

PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY ON TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF TIER 1 AND THE
ADULT LEARNER'S APPLICATION OF THE KNOWLEDGE

by Michelle Stapp

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA

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Abstract

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to examine teachers' experiences of implementing professional development into Tier 1 instruction at three elementary schools in North Central Texas. Participating teachers had at least three years of experience in grades Pre-Kindergarten through fifth. The leading theory which guided this study was the theory of andragogy by Knowles. Moreover, when teachers had an opportunity to self-reflect and understand how the learned strategies would improve student academic success, the implementation were heightened. The problem with Tier 1 professional development was that teachers were not involved in planning for the instructional strategies, which had the potential to positively impact their Tier 1 instruction. The question that needed to be answered is how did elementary teachers implement newly learned knowledge into Tier 1 instruction? The gap in current research lied in neglecting to inquire about how PD is integrated into their Tier 1 instruction through teacher perceptions. Participating teachers were randomly sampled from the three elementary schools in Mayberry Independent School District. Data was collected from interviews, writing and reflecting over a given prompt, and collaboration during focus groups. The analysis approach was to view of the data collected through epoche bracketing and analyzing transcripts to find emerging themes in the teacher's lived experiences. The results revealed four distinct themes through data collection: (a) professional development, (b) Tier 1 instruction, (c) barriers, and (d) building critical thinking.

Keywords: Multi-tiered system of supports, professional development, critical thinking, Tier 1

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to God, who has given me the strength to pursue this degree!

I dedicate this to my husband, who has supported, encouraged, and motivated me through the entire process.

To my parents, who modeled a great work ethic and taught me to work hard for my achievements.

To my sister, who has always encouraged me and stood beside me through life.

To my children, Zoe and Aly, may you never stop learning.

To the rest of my family, who have always cheered me on in all endeavors.

To all my colleagues over the past four years who have cheered, listened, and discussed this dissertation with me.

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I am so thankful that God has led me through this journey of growth and personal reflection. This study would never happen without the support and encouragement of my family. They have been beside me throughout each step continually cheering me on in a quest for higher education. Carl, my husband, has always listened to and encouraged me. YiaYia and Papu, my parents, have stood by my side, praying for my education and encouraging me by always pointing me to Christ, while always helping out with all activities to ensure I have time to study. Zoe and Aly, my daughters, are always watching and ensuring that I never give up. My sister, Julie, is my sounding board as she is in the throes of education. The rest of my family not mentioned continually praying for guidance and finishing this degree. Also, to Mrs. Jackson and Mrs. Wade, who would continually listen, read, and encourage me through each step of this process.

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List of Abbreviations

Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS)

Professional Development (PD)

Professional Learning Communities (PLC)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

Tier 1 classroom instruction, an element of a multi-tiered support system (MTSS), and teacher professional development (PD) have been seen by teachers as two separate components of teaching (Taylor, 2015). Though both are equally important to education, teachers needed to understand how they are interconnected. They needed to recognize the correlation of integrating strategies into Tier 1 instruction learned during PD (Taylor, 2015). Though results did not appear immediately, implementing highly effective Tier 1 instructional strategies was necessary, and action needed to be taken (Buffum et al., 2018).

In this chapter, MTSS and professional development were discussed independently, and how they were interconnected. The problem state and the background of MTSS and PD also was described. Finally, the purpose and significance of this study were noted, as well as the gap in the current research being identified, including research questions and definitions of key terms.

Background

Many studies have been conducted on professional development and MTSS. However, the problem was that teachers did not implement the learned strategies and knowledge with fidelity in their classrooms (Barrett & Newman, 2018; Blanks, 2013; Prasse et al., 2012). If gaps were not addressed and specifically targeted during Tier 1 instruction, an increased number of students were identified and found to require special services (Jitendra et al., 2017; Swanson et al., 2017). Students were inappropriately labeled when this occurred, affecting their educational experience and adulthood. When gaps were addressed through adequate strategies during Tier 1 instruction, student success did change the future of an individual's academic career. If Tier 1 instruction successfully met all students' needs, targeted instruction in Tier 2 and 3 was

unnecessary for fewer students (Swanson et al., 2017). Self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977) and the theory of andragogy (Knowles, 1979) were a few of the theoretical concepts that require an examination to understand the background of how professional development could impact MTSS. For these two theories to be utilized in the classroom, teachers and students had to understand how learning experiences could affect their future learning and understanding. Additionally, to understand the statement of the problem, one needed also to understand MTSS and PD in historical, social, and theoretical contexts.

Historical Context

To understand how MTSS and PD were interconnected with instruction and student success, the background of both must be taken into account. They each started for different purposes, but they have both demonstrated a profound impact on students.

MTSS

According to Sailor et al. (2021), MTSS evolved from special education. Dennis (2015) also noted that educators expressed concern about how to support student growth precisely due to the lack of student success with grade-level skills. During the 19th century, the identification of students who needed special education depended upon the judgment of one person or test (Berninger, 2006). However, states began to realize that this was not in the best interest of students and reauthorized the Individuals with Disability Act of 2004. Thus, the realization was born that the use of specialized tests as well as classroom data, should be used in the identification process. As these changes took place, it was noted that students needed to receive targeted instruction through various tiers before being considered for special education; therefore, MTSS was created (Berninger, 2006). According to Gamm et al. (2012), this model included specific interventions for academics and behaviors to support student success. The

intensities and frequencies were determined based on the tier in which the student receives interventions (Gamm et al., 2012).

Professional Development

According to Bergmark (2020), Europe implemented professional development after realizing that teachers understood skills and strategies but often needed to implement those practices in their school settings. The year of implementation was not directly stated. However, after seeing the benefits in Europe resulting from this training, the United States emulated its methods in the early 1990s. During this time, professional development began to be recognized as a critical teacher training technique. Then, between 1994 and 1995, professional development standards were developed (Anonymous, 2021). Professional development was to help teachers become engaged as active participants in their learning instead of merely learning through lectures. By the late 1990s, a study was conducted to determine if professional development positively impacted instruction (Anonymous, 2021). In 2001, President George W. Bush signed into act No Child Left Behind, which ensured that schools and appropriate funding recruited highly qualified teachers providing for adequate professional development (Anonymous, 2021). After this act was signed, new PD standards were also released (Anonymous, 2021). Finally, in 2011, the standards were released as a third version (Anonymous, 2021). As the Education Act first took effect in Sweden in 1985 and was revised in 2011, teachers began to learn how to apply their knowledge and skills in the classroom with quality instruction using research-based strategies (Bergmark, 2020).

Social Context

When schools and districts did not understand how to support teachers with effective implementation of strategies into Tier 1 instruction, and student success was not impacted,

several social contexts were affected. First, when students did not feel successful, it led to a lack of motivation to learn, impacting peer relationships. When this occurred, students tended to become introverted and less likely to socialize with friends. They did not want to be seen as different; therefore, it was hard for them to feel comfortable and valued in the classroom environment (Fischer et al., 2018; Kim et al., 2019; Suartama et al., 2019; Upadyaya & Salmela-Aro, 2013).

Another factor that was considered in the social context was student and teacher burnout. When students continually felt inadequate in learning and applying knowledge successfully, they gave up and lost the engagement they may have otherwise had at school. When they did not feel adequately prepared, teachers thought they were failing students and, therefore, ill-equipped to provide quality education in their classrooms. Teachers sometimes thought the PD did not directly impact their classroom and saw it as meaningless. These feelings resulted in turnover at the school and the process with new educators to ensure quality instruction took place again. Training new teachers on policies, procedures, content, and instruction took time. Often, schools did not have sufficient resources or time to retrain their educators, which resulted in a never-ending cycle (Fischer et al., 2018; Madigan & Kim, 2021; Saloviita & Pakarinen, 2021; Upadyaya & Salmela-Aro, 2013).

This study was able to impact students and teachers directly. When teachers felt their PD was significant to their content and classroom instruction, it increased the likelihood that PD would be integrated into instruction (Fischer et al., 2018; Kim et al., 2019; Saloviita & Pakarinen, 2021). When this occurred, student learning was positively impacted (Fischer et al., 2018; Kim et al., 2019). As teachers were able to self-reflect on their teaching experiences and saw student success, they continued to grow as highly qualified professionals (Fischer et al.,

2018; Kim et al., 2019). As Fischer et al. (2018) concluded, this motivated teachers to continue to pursue PD that was relevant and would continue to impact instruction positively.

Theoretical Context

Knowles (1979) utilized the theory of andragogy when delving into the interconnectedness of MTSS and PD. This theory examined adults' learning, emphasizing the learner (Knowles et al., 2015). In 1980, according to Pappas (2013), Knowles argued that four assumptions in the theory of andragogy should consider adult learners as they mature. First, as individuals learned through experiences, they became less dependent on others and relied more on themselves. The second assumption of adult learners was that the more they learned, the potential for earning additional income occurred and could be utilized as a resource for learning. Third, as the adult learner became ready to learn, they focused on acquiring their desired skills. The fourth assumption included learners understanding how critical it was to apply the new knowledge. Frequently learners gained new strategies and learning but postponed the application (Knowles et al., 2015; Pappas, 2013). In 1984, Knowles added a fifth assumption stating that internal motivation transpired for adult learners (Pappas, 2013). Knowles later expressed that adult learners needed to understand the reason for learning and the application of their instruction and immediate needs (Harper & Ross, 2011; Knowles et al., 2015). Knowles also discussed some principles adult learners possessed in the theory of andragogy. One principle included the need for adult learners to be included in the planning and evaluation of instruction. Additionally, they should have considered lived experiences as a basis for education. Another principle included how learning was most impactful when it was relevant and meaningful to the learner. Finally, learning evolved from being content-centered to problem-centered as the learner was able to effectively apply their learning throughout instruction (Pappas, 2013).

Professional development was often taught and received by adults. According to Harper and Ross (2011), Knowles discussed characteristics when training adult learners. The trainer or teacher must have had experience in the content and be passionate about the subject matter they are instructing. Training adults was markedly different from children, though methods could have been similar. The approach, the hands-on experiences, and the willingness to understand and build upon the knowledge adults possess were all critical pieces to consider when planning training. Creativity should also have played a role while working to meet the needs of the learners (Harper & Ross, 2011).

When teachers and students could understand how to take their newly acquired knowledge and apply it to their content, their ability to think critically became enhanced. Both parties were empowered as they demonstrated inevitable success when strategies were learned and used effectively.

Problem Statement

The problem was that the teachers and students were often not empowered by professional development because the newly acquired knowledge was not appropriately applied to instruction. Some root causes for this problem included time, lack of experience, too many directives, quick burnout, and teachers not self-actualizing the knowledge learned. As a result, teachers became overwhelmed and unsure how to apply their knowledge. With the culmination of all these factors, teachers were not strategically integrating newly acquired knowledge and skills from PD into Tier 1 instruction. When this occurred, students' academics may suffer (Abrammovich & Miedijensky, 2019; Ekinici & Acar, 2019; Fischer et al., 2018; Jitendra et al., 2017; Popova et al., 2021; Sprott, 2019). On many occasions, teachers sat in professional development required by their district or campus, only to return to their classrooms without any

attempt to implement what was taught. Teachers needed to feel empowered with the knowledge and understanding to connect PD and Tier 1 instruction (Ekinici & Acar, 2019; Smith et al., 2020). Studies have been conducted on effective professional development and teacher perceptions on this issue (Ekinici & Acar, 2019). Teacher collaboration has been noted to impact the active learning of strategies; however, when this opportunity was absent, implementation was limited (Abrammovich & Miedijensky, 2019, Ekinici & Acar, 2019).

With the noted problem, the gap in current research lied in neglecting to inquire about teachers' perceptions of how the new knowledge learned during PD applied to Tier 1 instruction and, ultimately, student success. When schools and districts did not ask for feedback from those implementing instruction taught during PD, current methods continued to be used, which may not be research-based or appropriate to instruction. Thus, student success was stagnant, and skills were not mastered.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to examine teachers' experiences of implementing professional development into Tier 1 instruction at three elementary schools in North Central Texas. At this stage in the research, the lived experiences of implementing PD into Tier 1 instruction was generally defined as the application of new knowledge. Understanding these allowed teachers to implement successful Tier 1 instruction and help students become critical thinkers (Knowles, 1979). These teachers have been involved in professional development to impact Tier 1 instruction positively. At this stage in the research, Tier 1 instruction was defined as the instruction that every student is entitled to receive and part of the core content (Buffum et al., 2018).

Significance of the Study

Though there have been studies conducted on the interconnectedness of MTSS and PD, schools and districts continued to question how to appropriately intervene with students if teacher perceptions were not collected and taken into consideration (Al Otaiba et al., 2015; Barrett & Newman, 2018; Mason et al., 2019). To grasp the significance of the study, one must have understood the theories related, observations or experience, and practicality. Teachers needed to understand that professional development was intended to improve students' critical thinking and positively impact knowledge application (Fasko & Fair, 2021; Machynska & Boiko, 2020). This occurred through self-reflection and consistent practice of skills seen in the theory of andragogy (Machynska & Boiko, 2020).

Theoretical Significance

The guiding theory of this study was the theory of andragogy (Basma & Savage, 2018; Machynska & Boiko, 2020). Basma and Savage (2018) agreed that teachers must be reflective in their teaching to improve their instructional strategies. Self-reflection occurred as teachers matured in their learning and experiences. Teachers' personal and professional knowledge supported their ability to apply newly learned skills in the classroom. If educators could self-reflect, they were better equipped to identify the type of professional development that would positively impact their Tier 1 instruction. Ensuring that teachers understood how to apply any knowledge learned to help students think critically and improve success would define professional learning, which aided in quality Tier 1 instruction.

Empirical Significance

With this study, the perceptions had to be understood of those currently in the field that would help schools plan better PD to impact teachers. Also, what needed to occur after PD while

teachers were allowed to plan and implement strategies during instruction needed to be understood. Teachers understood which skills were the most significant to teach while they considered how to take a piece of new knowledge and apply it to instruction (Dolfing et al., 2020; Kiemer et al., 2016; Sailor et al., 2021). This helped teachers understand the control of the implementation of the strategy while also allowing them to feel competent in their capabilities (Kiemer et al., 2016). Teachers should never have felt as though they were being judged when they tried one strategy and it only worked for some students (Dolfing et al., 2020; Sailor et al., 2021). Dolfing et al. (2020) added that when teachers felt they needed more confidence with new knowledge learned, they tended to make better instructional decisions with application into instruction. This study helped to mitigate some hesitations by being proactive regarding understanding how teachers were able to integrate the new knowledge into Tier 1 instruction with student success.

Practical Significance

When this study was completed, schools would positively have impacted how to best support teachers with the implementation of knowledge and skills learned during professional development on specific instructional strategies to impact Tier 1 instruction (Gamm et al., 2012). One significant effect of this study was that teachers could utilize self-efficacy in their practices. They were more adequately equipped for instruction when they analyzed positive student data and related it to skills incorporated into Tier 1 instruction (Bandura, 1977). Due to self-efficacy and positive results, students then, in turn, were able to understand the importance of the learning experiences (Bandura, 1977; Knowles, 1979). The significance of this study impacted student growth with knowledge and skills, ultimately impacting future learning and opportunities due to the increased self-efficacy and determination (Gannouni & Ramboarison-Lalao, 2016). Among

the three elementary schools that participated in this study, students were often in MTSS and incorrectly labeled for special education services. The practical significance of this study meant having the understanding of what Tier 1 resources and supports were necessary to ensure that all students received quality Tier 1 instruction.

Research Questions

Teachers attended professional development about research-based strategies but often needed help with the implementation of the learned strategies. The research questions chosen aided in gaining teacher insights into the supports and resources necessary for the integration of the strategies into Tier 1 instruction after attending professional development. The four questions below were what guided the study to help educators with regard to PD and Tier 1 instruction.

Central Research Question

How do elementary teachers implement newly learned knowledge into Tier 1 instruction?

Sub-Question One

What did Tier 1 instruction look like in the classroom?

Sub-Question Two

How did elementary teachers develop and apply critical thinking of new knowledge into Tier 1 instruction?

Sub-Question Three

What barriers did teachers experience that had hindered them in applying new knowledge from PD into Tier 1 instruction to support student success?

Definitions

1. *Multi-tiered support system* - Multi-tiered support system (MTSS) involved three tiers in which students were placed according to their needs for intervention on targeted skill (Jitendra et al., 2017).
2. *Professional Development* - Professional development (PD) improved quality of classroom instruction with the creation of self-reflection in teachers which led to a greater understanding in teaching professionalism (Dolly & Oda, 1997).
3. *Tier 1* - Tier 1 instruction referred to the instruction which all students received during their core content (Jitendra et al., 2017; Turse & Albrecht, 2015).

Summary

When schools and districts considered the perceptions of how to support teachers effectively with strategies learned during professional development, it significantly impacted the realm of education. This occurred by understanding the background of PD and MTSS through various contexts. The problem was not allowing teachers to have a voice in determining what supports and resources were necessary to integrate instructional strategies learned during PD into Tier 1 instruction. The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to examine teachers' experiences of implementing professional development into Tier 1 instruction at three elementary schools in North Central Texas. The significance of the study allowed schools to understand the necessary resources and the level of support teachers required to implement strategies and successfully increased student success. Schools did not need to label students before ensuring they received high-quality instruction. When teachers and students were encouraged to become active in their learning experiences, they possessed increased levels of

self-esteem, which resulted in a heightened capacity to demonstrate how new knowledge would positively impact future generations.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

This chapter will present a review of the current literature related to professional development and Tier 1 instruction. A systematic review of the literature was conducted to explore the problem with professional development and the implications on the impact of Tier 1 instruction. The first section will summarize the theories relevant to professional development, followed by a synthesis of recent literature on professional development and Tier 1 instruction. The following section will focus on how these are interconnected. The literature will also address the relationship between professional development and Tier 1 instruction and the resulting student success. Finally, a gap in the literature will be identified, presenting a likely need for the current study.

Theoretical Framework

The theory of andragogy is the theoretical framework to consider for professional development and Tier 1 instruction (Ajani, 2021; Knowles, 1975; Machynska & Boiko, 2020; Mews, 2020; Popova et al., 2020; Rocco et al., 2020). Forrest and Peterson (2006) describe andragogy as how to teach adult learners. This theory originated by Alexander Kapp and explained that through becoming reflective, learning could be experienced by adults and children (Rocco et al., 2020). In the theory of andragogy, Malcom Knowles (1975) stated that adult learners are more concerned with the process of learning, not the content. The theory is related closely to adult learners (Knowles et al., 2015). It can also be added that the framework for andragogy relies on the learner's self-awareness of the learning process while utilizing life experiences to increase knowledge (Mann & Willans, 2020; Rocco et al., 2020). Knowles (1980) also states that as an adult learner matures, the learner accumulates a growing reservoir of

experience that becomes an increasing resource for learning. The learner's experience should form the foundation for the learning activities. Knowles also discusses that there are five steps to attaining comprehensive self-learning that would inevitably lead to independent learning and critical thinking (Abdullah et al., 2021; Abedini et al., 2021). First needs to be identified, then create a plan of what the learning needs are currently, next identify resources, choose and implement a learning strategy and finally evaluate the outcomes (Abdullah et al., 2021). When these five steps are followed throughout PD and Tier 1 instruction, the theory of andragogy is a reality (Abdullah et al., 2021; Abedini et al., 2021).

Understanding these experiences is vital when considering professional development. If adults do not learn adequately, the outcome will not apply to Tier 1 instruction (Knowles, 1975). Adults must be able to understand their strengths and areas of refinement as they begin their learning, considering strengths and refinements (Forrest & Peterson, 2006; Knowles et al., 2015; Pappas, 2013). Adult learners must also recognize how to utilize their previous experiences when acquiring new knowledge (Forrest & Peterson, 2006). Forrest and Peterson (2006) also discuss how adult learners must be problem-centered. Educators should have the opportunity to reflect on their individual needs and understand the resources required and the objective behind the learning (Rocco et al., 2020). Adults are most interested in learning content that has immediate relevance and impact on their job or personal life (Knowles, 1984).

Once this is accomplished, educators need to determine if their learning is at the optimal level (Knowles, 1975). According to Knowles (1975), when this theory is used in the application of learning, critical thinking is enhanced as teachers work to become competent in implementing instructional strategies. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) would also agree that teachers will

directly impact their practices if they fully understand the skills taught. When this takes place, student success is inevitable.

Notably, when learning is at the optimal level, teachers must be reflective in their teaching to improve their instructional strategies. This occurs as teachers mature in their learning and experiences (Basma & Savage, 2018; Meier et al., 2020). When teachers possess good personal and professional knowledge, it supports awareness of how the new knowledge is applied in the classroom. If educators can self-reflect, they are better equipped to identify the type of professional development that will positively impact their Tier 1 instruction

Additionally, adult learners must consider how professional development and Tier 1 instruction impact the general education classrooms. In order to build capacity as lifelong learners, educators should become reflective in instructional practices, be provided with multiple opportunities to practice the strategies over an extended amount of time, and experience the learning with hands-on training (Smith et al., 2020). Pappas (2013) would state that through the theory of andragogy, as adult learners mature, so do aspects of the theory. Adult learners realize they do not have to rely on others. Instead, they use their learning experiences in content as a resource for knowledge. They also possess an internal motivation and readiness to learn. This results in the educator's ability to see the full impact of applying new knowledge. Through professional development, learning experiences continue. When they can take an active role in their professional development, they will internalize and be able to implement the strategies learned confidently (Knowles, 1975; Pappas, 2013). If they do not feel comfortable with the newly learned skills, it is not likely that they will effectively integrate those strategies into Tier 1 instruction (Bandura, 1977; Knowles, 1975; Smith & Robinson, 2020). Through Tier 1 instruction, educators can reach all students; thus, it is critical that the newly acquired skills are

effectively implemented to increase student success (Hoover & Soltero-González, 2018; Jitendra et al., 2017; Rocco et al, 2020).

In this literature review, the theoretical framework will help inform participants of this study's goals and guide the research questions. Understanding how to help teachers become self-reflective while building the capacity to apply new knowledge learned into Tier 1 instruction will increase student academic achievement and build critical thinking skills, positively impacting many classrooms. When campus administration and districts know how teachers can apply their knowledge to instruction, teachers and students will benefit. Hence, teachers will then continue to use these practices when they see the positive growth of students.

Related Literature

To understand how MTSS and PD are interconnected, one must understand the various components of each of these topics, understand how adults learn, and the barriers related to the application of knowledge. MTSS includes various facets such as understanding exactly how this is defined in schools and how each tier should be specifically implemented in a classroom. Additionally, understanding challenges that educators may face can increase the understanding of this phenomenon. The other challenge is to realize how PD can empower teachers in their classrooms when educators utilize research-based practices in PD.

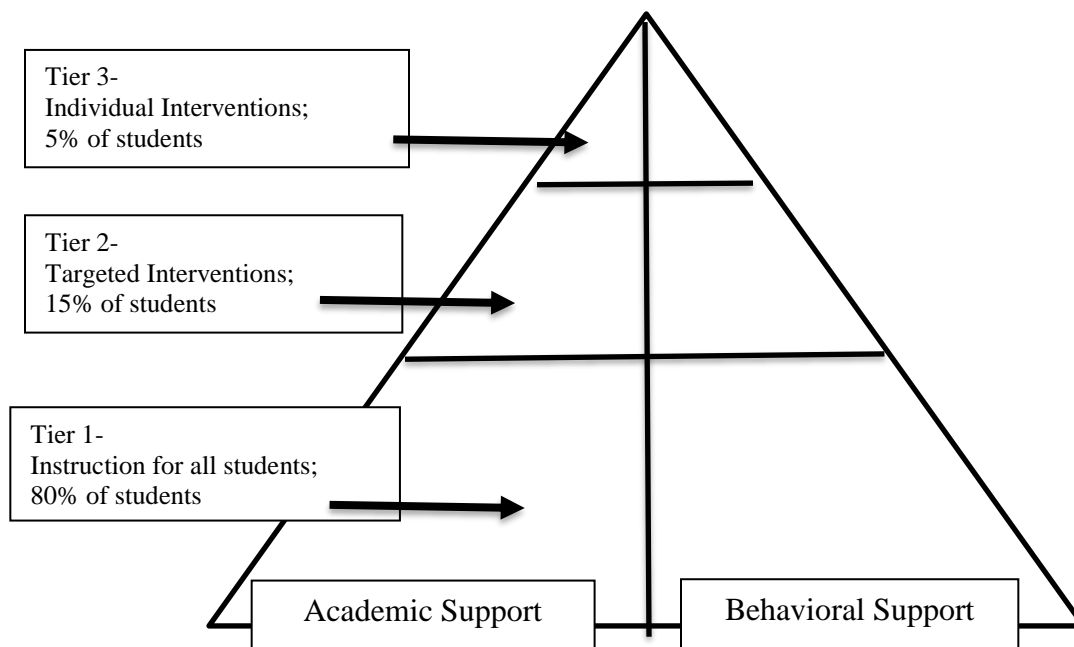
Multi-tiered Systems of Support (MTSS)

Multi-tiered support system (MTSS) involves three tiers in which students are placed according to their needs for intervention on targeted skills (Jitendra et al., 2017). Tier 1 instruction refers to the instruction which all students receive during their core content (Jitendra et al., 2017; Turse & Albrecht, 2015). MTSS can start as early as Pre-Kindergarten, impacting learning for individual students (Kong et al., 2019; Turse & Albrecht, 2015). For students to be

successful in learning, educators must provide direct and explicit instruction (Bell, 2017; Dennis, 2015). Studies specify that Tier 1 instruction should be rigorous, appropriate, and relevant for all students (Gamm et al., 2012; Jitendra et al., 2017). Quality Tier 1 instruction is critical to respond to the needs of students, as instruction is differentiated (Gamm et al., 2012; Turse & Albrecht, 2015; Wexler, 2017). Jitendra et al. (2017) and Wexler (2017) describe MTSS as a way to provide support to students by meeting students' needs. All students have access to the given curriculum and can use evidence-based tools and materials to help with mastery of skills (Turse & Albrecht, 2015; Wexler, 2017). The MTSS framework and process should always be data-driven to ensure that instruction is targeted (Braun et al., 2020; Dennis, 2015; Miller et al., 2020; Wexler, 2017). MTSS also provides ways to monitor students to ensure progress during tiered instruction (Braun et al., 2018; Wexler, 2017). During Tier 1 instruction, screeners help recognize the academic gaps students possess concerning specific skills (Braun et al., 2020; Turse & Albrecht, 2015). If this does not occur during Tier 1 instruction, students will not be given the appropriate interventions to address their needs (Dennis, 2015; Turse & Albrecht, 2015). One must ensure that as MTSS occurs on campuses, a disproportionate number of students is not reflected in each tier, as noted in figure 1 below (Charlton et al., 2020; Jitendra et al., 2017). If so, then one must question what interventions and strategies are taking place during instruction within each tier to ensure knowledge acquisition (Charlton et al., 2020; Jitendra et al., 2017).

Figure 1

MTSS Pyramid



Note: The figure above depicts how MTSS should be implemented in a school and the approximate percentage of students involved in each tier. Adapted from “Interpreting critical incidents in implementing a multi-tiered system of supports through an active implementation framework” by Charlton, C. T., Sabey, C. V., Young, E. L., & Moulton, S. E. (2020). *Exceptionality*, 28(3), 161–175. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09362835.2020.1727332>

Ideologies of MTSS

Furthermore, to continue building an understanding of MTSS, one must comprehend the ideas behind this approach. Several ideologies related to MTSS have been studied (Jitendra et al., 2017; Turse & Albrecht, 2015; Wexler, 2017). First, educators must believe that all students can learn grade-level skills when instruction is given (Jitendra et al, 2017; Wexler, 2017). MTSS is a data-driven model that utilizes research-based practices designed to assist students who need additional support to meet their needs regardless of their performing level (Jitendra et al., 2017; Wexler, 2017). Throughout each tier, instruction must focus on the needs of each student (Jitendra et al., 2017; Wexler, 2017). Finally, educators must have the ideology that providing

targeted student interventions will promote success and close learning gaps (Jitendra et al., 2017; Turse & Albrecht, 2015; Wexler, 2017).

Challenges of MTSS

However; when looking at MTSS, one must consider challenges that can occur. According to various researchers, some challenges may occur for educators during MTSS for schools (Braun et al., 2018; Charlton et al., 2020; Durrance, 2022). For some, consistency is a challenge. Another is understanding and implementing the framework for MTSS (Braun et al., 2018; Charlton et al, 2020). Additionally, students in specific areas, such as urban populations, demonstrating deficits in reading and math pass to the next grade level (Braun et al., 2018; Durrance, 2022). To the detriment of the students, educators are not always equipped or highly qualified to fill in the existing learning gaps; thus, students continuously fall further behind in their studies (Braun et al., 2018; Durrance, 2022). This also affects the MTSS framework when teachers do not understand when or how to change a student's goals or intervention instruction (Braun et al., 2018; Jones et al., 2012). Professional development must be offered when educators are required to make these informed decisions (Charlton et al., 2020; Durrance, 2022; Jones et al., 2012). If good PD does not occur, the wrong supports could be provided (Jones et al., 2012). If students are also not allowed to master grade-level skills due to remediation interventions, the MTSS framework will not be successful. Another challenge noted is that educators need to be clear on their role to ensure that the framework is practical (Braun et al., 2018; Durrance, 2022). To ensure validity, the following questions must be considered: 1) Who ensures the framework is being followed? 2) Who is in charge of following up with progress monitoring? 3) Who will take part in the intervention? Schools must ensure that appropriate supports and processes are implemented to help combat some of the challenges that educators

face (Braun et al., 2018; Durrance, 2022). These processes should outline when to screen all students and how to monitor students for progress (Charlton et al, 2020; Jones et al., 2012). Once this process is in place, educators must understand how to differentiate instruction for the various levels in the classroom (Charlton et al., 2020; Jones et al., 2012). If students continue not making adequate progress in Tier 1 instruction, then Tier 2 and later Tier 3 goals, strategies, and targeted instruction would need to be determined and implemented appropriately (Jones et al., 2012). Additionally, educators need to understand the available resources when working to implement Tier 1 instruction (Charlton et al, 2020; Jones et al., 2012). According to Wackerle-Hollman et al. (2021), MTSS is a framework easily adaptable to any school to support student success (Jones et al., 2012).

Tier 1 Instruction

Regardless of challenges that may occur in education, MTSS is a framework in which learning supports all students through various tiers (Jitendra et al., 2017; Terse & Albrecht, 2015). Tier 1 is when all students have an equal opportunity to master the skills taught (Hoover & Soltero-González, 2018; Jitendra et al., 2017; McMaster et al., 2020). McMaster et al. (2020) add that Tier 1 instruction should include research-based strategies to learn the core content that is being taught. This tiered instruction can start as early as Pre-Kindergarten, providing targeted support and differentiation to students (Braun et al., 2018; Kong et al., 2019). Though Tier 1 may look different across campuses and districts, Braun et al. (2018) state that a definition of Tier 1 is the support, curriculum, and resources available for all students. During Tier 1 instruction, effective strategies are implemented, and student progress is monitored to ensure student mastery (Braun et al., 2018; Jitendra et al., 2017). This takes place through various screeners or informal assessments to track student progress (Al Otaiba et al., 2016; Jitendra et al., 2017). Tier 1

instructional strategies are usually generalized for all students, but teachers must remember that one research-based approach will not always reach all students. Thus, mastery levels will be varied (Al Otaiba et al., 2016; Swanson et al., 2017).

At any rate, even if students receive specialized services, all learners will benefit from practical instruction (Braun et al., 2018; Jitendra et al., 2017). Educators should work to meet the needs of all students during Tier 1 instruction and ensure that the use of all strategies is a preventative measure to ensure student academic success (Jitendra et al., 2017; Wackerle-Hollman et al., 2021). Though it seems that more emphasis is given to students in Tier 2 and 3, one must analyze Tier 1 instruction to ensure that good instructional strategies are being taught to all students (Jitendra et al., 2017; Jones et al., 2012). Tier 1 instruction can be a universal screener that students at risk of not mastering grade-level concepts are receiving appropriate support (Buffum et al., 2018; Fuch & Fuch, 2017). MTSS can also be used and integrated across curricular contents, which has been documented in numerous studies have been conducted in science, math, and reading (Al Otaiba et al., 2016; Basma & Savage, 2018; Carta et al., 2014; Freeman et al., 2015; Jitendra et al., 2017; Leach, 2016; Mason et al., 2019).

Tier 2 and 3 Instruction

Furthermore, when students are not demonstrating satisfactory growth, they are moved into Tier 2 or Tier 3 instruction (Carta & Young, 2019; Kong et al., 2019). These tiers are designed for targeted instruction within a small group of students demonstrating gaps and not mastering skills during whole group instruction (Gamm et al., 2012; Miller et al., 2020). According to Fuch and Fuch (2017), schools indicated that at least 45% of their students received targeted interventions in these two tiers. The difference between these two tiers is the frequency and duration of the instruction for the students (Fuch & Fuch, 2017; Gamm et al., 2012). There is

a discussion that Tier 2 instruction only represents some students, as most students should be mastering skills through Tier 1 instruction (Carta & Young, 2019; Gamm et al., 2012). In Tier 2 instruction, the interventions given to these students would be in addition to the Tier 1 instruction (Carta & Young, 2019; Gamm et al., 2012). Several findings take it one step further, stating that educators must get to the root cause of why a student is not mastering grade-level skills (Gamm et al., 2012; Miller et al., 2020). With this notation in research, Tier 2 instruction should continue to target core content skills with critical elements that students are missing (Dennis, 2015; Gamm et al., 2012; Miller et al., 2020). Dennis (2015) and McMaster et al. (2020) state that Tier 2 should ensure that teachers have the necessary resources and knowledge to implement a focused intervention for this small group according to data with student needs. This instruction needs to be systematic and explicit to ensure that instruction is valuable (Dennis, 2015; McMaster et al., 2020). During this intervention, students are assessed and regularly monitored for progress or regression consistently for an extended time (Dennis, 2015; Gamm et al., 2012; Kong et al., 2019). Kong et al. (2019) go on to state that analyzing the data obtained during progress monitoring should drive the goals and instruction for each student.

Should students continue to indicate insufficient knowledge of targeted skills, teachers will, in turn, increase the level of intensive support (Gamm et al., 2012; Kong et al., 2019). In Tier 3, intervention should be given to fewer students (Carta & Young, 2019; Gamm et al., 2012). This level of intervention should incorporate strategies to meet the individual needs of each student. Tier 3 provides additional support to students than their peers in Tiers 1 and 2 (Charlton et al., 2020; Gamm et al., 2012). This instruction should be more intensive than Tier 2 and conducted with a smaller group of students (Carta & Young, 2019; Dennis, 2015). During this time, educators can provide immediate feedback to students while simultaneously building

their confidence in learning (Charlton et al., 2020; Dennis, 2015). Having a smaller group also allows students to be more comfortable asking questions and communicating their needs with teachers (Carta & Young, 2019; Dennis, 2015). Tier 3 can also be a time of frontloading information for students, ensuring that they can build background knowledge before introducing new concepts, thereby setting up a foundation for newly acquired knowledge (Carta & Young, 2019; Dennis, 2015). All students should receive effective Tier 1 instruction; however, those requiring small group instruction through Tier 2 and 3 should be at a minimum (Carta & Young, 2019; Dennis, 2015; Gamm et al., 2012).

With the ever-increasing standards for what students should master in school, schools must respond appropriately to each student's various needs. This includes differentiating instructional activities to increase student mastery (Buffum et al., 2018; Helmke & Schrader, 1987). Differentiation should first occur during Tier 1 instruction to improve student success (Buffum et al., 2018; Foorman et al., 2017; Gamm et al., 2012). If Tier 1 instruction is targeted, focused, and purposeful for students, many would not qualify for Tier 2 and Tier 3 (Jitendra et al., 2017; Scanlon et al., 2008). When this understanding takes place, the theory of andragogy is displayed through the teachers (Knowles, 1975; Knowles et al., 1975). For Tier 2 and 3 to be effective, the teachers must be able to optimize the targeted instructional strategies to progress students (Knowles, 1975; Knowles et al., 1975). MTSS helps teachers understand how to intervene, providing opportunities to bridge learning gaps and monitor students' progress (Gamm et al., 2012; Jitendra et al., 2017).

Classroom Instruction for Academic Success

When considering MTSS, one must examine how effective instruction is planned and implemented in the classroom for student success to be positively impacted (Buffum et al., 2018;

Jitendra et al., 2017). Though targeted instruction happens in the various tiers of MTSS, Tier 1 encompasses all students (Hoover & Soltero-González, 2018; Jitendra et al., 2017). Research notes that when the necessary supports are embedded in Tier 1 instruction and not used as standalone strategies, students demonstrate a higher level of mastery of objectives, ultimately resulting in school success (Buffum et al., 2018; Foorman et al., 2017). Researchers also discuss how effective Tier 1 classroom instruction is crucial in early elementary, pre-Kindergarten through second grade (Carta et al., 2014; Foorman et al., 2017). Furthermore, it is vital to incorporate universal screeners to assess student learning and progress monitoring tools after students receive interventions throughout the year (Foorman et al., 2017; Terse & Albrecht, 2015). Educators must be able to understand the screeners to determine how to group students, thereby meeting all students' needs and ensuring they are successful with instruction (Carta et al., 2014; Foorman et al., 2017).

Professional Development

Given the points of Tier 1 instruction, one should not only consider the classroom instruction and interventions given to students, but professional development also needs to be examined. PD can be described as an opportunity to provide learning experiences to help learn new knowledge (Brigandi et al., 2019; Freeman et al., 2017). According to Freeman et al. (2017), professional development should be a way to improve classroom instruction for all levels of learners. Through understanding the various strategies and continued implementation, student achievement should be impacted (Brigandi et al., 2019; Freeman et al., 2017). Research discusses that professional development impacts teachers' actions, which would support student learning (Basma & Savage, 2018; Freeman et al., 2017). While this may be true, the researchers also suggest that teachers deserve an opportunity to become reflective thinkers to help improve

their instructional strategies (Basma & Savage, 2018; Freeman et al., 2017). Additionally, when professional development includes opportunities to practice instructional strategies and become reflective educators on the learning experiences, it could positively impact student learning (Basma & Savage, 2018; Van Driel & Berry, 2012).

Wozniak (2020) takes it one step further in the discussion about understanding that PD has to carefully consider that the learning of adults differs from the learning of students. In all PD, critical thinking and understanding the limits of the adults that are learning new knowledge should be highly considered (Guskey, 2002; Wozniak, 2020). With this in mind about PD, schools often offer throughout the school year to educate teachers on content and instructional strategies that correlate to a district or school initiatives to increase (Guskey, 2002; Mamurov, 2019). PD should change every year based on the different needs of the staff, student outcomes on district and state standard assessments, as well as new student and teacher needs (Guskey, 2002; Mamurov, 2019).

Empowering Teachers through Professional Development

Professional development can empower teachers with content knowledge and effective instructional implementation (Ekinici & Acar, 2019; Smith et al., 2020). When teachers can reflect on their individual needs and attend learning to help support those needs, professional development can be empowering (Ekinici & Acar, 2019; Guskey & Yoon, 2019; Smith et al., 2020; Taylor, 2015). Smith et al. (2020) state that professional development gives teachers a chance to learn reflective practices, which will improve classroom instruction. Ekinici and Acar (2019) also note that if teachers do not feel professional development is pertinent to their needs, they are not likely to integrate the new learning into their classrooms. Teachers must know the students and the various needs of each classroom (Ekinici & Acar, 2019; Hill & Chin, 2018). Hill

and Chin (2018) explain that when teachers understand that professional development can impact the various needs of learners in each classroom, student outcomes are significantly impacted.

This will also lead to more effective teaching (Ekinici & Acar, 2019; Hill & Chin, 2018).

Another way to empower teachers through professional development is collaboration (Abramovich & Miejjensky, 2019; Ekinici & Acar, 2019; Voogt et al., 2015). Teachers must have opportunities to talk with other teachers while learning to determine misconceptions and student experiences that need to be addressed to demonstrate mastery of a given skill (Ekinici & Acar, 2019). When teachers work together, and knowledge is shared, they begin to see the relevance and become engaged in the change (Ekinici & Acar, 2019; Voogt et al., 2015). Through the social nature of humans, activity, and collaborations, teachers agree on what changes need to be made for Tier 1 instruction that will impact the learning goals that haven't been set (Ekinici & Acar, 2019; Voogt et al., 2015). Spratt (2019) also noted that teachers improved their practice when they could actively participate in learning experiences alongside their students. This would be defended by the theory of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977; Voogt et al., 2015), as participants were able to understand the more significant impact of effective instructional practices.

Additionally, studies discuss that teachers are empowered through professional development when the changes that need to be made for integration into content are minimal or slight changes (Ajani, 2019; Brigandi et al., 2019). Strategies that are already being utilized to support student learning should also be considered and when modified slightly, teachers tend to apply the new knowledge learned (Ajani, 2019; Brigandi et al., 2019). Moreover, teachers have to understand that when putting new knowledge into practice from professional development, perfection is going to take time and that is ok (Brigandi et al., 2019; Fonsén & Ukkonen-Mikkola, 2019). With this understanding, teachers feel more empowered to implement new

knowledge and learn to be more self-reflective when determining if the instruction is effective (Brigandi et al., 2019; Fonsén & Ukkonen-Mikkola, 2019).

Accordingly, research has also shown that when teachers are allowed to observe each other, participate in a mentoring experience, and collaborate with experts in the field, student learning increases and instruction is positively impacted (Abramovich & Miedijensky, 2019; Ekinci & Acar, 2019; Prasse et al., 2012). This is when the theory of andragogy can impact professional development (Knowles, 1975; Knowles et al., 1975).

Factors of Professional Development

On the subject of professional development, various studies have been conducted documenting several factors that have been noted to be highly effective. Ensuring that the strategies learned during professional development are limited and controlled will help with implementation in the classroom (Diaconu et al., 2012; Guskey & Yoon, 2019). These strategies should also be inquiry and research-based to prove the reliability of their effectiveness (Diaconu et al., 2012; Guskey & Yoon, 2019; McMaster et al., 2020).

The participants' willingness for professional development is another factor that must be considered. Engagement and understanding are heightened when teachers are actively involved and can experience the strategies firsthand (Kennedy, 2016; Smith & Robinson, 2020). When teachers feel confident in their learning because of their experiences, self-efficacy is higher, and implementation is much more likely in the classroom (Bandura, 1977; Bandura et al., 1975; Knowles, 1975; Smith & Robinson, 2020). This learning experience also lends itself to educators understanding the outcomes and how to support mastery of skills (Bandura et al., 1975; Smith & Robinson, 2020).

In addition to participants' willingness, studies also discuss the need for professional development to be relevant, authentic, collaborative, and supportive of teachers' learning over time to support the effective implementation of learned strategies (Basma & Savage, 2018; Blanks, 2013; McMaster et al., 2020). When teachers have an active role in their learning and understand how it can directly impact their classroom instruction, it can serve as evidence that the value placed on the newly learned skills will be integrated (Basma & Savage, 2018; Blanks, 2013; Van Driel & Berry, 2012). Studies also discuss that when teachers can practice in a structured environment with colleagues who can collaborate on the strategies, it is more likely that the strategy will be implemented into classroom instruction benefiting students (Basma & Savage, 2018; Vaughn et al, 2022). This study does go on to explain another factor that needs to be present in PD is time for feedback and follow-up opportunities (Basma & Savage, 2018; Vaughn et al., 2022). In addition, Researchers attest that when the PD is practical and aligns with the classroom content, teachers tend to integrate new knowledge which improves the outcome for all students (Jones et al., 2012; Vaughn et al, 2022).

Interestingly, discuss the duration for which teachers received professional development was studied to determine whether or not it was a factor limiting teachers' ability to integrate the new learning appropriately (Basma & Savage, 2017; McMaster et al., 2020). It was found that the length of professional development was not crucial to educators. According to teacher perception, the most critical factor is the quality of professional development (Basma & Savage, 2017; McMaster et al., 2020).

Other factors that have been noted to increase the quality of PD and positively impact student outcomes include coherence (Guskey & Yoon, 2019; Jenkins, 2013). With coherence, the educators involved with PD must be able to connect how their previous knowledge will be

impacted by the new knowledge (Guskey & Yoon, 2019; Jenkins, 2013). Furthermore, offering teachers support after the PD is critical (Jones et al., 2012; Vaugh et al., 2022). Also included is the content focus (Guskey & Yoon, 2019; Jenkins, 2013). If a teacher is asked to attend a PD that does not involve content they are directly teaching in Tier 1 instruction, knowledge retention is significantly less (Guskey & Yoon, 2019; Jenkins, 2013). The duration and format also denote whether PD is effective according to teachers (Guskey & Yoon, 2019; Jenkins, 2013). Time is listed as a barrier to applying new knowledge to Tier 1 instruction, and it must be considered when determining the duration of any planned PD (Guskey & Yoon, 2019; Jenkins, 2013). When activities and new knowledge are easily integrated into Tier 1 instruction after PD, the application of newly learned knowledge takes place (Guskey & Yoon, 2019; Jenkins, 2013). Ensuring that PD is considered based on teachers' and students' needs and in direct relation to the campus plan and initiatives are also factors to consider to ensure teachers are empowered to apply what they are learning (Guskey & Yoon, 2019; Jenkins, 2013). Campus administration can aid teachers in tracking student data to ensure that decisions are made based on the needs noted (Charlton et al., 2020; Jones et al., 2012). In a district, this could mean that various schools' tracking could look the same, though the decisions and needs are vastly different (Charlton et al., 2020; Jones et al., 2012).

Professional Development Impacting Tier 1 Instruction

With the current state of education, one would need to understand the relation between Tier 1 instruction and professional development as it can be cross-curricular and impact all facets of the instruction. First, professional development should examine the practices of effective teachers and train them on how to better serve the needs of all students during Tier 1 instruction (Al Otaiba et al., 2016; Jitendra et al., 2017). According to various studies, students deserve

equal access to grade-level curriculum, regardless of the level of mastery at which they perform (Gamm et al., 2012; Jitendra et al., 2017). When teachers can engage in professional development and have adequate time to implement the strategies effectively, instruction will be positively impacted (Barrett & Newman, 2018; Jitendra et al., 2017). If educators are provided the purpose for implementing new strategies for all students at various levels of understanding, instruction will be positively impacted (Barrett & Newman, 2018; Gamm et al., 2012). discussed that when teachers attended a PD that was intentional, the quality and frequency increased with implementation in the classroom (Vermunt et al., 2019; Wasik & Hindman, 2020). When this was established, student success was heightened due to purposeful feedback and high-level teaching. Demonstrating the theories of self-efficacy and andragogy is when teachers gain the understanding and clarity for instruction (Bandura, 1977; Knowles, 1975). Teachers will implement the newly learned skills with fidelity when they understand how and why the strategies will help their students (Gamm et al., 2012; Vermunt et al., 2019). When student success is visible, this practice will become systematic for teachers (Gamm et al., 2012; Vermunt et al., 2019). If teachers do not implement the knowledge learned in professional development, it will not occur (Gamm et al., 2012; Vermunt et al., 2019). Also noted that old practices will be perpetuated, resulting in deficits as the standards are raised and the level of rigor increases (Gamm et al., 2012; Vermunt et al., 2019). When teachers utilize self-efficacy, they are better equipped to fully realize how to use research-based instructional strategies to benefit their students within Tier 1 instruction. When professional development addresses effective Tier 1 strategy and can be shown through research to enrich instruction through the use of student-centered learning and engagement, school success should exceed expectations.

Moreover, professional development can also impact Tier 1 instruction when coaching is involved (Al Otaiba et al., 2015; Bethune, 2017; Mason et al., 2015). Bethune (2017) and Mason et al. (2015) discovered in their study that fidelity increased when a coach worked side by side with the teachers to implement strategies. It was noted that after teachers participated in professional development and coaching opportunities with an expert in the field, the instructional feedback they received was beneficial and improved student performance (Al Otaiba et al., 2015; Charlton et al., 2020). Furthermore, districts and schools need to plan how the staff is trained regarding MTSS (Bethune, 2017; Mason et al., 2019). When teachers lack knowledge of the various MTSS tiers and the instructional strategies used in each tier, students will not experience significant progress (Jitendra et al., 2017; Mason et al., 2019). Teachers must be allowed to learn about MTSS, understand the training, and have time to implement it into quality classroom instruction (Mason et al., 2019; Vermunt et al., 2019).

With coaching comes performance feedback. Researchers noticed the relevance of coaching and how it leads to academic success (Cuticelli et al., 2015; Driscoll, 2008; Lofthouse, 2018). Teacher feedback was given verbally and graphically, resulting in better implementation of instructional strategies (Cuticelli et al., 2015; Lofthouse, 2018). The feedback was immediate, and teachers had concrete evidence and suggestions to help implement strategies more effectively during instruction. In another study, modeling was another strategy that had been used to interconnect professional development with Tier 1 instruction (Driscoll, 2008; Stammen et al., 2015). When teachers see instruction modeled and experience authentic learning, it increases teacher capacity (Cuticelli et al., 2015; Stammen et al., 2018).

Similarly, discuss how campus administration can help targeted PD impact Tier 1 instruction (Jones et al., 2012; Parkhouse et al., 2019). First, there needs to be a process that PD

is planned according to the needs after analyzing student data (Charlton et al., 2019; Jones et al., 2012). Once this occurs, the facilitation of PD is the first step toward success. Ensuring that the PD topics will directly impact the teacher's instruction in the classroom and allow for application is crucial (Jones et al., 2012; McMaster et al., 2020). Furthermore, discussion that PD should be very targeted to support teacher knowledge of how to intervene with students in the various classroom tiers has occurred (Jones et al., 2012; McMaster et al., 2020). Next is allowing teachers sufficient time to implement the PD into Tier 1 instruction (Gamm et al., 2012; Jones et al., 2012). This also includes supporting teachers with the implementation and providing coaching opportunities (Bethune, 2017; Gamm et al., 2012; Jones et al., 2012; Mason et al., 2015). Lastly, the strategies learned during PD must be implemented with fidelity to ensure that it positively impacts Tier 1 instruction (Jones et al., 2012; Mason et al., 2015). Many teachers might attempt a strategy once, but if they do not see immediate results, they discard the idea and resort back to previously used methods (Bandura, 1977; Smith & Robinson, 2020). Thus, coaching with specific feedback during the second step of implementation would alleviate the stress of learning how to implement the strategy appropriately (Cuticelli et al., 2015; Jones et al., 2012; Parkhouse et al., 2019). Other factors to consider when making sure PD will positively affect Tier 1 instruction includes providing teachers with the resources and supports necessary to be successful. This would involve developing skills to help educators succeed in their planning (Jones et al., 2012). Additionally, PD needs to be incorporated collaborative opportunities to discuss the implementation of newly learned skills (Jones et al., 2012; Parkhouse et al., 2019). On the next page, Table 1 demonstrates how professional development can impact instruction according to various research studies.

How Adults Learn

Furthermore, several researchers have studied how adults learn to better understand what PD should look like for the highest impact. Before planning PD, the adults who will be participating in the PD need to be considered including their skills, prior knowledge, and abilities (Ajani, 2019; Wozniak, 2020). When this is known and utilized in the delivery of new information, participants are more likely to be involved in learning and motivated (Ajani, 2019; Wozniak, 2020). Another consideration for adult learning is the understanding of the frontal lobe of the brain and its development in various age groups (Ajani, 2019; Wozniak, 2020). When this is taken into consideration, it is helpful to recognize the decision-making and critical thinking that is modeled for instruction (Ajani, 2019; Wozniak, 2020).

It has been noted that adults learn through four specific assumptions of learning, including: 1) Self-directed learning, 2) Learner's Experiences, 3) Readiness to learn, 4) Learning orientation (Forrest & Peterson, 2006; Knowles, 1975; Knowles et al., 2015). Forrest and Peterson (2006) go further into how the assumptions transfer into application in the classroom.

Self-Directed

The first assumption is self-directed learning, where adult learners are valued for what they need to learn (Abdullah et al., 2021; Forrest & Peterson, 2006). An example of this applied to professional development would be allowing educators to read articles or books on a specific subject of their choosing, based on their desires and needs (Abdullah et al., 2021; Forrest & Peterson, 2006). Through self-directed learning, learners will be more likely to participate when they are comfortable with the PD actively and value the content. When a person is self-directed in their learning, they can become a proactive learner and learn better because they are motivated (Abdullah et al., 2021; Forrest & Peterson, 2006). A self-directed learner also understands that the leading educator in a classroom must offer opportunities for students to work as partners to

be engaged and active in the learning process (Abdullah et al., 2021; Forrest & Peterson, 2006). Through self-directed teaching, students begin to build trust, enabling them to begin to construct their own educational experiences and increase their knowledge and abilities (Abdullah et al., 2021; Forrest & Peterson, 2006)

Experience

Secondly, the next assumption relates to a person's experiences (Ajani, 2019; Wozniak, 2022). Forrest and Peterson (2006) and Abdullah et al. (2021) discuss that learners begin to build identity and self-image as they learn. When learners become active in the process, they can apply their knowledge and skills (Forrest & Peterson, 2006; Knowles et al., 2015). Thus, learning becomes relevant to students, and they can apply knowledge in various contexts (Forrest & Peterson, 2006; Knowles et al., 2015). When students experience learning, they are increasingly more self-reflective and extend their learning beyond what they know (Forrest & Peterson, 2006; Knowles et al., 2015). This also gives the learner a chance to develop maturity and responsibility in their new knowledge and have application in their daily lives (Abdullah et al., 2021; Forrest & Peterson, 2006).

Readiness to Learn

The third assumption that helps build a learner's identity is the readiness to learn (Forrest & Peterson, 2006; Knowles, 1975; Knowles et al., 2015). Educators must help students to connect to their learning. This will lead to an increased desire to further their knowledge base and dig deeper into content (Forrest & Peterson, 2006; Knowles et al., 2015). When they can see how their knowledge can impact learning, their readiness and eagerness to continue learning increase significantly (Forrest & Peterson, 2006; Knowles et al., 2015).

Orientation to Learning

This last assumption of andragogy refers to someone wanting to learn to accomplish a need (Forrest & Peterson, 2006; Knowles et al., 2015). This could also be considered a problem-centered mindset (Forrest & Peterson, 2006; Hee et al., 2019). In schools, when teachers instruct and students have an orientation to learning, they understand that the knowledge will impact their future in some direct way (Forrest & Peterson, 2006; Hee et al., 2019). This assumption also helps a student to understand the real-life application of knowledge, which impacts the students' willingness to learn (Forrest & Peterson, 2006; Hee et al., 2019). The ultimate goal according to Knowles is that learners must grasp the concept of independence (Abdullah et al., 2021; Hee et al., 2019).

Barriers in Applying New Knowledge

When considering professional development and Tier 1 instruction, several factors may present barriers to teachers implementing newly learned knowledge into their instruction. These factors include but are not limited to attrition, lack of knowledge, self-efficacy, time, and too many directives/expectations to follow. When teachers do not feel that the new knowledge they have learned is valuable and the implementation is too difficult, it will not be implemented in the classroom (Borup & Evmenova, 2019; Michael et al., 2019). Similarly, low self-efficacy and no confidence in integrating the new knowledge is also a barrier to applying new knowledge (Borup & Evmenova, 2019; Michael et al., 2019). Another factor discussed is that classroom behaviors can occasionally prevent the implementation of new knowledge with fidelity (Michael et al., 2019; Skae et al., 2020). A comparable study that discusses barriers to applying new knowledge included a lack of resources, time constraints, and the school's workload which also connect to how adults learn (Skae et al., 2020, Wozniak, 2020).

Additionally, mentions that one must consider the time teachers have to implement the new knowledge learned and what resources are readily available (Michael et al., 2019; Wozniak, 2020). Furthermore, researchers go on to discuss other barriers that could be faced in applying new knowledge is motivation and lack of educational experiences (Skae et al., 2020; Wozniak, 2020). All of the factors mentioned above lead to one significant result, teacher burnout. If teachers do not feel adequate and are continually stressed while attempting to balance life, they will ultimately leave the profession (Michael et al., 2019; Skae et al., 2020; Wozniak, 2020).

Teacher Burnout and Attrition

First, Oberle et al. (2020) stated that teacher burnout is occurring at a startling rate. It is comparable to the burnout experienced by those in the medical field. Within the first five years, teachers leave the profession to find another career (Oberle et al., 2020; Saloviita & Pakarinen, 2021). Teachers leave the profession for various reasons. They might experience mental exhaustion, detachment from their profession, or lack a sense of accomplishment (Oberle et al., 2020; Van Droogenbroeck et al., 2021). This leads to other barriers that attribute to not being able to apply knowledge, such as low self-efficacy.

The lack of resources and support and increasing job demands are just a few more reasons that have been noted for burnout (Kuok & Lam, 2018; Oberle et al., 2020; Saloviita & Pakarinen, 2021). Studies found that teachers are not necessarily leaving due to the organizations they are working for; instead, they have never been taught how to cope with the requirements in the field of education (Saloviita & Parkarinen, 2021; Van Droogenbroeck et al., 2021). When educators leave the profession, it affects their personal lives as well as the lives of their students (Kuok & Lam, 2018; Vandenberghe & Huberman, 1999). also concluded that when teachers leave due to low satisfaction in their jobs, student achievement and peer interactions will be

diminished (Oberle et al., 2020; Saloviita & Parkarinen, 2021; Vandenberghe & Huberman, 1999).

Teachers attending professional development note that they lack recognition and adequate resources and support necessary for classroom implementation (Khan et al., 2019; Saloviita & Pakarinen, 2021). When teachers burn out too quickly, it leads to high campus attrition. Teacher inconsistency and student success stalls (Khan et al., 2019; Saloviita & Pakarinen, 2021). Additionally, if students are not progressing as teachers feel they should, educators might leave education feeling as though they are unable to motivate and impact student learning (Khan et al., 2019; Saloviita & Pakarinen, 2021).

Lack of Knowledge

Likewise, it has been said that people do not know what they do not know. This is true for educators, especially those new to the field. The next barrier is having a lack of knowledge to understand how to apply new knowledge to instruction. In one study, teachers attribute their knowledge of content, ideas, and values to their personal experiences (Charlton et al., 2020; Thornberg, 2008). states that these personal experiences occur as they learn in school and internalize the values they are taught (Gudmundsdottir, 1990; Thornberg, 2008). Gudmundsdottir (1990) adds that knowledge is subjective and not objective when this occurs. The resulting problem is a lack of interconnectedness between experiences and the knowledge of how to teach content.

When teachers were asked about their knowledge, they admitted to making unplanned and reactive decisions instead of responding proactively (Malatesha & Wijekumar, 2019; Mantai & Huber, 2021; Thornberg, 2008). Gudmundsdottir (1990) further explained that it is not practical when an educator tries to learn content in isolation. Educators must take it one step

further and understand how to take their knowledge and dig deeper to ensure students are mastering skills on their level. If teachers cannot pinpoint the instructional strategy that will help close learning gaps in the student's content knowledge, success will be stalled (Gudmundsdottir, 1990; O'Reilly et al., 2019). They must be able to intertwine values and passion into content for students to learn and apply new knowledge (Gudmundsdottir, 1990; O'Reilly et al., 2019).

Another study showed that when looking at student data, teachers did not know how to help them due to a lack of training (Charlton et al., 2020; Malatesha & Wijekumar, 2019).

Similarly, a lack of knowledge can be from a lack of training (Mantai & Huber, 2021; Michael et al., 2019). Teachers often feel as if they are not confident in implementing new knowledge because they feel the training received is often inadequate and does not prepare them for application to their instruction (Mantai & Huber, 2021; Michael et al., 2019). When teachers are new to the field of education, it is hard for them to conceptualize and understand how to take a piece of new knowledge and apply it in a manner that will positively impact instruction (Mantai & Huber, 2021; Michael et al., 2019)

Educators have also noted that once they attend training, lack of ongoing PD has been another issue in successfully incorporating the new knowledge into their instruction (Michael et al., 2019; O'Reilly et al., 2019). Frequently, the resources and curriculum given to educators are not always seamlessly integrated into the district's scope and sequence of instruction (Gudmundsdottir, 1990; Michael et al., 2019). When teachers do not feel confident and do not feel supported, they ultimately will revert to old teaching methods instead of positively impacting Tier 1 instruction with the new instructional strategies (Gudmundsdottir, 1990; Michael et al., 2019; O'Reilly et al., 2019).

Lack of Self-Efficacy

Another factor that coincides with a teacher's lack of knowledge is a shortage of self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is the ability to understand how Tier 1 instruction can impact student behavior, leading to successful outcomes (Mahler, 2018; Stepp, 2021). This is important because if teachers are not motivated and lack self-efficacy, student engagement is lessened, negatively impacting learning (Mahler, 2018; Stepp, 2021). Many teachers also lack classroom experiences and cannot accurately reflect on instruction, which ultimately leads to low self-efficacy (Stepp, 2021; Webster, 2019). Students' success, motivation, and instructional beliefs are affected when teachers do not feel competent. Educators must understand how new knowledge can impact their instruction to become reflective in their practices (Duffin et al., 2012; Webster, 2019). Duffin et al. (2012) state that when educators lack practical knowledge, it affects instructional practices. Other factors that lead to low self-efficacy are deficient measures that may be used to judge one's ability, comprehend their capabilities, and increase internal motivation (Duffin et al., 2012; Stepp, 2021).

It was noted by Klassen (2014) that to build self-efficacy in teachers, it should take place through training and professional development. These trainings would be targeted to help teachers understand how their instruction impacts students (Duffin et al., 2012; Klassen, 2014; Webster, 2019). To increase self-efficacy, Klassen (2014) and Stepp (2021) noted that teachers need the ability to practice the application of new knowledge prior to implementing it into their instruction. When teachers are given this opportunity, they can reflect on the strategies that worked and improvements they might make in the future (Klassen, 2014; Stepp, 2021).

Lack of Time

Next, when teachers are not given adequate time to teach content, allow students time to think critically, or engage students in oral discourse, it can be detrimental to learning and

applying new knowledge (Brownell & Tanner, 2012; Grenz, 2012; Oluwasanu et al., 2021; Skae et al., 2020). Time must always be considered to ensure adequate pacing during Tier 1 instruction and guarantee that any necessary changes can be implemented effectively (Brownell & Tanner, 2012; Khan et al., 2019). Teachers are not always prepared to make changes quickly, citing a lack of time to significantly impact student success (Brownell & Tanner, 2012; Khan et al., 2019). Time constraints are also noted by several researchers (Grenz, 2012; Khan et al., 2019; Oluwasanu et al., 2021). He states that providing professional development based on needs will decrease teacher burnout. If time cannot be devoted to ensuring that teachers are properly trained while providing allowances to help them improve upon their instruction, critical thinking will not take place, and students will not be able to comprehend how to apply their new knowledge (Grenz, 2012; Khan et al., 2019; Oluwasanu et al., 2021).

According to Oluwasanu et al. (2021) study, it was shown that participants were unable to implement new strategies due to limited time to learn. When schools do not make allowance in time for educators to learn and practice the new skills, the application is limited (Oluwasanu et al., 2021; Skae et al., 2020). Similarly, studies determined that when teachers were not given adequate time, they were not able to implement new knowledge successfully (Oluwasanu et al., 2021; Skae et al., 2020). Not only did this study discuss the lack of time educators experience, but they also went on to state that instruction in core content is often limited due to time constraints (Khan et al., 2019; Oluwasanu et al., 2021). Therefore, teachers are unable to adequately teach skills to mastery (Khan et al., 2019; Oluwasanu et al., 2021; Skae et al., 2020). These time constraints need to be considered as a barrier to applying knowledge as well.

Too Many Directives

Lastly is the fact that frequently teachers feel as though they are given many directives without direction. Teachers often feel they are given too many directives without direction. Thus, they are unsure how to proceed and positively impact student learning (Roll et al., 2017; van der Wal et al., 2019). Though this study was completed with students, the knowledge can be applied to the field of education. When instruction is not explicit, and tasks are not broken down for educators to grasp, directives can become ineffective (Roll et al., 2017; van der Wal et al., 2019). To avoid teacher burnout, one must ask if directives should be given through the lens of a situational response or more of a mandate (Ippolitto, 2010; Roll et al., 2017; van der Wal et al., 2019). Regardless, the person giving the directives must know the educator and their needs to determine when being directive or responsive is necessary to support instead of pushing them out of the classroom (Ippolitto, 2010; Roll et al., 2017).

As students are provided with multiple opportunities to learn, teachers should be offered developmental options to grow through coaching and reflection in an effort to improve instruction. Similarly, we ask teachers to know their students and their individual needs. This directly aligns with how directives are given. Educators need to be allowed to grow; however, there might be the occasion when they need a reminder or firm instructions to hold them accountable (Ippolitto, 2010; Roll et al., 2017).

One directive educators are given that hinders the implementation of new knowledge is the lack of choice when teaching (Khan et al., 2019; Mantai & Huber, 2021). Educators state that they are told what to teach and when to teach. This practice does not always lend itself to integrating new knowledge (Khan et al., 2019; Mantai & Huber, 2021; van der Wal et al., 2019). At some schools, the delivery is also scripted, effectively stifling teacher's ability to implement new instructional strategies (Mantai & Huber, 2021; van der Wal et al., 2019).

Critical Thinking

Notably, when educators can apply their knowledge learned during PD to their Tier 1 instruction, critical thinking can be increased among students. Critical thinking can be applied in any discipline and should be embedded in the curriculum throughout all facets of learning (Dickerson, 2005; Dunne, 2018; Fasko & Fair, 2021). Critical thinking involves characterizing thinking with an understanding of attitudes and habits of the mind (Dunne, 2018; Fasko & Fair, 2021). Moreover, through learning, these mindful habits and cognitive abilities are developed (Dunne, 2018; Fasko & Fair, 2021). Based on the study of John Dewey, critical thinking occurs through various modes, including suggesting, problem-solving, initiating and testing a hypothesis to a problem, and reasoning (Fasko & Fair, 2021; Mina, 2022). Peter Facione takes critical thinking further when he suggests there are related sub-skills (Fasko & Fair, 2021; Mina, 2022). These skills include interpretation, inferencing, evaluation, analysis, and justifying (Fasko & Fair, 2021; Mina, 2022). When students utilize the skills regularly, critical thinking is reinforced.

Granted, critical thinkers understand how to question and seek to understand the information in its presented context (Dickerson, 2005; Dunne, 2018). Critical thinkers are also able to decipher reasons for actions and conclusions, as well as determine what influence is the strongest (Dickerson, 2005; Dunne, 2018). They are then able to reason if the cause warrants the effects. One must be able to reason if the desired outcome was the product of the utilized critical thinking skills (Dickerson, 2005; Dunne, 2018). Lastly, to be a critical thinker, one must know how to apply their learning in various situations after analyzing the problem (Dickerson, 2005; Dunne, 2018). When this takes place, a student experiences learning instead of having to endure it (Dickerson 2005; Dunne, 2018).

Cultivating Critical Thinking Skills

Additionally, when fostering an understanding of critical thinking skills, it should be applied in all content areas (Dickerson, 2005; Mina, 2022). It has also been noted that students need to be given a chance through instruction to develop critical thinking skills (Bojanek et al., 2021; Dickerson, 2005). Through this targeted instruction, decision-making, problem-solving, and even self-regulation skills are increased for students (Bojanek et al., 2021; Dickerson, 2005). Students must have a basis for analyzing information to make a decision that would result in a preferred outcome (Dickerson, 2005; Dunne, 2018). One has to be able to look at circumstances or situations and comprehend the best outcome once decisions are made (Bojanek et al., 2021; Dickerson, 2005). Self-reflection is the next step while considering what needs have to be met and what feedback has already been given under the circumstance. (Dickerson, 2005; Howlett et al., 2016). Studies discuss that when one is reflective, they understand their own beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors and contest them for a more desired outcome (Dickerson, 2005; Howlett et al., 2016). One must recognize that change may have to take place to get more desirable results than possibly a previous experience (Dickerson, 2005; Howlett et al., 2016). When a result is unfavorable, individuals must reconsider their decisions and plan accordingly, anticipating that results will change the next time (Dickerson, 2005; Howlett et al., 2016). When one can plan with higher-order thinking enhancements, critical thinking skills are increased (Dickerson, 2005; Mina, 2022). Teachers must be open-minded to questions and feedback along the way (Dunne, 2005; Schoenberger-Orgad & Spiller, 2014). Schoenberger-Orgad and Spiller (2014) agree that feedback is essential. According to their study, when one is prompted to give feedback, it causes them to think more critically, heightening skills (Charlton et al., 2020; Schoenberger-Orgad & Spiller, 2014). People do not always question the actions of others to

belittle or make others feel inadequate; instead, they seek to understand on a deeper level (Dickerson, 2005; Schoenberger-Orgad & Spiller, 2014). If one is not open to this, critical thinking will be squashed. Providing time for the learners to experience hands-on learning and then reflect on teaching is a critical way to help learners grasp the significance of the learning (Dickerson, 2005; Ekinici & Acar, 2019; Guskey & Yoon, 2019; Smith et al., 2020; Taylor, 2015). Finally, one should be a lifelong learner, making continuous efforts to grow and be effective in the learning process (Dickerson, 2005; Ekinici & Acar, 2019; Guskey & Yoon, 2019; Smith et al., 2020; Taylor, 2015).

Theoretical Significance

Ensuring that teachers understand how to apply any knowledge learned to help students think critically and improve student success will define the professional learning that can aid in quality Tier 1 instruction. When educators grasp how adult learning can also be applied to student learning, success and critical thinking are enhanced. Educators should realize that students have their own learning experiences, and when they can apply prior knowledge, they begin to take control of their learning (Basma & Savage, 2018; Forrest & Peterson, 2006; Knowles et al., 2015). With this newly found autonomy, students can build critical thinking skills while learning how to apply knowledge to future learning experiences (Basma & Savage, 2018; Forrest & Peterson, 2006). Once learning encapsulates all the assumptions of an adult learning in the classroom, student success is inevitable.

Summary

Effective Tier 1 instruction and professional development have been noted as the foundation for academic success. This not only applies to schools but individuals as well. This is discussed in the theoretical framework and related literature. Tier instruction and professional

development can be studied individually, and some studies have interconnected the two. Numerous studies have been conducted on the multi-tiered support system and the knowledge that if Tier 1 is ineffective, student learning is adversely affected. Student academic success is multi-faceted and negatively impacted when educators cannot implement the most effective instructional practices. In many instances, these practices are learned during professional development. Through the theories of self-efficacy and andragogy, we understand that adult learners must be active in their learning to understand how learning takes place truly. This must be considered not only when planning professional development centered on Tier 1 instruction but also to improve implementation and student success. When the positive effects are noted, it will perhaps energize the teacher to continue learning new and innovative strategies to improve Tier 1 instruction.

Professional development has been an integral part of schools, supporting teachers in all areas of instruction. Teachers often attend professional development, yet there is no significant impact on instructional and student progress. Though additional research has continued to explore the influence of effective professional development on classroom instruction, several factors have been consistently noted. One of these characteristics is building a teacher capacity to feel capable of learning and empowered to successfully apply the necessary knowledge in the classroom for academic acquisition, which coincides with self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977). Another facet is the fact that teachers are not given the appropriate resources or support to help them feel empowered to implement instructional strategies (Braun et al., 2018 effectively).

While we know that professional development and Tier 1 instruction are crucial to the success of schools, we expect that they are interconnected. Teachers are consistently present in the classroom and are asked to take the knowledge they learned in professional development and

integrate it into their Tier 1 instruction. Though studies suggest limitations of why teachers do not effectively implement strategies, there has been little research on teacher perceptions of what supports and resources are needed to ensure the implementation of professional development into Tier 1 instruction. When implementation is unsuccessful, does one look to the teacher, the instruction, or the professional development? The theoretical impact this study can have on education is understanding how to support teachers in becoming reflective teachers and building critical thinking skills within students. In doing this effectively, teachers can see the positive impact on student learning, and it will influence teachers to continue integrating instructional strategies learned into Tier 1 instruction. For practical significance, understanding a teacher's perspective on the next steps of best implementing the research-based strategies after professional development is critical. The gap in literature leads us to question how to gain teacher perceptions on effectively implementing the strategies learned in professional development in an effort to impact a classroom's Tier 1 instruction.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to examine teachers' experiences of implementing professional development into Tier 1 instruction at three elementary schools in North Central Texas. All students deserved access to an equitable education, including those who required more support (Jitendra et al., 2017). The problem, which too frequently arose, was that districts offered professional development. Once teachers attended, they were unable to incorporate their newly learned knowledge into Tier 1 instruction for various reasons. The new learning techniques could have impacted all students, but unfortunately, without understanding the application, students did not receive the new teachings. In order to understand how some teachers were able to apply their new knowledge, one must have examined their lived experiences. This chapter outlined the research design, methods, data collection, data analysis, trustworthiness, and ethical considerations utilized throughout the study.

Research Design

The qualitative research design included studying participants who had lived through the experience of the topic of research. This transcendental phenomenological design helped readers understand the reality of a topic by giving a description of the phenomenon through the perceptions of others (Chan et al.; Manen, 2016; Usher & Dolan, 202). In order to have accomplished this, the human experience needed to be investigated and further understood. This study identified participants who were all experiencing the same phenomenon of acquiring newly learned knowledge during professional development and then applying it to their Tier 1 instruction. Research centered around the teachers' perceptions as a basis for understanding how they were able to embed their new knowledge into instruction. When districts and schools

considered how teachers were able to be successful with the application through implementation, Tier 1 instruction was positively impacted, thereby resulting in increased student success through the ability of critical thinking.

According to Dowling (2007), Husserl was one of the philosophers who significantly contributed to phenomenological research of lived experiences. According to Husserl, this research stated that lived experiences were the basis of the research but also included the reflections of those individuals. It was important to remember that research had to be unbiased through past philosophers to gain insight into their field of study (Dowling, 2007). van Manen and van Manen (2021) also stated that phenomenological research brought attention to issues that individuals were experiencing or living. When this took place, the phenomena being studied could be directly impacted by the study findings (van Manen & van Manen, 2021).

The type of phenomenological research to be used was transcendental phenomenology. According to Moustakas (1995), this phenomenon was described in a new way that encapsulated the essence of the study. Transcendental phenomenology was chosen because it collected data from several participants who had experienced the phenomena, while themes and commonalities, as well as patterns, were analyzed throughout the data collection (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Research Questions

Teachers attended professional development regarding research-based strategies but have had difficulty applying their newly learned knowledge to Tier 1 instruction. The research questions had been chosen to gain teacher insights into how they were able to integrate new strategies into Tier 1 instruction after attending a professional development.

Central Research Question

How did elementary teachers implement newly learned knowledge into Tier 1 instruction?

Sub-Question One

What did Tier 1 instruction look like in the classroom?

Sub-Question Two

How did elementary teachers develop and apply critical thinking of new knowledge into Tier 1 instruction?

Sub-Question Three

What barriers did teachers experience that had hindered them in applying new knowledge from PD into Tier 1 instruction to support student success?

Setting and Participants

For this study, the setting and participants were valuable to ensure that valid and accurate data was collected. This study could have had a significant impact not only on teachers' instruction but also on the academic success of all students.

Setting

The setting of this study was three elementary schools in North Central Texas. The district and three elementary schools utilized in the study have been given pseudonyms. All three elementary schools were within Mayberry Independent School District (Mayberry ISD). Each school consisted of a principal, an assistant principal, and a campus academic leader. The campus academic leader helped facilitate professional learning communities four times a week while observing, mentoring, and coaching all teachers on each campus. The district also housed central administration leadership, including content coordinators who oversaw the planning of instruction as well as content coaches. Though there were coordinators for all content areas, there

were only coaches in reading and mathematics. The coordinators for science and social studies were also the coaches for teachers. Central administration also included both an executive director of leadership who worked closely with the principals and a superintendent who oversaw the school district.

In this district, professional development focused on teacher growth and improvement. Professional development was offered four full days a year, and there were also after-school meetings once a month for teachers to attend based on content areas. However, once the professional development was completed, teachers were not always able to effectively implement what they had learned.

While in the same district, the three schools had similarities and differences. Mayberry Elementary had approximately 750 students with 75 staff members, 46 of whom were professional staff. James Elementary had approximately 400 students with 50 staff, 28 of which were professional staff. Cano Elementary had approximately 550 students with 63 staff, 40 of which were professional staff. The staff demographics included 65% Caucasian, 25% Hispanic, 9% African American, and 1% other. The attrition of staff varied across campuses. All schools held the designation of Title 1, as 85%-88% of students at each campus were on free or reduced lunch. Similarly, the economically disadvantaged percentage of students was roughly 85% at each school, and the student population was 85% Hispanic. Other subpopulations included Caucasian, Asian, African American, and more than two races.

On each campus, there was a principal with at least six years of experience in administration, an assistant principal with at least two years of experience in administration, and a campus academic leader with at least one year of experience. The principal and assistant principal were campus evaluators, while the campus academic leader was a teacher coach,

mentor, co-teacher, and facilitator of professional learning communities. The district had a coordinator for each content in English language arts, math, and science. Multiple coaches supported all three campuses. The campus administration was led by a leadership executive director and the superintendent.

Mayberry ISD was chosen for this study due to the researcher's knowledge of the professional development offered and the Tier 1 instruction provided to all students. Tier 1 instruction was only sometimes effective in this district, as evidenced by student mastery of state assessments. There was also a high rate of students referred for special education, though they were only sometimes given the proper support through Tier 1 instruction. This study impacted the support and resources given to teachers when implementing instructional strategies learned during the professional development attended.

Participants

There were 12-15 participants in this study which consisted of teachers of core content areas with more than three years of experience who have had experience with PD and implementing Tier 1 instruction (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1995). The participants were all employed at Mayberry Independent School District, including James Elementary, Mayberry Elementary, and Cano Elementary. Specific demographics such as gender, age, ethnicity was not used in the selection of participants.

Researcher Positionality

Though there have been studies conducted on PD and Tier 1 instruction, there was a gap in understanding what resources or supports teachers needed to implement strategies effectively. As a teacher for nine years, no one asked for my lived experiences of the PD I had received, nor did they consider the impact it had on my instruction or student success. I sat in the PD and then

returned to class and carried on with what I thought worked. When the opinions of those experiencing the phenomenon daily were not considered, we missed out on how to continue to move forward in the field of education. State assessments and districts were not slowing down on expectations of student success, but it needed to start with Tier 1 instruction. Social constructivism was the framework of this study, as it considered the participants' voices and helped the researcher understand the phenomenon from different perspectives. Through understanding philosophical assumptions and how it impacted the study, this helped to ensure validity, bias, and credibility (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Interpretive Framework

The interpretive framework that was considered is social constructivism. There was an understanding of the phenomenon of teachers attending professional development and the new strategies that were learned. According to teachers, there needed to be a more complex study on the necessary supports or resources as they lived through the experiences, so they could take what was being learned and practice during Tier 1 instruction. This framework focused on the interaction of others as they were living and experiencing the phenomenon firsthand. With this current study, listening to the perception and experiences of those directly involved could help the field of education determine how student success through Tier 1 instructional strategies was directly impacted. This occurred through understanding the gathered data to determine the meaning and shape an interpretation (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Philosophical Assumptions

As an administrator and former teacher, I was often given multiple opportunities to engage in PD; however, I was seldom able to implement the training in the classroom. This could have been due to a lack of time to implement the many strategies presented and asked to put into

practice. Though this might sound like an excuse, it was the reality in classrooms. Therefore, Tier 1 instruction was not impacted by PD because teachers could not effectively implement the new teachings into their instructional strategies. Thus, students continued to fall behind, and learning gaps increased with each passing year.

While districts developed yearly strategic plans aligned with the vision, they did not always align with teacher growth. School districts needed to understand the insights from those in the classroom that can take the initiatives/strategies taught during PD and effectively implement them into Tier 1 instruction. This then led to the philosophical assumption of ontology, where themes emerged from the insights of participants experiencing the reality and phenomena in their field of study.

Ontological Assumption

With ontological assumptions, multiple realities were considered. This included the perspectives from the various views of reality from those living in the experience. As the perspectives were considered, themes emerged. In this study, teachers varied in years of experience and elementary grade levels taught. This helped gather data, accounting for multiple perceptions of PD and how it impacted Tier 1 instruction and student success. Also included were various modes of collecting data to ensure that all realities were represented in terms of the level of support and resources required to be an effective teacher in Tier 1 instruction while utilizing strategies learned in PD (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Epistemological Assumption

In this qualitative study, the epistemological assumption occurred when the researcher was close to the participants. Through this, quotes were used, and the researcher became a participant, not just an observer. Thus, the researchers could have been close to participants to

understand the research findings. The experiences and perceptions of teachers for this study shaped assumptions. PD directly impacted the teachers, which impacted student learning through Tier 1 instruction. The study took place in an environment where participants were comfortable and worked daily. Between the interviews and frequent surveys, the participants and I continued to learn, thus minimizing any separation which could have occurred (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Axiological Assumption

With axiological assumptions, the researcher ensured that readers understood their values which helped to shape the study and how the interpretation of the findings and participants impacted it. Through this, readers understood the researcher's biases and values throughout the research. Though I have experienced PD and Tier 1 instruction as a teacher and administrator, I worked hard not to have biases or assumptions throughout this study. I understood what it was like to attend PD, which should have benefited classroom Tier 1 instruction and student success; however, the teachings were not implemented in my classroom due to many factors. Though there were biases, I, as the researcher, ensured that they were put aside and endeavored not to have skewed interview questions or answers by speaking to participants about my experiences, using facial expressions, or responding in a specific manner (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The purpose of this study was to ensure that there were new meanings to PD and how Tier 1 interconnected through the participants' viewpoint (Kelly et al., 2018).

Researcher's Role

My role in the school district was as a campus administrator. The participants in this study may be on the campus I was a part of, but I was not their direct appraiser during the year of study. Other participants were from the other two campuses, where I was not actively involved. Though I met with a leadership team monthly, including other principals, no discussion of this

study took place to keep all opinions out of the study and truly focus on the participants' lived experiences. Participants' identities and information were kept confidential, and pseudonyms were used. The study collected data through surveys, focus groups, and interviews. Because of the biases and assumptions described below, epoche bracketing was used to document all interviews to look for patterns, trends, and similarities among the participants. I ensured that participants understood that at any time, should they want to discontinue their participation, they were able to do so.

The biases noted at the time were the knowledge of how much professional development I had contributed to and participated in. However, weekly walkthroughs revealed that the strategies learned were never fully implemented. It was assumed this happens due to time constraints and knowledge of new material. Though I am not far removed from the classroom and worked closely with campus teachers, consideration had to be made to prevent bringing in prior knowledge into the questions, which resulted in skewed responses. Through many of the research articles, there was an understanding that coaching is invaluable; however, I did not believe it was the only support that would aid teachers in implementation strategies, which was why this study was so critical. Another bias I brought to the study was that I conducted weekly walkthroughs on some participants focusing on their Tier 1 instruction. I noted that when they answered the questions about their experience through the phenomenon, my knowledge of their teaching was not brought into the study with any assumptions. One reason that transcendental phenomenology was being used was to keep the biases and assumptions at bay, as this study was being conducted to understand teachers' perceptions during the present time. As the human instrument in data collection for this study and biases and assumptions out of the study, I focused on ontological assumptions to ensure that I did not become an insider into the study. Due to

having lived this experience myself, it was essential to remember that I wanted to portray in the findings what teachers perceived as support and resources in the present day. The field of education changed often, and schools/districts had to stay up to date to support the success.

Procedures

Before conducting the study, approval from the IRB and site superintendent was acquired, granting permission for participants to be asked to volunteer for the study. Interview and survey questions were shared with the dissertation chair to ensure no bias or assumptions were noted. Once all approvals were received, I emailed all elementary school teachers in the Mayberry School district to get volunteers. As teachers filled out the google form and signed the consent, the criterion was evaluated, and if met, they received an email stating they were a participant. The demographic information was used for chapter four of the dissertation. Interviews were conducted next to understand participants' learning experiences with professional development and Tier 1 instruction. Questions were also asked to clarify demographic information or interview answers. The interview was transcribed in NVivo using explicit coding and storing the documentation. Then epoche bracketing was utilized to determine any categories or subcategories that eventually led to trends or patterns that began to emerge.

After the interview, participants were asked to complete a protocol writing on which they described implementing a Tier 1 instructional strategy learned during PD. This was targeted and gave specifics such as writing about how the participant felt during the implementation, what was happening in the classroom, and detailed the strengths and struggles noted. Participants were asked to include feelings, thoughts, and perceptions in their writing. To help with the triangulation of the interview and protocol writing, two other educators in the district, not involved in the PD or research study, read through the answers to ensure that there were no

biases or assumptions in the findings. These were turned in within a two-week time frame to give the participants a chance to self-reflect on a specific time without feeling rushed and unable to get all information noted. Again, after these were turned in either handwritten or electronically, transcriptions took place using NVivo to continue to watch for emerging trends or patterns. Coding in NVivo included short descriptions, inclusion and exclusion criteria, and typical exemplars demonstrated and explained in the study. After this was completed, two focus group sessions were planned, and participants were asked to attend one session. Questions for these groups were focused more on the district aspect of PD and Tier 1 instruction. Notes were taken as participants shared and a voice recording, which were noted in both groups to ensure that all answers and collaboration were transcribed adequately in NVivo. During the focus groups, body language and listening for differences among participants living through the same experience were observed and monitored. Using NVivo with the transactions of the interview also helped to take out any biases and helped to achieve triangulation. At the end of the study, there was an exit survey about the study.

Permissions

The first part of permissions began with completing the CITI training required by Liberty University. Then, all permissions and forms were created and sent in word document form in the Cayuse Research Suite. These included permission requests, recruitment materials, consent materials, and instruments that were utilized.

Then, permission was needed from the IRB for approval and was the consent letter, which can be seen in Appendix A. Next, permission was gained from the superintendent of the Mayberry school district granting authorization to recruit various elementary teachers from the three elementary schools, which can be seen in Appendix B. The following permission will be

the teacher recruitment letter from teachers to participate in the study, which can be seen in Appendix C.

Recruitment Plan

There were three elementary schools in the Mayberry school district. Each school was composed of Pre-Kindergarten through fifth-grade teachers. Once all approvals were received, an email was sent to the three elementary schools introducing the research, including the purpose and information that would be gained from the study. Included in the email was the link for the google form to fill out the questionnaire if they were interested. There was an email notifying the researcher that the questionnaire had been completed and signed the informed consent. Once 12 to 15 teachers had volunteered, an email was sent to each one about the participation (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Dilshad & Latif, 2013). See Appendix C for the participant consent form. Having 12 to 15 participants was essential to ensure that the group was small enough to explore attitudes, perceptions, and experiences thoroughly while also having ensured that the group is diverse enough for full representation (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Dilshad & Latif, 2013; Moustakas, 1995). The determination of participants depended on whether those who volunteered were given enough information to truly study the lived experience (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Another consideration when selecting participants was that throughout the study, there was at least one focus group conducted in, which all participants were able to attend. . Other options were given to ensure participation if there were scheduling conflicts. Ensuring enough participants collaborated in these focus groups was essential. There are not many male teachers at the three elementary schools, so the recruitment attempted to have at least two male teachers participate while female teachers were utilized to complete the sample. All teachers had at least three years

of experience in Tier 1 content areas as these participants have lived experiences and knowledge towards the contribution of the theory development.

Data Collection Plan

Sutton and Austin (2015) discussed that with data collection, ensuring the participants' voices were heard and stay true to their perspectives was important. Data collection occurred with triangulation, ensuring that the research would have allowed for a bigger picture view (Heale & Forbes, 2013). First, a questionnaire was given to get the demographic information of each participant. Next, an interview was conducted to understand the educational experiences of each participant and clarify any questions on the questionnaire. The interview questions were open ended that aligned with the research questions. After the first interview was completed, the researcher asked for feedback from each of the participants to refine the questions for clarity, reliability, and validity (Yeong et al., 2018). At the time of the interview, comprehensive student data demonstrated a baseline of student academics, turned in and documented. Afterward, a journal was collected, asking the teachers to record what made the strategy easy or difficult for integration into their daily Tier 1 instruction and detailed other self-reflections. The questionnaires was in Google for data analysis, which helped disaggregate data received. For interviews and journals, NVivo was used to transcribe and then epoche bracketing helped determine any developing themes or patterns collected throughout the study.

Individual Interviews

For this study, it was crucial to understanding participants' experiences. After getting initial demographic information, interviews were scheduled quickly to gather baseline data from the participants before beginning the study. Individual interviews were chosen as one method to gain an understanding of one's experiences, opinions, and feelings (Mack et al., 2005). This type

of data collection also helped build relationships and connections with others whom experienced a specific phenomenon (Mack et al., 2005). The goal of this interview was to begin to gather data on the perceptions of how these teachers applied newly learned knowledge from PD in Tier 1 instruction based on personal experiences. Having individual interviews helped participants to feel comfortable in truthfully answering questions (Mack et al., 2005). Since participants had various levels of experience, this interview also helped determine how experience connected with implementing strategies. This information also helped formulate targeted questions in the focus groups that allowed for collaboration. The interviews took place in the participant's classroom, and the interview length was between thirty minutes to one hour. The interviews were recorded, with the knowledge of the participant, in order to be transcribed in NVivo. In adherence to school safety protocols, the interview was conducted face to face unless policies and procedures changed due to Covid 19.

Individual Interview Questions

1. Please describe your educational background and career through your current position.
CRQ
2. Describe what effective Tier 1 instruction is in your classroom. SQ1
3. What trainings have you been to that discuss effective Tier 1 instruction? SQ1
4. What professional development experiences have you had that prepared you for Tier 1 instruction? SQ2
5. Discuss the methods used during the professional development such as interactive, hands on, sit and get. SQ2
6. Describe a professional development you have attended that was provided by the district that embraced building critical thinking of students. SQ2

7. Describe specific strategies that have been learned in PD that support increasing critical thinking skills for student success. SQ2
8. Describe how the newly learned knowledge and strategies are applied into instructional planning? CR
9. Describe the barriers faced when having to take new knowledge learned from PD and embedding it into Tier 1 instruction. SQ3
10. Describe successful resources that have been given in the past to help with the integration of new knowledge into Tier 1 instruction. SQ3
11. What would you like to add to our discussion of your experiences with applying newly learned knowledge from PD into your Tier 1 instruction to build critical thinkers for student success? CR

Individual Interview Data Analysis Plan

After each of the interviews, transcription took place using NVivo. Using this software helped with triangulation, as well as reliability and validity of the themes and patterns noted as the study was conducted. When using NVivo, it helped to store all information in one, easily accessible place. With NVivo, the key search, also known as a word query for resources, supports, and effective Tier 1, were used to help determine the significance of the interviews and professional development (Bergin, 2011). Epoche bracketing was taken into consideration when emerging themes were determined. According to Seale and Silverman (1997), it was noted that perhaps if the transcription was not entered word for word, but with additional information such as how the participants spoke with more ideas and symbols, it gave more reliable data from the interviews. Through the use of coding, the values, processes, and emotions were also discovered

(Saldaña, 2021). Also, used in coding are the short descriptions, inclusion criteria, and typical exemplars, which were accounted for in the research (Saldaña, 2021).

In these interviews, epoche took place (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The researcher must have understood the biases at the forefront of the phenomenon and were able to set these aside to identify and be aware of the participants' lived experiences. This helped to be able to synthesize the information gained for themes and the essence of the lived experiences that were studied.

Protocol Writing Prompt

After the interview, participants were asked to write any thoughts describing the lived experience, emotions, feelings, and thoughts while describing a specific time (Manen, 2016). Participants were asked to write these two weeks after the interview. The purpose of the protocol writing was to allow participants to reflect on the questions asked during the interview and extend their answers by providing more detailed information that may have been left out. This data collection also helped understand their perceptions through thoughts. Participants were asked to submit their thoughts through either handwritten or electronic means to get the additional information for data analysis. This helped gain the sights, sounds, and feelings of the lived experience through the eyes of the participant. In giving teachers two weeks to complete this writing, it allowed them to reflect on a particular day and spend time analyzing their perspectives to write a more thorough account (Manen 2016).

Protocol Writing Prompt

Participants were asked to write about a professional development they attended and include how they applied the newly learned knowledge to Tier 1 instruction. This writing included the specific strategies incorporated and any barriers they had faced while attempting

implementation. Participants gave specific times when the strategy worked or did not work for a better understanding of the lived experience (Manen, 2016).

Protocol Writing Data Analysis Plan

The protocol writing prompts were then transcribed in NVivo to determine if additional categories or subcategories emerged to help understand the major themes related to the phenomena. This included a short description and the exclusion criteria when coding (Saldaña, 2021). During the analysis, it gave a clear picture of the lived experience, as this was completed when participants were on their own without anyone asking leading questions. In the data analysis, imaginative variation was also considered to help value the themes and essence of the individual experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Focus Group Discussion

The third method for data collection was a focus group discussion. This type of data collection was significant because as participants shared, phrases or keywords helped one remember an example and encouraged further conversation regarding the topic (Mack et al., 2005). Through observations of participants' reactions to each other and listening to the different viewpoints, a global picture of the phenomenon was noted and considered (Mack et al., 2005). Before the focus groups started, norms were established to ensure that everyone feels safe and valued as a participant in the study (Mack et al., 2005). Participants were asked to attend one session regarding the studied lived experience. These focus groups were divided up as determined by the interview and protocol writing. For this data to be sufficient and encourage participants' collaboration, it was necessary to ensure their experiences were similar. This type of data collection helped the study because it helped others think about supports and resources they may have used but were not thinking about to aid in finding themes through perceptions. The

two groups were limited to six to ten participants to ensure that they all could give feedback; therefore, there was at least two focus groups. Participants were invited strategically to ensure variation in viewpoints of Tier 1 instruction about PD while ensuring adequate time to talk and provide more details about the phenomenon. During the focus groups, there was time to observe body language and examine the differences in experiences, perceptions, thoughts, and feelings (Moser & Korstjens, 2017). However, they were all living through the same phenomenon (Moser & Korstjens, 2017).

Focus Group Questions

1. Through the lived experience of teaching, how did schools/districts support the application of newly learned knowledge from PD into Tier 1 instruction? CRQ
2. How often did you attend PD that relates back to your specific content area taught? CRQ, SQ2
3. Have you ever been given the option to choose what type of PD to attend? SQ3
4. What did you feel the most important aspect of Tier 1 instruction is? SQ1
5. How did you apply new knowledge that you learn? CRQ, SQ1, SQ2, SQ3

Focus Group Analysis Plan

The focus group responses were transcribed in NVivo to understand what categories or subcategories emerged concerning the individual interviews and protocol writing to help understand the major themes related to the phenomena. This included a short description and exclusion criteria when coding (Saldaña, 2021). For this analysis, ensuring that not only were themes discussed but the differences were noted between the individuals. Due to the sample size of the participants ranging from Pre-Kindergarten through fifth grade, the differences needed to be noted, as Tier 1 instruction looked different in each grade level.

Data Synthesis

Data was synthesized through several various modes. NVivo was one instrument that was used as a data management tool. The researcher then transcribed and analyzed patterns and themes through the interviews and journals. With this, the interview was conducted face to face, and the questions were analyzed with two extra educators who read the responses and validated the conclusion of the data. This occurred through bracketing to ensure that the participants' perspectives were utilized while allowing for a new data set for the study (Dörfler & Stierand, 2020; Shorey & Ng, 2022). When bracketing was used, though the researcher had preunderstandings about the topic, those were held off, which helped raise awareness (Dörfler & Stierand, 2020). Bracketing also ensured the study was trustworthy (Weatherford & Maitra, 2019). This aligned with transcendental phenomenology data synthesis as there was no prejudice, bias, or influences outside the study (Lockwood et al., 2015). The data collection aimed to understand each participant's lived experience through their perception. This data was not analyzed separately from the three data sources, but it looked for a single set of themes resulting from the data analysis. Not only did themes emerge through the data, but it also built an understanding of the phenomenon and noted the differences between the experiences of those in various grade levels. The process of the data synthesis was to recognize the essence of the phenomenon being studied (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The data was kept in digital files (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Though there will not be multiple parties involved in the research, due to having a second-rater, computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) was considered for validity (Saldaña, 2021).

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness came from many different areas to ensure that the study was valid and genuinely impacted the field of education. When discussing trustworthiness, credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, and ethics, all were essential aspects to consider. Lincoln and Guba (1985) noted that to ensure trustworthy qualitative research, it must include: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. The reader was the one who ultimately concluded that the study was trustworthy.

Credibility

Lincoln and Guba (1985) discussed credibility being demonstrated through various modes. For this study, prolonged engagement was one way to ensure credibility. Due to the researcher's educational background and experience, they understood the phenomena being studied and the setting in which the study was conducted. With lived experiences, credibility supported the reader's ability to understand the phenomena through the eyes of others (Krefting, 1991; Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). Also included is triangulation. Using other educators and NVivo, triangulation was completed to ensure credibility (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). In this study, the use of peer evaluation of questions, member checking, and triangulation was used to guarantee credibility.

Transferability

Through the thick description of the phenomena, readers could understand the context in which the study was conducted. Social relationships and cultural aspects were included throughout the study and between participants. Transferability occurred if this study was utilized to study other educators and secondary education at a different time during the school year. With transferability, though the researcher worked to ensure this was noted, the reader was ultimately the deciding factor who determined if the study was transferable (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006).

Dependability

For this study, dependability was demonstrated through other educators checking the findings from the questionnaires and surveys. This fell in line with confirmability through the use of inquiry audits (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). According to Cohen and Crabtree (2006), this external audit helped to ensure that the findings were accurate and valid. Working with the dissertation committee at Liberty University on a thorough review of the processes and procedures being utilized during the study helped support dependability.

Confirmability

Confirmability was when one uses external audits to help determine the dependability and confirm the study's findings. Through the use of bracketing, this helped ensure that the researcher stayed neutral in the findings of the study (Dörfler & Stierand, 2020; Shorey & Ng, 2022). To ensure confirmability, having an outside source who was not a participant nor had knowledge of the study was used. The first task was to guarantee the procedures and methods were specific (Haven & Van Grootel, 2019). Also, the outside source ensured that data collection and reporting results increased the study's credibility. Reflexivity was also noted in the research to ensure that the biases, knowledge, values, and assumptions were transparent and did not impact the findings. The use of triangulation also helped confirm the study (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006; Johns, 2022).

Ethical Considerations

One ethical consideration was that of pseudonyms. Due to the nature of the study being conducted in the district the researcher worked, and the PD offered within the district, not including the real identities of the school district and participants was important. Ensuring that the participants understood this and that the researcher was held accountable was critical.

Another ethical consideration was what would happen if the researcher and the educators reading the responses to ensure trustworthiness did not agree. How this issue was handled needed to be considered as the external audit was implemented. Informed consent and journal entries submitted on paper was kept in a locked filing cabinet to which only the researcher had access. Electronic files were housed in one folder in google with password protection enabled. All files were also backed up on a thumb drive, locked up when not in use. Additionally, there was a master file list in google and on the thumb drive of all information gathered. After three years, the files were destroyed. Participants also chose pseudonyms for the written portion (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Ponterotto, 2010). Building trust was vital to the research with participants in all aspects of data collection and storage (Tsang et al., 2019).

Summary

Teacher perceptions on how to take the new strategies learned in PD and effectively apply them during Tier 1 instruction were essential to the field of education. Through a phenomenological study that utilized questionnaires, surveys, journaling, and interviews, I hoped to bracket responses and utilize other educators who had experience with instruction and PD but have no claim to this study to validate responses and ensure credibility. In doing so, my biases and assumptions were kept out of the study as new perspectives from teachers were analyzed. Also, using digital files and NVivo helped with the study's data management. We only had knowledge of what we know, and if we chose to dig deep and ask those who were involved daily with this phenomenon, the insight that could be gained in the field of education could change classrooms and positively impact student success.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to examine teachers' experiences of implementing professional development into Tier 1 instruction at three elementary schools in North Central Texas. The theory guiding this research is the theory of andragogy which occurs when educators can self-reflect and consistently practice skills through learned experiences (Machynska & Boiko, 2020). Educators must understand that when new knowledge is applied to Tier 1 instruction, critical thinking in students is increased to impact success (Gamm et al., 2012; Jitendra et al., 2017). Knowles understands the process of understanding the lived experiences of individuals, also known as transcendental phenomenological (Knowles, 1979). The study helped to understand participants by identifying their feelings and experiences of the phenomena through the what and how (Hamilton et al., 2018). Themes and patterns were analyzed through interviews, focus groups, and individual writing protocols. The steps of the data analysis used in the study include looking at all relevant experiences through transcriptions and written work, grouping the experiences that were similar, and bracketing out all themes that were not necessary. This chapter will contain information on participants, data analysis, themes, and research questions responses.

Participants

Table 1 below lists participant descriptions with pseudonyms utilized for confidentiality. Participants received an email from their campus principals with the study information and consent Google form. All participants, except for one, had worked at Mayberry Elementary for the majority of their career. One teacher who met the study criteria was finishing her second year. Twelve teachers filled out the Google form consenting to the study and then participating in

demographic information. Once the forms were received, the demographic information was analyzed to ensure that participants met the requirements for the study.

Table 1

Teacher Participants

Teacher Participant	Years Taught	Highest Degree Earned	Content Area	Grade Level
Becky	5	Masters	English Language Arts and Math	4th
Cathy	6	Bachelors	Math/Science	5th
Haley	21	Masters	English Language Arts	K-5 th
Kimberly	18	Bachelors	All Content Areas	K
Lucy	19	Bachelors	All Content Areas	2nd
Pam	10	Bachelors	Math/Science	5 th
Paula	9	Bachelors	All Content Areas	K
Perla	14	Masters	English Language Arts	3rd
Rachel	3	Masters	All Content Areas	K
Sarah	7	Bachelors	English Language Arts	4th
Wendy	9	Bachelors	Math/Science	3rd
Willow	23	Masters	Math/Science	3rd

Becky

Becky is a fourth-grade teacher at Mayberry Elementary. The highest degree she has earned is a master's degree. She taught in a different state before accepting the job at Mayberry Elementary for the past three years. She has taught second grade and fourth grade in Texas. She has pursued PD, which will help her focus on growth areas. She did say that most of her PD that have benefitted her classroom instruction has been outside of the district. She is a rational teacher with high patience as she has taught new subjects each year to prepare to be a building administrator.

Cathy

Cathy is a fifth-grade teacher at Mayberry Elementary. The highest degree she has earned is a bachelor's degree. She has been at Mayberry Elementary for six years as an educator. She teaches math and science and speaks highly of PD that she has attended at the district level. She does discuss how it has been beneficial for her classroom. She teaches a diverse group of students and has a passion for teaching.

Haley

Haley, a reading teacher for all grade levels, works at Mayberry Elementary. She has been at Mayberry Elementary for the entire 21 years of teaching. The highest degree she has earned is a master's degree. She loves reading, though she would state that the trainings she has benefitted the most from more recently are those outside the district that provide intentional strategies to help students with reading. She is compassionate for helping all students but ensuring that students do not fall through the cracks in their classroom.

Kimberly

Kimberly is a Kindergarten teacher at Mayberry Elementary. She has many years of experience but just finished her second year at Mayberry Elementary. Her experience is vastly

different from others. The highest degree she has earned is a bachelor's degree. She feels the best PD she has attended that she has been able to implement in the classroom is one by a Kindergarten teacher who understands the day-to-day tasks required by teachers. She is calm and passionate about teaching.

Lucy

Lucy, a second-grade teacher, works at Mayberry Elementary. She has taught her 19 years all at Mayberry Elementary. The highest degree she has earned is a bachelor's degree. She stated that in her experience with PD and the district, PD has been much sparser than in years past. She understands how to challenge students and encourage them in their educational journey.

Pam

Pam, a fifth-grade teacher, works at Mayberry Elementary. She has taught all ten years at Mayberry Elementary. The highest degree she has earned is a bachelor's degree. She stated that she has been through so many great trainings, and she said her note-taking ability helped greatly in her ability to implement new knowledge into her instruction. She is a teacher who understands how to reach a diverse group of students and help them achieve individual success.

Paula

Paula is a Kindergarten teacher at Mayberry Elementary. She has taught for nine years, but the past five have been at Mayberry Elementary. The highest degree she has earned is a bachelor's degree. She stated that many trainings in the district are good but usually encompass several grade levels, so bringing specific knowledge back to Kindergarten students is not always easy. She is a patient, kind, and generous teacher to her students.

Perla

Perla, a third-grade teacher, works at Mayberry Elementary. She has taught for 14 years, all at Mayberry Elementary. The highest degree she has earned is a master's degree. She teaches in a departmentalized grade and attends trainings for reading and writing. Though there are not many, she has attended more than lower elementary grades since she is in a tested grade level. She thinks make-and-take PD is the best when a teacher can return to the classroom with the resources already made.

Rachel

Rachel, a Kindergarten teacher, works at Mayberry Elementary. She has three years of experience, all at Mayberry Elementary. The highest degree she has earned is a master's degree. She loves PD and will explore, research, and look for trainings on her own to help support the areas she feels she needs growth. She is also great at not only attending trainings, but bringing it back in a real way to her teammates to impact grade levels and all students.

Sarah

Sarah, a fourth-grade teacher, works at Mayberry Elementary. She has seven years of experience, six being at Mayberry Elementary. The highest degree she has earned is a bachelor's degree. She stated that she loves PD and learning, but PLCs is where she has had the most impact on newly learned knowledge. Through PLCs, PD can be tailored to fit the needs of just classroom teachers. She is skilled at knowing exactly what skills students need in order to achieve success.

Wendy

Wendy, a third-grade teacher, works at Mayberry Elementary. She has nine years of experience, all at Mayberry Elementary. The highest degree she has earned is a bachelor's degree. She teaches math and science and feels the district is good about PD in these two

subjects. She feels that examining what all teachers must do and removing something when something is added would be the most impactful in applying new knowledge.

Willow

Willow, a third-grade teacher, works at Mayberry Elementary. She has 23 years of experience, all at Mayberry Elementary. The highest degree she has earned is a master's degree. She feels that the district has always offered PD and has changed and evolved over the years. She stated that when grade-level teachers could work with content coordinators, it was impactful in planning and applying new knowledge to Tier 1 instruction

Results

Through the use of individual interviews, focus groups, and writing protocol, data was collected. After the transcriptions were reviewed, themes and patterns were analyzed throughout. The study revealed four distinct themes that emerged through the data collection. They included how professional development and Tier 1 instructions were intertwined. Also emerging were the concepts of building critical thinking in the classrooms and the barriers educators face as they begin implementing newly learned knowledge into their instruction.

Theme 1: Professional Development

Teachers are passionate about continuing to learn to better their craft in the classroom. However, teachers at Mayberry ISD receive varied training based on grade levels and the content that is taught. When speaking about professional development and if it impacted Tier 1 instruction, Willow stated that she had “spent many pieces of training looking at our data and looking at the TEKS and how we need to teach it differently.” It was also evident that PD on Tier 1 instruction came from outside sources such as reading academy, Region 11, and privately paid PD, though only stated, “I have not attended a ton of trainings that directly discussed Tier 1

instruction.” Other factors discussed were the frequency, choices, methods, and strategies learned.

Varied Professional Development

Interestingly, about two-thirds of the participants stated they had attended professional development in the district, though the majority had been in math and science. Paula stated how she had one “for math and the science one was good,” and “we’ve done lead forward training.” Math was noted again with Wendy discussing her PD “using new programs like StemScopes.” All reading PD noted by participants took place outside the district, namely reading academies from Texas Education Agency. Also noticed during the data analysis was only one grade level discussing how their PD was during PLCs, so no other grade level or district teachers were present. Writing was also mentioned by two participants, but no reading PD was mentioned throughout the interviews and data collection.

Varied Grade Levels

Kimberly discussed how she has had to seek outside PD to grow as an educator. “He is a kindergarten teacher and real-life classroom title one school so I can relate a lot to his teaching.” The second-grade teacher, Lucy, could only describe math training completed in the district. She said that the reading academy had benefited her the most this year “helps with the Tier 1 instruction for the phonics and reading and phonological awareness”. The third-grade teachers noted mainly math and science training. Two fourth-grade teachers discussed how one of their most impactful PDs came out of their professional learning communities, “so in PLC, for example, it is more about high rigor teaching” and “taught us some very hands-on activities that we can do.” Fifth-grade teachers stated that their main trainings are on data and TEKS for math and science as well. Though writing was noted, it was for only one grade level.

Frequency and Choice Given

Frequency and teacher choice for professional development were discussed during focus group interviews. Several participants stated that frequency varied from once to four or five times a year. One participant stated she had not attended any in a year but that she “did seek out my own help and I would ask to meet with my coach weekly.” One participant went on to explain, “it was with various grade levels so it wasn’t always easy to jut focus on one particular grade level.” Some participants stated that as they worked through the reading academy, they met every nine weeks but only to be given work time. Most participants stated that “summertime,” “in the summer,” and “especially in the summer” was when choices were given. Other participants who had been at Mayberry ISD for more years remembered a time when during the year, they were given options on what to attend, though that has changed.

Methods and Strategies Learned

Though three participants described PD as “sit and get” and “lecture format,” the rest of the participants used adjectives such as “interactive,” “hands-on,” “helpful,” and “evidence-based practices.” Willow noted that in PD, they started with “concrete before we moved to abstract” concepts, which also supported the successful implementation of strategies and content. Strategies learned throughout PD came through modeling, allowing teachers to make items to take back to the classroom. By providing resources that could be made at the given time, participants stated it allowed easier implementation of strategies learned. Wendy stated that one strategy that was learned was “providing them (students) multiple opportunities,” which may help lead to a better understanding of what they are being asked.

Theme 2: Defining Tier 1 Instruction Differently

Teachers do understand Tier 1 instruction though how they each defined it was different. “Teaching to the whole,” “teaching to the 80%ish of your kiddos”, “reach out to the top,” “teaching the full class the same content,” and “everybody gets the same thing for Tier 1” are just a few examples. Some teachers brought it back to themselves by stating they must know “what kind of instruction” and “what my goal for the lesson is.” A few teachers stated that understanding how to assess to “see how the kids did” and “pass the assessment” should be a goal of Tier 1 instruction. Several participants also mentioned modeling as an important aspect of Tier 1 instruction to help ensure student success.

PD and Tier 1 Interconnected

Many participants did not specifically take PD, built just for Tier 1 instruction; however, many of the learned items could be used in Tier 1. Sarah explained that in a PD she took, instruction for a research-based strategy was modeled, and expectations were set for teachers. Paula agreed and stated, “Basically the model, making sure we build it first together as teachers and so when we do the lesson, we know this is the result for the kids and like we can plan for it and make sure we are holding the kids accountable to that standard.” Haley discussed how many trainings she attended were digging into the curriculum, which would impact Tier 1 instruction. Participants also agreed that through PD, educators would understand the content and what students should be able to do at the end of the content according to the individual grade level. Pam said her greatest success came when “I know what they should be doing.”

Theme 3: Barriers

All participants agreed that many barriers get in the way of implementing PD into Tier 1 instruction. Through individual interviews and writing prompts, several sub-themes emerged. The same barriers discussed during individual interviews also occurred during the writing

protocol. Many different facets of time surfaced, as well as PD that is given to be practical for the educators attending it. Furthermore, when educators do not feel adequately prepared, it causes new knowledge to be left out and old ways used. Failure was also a sub-theme that appeared as not only do educators want to fail in front of students but also in front of their administration. Kimberly stated, “My biggest fear is that I’m going to do something wrong.”

Time

“There is not time”, “I think the greatest challenge is the time,” and “It takes time” are just a few of the remarks from participants. One went on to add that there are after-school events, and then when there is training until the event, time is rushed, people are tired, and PD is not taken seriously because “you’re in the session, but you’re not, really.” Another facet of time is getting items prepared. “I have to go make those copies and cut out these arts and have everything ready. So just more time, time management that you have kind of have”. Other obligations such as families, second jobs, and other activities also hindered how much time could be spend on planning and preparing for new strategies to be implemented.

Practicality

“I would say the biggest barrier was that there was never anything taking away, that was only things being added to the curriculum”. Teachers do not always know what they can hold off on or what is top priority. “Everything is a priority” when it comes to students, so having a better understanding would help with this barrier. Another participant noted was that some PD is not always practical. “What works well for one teacher may not work the same for another teacher” and asking, “can we incorporate it depending on the time of year” are just a few examples of when some PD is not practical. Not only does one have to keep in mind teachers, but also students. “It just depends on the kids that you have, what works for them and what doesn’t

work.” Some PD “doesn’t really apply to what I’m teaching” so it is hard to implement to Tier 1 instruction.

Inadequately Prepared

Being adequately prepared in the classroom correlates with both teachers and students. When teachers do not understand the content or “do not feel adequately prepared, the challenge came”. Especially when you are a new educator, and there are so many things to learn, if PD does not support understanding the new knowledge, they feel overwhelmed and do not even try to implement it. “Training was very hard to follow, the materials were limited, and the presenter had no idea how to help us adapt our materials for interventions,” was one explanation received when questioned about barriers. Interestingly, being adequately prepared does not only apply to educators but also students. When students “lacked background knowledge and experiences to participate,” it made it very difficult to implement new knowledge.

Other Barriers

Other barriers noted sparsely through the interviews and writing protocol noted that student discipline problems were an issue. Another barrier was managing materials while being able to “check for understanding” for students to ensure understanding of grade-level skills. Mayberry Elementary does have bilingual classes, and one barrier mentioned by several participants was “as bilingual teachers is that sometimes during the sessions the materials are not in Spanish.” Fearing failure in front of students and administration was also mentioned. Educators want to do things right the first time. Through the data collection methods, it was clear that educators want to look like they have it all together, and when implementing new knowledge, if it is a struggle, educators go back to their old ways of teaching.

Theme 4: Building Critical Thinkers

Several responses were given when discussing if professional development was given to enhance student's critical thinking in the classroom. Three participants noted that they had yet to attend any trainings that would support building critical thinking. The two fourth-grade participants described that the PD in their PLC did help to support the implementation of planning critical thinkers. They "showed us what the high-level thinking learning, I mean questions should look like we had to kind of bring out of our lesson plans and see if we were asking those high-level questions." Writing training and thinking map training where "students share turn and talks before the students write the pre-writing skills" has helped to build critical thinking in the lower grades.

Research Question Responses

One central research question and three sub-questions were used throughout the study as a basis for all interviews and writing protocol. Questions were intentionally developed that would support understanding the phenomenon being studied. Through the shared answers of participants, the lived experiences were clear. With this, four prominent themes were discovered. The participants' answers regarding each of the study questions are below.

Central Research Question

How do elementary teachers implement newly learned knowledge into Tier 1 instruction? The participants believe that Tier 1 is important for student success in the classroom. Becky said, "sharing with other teachers what worked, what didn't work, and maybe even observing other classrooms." Willow agreed with her statement, "having someone to talk through, or you know just going into like you are." Sarah added that "having a timeline when it needs to be implemented" to "have time to gather it and get the time to implement." Other participants stated that one must give grace when taking newly learned knowledge into the classroom. Haley stated,

"giving lots of examples, modeling it in the planning to see how you can incorporate it." Being able to visualize what the instruction could look like helps as well. Also, teachers need to understand how to self-reflect and tweak when needed.

Sub-Question One

What does Tier 1 instruction look like in the classroom? Kimberly explained that Tier 1 instruction was "explicit" and "systematic." Several participants stated that it was teaching to "the whole class," "80%ish of students", and "your top students." Giving immediate feedback is important in letting students work things out for themselves, understanding how to incorporate vocabulary, "lots of vocabulary," and visuals, "a lot of visuals." Backwards planning was also brought up by several participants in knowing what students need to be able to accomplish at the end of the content being taught. Sarah also added "model, and then they're doing independent work and then you have a closure" so that students can get in practice.

Sub-Question Two

How do elementary teachers develop and apply critical thinking of new knowledge into Tier 1 instruction? This question was harder for teachers to answer as most have received some training in critical thinking, but not all have been immersed in developing and applying critical thinking. Sarah and Becky discussed a PD they attended that related to developing critical thinking in the classroom. They stated that students have to talk and have "accountable talk". The new knowledge was taken one step further when they looked at how students are questioned and how to increase the rigor of questioning. Sarah explained that questions should "bring out" questioning in "our lesson plans and see if we were asking those high-level thinking questions." Role playing while learning the new knowledge, as well as watching someone modeling the skill, are also factors in being able to develop and apply critical thinking in Tier 1 instruction.

Sub-Question Three

What barriers do teachers experience that have hindered them in applying new knowledge from PD into Tier 1 instruction to support student success? “My biggest fear is that I’m going to do something wrong” was a barrier for several participants. “I think the greatest challenge is the time” was brought out by Cathy. Perla and Sarah agreed with the time and added that things must be made or even after-school scheduled activities, and trying to fit everything in is complicated. Pam and Becky discussed another barrier: one does not always know where to start and so take it in pieces. She also added that one must “decide which one” to implement when your plate is full. The last barrier related to teachers and students is that not everyone learns at the same rate or with the same methods, and that needs to not be forgotten.

Summary

After the study was conducted, using coding all interviews, writing protocols, and focus group interviews, four main themes were common with applying newly learned knowledge into Tier 1 instruction to build critical thinkers. Creswell and Poth (2018) discuss that transcendental phenomenology should give others an “essence of the participant experience” so that others can learn (p. 78). Throughout the data collection, it was clear that through the lived experiences, participants could describe their knowledge of the phenomenon being studied. It is clear that when others can learn from lived experiences, changes can occur that will bring more success. Below are the four main themes that were identified from this study.

The first theme was about the professional development that the teachers experience in their district. Many teachers discuss the need for PD as they feel it is their way to continue to grow in their profession and develop their skills. Though some PD is offered to teachers in the district, it varies by grade level and content. The PD that was discussed that was the most

beneficial was the training received from outside the district for several participants.

Interestingly, reading PD was never mentioned by any participant.

Then, understanding Tier 1 from the participant's perspective, grasp that all students need to be taught grade-level skills. Educators have to teach all students and give them access to the grade-level curriculum with the understanding of what the goal is at the end of the content. Understanding the path of instruction to ensure student mastery is important. Several participants discussed how imperative it is to have visuals and vocabulary throughout the classroom. Also included is modeling from the teacher and explicit instruction to assist in Tier 1. Furthermore, participants then discussed how these two themes are interconnected. Again, going back to professional development, some have had good Tier 1 PD, but it was outside of the school district. The few PD inside the district are related to math or science. Teachers understand the need to bring new knowledge back to the classroom but feel that only a few trainings related to their specific content could be taken back immediately. Participants saw how these two themes interconnected when discussing methods and strategies that were taught and taken back into the classroom.

Next, the theme was building critical thinking. Interestingly, some participants felt they had received great training on higher-level questioning to help build critical thinking. Other participants could see how some PD had helped their planning of critical thinking, though some participants would have disagreed that they had any training that would help prepare them. In building critical thinking in the classroom, it was not necessarily in the content but the methods and strategies used through instruction that would help. Hands-on learning, where students learn for themselves and accountable to talk with peers, was beneficial with support in the classroom.

The last theme was barriers that are faced along the way to implementation. Time is a big factor, but only sometimes having the correct understanding of the new knowledge to take it back and put it into practice. Plates are full with nothing coming off when new things are added, and practicality is also a barrier. If the PD did not connect with what teachers were working on at the current or future time, the practicality of trying to implement it did not seem plausible. Also, the fear of failing hindered working on new knowledge in Tier 1 instruction.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study is to examine teachers' experiences of implementing professional development into Tier 1 instruction at three elementary schools in North Central Texas. This chapter will consist of five discussion subsections: (a) interpretation of findings, (b) implications for policy and practice, (c) theoretical and methodological implications, (d) limitations and delimitations, and (e) recommendations for future research. In interpreting findings, readers will understand the main themes presented throughout the data collection with participants. These findings led to the proposal of some implications for Mayberry ISD policy and practices used for PD to impact their Tier 1 instruction. The theory of andragogy was the basis of the research and how it connected to the study results. Also included are limitations and delimitations found, as well as what recommendations are being recommended for future studies.

Discussion

The interpretation of findings and emerging themes are below to understand the study's results. One fact to remember is that all participants work for the same school in Mayberry ISD. Though all participants agreed with much of the discussion, some variations existed. One big variation was the occurrence of PD in each grade level. Participants did align with findings on Tier 1 instruction, barriers, and building critical thinkers.

Interpretation of Findings

The study did find four themes that were prevalent in each of the data collections. In different aspects of professional development, participants could reflect on their experiences thus far in their careers. PD experiences noted were both in-district and out-of-district. Another theme

is how participants define Tier 1 instruction as they teach this daily in their classroom and having access to given district curriculum. Also included is how educators connected PD to their instruction. Other themes included challenges into implementation and why it was so important to build critical thinkers during instruction for student success.

Summary of Thematic Findings

Mayberry ISD varies in how often PD is provided for all grade levels. Though there is some connection to Tier 1 instruction, participants did discuss how there is not always access to integrating PD to the given curriculum. Understanding challenges that may be faced and why critical thinking is so important to the classroom, could help with more effective implementation of newly learned knowledge.

Effective Professional Development. Mayberry ISD does provide professional development to all grade levels for elementary. This was clear when speaking with all participants. The frequency varied by grade level, however. Third through fifth grades take state-mandated tests each year in the spring. Those grade levels were the ones that had more PD and included more rigorous instructional strategies. The participants would agree that the PD was good, but it was only sometimes given at the right time and did not always get taken back to the classroom because the new knowledge did not make sense with what was being taught then. When the focus groups were conducted, teachers were able to recall more PD as they listened to others talk about their experiences. It sparked more conversation than when individual interviews were conducted. Listening to participants discuss PD did connect to the theory of andragogy. Participants were self-reflecting on their experiences of PD and how the way they learned during their specific PD impacted their instruction in the classroom (Basma & Savage, 2018; Freeman et al., 2017).

Though three teachers stated that many of their PD attended was “sit and get” or lecture style, the others stated that many of their trainings had been interactive. This connects to what Freeman et al. (2017) studied when educators learn and understand what they are learning, they can take it back to impact student success. Participants concurred that when PD was interactive, it led to a better understanding of the strategies and methods learned. One participant spoke of how this helped to bring the knowledge to life in the classroom for students. This not only helped educators gain a better understanding but student success with content.

Access to Given Curriculum. With this theme, all participants agreed that this type of instruction was for all students (Jitendra et al., 2017). Ensuring all students have access to the grade-level curriculum was the consensus with immediate feedback. The early elementary participants discussed more “visuals” and “vocabulary,” modeling, and scaffolding for students. In contrast, the older elementary participants discussed more backwards planning, ensuring students would be successful in assessment at the end of the content. Students in second grade and higher are given end-of-content assessments, so for Kindergarten and 1st grade, this was not even given consideration. However, all participants would agree that teachers must understand what they are teaching and the end goal for all students to demonstrate success in the classroom.

Connecting Professional Development. As the discussion continued on PD and Tier 1 instruction, not all participants could connect the PD they had attended to their Tier 1 instruction. As participants reflected on these two areas with PD in the district, it was noted that as they dug into data and curriculum, they did not think it affected Tier 1 instruction; however, it did to some degree. The two fourth-grade teachers who stated their PD had impacted their classrooms were in PLCs with only their team, and no other teachers benefitted from the training. The participants who felt like their PD had impacted their classroom instruction were PD outside the district. This

was because the teachers had sought out PD themselves, knowing that was an area of growth for them.

Challenges During Implementation. All participants agreed that educators face many barriers when implementing new knowledge into instruction. Time is the major barrier. They feel their plates are already full of everything they have to do. When another thing is added to do, there is not enough time to get it all done. Also included in time was the need to make things and be prepared with materials, as well as other obligations. Several participants have young kids, and some have older kids involved in extracurricular activities, after-school duties, and meetings. This is not always easy, so new knowledge is pushed aside. One participant was sincere in saying she feared failing in front of students. She stated that although she taught students it was okay to fail and learn from it, it was not in her nature to fail. Other teachers also mentioned that to look good in front of administrators and students, if something did not work perfectly the first time, it was usually thrown out, and old ways reverted. One of the other barriers brought up by a few participants was that PD cannot be one size fits all for all educators. Not all strategies succeed in every classroom. Not all educators have the same background to be successful in implementing new knowledge back into their instruction as easily as others.

Importance of Critical Thinking. Though all participants agreed that rigorous lessons were needed for students, they did not feel that their PD led them to do that. Again, the two fourth-grade teachers who had been in a PLC felt their training benefited them. One participant discussed if one PD could be that influential in building critical thinking for one grade level, how many more students could benefit if it had been shared with all educators. A few other upper elementary participants felt that learning the new curriculum through PD helped them to be

purposeful in planning. However, at least half of the participants could not think of a time they attended PD to build critical thinking in the classroom.

Implications for Policy or Practice

When thinking of implications for the school district, one must understand participants' lived experiences. While there is some variation in the data, consistent and clear messages surfaced. When districts listen to educators and improve their practice, student success is positively impacted. These implications have to also be realistic for all involved. After analyzation of data, themes were discovered, but it was also clear that there are implications to the policies and practices of the district.

Implications for Policy

After conducting this study, the district must deliberately determine how PD is planned equally across grades. Because several participants indicated that they had only attended one PD during the school year and others had attended four to five times during the school year, it is important to address how all educators can continue to improve their craft. Not only thinking about equally across grade levels but also content. It was noted that math and science have many trainings, and writing was mentioned twice, but none for reading. Educators who are self-contained and teach all subjects may need training in different content, but that is not happening now, and the district needs to ensure this takes place. The district also needs teachers to set professional goals on particular areas that need development and consider that when planning PD. This would need to happen at the end of each school year, so consideration for future PD for the summer and the next school year is purposeful. Another policy to consider is how educators can request assistance receiving outside PD instead of paying out of pocket. This is if it can be used across the district to support student success.

Implications for Practice

There are several implications for practice. First, educators like a choice. Individual educator professional goals need to be considered when planning PD. One barrier mentioned was that not all PD applied to all educators even though they were all expected to attend. PD should give educators what they need to improve classroom instruction. When educators feel they have a voice, they are more likely to take back knowledge into their instruction. The question then becomes how choices could be given for various PD instead of a one-size-fits-all.

Another implication is if educators want to implement something new, what can be done with them or provide them the time to do it successfully? This could include modeling the strategy or new knowledge. It could also include offering time for educators to collaborate and then allowing time to implement it in the classroom. Some participants even added that check-ins with "experts" in this new knowledge could support the implementation of newly learned knowledge. Through these check-ins, feedback, and debriefing may occur that will help continue implementation of the new knowledge learned.

A third implication would be to think about the PD schedule ahead of time. This will ensure that when PD is delivered, it is relevant to the current content and easier for educators to plan and implement. Educators want to attend PD that is practical for their skill set and content, but more intentional planning may be needed. Also included in the planning is scheduling follow-up. It may involve observing the new knowledge implemented or talking with educators who worked to implement it. This needs to be purposefully scheduled with enough time for educators to plan and then carry out the process.

Theoretical and Empirical Implications

This study was set based on the theory of andragogy. Educators must grasp concepts they are expected to teach in a way that will make it real for them to implement in the classroom. They must also be able to self-reflect and tweak methods and strategies. Empirically, it was clear that educators prefer to choose what PD they attend as they feel this is the best motivation for application into the classroom for students. With consideration of the theories and empirical implications, educators are given what they need resulting in building critical thinking and applying to Tier 1 instruction.

Theoretical Implications

The study incorporated the theory of andragogy. Participants discussed the importance of learning from PD and new knowledge to be relevant and meaningful to their content area (Pappas, 2013). This was considered when speaking about educators being given a choice for PD, notably. All participants considered how they take new knowledge and intentionally plan into their instruction which is another basis (Pappas, 2013). This happens when the new knowledge learned is practical for what educators need and with the content being taught at the current time. The self-reflection included that the PD needed to be practical to what was being taught, and through collaboration with others and time given, planning of new knowledge may be implemented.

According to Pappas (2013), Knowles also had five assumptions for andragogy theory. Throughout the study, every assumption was brought to life through the participants' lived experiences. The first two assumptions began by discussing how as individuals learn on their own, they become less dependent on others, can rely on their skills, and focus on the acquired skills needed (Knowles et al., 2015; Pappas, 2013). Participants discussed needing PD to focus on their desired skills to enhance classroom instruction. This was also seen when participants

discussed the methods used to give successful PD. Third, learners can be used as a resource once they learn (Knowles et al., 2015; Pappas, 2013). This was evident in analyzing data when it was discussed that if, after PD, the "expert" in the content observed, modeled, and followed up with participants, it would benefit implementing newly learned knowledge into Tier 1 instruction. The fourth connection is that they rely on their training and plan for themselves to implement the newly acquired knowledge, which follows the assumption of the learner understanding the reason for learning and application into instruction. (Harper & Ross, 2011; Knowles et al., 2015). Also, when instruction enhances critical thinking and increases student success, participants are motivated to continue learning which is the fifth assumption. (Knowles et al., 2015; Pappas, 2013).

Empirical Implications

It was clear throughout the study with participants that educators must have some control over the PD they receive. When they feel that they are learning new knowledge that is applicable and will benefit classroom instruction and students, their motivation to learn and apply knowledge is heightened (Dolfing et al., 2020; Kiemer et al., 2016; Sailor et al., 2021). When educators feel they are attending PD that is beneficial to their instruction, they tend to buy in. According to participants, this would also help with another barrier of failing. With failure, the empirical implication is that if teachers feel judged with implementation, they will not try, though the strategy or instruction could greatly benefit student success with content (Kiemer et al., 2016).

Limitations and Delimitations

Through the course of studies, there are possibilities of limitations and delimitations occurring. Whether it is the number of participants, the location, or the data collection, all could

be potential factors in limitations. For delimitations, one needs to understand why one study method was utilized over others similar. This will help to realize the importance of the study.

Below, limitations and delimitations are defined for this study.

Limitations

The limitation of the study is that the participants were all from one elementary school. Mayberry ISD has three elementary schools, but sampling only from one school could limit the findings. With different leadership at each elementary, educators may have varying views on the PD they receive and their Tier 1 instruction. A further limitation is that teachers do not have to have a certain number of years at Mayberry ISD. One participant had different experiences than the others but was employed less time in the district than all the others. Reading content not being delivered in PD was also a limitation. It limited how much PD was discussed with methods and strategies. Reading is an integral part of core content and if there had been mention of PD, it could have changed results in methods, strategies, and building critical thinkers.

Delimitations

One delimitation is that transcendental phenomenology was used versus hermeneutic in order for readers of the study to understand the phenomenon from those who live the experiences now. When readers have a comprehension of the phenomenon through the voices of those who are living it, it gives a deeper understanding. Also, having the researcher's opinion in the study could negatively impact the study because the lived experiences could be years ago. If the study is to apply to present times, one needs to understand through the perceptions of those in the current times.

Recommendations for Future Research

In consideration of the study findings, limitations, and delimitations placed on the study, to truly support the purpose of the research, one recommendation for future research could be studying educators who are implementing new knowledge from PD for Tier 1 instruction and who are receiving follow-up visits and debriefing. Another recommendation for future research is to examine what teachers feel has become their educational responsibility. Several participants discussed having many things on their plates and nothing being removed when new things are added. This study must be conducted with those with at least one year's experience. However, having a wide range of experience for this study would give a clearer picture of what educators face daily in their tasks.

Also, conducting a study on PD where educators have a chance to watch a strategy being modeled. In this PD, educators could be given time to practice the strategy or method before applying it. This would allow collaboration with “experts” and peers that are learning. Then follow up with other educators living through the same experience would be beneficial in ensuring the implementation of new knowledge is applied. Coaching has been studied numerous times, but working with peers on newly learned strategies would impact the world of education.

Conclusion

Understanding the lived experiences of those going through a particular phenomenon benefits others in the same field. Educators feel that they have so many daily tasks that they are inundated with. They also all want what is best for each student in their classroom and to see success. Educators have a desire to continue to be lifelong learners to be empowered with their skills in the classroom. They need to feel that the PD they attend is relevant and meaningful to what they teach at that given time. They need to see the strategies in action and collaborate on barriers that may hinder effective implementation in the classroom. Educators also need time to

implement new knowledge truly. They cannot be expected to learn one day and apply it the next day without time to self-reflect or discuss. This was apparent when listening to the participants and analyzing the data gathered. Participants were also amazed throughout the focus group discussions when the differences between PD and grade levels were made more aware. It was evident throughout the interviews that participants feel that several things could impact their instruction to lead to student success. They agreed that if follow-ups were scheduled accordingly, the instruction would be positively impacted. This would allow for feedback and continuing to grow in learning. The participants also discussed that if PD led to increasing critical thinking, student success would increase. Mayberry ISD needs to reconsider its PD schedule to ensure consistency and equity across all grade levels and content areas. However, to do this effectively, teachers setting individual goals need to be in place and examined to support the planning of PD. Ensuring that PD is relevant and timely and that educators have time to process how to implement with collaboration with peers are all pieces that need to be put into place. Every participant shows up daily to do what is best for each student in their classroom. With better PD and a strategic plan for the implementation of new knowledge, not only will students perhaps see more success with critical thinking and academics, educators will grow in the craft and far surpass any achievement they could ever imagine.

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Appendix A

IRB Approval Documentation

CONSENT

PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY ON TEACHER PERCEPTIONS ON TIER 1 AND THE ADULT LEARNER'S APPLICATION OF THE KNOWLEDGE

Michelle Stapp
Liberty University
Department of Education

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be a teacher and have at least three years of experience in a core content area from Pre-Kindergarten through fifth grade. 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.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study is to examine teachers' experiences of implementing professional development into Tier 1 instruction at three elementary schools in North Central Texas. Understanding this will provide teachers an avenue to implement successful Tier 1 instruction and help students be successful and become critical thinkers.

Procedures

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

1. Complete an online survey to gather demographics of each participant. This will take approximately 10 minutes.
2. Attend an individual interview. This interview will take approximately 30 minutes and will be audio recorded.
3. Complete and submit a protocol writing prompt. This prompt will vary in minutes from 10-30 minutes and will be turned in no more than three weeks from the individual interview.
4. Attend one focus group discussion. Participants will be given multiple opportunities to attend one focus group discussion once the interviews and writing prompt have been completed. This group discussion will take approximately 45 minutes and will be audio recorded.

Benefits

The direct benefits participants should expect to receive from taking part in this study are to understand various lived experiences and how best to implement PD into Tier 1 instruction consistently.

Limits

Interviews and focus group discussions will be audio recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in focus group discussion. While discouraged, the members of the focus group may share what was discussed with persons outside the group. Though participants can be linked to information shared in interviews, protocol writing, and focus group discussions, the researcher will not disclose identities or identifiable individual responses. Pseudonyms will give used in writing the research.

Participation

Participation of this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Mayberry Independent School District. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time.

Withdraw

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you, apart from the focus group data, will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study. Focus group data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

Contact Information

The researcher conducting this study is Michelle Stapp. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact her at mmstapp@liberty.edu. You may also contact the research's committee chair at paferrin@liberty.edu. 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 Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blv., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

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 the 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 audio record me as part of my participation in this study.

Printed Subject Name

Signature & Date

Printed Name of Investigator

Investigator Signature & Date

Appendix B

IRB Approval

From: IRB, IRB <IRB@liberty.edu>
Sent: Tuesday, March 28, 2023 9:29 AM
To: Stapp, Michelle Marie <mmstapp@liberty.edu>
Cc: Ferrin, Pat (School of Education) <paferrin@liberty.edu>; IRB, IRB <IRB@liberty.edu>
Subject: RE: IRB-FY22-23-832

Good Morning Michelle,

Thank you for providing your survey link. The IRB has completed its review of your research application, and you will receive your approval notification shortly. Some minor edits were identified on the attached document(s), and we wanted to make you aware of the edits, but you do not need to return the documents to the IRB. However, please make sure that your online survey link **exactly matches** the consent and demographic documents attached to this email, incorporating the edits. Feel free to contact the IRB if you have any questions.

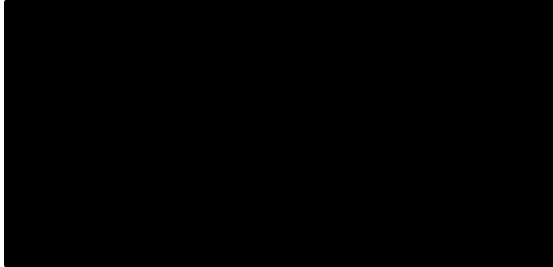
Best Regards,

Gwyneth Bennick
Assistant Research Coordinator
Office of Research Ethics

(434) 592-5530

Appendix C
Site Permission Form

January 14, 2023



As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree. The title of my research project is “Phenomenological Study On Teacher Perceptions Of Tier 1 And The Adult Learner’s Application Of The Knowledge”. The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study is to examine teachers' experiences of implementing professional development into Tier 1 instruction at three elementary schools.

I am writing to request your permission to contact members of your staff at Mayberry Elementary, Cano Elementary, and James Elementary to invite them to participate in my research study.

Participants will be asked to complete the attached survey. Participants will be presented with informed consent information prior to participating. Take part in this study is completely voluntary, and participants are welcomed to discontinue participation at any time.

Thank you for considering my request. If you choose to grant permission, respond by email to mmstapp@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,

Michelle Stapp

Appendix D
Site Permission Approval

[Redacted]

Hello Lady! Approved

Do you need anything more formal?

[Redacted]

The grass isn't greener on the other side. The grass is greener where you water it..."

Appendix E
Recruitment Letter

January 14, 2023

Dear Staff,

As a graduate 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 this transcendental phenomenological study is to examine teachers' experiences of implementing professional development into Tier 1 instruction at three elementary schools in North Central Texas. Understanding this will provide teachers an avenue to implement successful Tier 1 instruction and help students be successful and become critical thinkers. I am writing to invite eligible participants to join my study.

Participants must be a core content teacher, who has at least three years of experience in grades Pre-Kindergarten through fifth grade. Participants, if willing, will be asked to:

1. Complete an online survey to gather demographics of each participant. This will take approximately 10 minutes.
2. Attend an individual interview. This interview will take approximately 30 minutes and will be audio recorded.
3. Complete and submit a protocol writing prompt. This prompt will vary in minutes from 10-30 minutes and will be turned in no more than three weeks from the individual interview.
4. Attend one focus group discussion. Participants will be given multiple opportunities to attend one focus group discussion once the interviews and writing prompt have been completed. This group discussion will take approximately 45 minutes and will be audio recorded.

Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but the information will remain confidential.

To participate, please click [here](#) to complete the attached survey.

A consent document is provided as the first page of the survey and is attached to this email. The consent document contains additional information about my research. After you have read the consent form, please click the button to proceed to survey. Doing so will indicate that you have read the consent information and would like to take part in the survey.

Sincerely,

Michelle Stapp
Researcher
mmstapp@liberty.edu

Appendix F

Participant Demographic Study

1. I give consent to participate in the Phenomenological Study on Teacher Perceptions of Tier 1 and the Adult Learner's Application of the Knowledge.
Please type your name and date on the line below.
2. What school do you teach at currently: *
Mayberry Elementary
Cano Elementary
James Elementary
3. How long have you been in the field of education? *
3-5 years
5-10 years
10-15 years
15-20 years
Over 20 years
4. What is your age? *
21-30
31-40
41-50
Over 50
I prefer not to say
5. What is your ethnic background *
White/Caucasian
Hispanic
African-American
Native-American
Asian-American
Mixed Race
Other
I prefer not to answer
6. What is the highest level of education you have achieved? *
Bachelor's degree
Master's degree
Doctoral degree

Appendix G

Individual Interview Questions

1. Please describe your educational background and career through your current position.
2. Describe what effective Tier 1 instruction is in your classroom.
3. What trainings have you been to that discuss effective Tier 1 instruction?
4. What professional development experiences have you had that prepared you for Tier 1 instruction?
5. Discuss the methods used during the professional development such as interactive, hands on, sit and get.
6. Describe a professional development you have attended that was provided by the district that embraced building critical thinking of students.
7. Describe specific strategies that have been learned in PD that support increasing critical thinking skills for student success.
8. Describe how the newly learned knowledge and strategies are applied into instructional planning?
9. Describe the barriers faced when having to take new knowledge learned from PD and embedding it into Tier 1 instruction.
10. Describe successful resources that have been given in the past to help with the integration of new knowledge into Tier 1 instruction.
11. What would you like to add to our discussion of your experiences with applying newly learned knowledge from PD into your Tier 1 instruction to build critical thinkers for student success?

Appendix H

Protocol Writing Prompt

Participants will be asked to write about a professional development they attended and include how they applied the newly learned knowledge to Tier 1 instruction. This writing will include the specific strategies incorporated and any barriers they may have faced while attempting implementation. Participants will give specific times when the strategy worked or did not work for a better understanding of the lived experience.

Appendix I

Focus Group Questions

1. Through the lived experience of teaching, how can schools/districts support the application of newly learned knowledge from PD into Tier 1 instruction?
2. How often do you attend PD that relates back to your specific content area taught?
3. Have you ever been given the option to choose what type of PD to attend?
4. What do you feel the most important aspect of Tier 1 instruction is?
5. How do you apply new knowledge that you learn?