covid-19 school closure.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the lived experiences of Tier 3 early reading intervention providers at the Urban Independent School District (UISD) in Texas three years after a school closure. This chapter summarizes my research and includes interpretations of the findings. In addition, this chapter will address implications for policy and practice, theoretical and empirical implications, limitations and delimitations, and recommendations for future research. The chapter ends with a concluding summary.

Discussion

This transcendental phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of Tier 3 early reading intervention providers at UISD. It focused on their beliefs, attitudes, mental states, and actions three years after a school closure. Moustakas' (1994) transcendental phenomenological design was used to identify themes and subthemes of the phenomenon experienced by the participants; this section includes my interpretations of the findings. Chapter two of this written work included the theoretical and empirical literature that was the basis of this study, and chapter four discussed the findings related to the research questions. This section merges the research completed in chapter two and the newly acquired knowledge to develop new interpretations of the findings and provide empirical, theoretical, and practical implications of those findings.

Interpretation of Findings

The participants of this study all came from different backgrounds. They brought different experiences to the table, and although they are all unique, they had many commonalities when it came to their lived experiences as Tier 3 early reading intervention providers in UISD

three years after a school closure. They openly shared their beliefs, attitudes, mental states, and actions through interviews, online questionnaires, and written letters throughout the study. Six overarching themes encapsulated intervention providers' lived experiences: satisfaction with career choice, school closure effects on the holistic development of young children, belief in the efficacy of self, work, and students, tackling obstacles to successful interventions, being intentional with meeting the needs of students, and fostering a shared investment in student success. From the six overarching themes, 16 additional subthemes were identified: the work of intervention providers is fulfilling, gratefulness upon returning to in-person learning, academic gaps as wide as bridges, stifled the development of social-emotional skills, self-efficacy, student-efficacy, intervention-efficacy, not enough time to support all students and all gaps, intervention efforts are strained due to the teacher shortage, actions revolve around data, teaching foundational skills explicitly, parental commitment, classroom teachers as partners, supportive campus leadership, responsive district leadership, and effective state legislation. The identified themes and subthemes serve as the foundation for making sense of the lived experiences of Tier 3 early reading intervention providers at UISD three years after a school closure. This section includes a summary of the thematic findings, followed by my interpretation of all the data collected.

Summary of Thematic Findings

This study's thematic findings help understand the lived experiences of Tier 3 early reading intervention providers at UISD three years after a school closure. Responses provided during individual interviews, questionnaires, and letter writings gave insight into intervention providers' beliefs, attitudes, mental states, and actions three years after a school closure. All school closures, regardless of length, negatively affect students (Haeck & Larose, 2022;

Maldonado & De Witte, 2022; Zierer, 2021). During school closures, there are decreased levels of literacy instruction, even if instruction continues virtually (Crosson & Silverman, 2022).

According to early reading intervention providers at UISD, when students returned to in-person learning, their reading levels were two to three years behind, according to standards set before the school closure. In addition, students' academic performance is tightly connected to acquiring social-emotional skills such as making good decisions, managing emotions, and building relationships with others (American Institutes for Research, 2022). To address student needs, intervention providers had to be more intentional about supporting Tier 3 students and strengthening partnerships with all stakeholders to help support Tier 3 students. Despite the many obstacles to successful interventions, intervention providers believe they are just the people to help students close those academic and social-emotional gaps. Tier 3 early reading intervention providers at UISD also believe students can and will learn. Intervention providers' passion for helping struggling students and seeing them grow intrinsically motivates them to continue the work despite the challenges.

Intervention Providers' Work was Intensified After the School Closure. Although school closures are an effective way to mitigate infectious disease outbreaks (Cauchemez et al., 2009; Kishimoto et al., 2021; Viner et al., 2020), they negatively impact students' academic and social well-being (Brooks et al., 2020) which intensified the work of Tier 3 early reading intervention providers. During school closures, students can experience learning loss, meaning they either know less than they did before the closure or they continue to learn but at slower rates than when they were in the traditional school setting (Anderson, 2021; Kerem & Cihan, 2022; WHO, 2022b). Ana asserted that after the Covid-19-related school closure, Tier 3 early reading intervention providers quickly became aware that students were returning to in-person learning

two or three years behind grade-level expectations set before the school closure. Juana confessed that student regression made the work of the intervention providers more difficult because more students needed support, and the gaps were wider than ever before.

Making matters worse, after schools return to in-person learning, parents hesitate to send their children back to school based on fear; in turn, the effects of interrupted schooling continue to expand (Rohwerder, 2020). Gabriela shared, “Even three years after the closure; unfortunately, I still have a lot of attendance issues. My babies are not consistent. They don’t come to school like they should.” Faith added, “It is hard to get them where they need to be when they are missing school. Attendance issues make our work very challenging.”

School closures have caused students to experience increased physiological damage and emotional stress (Ncube & Motalenyane, 2020; WHO, 2022b). Elizabeth acknowledged that students worldwide have had to deal with the stress and fear of dying or having somebody in their family die for simply leaving the house during the pandemic. The isolation of the school closures also caused students to feel lonely (Anderson, 2021). Consequently, upon returning to in-person learning, students “are grateful to be with friends, but they also don’t know how to talk to friends...they don’t know how to wait their turn...and are overly chatty,” Elizabeth added. Dana argued that a big part of the work of the intervention provider after a school closure is to help students feel safe and provide spaces where they can practice being social. “When students feel safe, they are able to express and share about themselves, and they get a chance to build their confidence,” Dana added.

During a school closure, it is difficult for intervention providers to provide immediate feedback to students. When reflecting on providing interventions virtually, Faith shared, “As they were holding and flipping a book, they may not have had an actual book with them, and I

would show them a digital book.” Gabriela added that it has been difficult for students to return to the hands-on activities necessary to close academic gaps because students become reliant on technology during the school closure. Due to students’ dependence on technology, even three years after the school closure, intervention providers still struggle to engage students with hands-on activities necessary to cement learning. Faith agreed that “younger learners were affected more...[because] the hands-on, kinesthetic aspects are so crucial for early learning [and are] difficult to emulate virtually.” Therefore, another negative byproduct of the isolation caused by the school closure is that students did not have access to their community and social interactions that young children need to make connections necessary for learning and creating meaning (Vygotsky, 1978).

Intervention providers’ work was further intensified by the “persistent stress coupled with lack of growth both socially and academically produced students who struggle to focus and hinder our work,” Elizabeth noted. Cielo summed up the work of the intervention provider after a school closure as follows:

Reading Interventionist recovery efforts should start as soon as possible and make them as intensive as possible, as emerging student delays can ‘harden’ over time if not promptly addressed. To ensure all students can regain ground, we must urgently begin intensive individualized Tier 3 targeted interventions with a deep understanding of student’s current areas of academic performance, provide and monitor data-driven interventions, strengthen attendance, and provide social-emotional support, or in other words, use MTSS as a guiding principle.

Although Tier 3 early reading intervention providers love their work and are happy to serve their students, their work has been intensified by the school closure. In addition to

addressing widened academic gaps, intervention providers have had to learn to overcome ongoing attendance issues and students' inability to fully engage in learning because of over-talking and technology dependency. Intervention providers also had to adapt their intervention lessons to address the two to three-year learning gap, the psychological damage, and the social-emotional delays caused by the school closures. Intervention providers know their intensified efforts are vital to students' academic and social-emotional health.

Intervention Providers Want a Systematic Approach to Interventions. The literature review of this study highlighted that intervention providers felt frustrated by the lack of consistency and resources necessary to help at risk students be successful (Braun et al., 2020; Washburn et al., 2022). This frustration was shared by intervention providers at UISD prior to the school closure. However, upon returning to in-person learning, UISD recognized the great need for a systematic approach to interventions, so they established an MTSS department whose purpose would be to create consistency across the district and provide a research-based resource that systematically helps students develop foundational reading skills.

Students learning to read is a critical goal for all educators (Moats, 2020). Early interventions prevent immediate and long-term reading difficulties that may follow children into adulthood (González-Valenzuela & Martín-Ruiz, 2017; Moats, 2020). Therefore, intervention providers must optimize student brain plasticity early on to tap into their increased developmental potential (Perez-Johnson & Maynard, 2007). Dana shared that after returning to in-person learning, she had to help students rebuild “brain memory muscles” as they “seemed to have been weakened.” In order to help students rebuild what they lost during the school closure, intervention providers, with the guidance of district leadership, had to provide systematic and intentional interventions to meet the needs of the students they serve.

Elizabeth explained that they are all grateful for the changes the district is making and that they finally have a resource that systematically addresses students' needs. Most students at risk for reading difficulties struggle with word recognition, vocabulary, and phonological awareness (Bratsch-Hines et al., 2020; Gersten et al., 2020). Consequently, the most effective reading interventions include instruction of basic foundational reading skills such as phonological awareness, phonics, letter and word recognition, and fluency (Wanzek et al., 2018). Faith was excited to share that the new resource systematically addresses those foundational skills and gradually builds students up.

Tier 3 interventions succeed when instruction is tailored to student needs (Field et al., 2019; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2017). All ten intervention providers in this study agreed that looking at data to identify students for intensive intervention and what skills to address during interventions was vital to their work as data enables them to develop a systematic plan to address student needs. Ana believes her constant attention to data has helped her become more solid, and her interventions are “much more targeted and much more intentional.”

Another layer to a systematic approach to interventions after a school closure is all stakeholders' shared investment in student success. Wanzek et al. (2018) argued that when early intervention efforts are built on trust among parents, administrators, and teachers, there is an increased level of academic excellence and social advances. Intervention providers at UISD recognized that they had to create partnerships with parents and classroom teachers to ensure that what was being taught in the intervention room was being practiced in the regular classroom and at home. Faith acknowledges that

to ensure success after the school closure, you will need to communicate with the teacher and parent of the students you provide intervention for; let them know what skills you are

working on so they can reinforce them in the classroom and at home. It helps to keep everyone in the loop and have an accountability piece for all parties involved.

Intervention Providers Believe Their Work is Important. The Covid-19-related school closures brought much devastation but also highlighted the importance of the work of intervention providers. Tier 3 early reading intervention providers at UISD want to ensure all students reach their maximum potential, but unless they feel their actions will have a meaningful impact, they are likely to have little motivation to act (Bandura et al., 1996; Erdem & Demirel, 2007). Nevertheless, Brandi expressed that helping students, who may have fallen through the cracks, develop a love for reading brings her happiness, and she believes that she is the best person to support her Tier 3 early reading students after a school closure. According to Bandura (1977a), when people see themselves as capable of success, they are more likely to exert increased effort and endure difficult situations longer (van Dinther et al., 2011). People with high levels of self-efficacy are more resilient and persistent and are better equipped to face obstacles and challenges (Yost, 2006). The intervention providers that participated in this study are all experienced educators. Participants transitioned to the role of intervention provider either because they believed they would do a good job or because somebody else believed they would do a good job. Juana admitted that when she was hired for the interventionist position, somebody believed in her more than she believed in herself. On the other hand, when Cielo read the job description, she felt she was qualified for the job and applied. Providers' self-efficacy is directly related to how students perform and ultimately impacts the self-efficacy of students (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001).

The increased workload when instruction returned in person caused teachers to experience increased levels of stress that influenced their self-efficacy (Kuok et al., 2022;

Pressley, 2021). In addition, Covid-19-related school closures exacerbated students' emotional and academic needs and reduced teacher self-efficacy in meeting student needs (Andreou et al., 2022). Even though intervention providers admitted that returning to in-person learning after the school closure had many challenges, the belief that their job is essential never wavered.

Intervention providers agreed that their job became more critical after the school closure. Hunter shared, "I always knew how important they were, and now I think they are more important than ever." When reflecting on the importance of early reading interventions, Faith echoed, "I think it always has been important, but especially coming back from a closure where kids weren't at school every day. Some missed such a long period of time. I think it's important that we catch them back up."

Despite the challenges, intervention providers believe that they are making a difference and that their efforts to be intentional in providing Tier 3 early reading interventions are paying off. Imani stated, "Interventions can work, and they do work." Juana believes that they are catching students up. Intervention providers at UISD all agree that MTSS provides a multi-tiered systematic approach to addressing students' academic, behavioral, and social-emotional needs, ultimately leading to student success (Sailor et al., 2021).

Implications for Policy and Practice

School closures, regardless of length, negatively impact students' academic achievement (Haeck & Larose, 2022; Maldonado & De Witte, 2022; Zierer, 2021). Therefore, the study of the lived experiences of Tier 3 early reading intervention providers offers an opportunity to consider changes to policy and practices, not only for Covid-19-related school closures but in preparation for any school closure caused by natural disasters, infectious disease outbreaks or any other

reason that causes schools to close for short or extended periods. This section outlines potential implications for policy and practice.

Implications for Policy

Tier 3 early reading intervention providers that participated in this study were all employed at UISD. UISD is a large school district that focuses on early reading interventions. All elementary campuses are expected to include early reading interventions as part of the best practices implemented at each campus. In addition, UISD has a dedicated MTSS department created in response to the school closures caused by Covid-19 that oversees the intervention programs. Although the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) allows states to develop intervention models (Braun et al., 2020; Choi et al., 2020; Gersten et al., 2020; Zirkel, 2018), strict guidelines have not been enforced. However, intervention providers at UISD expressed that the new strict guidelines and new research-based curriculum provided by their district have allowed them to be more intentional about providing targeted interventions and increased their level of fidelity.

Juana and Ana agree that the state of Texas should increase funding for districts to create more intervention positions. Policy should address how many intervention providers should be hired. Instead of allocating funds for the same number of intervention providers at each school, policy should mandate that the number of intervention providers hired correlate with the need of the campus. There should be enough intervention providers to support all students identified as Tier 3 based on the universal screener. Additionally, policy that states the criteria of who should be hired as an intervention provider is needed. An intervention provider should be a person who has proven to have been successful in remediating students in their classroom, is passionate about helping struggling students, can build relationships with students, demonstrate knowledge

of social-emotion learning, has a growth mindset for themselves and their students, and has high self-efficacy and believes that students can and will learn.

Policy and funding are also necessary to purchase research-based curricula. Hunter warned that if a research-based curriculum is not provided, intervention providers would “patch things together [because] they are not sure [what to use].” During her interview, Dana remarked, “MTSS is actually beneficial as we learn and understand it better.” There is a need for policy that requires professional development and capacity building that would increase the understanding and implementation of MTSS models that support Tier 3 early reading interventions.

In addition, the creation of the MTSS department has helped all stakeholders at UISD have a shared investment in student growth and success by establishing a system of collaboration and looking at students holistically by addressing students’ academic and social-emotional needs. Overall, the participants of this study see MTSS as a viable structure that could be leveraged to mitigate the academic impact seen after schools resume in-person learning after a school closure or periods of virtual learning (Sullivan et al., 2020). A policy that mandates creating an MTSS department and establishing clear intervention guidelines may also benefit other school districts as they consider ways to mitigate the adverse effects of school closures.

School closures are one of the first steps taken when a catastrophic event occurs. However, the effects are devastating. Hence, policy is needed that states that school closures should only be implemented when absolutely necessary, along with criteria of what is deemed absolutely necessary. During the Covid-19 related school closures, educators were unprepared to provide instruction virtually. Consequently, policy is needed that mandates educators be trained and prepared on different technology and pedagogical practices that have proven to be effective during virtual learning. Policy should also outline what virtual learning looks like and the

expectations for educators, parents, and students. School closures are not new and are expected to continue to occur. Therefore, policy must be in place to ensure students continue to learn at high levels to prevent future academic and social-emotional gaps.

Implications for Practice

Tier 3 early reading intervention providers at UISD expressed that interventions are helping students close academic and social-emotional gaps created or exacerbated by the Covid-19 school closures. School districts should ensure that practices revolve around the whole child, including addressing students' academic and social-emotional needs. Furthermore, Ana expressed that intervention providers should "be vocal about [their] role as an interventionist." Brandi added, "It is very important that the stakeholders in education understand the purpose of interventions and how to strategically assist students in succeeding." Efforts should be made to increase awareness of the importance of Tier 3 early reading interventions for all stakeholders, including the state of Texas, district leadership, campus leadership, classroom teachers, and parents. Brandi expressed that there is a need to keep the work of intervention providers "on the forefront" to strengthen the implementation support. Increased awareness of the role of the intervention provider and the impact interventions have on students should lead to practices that revolve around protecting intervention time. Intervention providers should not be used as substitute teachers to cover classrooms. Intervention providers are skilled personnel that should be protected and expected to provide targeted interventions with fidelity.

Despite the many challenges faced in schools worldwide, intervention providers at UISD shared that they are grateful to be back to in-person learning and have welcomed the changes their district has made in response to the school closure. District leaders may need to consider implementing "a strong program and [increase] ...awareness at the highest levels of [the] district

of the significant needs of [the] schools. Schools need to have quality intervention materials with strong phonics and [phonological] awareness components, as well as building fluency and comprehension,” Ana offered. Other intervention providers may also benefit by aligning their practices to include a systematic approach and becoming more intentional about meeting students’ needs by ensuring their actions revolve around data, explicitly teaching foundational reading skills, and fostering a shared investment in students’ success with parents, classroom teachers, campus leadership, and district leadership. Strong partnerships between all stakeholders are necessary for the success of Tier 3 early reading interventions. Intervention providers cannot do the work independently. Consequently, campus leaders should create “a school-wide plan that ensures [that interventions] are happening,” Ana suggested.

Theoretical and Empirical Implications

The theories that guided this study were the Vygotskian sociocultural theory of human learning (1978) and Bandura’s (1977a) self-efficacy theory. The Vygotskian sociocultural theory of human learning highlights students’ need for social interactions as part of their learning. Bandura’s (1977a) self-efficacy theory focuses on how intervention providers see themselves as capable of addressing student needs after a school closure and how those views affect their efforts, successes, and, ultimately, student achievement. This study confirmed that students learn through social interactions and suffer academically and socially when those connections are severed during school closures.

This study helps to understand and apply the Vygotskian sociocultural theory by highlighting the effects of the severed connection between students and knowledgeable adults necessary for new learning to occur within the student’s current ability levels. Intervention providers at UISD experienced firsthand how most students lost their ability to communicate

effectively, became dependent on technology, and became stagnant in their progress in learning to read. This study shows how intervention providers applied the Vygotskian sociocultural theory upon returning to in-person learning by prioritizing a systematic approach to building relationships with students, providing increased opportunities for interactions and hands-on activities, and explicitly teaching foundational skills to address the diminished levels of learning incurred during the school closure. This study also confirms that when intervention providers believe that they are capable of helping students close academic and social gaps, they are more invested in their work, get intrinsically motivated to help students succeed, and find joy in what they do regardless of the challenges faced when in-person learning resumes. The data collected in this study provided additional evidence reinforcing Bandura's (1977a) self-efficacy theory. The application of this theory is realized because participants had high levels of self-efficacy, resulting in increased levels of commitment and effort that yielded better student performance.

Natural disasters and infectious disease outbreaks are not new occurrences and are expected to increase (Berlemann, 2016); hence, our knowledge of how they affect all aspects of our lives must also increase to help us be better prepared to deal with the aftermath. Much research has focused on school closures' effects on students' academic, social-emotional, and behavioral well-being (Haack & Larose, 2022; Maldonado & De Witte, 2022; Zierer, 2021). However, there was a noticeable gap in the literature concerning the perspective of those tasked with providing interventions to affected students (Yakut, 2021). This study adds to the empirical knowledge by narrowing the gap in the literature and bringing to light the lived experiences of Tier 3 early reading intervention providers. This study adds to the professional body of knowledge on the effects of school closure, the impact of natural disasters and disease outbreaks, and the experiences of intervention providers.

In addition, this study confirms previous research that suggests that MTSS is a structure that could be leveraged to mitigate the academic impact seen after schools resume in-person learning after a school closure (Sullivan et al., 2020). This study also expands knowledge of barriers to successful Tier 3 interventions, such as lack of fidelity of implementation, specifically when intervention providers are pulled to cover classrooms (Coyne et al., 2018). Furthermore, this study highlights previous research on the importance of providing early reading interventions to optimize brain malleability (Dweck, 2006; Perez-Johnson & Maynard, 2007) even when brain muscles have been weakened due to a lack of learning opportunities during a school closure. Lastly, this study further supports prior research on the science of reading and the importance of explicitly teaching foundational reading skills such as phonological awareness, phonics, sight words, and fluency (Bratsch-Hines et al., 2020; Moats, 2020; Petscher et al., 2020).

Limitations and Delimitations

UISD is a large district serving approximately 33,000 pre-kindergartens to twelfth-grade students in 37 school campuses, of which 20 are elementary (kindergarten through fifth-grade). However, the focus of this study was the lived experiences of Tier 3 early reading intervention providers at UISD. Therefore, the option to participate in the study was only extended to the early reading providers at all 20 elementary campuses, specifically supporting students in kindergarten, first, or second-grade. All elementary schools have at least one designated intervention provider to deliver early reading support for students at risk for reading difficulties. However, only 10 early reading intervention providers agreed to participate in the study.

Consequently, a limitation of the study was the small sample size, and the experiences of the 10 participants may not represent that of a larger population. Nine of the 10 participants were

female, and only one was male. This was an additional limitation of the study, as having more diversity may have yielded different outcomes and perspectives. Tier 3 early reading intervention providers are perceived to be the intervention experts and leaders at their campuses. Therefore, a possible limitation of this research was that participants might have felt pressure to provide answers during their interviews, letter writing, and questionnaires that they believed were correct rather than sharing their experiences honestly.

A delimitation of this study is the choice to only focus on early reading intervention providers at UISD. UISD was explicitly selected because it created an MTSS department to respond to the Covid-19-related school closure. UISD recognized that students were gravely affected by the school closure and that efforts had to focus on addressing students' academic and social-emotional gaps created or exacerbated by the school closure. The choice to solely focus on early grades, kinder, first, or second, was because it is in the early grades that foundational reading skills are taught and developed. Foundational skills were difficult to address while schools were closed, and instruction was provided virtually. However, including several districts and reading intervention providers in other grade levels may increase the ability to generalize the experiences of intervention providers after a school closure.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study aims to shed light on the experiences of trained reading interventionists who, through their interactions, help close reading gaps for young students most in need three years after a school closure; however, there is more to be learned about the effects of school closures and the work of intervention providers. Therefore, future research should include students in grades older than second-grade. Although the Covid-19 school closures affected younger students gravely, older students also missed opportunities to learn and develop foundational

reading skills, as expressed by many of the intervention providers participating in this study. Consequently, exploring how intervention providers experience supporting older students after a school closure would expand upon this study. Future research could replicate this study at smaller and larger school districts to help identify how school closures affected districts with different demographics.

A big issue that school districts face, and that impact the experiences of intervention providers, is the increasing teacher shortage; therefore, future research should explore how school closures affect teacher recruitment and retention. Research could also focus on how school closures contribute to the recruitment and retention of intervention providers. Research should also investigate classroom teachers' perception of the work of intervention providers and how those perceptions impact the fidelity and effectiveness of Tier 3 interventions. Additional research should explore the long-term effects of school closures on student academic and social-emotional achievement five years (and beyond) after a school closure. This study should be replicated five years after the Covid-19 related school closure to see how the experiences of Tier 3 early reading intervention providers have evolved from three to five years.

Conclusion

The Covid-19 pandemic was an unprecedented global disaster that caused schools to close worldwide (Anderson, 2021). Unfortunately, it was not the first-time schools had to close to deal with extenuating circumstances (González & Bonal, 2021), and arguably as natural disasters and infectious diseases increase (CRED, 2022), it will likely not be the last. School closures negatively impact students' academic and social-emotional health (Haeck & Larose, 2022). The work of Tier 3 early reading intervention providers is of utmost importance after a school closure. However, there was a gap in the literature concerning the perspective of

intervention providers (Yakut, 2021). Therefore, the purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the lived experiences of Tier 3 early reading intervention providers at the Urban Independent School District in Texas three years after a school closure.

The Vygotskian (1978) sociocultural theory of human learning and Bandura's (1977a) self-efficacy theory were the foundation for this study. Moustakas' transcendental phenomenological model was used to identify the essence of the phenomenon experienced by the participants. Data was collected and triangulated using participant interviews, open-ended questionnaires, and letter writing. In this study, data revealed that intervention providers' work intensified after the school closure. They want a systematic approach to interventions and believe their work is essential. Implications from this study include the need for policy that clearly outlines the work of intervention providers and practices that ensure intentional efforts to support individual student needs. This study brings an awareness of the importance of the role of Tier 3 intervention providers after a school closure. Student deficits after a school closure are extensive, and all stakeholders must understand that there is a need for interventions to be provided systematically and with fidelity. Based on this study, all stakeholders, including national and state legislators, district leadership, campus leadership, classroom teachers, and parents, must partner to propel Tier 3 early reading intervention efforts after a school closure. When intervention providers are valued and supported, their work translates to increased levels of student achievement that carry over to adulthood which is the ultimate goal of all educators.

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Appendix A: IRB Approval Letter**LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.**
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

March 17, 2023

Sue Ellen Washington
Laura Jones

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY22-23-993 THE EXPERIENCES OF TIER 3 EARLY READING INTERVENTION PROVIDERS THREE YEARS AFTER A SCHOOL CLOSURE: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

Dear Sue Ellen Washington, Laura Jones,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.


Your study falls under the following exemption category, which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:104(d):

Category 2.(iii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:

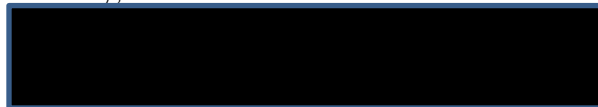
The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by §46.111(a)(7).

Your stamped consent form(s) and final versions of your study documents can be found under the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study on Cayuse IRB. Your stamped consent form(s) should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document(s) should be made available without alteration.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at 

Sincerely,



Appendix B: Recruitment Letter

Dear [Recipient]:

As a student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree. The purpose of my research is to describe the lived experiences of Tier 3 early reading intervention providers at the Urban Independent School District (UISD) in Texas three years after a school closure, and I am writing to invite eligible participants to join my study.

Participants must be a current Tier 3 early reading intervention provider at UISD. Participants, if willing, will be asked to participate in a Zoom interview that will take approximately one hour. I will transcribe the interview and you will be asked to review the transcript for accuracy. You will have two weeks from the time you receive the transcripts to return to me with your feedback. You will then be asked to write a letter of at least two to three paragraphs to hypothetical future Tier 3 early reading intervention providers, you will have two weeks to return this letter via mail, email, or google doc. Lastly you will be asked to complete a google form of 12 questions aimed at exploring your beliefs, attitudes, mental state, and actions in Tier 3 early reading interventions three years after a school closure. The questionnaire should take no more than 15 minutes to complete, and you will have one week to return it to me. Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but the information will remain confidential, and you will remain anonymous

To participate, please contact me at [REDACTED] or [REDACTED] to schedule an interview.

A consent document is attached to this email. The consent document contains additional information about my research. If you choose to participate, you will need to sign the consent document and return it to me at the time of the interview, or earlier.

Sincerely,

Sue Ellen Washington
Doctoral Student



Appendix C: Consent Form

Title of the Project: The experiences of Tier 3 early reading intervention providers three years after a school closure: A phenomenological study

Principal Investigator: Sue-Ellen Washington, Doctoral Candidate, School of Education, Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be a current Tier 3 early reading intervention provider at UISD. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research.

What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of the study is to describe the lived experiences of Tier 3 early reading intervention providers at the Urban Independent School District in Texas three after a school closure.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following:

1. Participate in a Zoom interview that will take no more than an hour. I will transcribe the interview and you will be asked to review the transcript for accuracy. You will have two weeks from the time you receive the transcripts to return to me with your feedback.
2. Write a letter of at least two to three paragraphs to hypothetical future Tier 3 early reading intervention providers, including giving them advice on how to address intervention after a school closure and sharing the knowledge you acquired through your personal experience with providing intervention three years after a school closure. You will have two weeks to return their letters via mail, email, or google doc.
3. Complete a google form of 12 questions aimed at exploring your beliefs, attitudes, mental state, and actions in Tier 3 early reading interventions three years after a school closure. The questionnaire will take no more than 15 minutes to complete, and you will have one week to return to me.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Benefits to society include shedding light on the experiences of intervention providers, as they are tasked with addressing student needs that are vital to students' short- and long-term success. In addition, a valuable by-product of this study might be the creation of innovative and impactful professional development geared to address the needs of intervention providers after a school closure.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The expected risks from participating in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- Participant responses will be kept confidential by replacing names with pseudonyms.
- Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.
- Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer for three years and then deleted. The researcher and members of her doctoral committee will have access to these recordings.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study Sue Ellen Washington. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at [REDACTED] and/or [REDACTED]. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Laura Jones, at [REDACTED].

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the IRB. Our physical address is

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.

Your Consent

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

The researcher has my permission to video-record me as part of my participation in this study.

Printed Subject Name

Signature & Date

Appendix D: Individual Interview Questions

Standardized Interview Questions

1. Please describe your background and what led you to begin your career in education.

CRQ

2. When and how did you transition from the classroom to intervention provider? CRQ

3. Please describe your current position as an intervention provider; Please include all grades and subjects you service. CRQ

4. How has your role changed, if at all, since your district experienced the school closures?

SQ1, SQ4

5. What actions do you take as an early reading intervention provider to address the academic gaps created or exacerbated by the school closure? CRQ, SQ4

6. How would you describe your experience as a Tier 3 early reading intervention provider three years after the school closure? SQ1

7. Please describe your challenges when providing Tier 3 early reading interventions three years after-school closures. SQ1, SQ2, SQ3, SQ4

8. How have Tier 3 early reading interventions changed, if at all, since the school closure?

SQ2, SQ3

9. What have you learned about interventions after-school closures? SQ2

10. Please describe what you believe are successful Tier 3 early reading intervention strategies after the school closures. SQ2

11. What do you think schools can do to ensure the success of Tier 3 early reading interventions after a school closure? SQ3

12. What do you think districts can do to ensure the success of Tier 3 early reading interventions after a school closure? SQ3
13. What do you think the state of Texas can do to ensure the success of Tier 3 early reading interventions after a school closure? SQ3
14. What else would you like to add to our discussion of your experience with Tier 3 early reading interventions two years after a school closure? CRQ

Appendix E: Letter Writing Prompt

Instructions: Think about your experience with providing Tier 3 early reading interventions three years after a school closure. Write a letter of at least two to three paragraphs to hypothetical future Tier 3 early reading intervention providers giving them advice on how to address early reading interventions after a school closure. Be sure to share the knowledge that you have acquired through your personal experience with providing Tier 3 early reading interventions after a school closure. Please return your letter to me within two weeks via mail, email, or google doc.

Appendix F: Questionnaire

Please select the statement that best applies to you?

1. What age group do you belong to? CRQ
 - a. 25 and younger
 - b. 26-35
 - c. 36-45
 - d. 46 and older
2. How many years of teaching experience do you have? CRQ
 - a. 0-5
 - b. 6-10
 - c. 15-20
 - d. 21 or more
3. On a scale of 1-4 (1- Not at all, 2- Hardly true, 3- Moderately true, 4- Exactly true) how true is the following statement? I believe I am the best person to support my Tier 3 early reading students after the school closure. SQ3
4. On a scale of 1-4 (1- Not at all, 2- Hardly true, 3- Moderately true, 4- Exactly true) how true is the following statement? I am confident that I can efficiently deal with unexpected events, such as unexpected school closures. SQ3, SQ4
5. On a scale of 1-4 (1- Not at all, 2- Hardly true, 3- Moderately true, 4- Exactly true) how true is the following statement? Thanks to my resourcefulness, I am able to provide adequate reading interventions to my Tier 3 early reading students, after a school closure. SQ3, SQ4

6. On a scale of 1-4 (1- Not at all, 2- Hardly true, 3- Moderately true, 4- Exactly true) how true is the following statement? I can solve most problems related to providing Tier 3 early reading interventions after a school closure, if I invest enough effort. SQ3, SQ4
7. On a scale of 1-4 (1- Not at all, 2- Hardly true, 3- Moderately true, 4- Exactly true) how true is the following statement? I can remain calm when facing difficulties associated with providing Tier 3 early reading interventions after a school closure, because I can rely on my coping abilities. SQ3
8. On a scale of 1-4 (1- Not at all, 2- Hardly true, 3- Moderately true, 4- Exactly true) how true is the following statement? When confronted with a problem associated with providing Tier 3 early reading interventions after a school closure, I can usually find several solutions. SQ2

The following are open-ended questions, please answer as thoroughly as possible.

9. How do you believe students were affected by the school closure? SQ1
10. How prepared were you to provide Tier 3 early reading interventions after the school closure? Please explain. SQ3, SQ4
11. What are your beliefs and attitudes about Tier 3 early reading interventions three years after the school closure? SQ1, SQ2
12. What additional information do you want to share with other educators about the experience of providing Tier 3 early reading intervention after-school closures? CRQ