TEACHER'S EXPERIENCES OF THE RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION MODEL

IMPLEMENTATION IN STATE-RANKED NEW JERSEY SCHOOLS: A QUALITATIVE

CASE STUDY

by Kimberly Myers

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

Liberty University

2024

TEACHER'S EXPERIENCES OF THE RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION MODEL

IMPLEMENTATION IN STATE-RANKED NEW JERSEY SCHOOLS: A QUALITATIVE

CASE STUDY

by Kimberly Myers

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA

2024

APPROVED BY:

Dr. Janet Deck, EdD, Committee Chair

Dr. JoAnna Oster, EdD, Committee Member

Abstract

The purpose of this case study was to discover and describe teachers' experiences of RTI implementation for kindergarten through grade five general education teachers at state-ranked suburban New Jersey schools. The theory guiding this study is Bandura's theory of self-efficacy, as it applies to teachers' experiences of the effectiveness of the RTI process. According to Bandura, self-efficacy is the perception of how well one can execute a task. Self-efficacy can connect to teacher efficacy through the feeling of understanding the job requirements and the intended goals. This case study assessed how teachers' experiences of the RTI process impact the overall program effectiveness in proper implementation and data collection. The central research question that this study addressed was: What are the experiences of kindergarten through grade five teachers when implementing RTI in the general education classrooms? To address this question, a group of ten general education teachers were individually interviewed, focus group interviews were conducted, and documents were analyzed to collect pertinent data to answer this case study's driving research questions. Multiple means of data collection allowed for coding and thematic analysis to take place. This study's findings showed the need for general education elementary teachers to be provided additional training and have administrative support in order to raise levels of teacher efficacy and create a successful RTI program. By understanding teachers' experiences with RTI implementation, future professional development and collaboration throughout school districts can be developed.

Keywords: interventions, tiers, collaboration, teacher experiences

Copyright Page

Dedication

First, I humbly dedicate this dissertation to God. It is through him that all things are possible. "I can do all things through him who strengthens me" (English Standard Version Bible, 2001, Philippians 4:13)

To my parents, who instilled in me at an early age the discipline of having a strong work ethic and never quitting.

To my sister, who has always believed in me and who is the perfect example of strength.

To my husband, who inspires and supports me in every way possible.

To my wonderful friend and co-teacher, Kate, who continually showed understanding, encouragement, and motivated me to work through any problem.

To my nephew, Tucker, you are the source of my laughter and brighten up my days.

To my daughter, Reagan, you have been the perfect gift from God arriving at the most perfect moment.

Acknowledgments

I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to Dr. Janet Deck, my dissertation chair, for her invaluable guidance throughout this journey. Her positivity, kindness, and encouragement have been truly priceless. I would also like to extend my gratitude to Dr. JoAnna Oster for her continual support and expertise throughout my doctoral journey.

I would also like to extend my appreciation to Dr. Natalie Betz who has generously shared her vast knowledge and support throughout this long journey. She has dedicated her time and expertise that has been instrumental in guiding me to success. Lastly, I would like to thank all my professors who have provided me with guidance and knowledge to complete this journey.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Abbreviations

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

Learning Disabilities (LD)

Multi-tied Support Systems (MTSS)

No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)

Response to Intervention (RTI)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

This qualitative case study focuses on teachers' experiences of the implementation of Response to Intervention (RTI) and the effectiveness of meeting students' needs at the elementary level. Throughout Chapter One, the focus will be the background of Response to Intervention (RTI), including its evolution to present-day implementation. The problem statement provides literature support, and teachers' experiences are highlighted, while the purpose statement previews the goal of this study. This study's overall goal is to describe teachers' experiences toward implementing the RTI process and associate those feelings with experience in the field of education. Lastly, definitions are provided to clarify words and phrases further under this study.

Background

While teachers are responsible for supporting students' social-emotional learning, educators' overall well-being and social-emotional climate impact students most (Oberle et al., 2020). Teacher burnout has been researched, and in 2014, 46% of teachers reported very high stress levels throughout the workplace (Gallup, 2014). Top contributors to this burnout included teacher attitudes and low levels of support from administrators, principals, colleagues, and parents (Brunsting et al., 2014). Students' academic success is cultivated in a classroom environment adaptive to learning needs specific to the child. When students become at-risk learners, teachers are responsible for adapting instruction to meet their unique needs. One initiative developed to identify struggling learners is RTI. RTI is a multi-tiered system of support that places the responsibility on the classroom teacher to begin the initial implementation. Although RTI has existed for many years, teachers' experiences with RTI remain worth studying.

When examining what contributes to these workplace stresses, academic initiatives with little professional development are significant factors (Andilos et al., 2018). Successfully implementing RTI requires teachers to have adequate knowledge of the initiative and have administrative support.

Historical Context

The idea of using interventions as support systems has been implemented for decades. Although RTI emerged nationally through the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (2004), its roots can be traced back to the foundation of learning disabilities (LD) (Preston et al., 2016). The term *learning disabilities* was first coined by Samual Kirk (1962) and is described as individuals who have academic difficulties not due to an intellectual disability (Kirk & Bateman, 1962). With learning disabilities (LD) now being an identification for struggling learners to receive special education services, these students began overidentifying due to inadequate classification systems. Understanding the need for a solution to the overidentification of students with learning disabilities, the origins of multitiered support systems can be credited to Heller, Holtzman, and Merrick (1982). Heller et al. (1982) stated that general education teachers' job is to initially provide support to lessen the overidentification of special education students. This research found that progress with adequate instruction determines a child's success determined by progress with quality instruction.

Following this research, developing a tiered support system for education began with Kauffman (1999). The current model of RTI uses three levels of support. The three levels of prevention, primary, secondary, and tertiary, are applied when supporting students' emotional and behavioral goals. Although beginning as a support system for emotional and behavioral disorders, these levels of intervention most closely align with the current RTI model. According

to Kauffman, the primary level prevents the disorder from occurring. Once the condition is identified, the secondary level of intervention comes into play. The goal of this level is to stop the disorder from increasing in severity. If the disorder continues to grow, the tertiary level of intervention is enacted to prevent the disorder from severely impacting the individuals' overall well-being. These levels of intervention closely align with what is now known as RTI.

Providing support through interventions has been implemented for decades. The idea of Response to Intervention at a federal level began with the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2001). The No Child Left Behind Act began to hold public schools accountable for student achievement (Dee & Jacob, 2011). Adopted in 2001, the NCLB required states to implement accountability systems for all public schools with the inclusion of all students. Students with disabilities are a subgroup within the NCLB Act, which states that schools are responsible for closing the achievement gap between students with disabilities within the subgroup and all other students (McLaughlin, 2010). Following the No Child Left Behind Act, The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004) laid the groundwork for implementing multi-tiered support systems to provide additional support for struggling learners. The goal of IDEA is to ensure all students with disabilities have a free, appropriate public education (FAPE) that provides resources to meet the unique needs of all students (2010). The implementation of IDEA (2004) will identify the difference between students who require special education services versus students who need adequate instruction in the general education classroom setting. IDEA calls for school districts to provide additional support for struggling students. IDEA (2004) encourages communities to implement scientific, research-based interventions to ensure these supports are provided. The National Center for Learning Disabilities (2006) outlines the purpose of IDEA and the rights given to parents due to this act. Response to Intervention is outlined as a

service the school district provides due to IDEA (NCLD, 2006). Throughout many school districts across the United States, the interventions have surfaced as the RTI program. The overall goal of RTI is to reduce the number of special education students and to ensure that the appropriate steps are being taken to meet the needs of all struggling learners.

Social Context

The primary reason for RTI to be implemented among public school districts is to prevent the over-identification of students with disabilities, to prevent the disproportional number of minority students who receive special education services, and to avoid the *wait to fail* model of instruction (Alahmari, 2020; Al Otaiba et al., 2014; Fuchs et al., 2003). The purpose of RTI is to change how struggling learners receive the academic support uniquely required. The wait-to-fail (Fuchs et al., 2003) model argues that in many cases before RTI, students could not obtain the immediate support they desired to achieve academically due to the academic discrepancy models used for special education services.

It is clear that teachers want their students to succeed due to the numerous hours of time and effort put forth to meet the needs of students. However, many students need help academically, leaving teachers to question whether the students would benefit from special education services or a more intensive instructional approach, such as RTI. Knowing there is not a one-size-fits-all approach to learning, teachers differentiate the instruction to meet the needs of the students within the classrooms. Although teachers are aware of the need to differentiate instruction, when implementing an intervention support system such as RTI, many feel the need for more support adequately and appropriately to implement the process. Many educators become frustrated with educational programs with high demands and limited success. RTI is a process, not a program (Jones, 2016), and the process can potentially create academic success.

Theoretical Context

An ample amount of research has been completed regarding the effectiveness of RTI. Prior to defining RTI as it relates to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004), a study was completed by Vellutino et al. (1996) to examine whether early reading interventions would close academic gaps and prevent any misinformed learning disability (LD) identification. The results yielded that providing intensive reading support, early intervention, and appropriate reading instruction prevented students from being identified as having a learning disability. By using progress monitoring tools, data showed that students significantly increased reading scores following these interventions. Since the development of RTI, research has proven its effectiveness (Fuchs & Vaughn, 2012). While established to meet the needs of all learners, the question remains of understanding and implementing RTI from an educator's point of view.

Understanding the work of teachers has been increasingly growing in complexity and intensity due to social changes and educational reforms (Brante, 2009); the correct implementation of RTI relies on general education teachers. Many teachers feel a significant amount of stress at work, and this, in turn, affects their self-efficacy in the workplace. The theory of Self-efficacy is based on the work of Albert Bandura (1977;1986) and is described as a person's belief in how a task is executed. Properly executing RTI within an elementary classroom relies heavily on the teachers' experiences of understanding and facilitating the process.

<div align="center">Problem Statement</div>

The problem is the lack of professional development training impacting the implementation and effectiveness of RTI for all learners in kindergarten through fifth-grade classrooms in suburban New Jersey. This research will explore teachers' experiences of facilitating RTI and, specifically, focus on the understanding of RTI, impediments of RTI, and

implementation of RTI in the respective classrooms. The RTI program requires collaborative teacher teams to provide effective intervention strategies that call for small-group instruction and progress monitoring. The RTI program focuses on student outcomes through a tiered approach through evidence-based intervention strategies (Grapin et al., 2019). To implement the RTI process effectively, ample teacher training in intervention strategies and administrative support is needed. Training teachers in the RTI model and identifying at-risk students should be emphasized for RTI to succeed (Arias-Gundin & Llamazares, 2021). This study will understand teacher efficacy towards the RTI process and note any correlations between efficacy and experiences.

Implementing RTI helps target the needs of all learners and allows them to succeed in a comfortable classroom environment. While RTI aims to provide in-class support, many teachers feel inadequate in the implementation, which causes anxiety. Researchers can identify the concerns by studying teachers' experiences with RTI. The case study's results will provide insight into the need for teachers to be supported and appropriately trained. When teachers feel supported, efficacy begins to grow. Previous research indicates a strong relationship between high efficacy and positive attitudes (Saloviita, 2020).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this intrinsic case study was to discover and describe teachers' experiences of implementation of the RTI program for kindergarten through grade five general education teachers at a state-ranked suburban New Jersey school.

Creswell and Poth (2018) suggested that a qualitative research design is best suited when examining the experiences of others. Teachers are essential to program success, and it has been researched that training and experience contribute to overall effectiveness (Al Otaiba et al.,

2019). At this stage of the research, the effectiveness of the RTI program was generally defined as a multi-tiered evidence-based intervention approach to identify at-risk learners.

<div align="center">**Significance of the Study**</div>

A teacher's responsibility to meet all students' needs strongly correlates to self-efficacy and how well one perceives achievement (Bandura, 1977). Addressing the success of RTI in an elementary classroom setting will impact special education referrals and the overall school climate. To a degree, students can pick up on their teacher's stresses, which can contribute to a hostile classroom environment (Oberle et al., 2020). These stresses can build from having inadequate confidence in job responsibilities. When analyzing teachers' experiences with RTI implementation, stakeholders can make the appropriate changes to ensure teachers are confident in their roles and students' needs are appropriately being met. Looking through the lens of the Social Cognitive and Self-Efficacy theory (Bandura, 1977;1986), districts can prepare solutions to increase teachers' efficacy and create inclusive classroom settings where both students and educators thrive. This study's results may create professional development opportunities and adjust administrative support to build teachers' efficacy toward RTI.

Theoretical

This study focuses on teachers' experiences with RTI implementation and how self-efficacy contributes to success. Self-efficacy is one's belief of how well they can execute their responsibilities. Teachers are faced with daily challenges with curriculum changes, district initiatives, and natural classroom environmental obstacles, such as behavior, meeting the diverse needs of every learner, and achieving high state standards. The theory of self-efficacy under the

social cognitive umbrella contributes to the understanding and analysis of the participants. The results will hopefully show improvements related to job satisfaction and support.

Empirical

Multi-tiered systems of support, such as RTI, are commonly researched to enhance educational practices. There are previous studies that relate RTI to special education, looking at the implementation from different perspectives- a *wait to fail* approach or an early identification intervention. This study will contribute to the related literature as it places the focus not on the program itself but on educators' experiences. Analyzing experiences allows for a reflective environment. Learning through experience is practiced through the Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1977) approach and can contribute to transformed attitudes.

Practical

For educational programs to be successful, they require administrative and teacher buy-in. Reflecting on the RTI process within the studied participants' setting will provide guidance to the entire school district on areas of improvement. To measure the effectiveness of a program, an ample amount of data must be collected and analyzed. A vital component of this data analysis is taking first-hand accounts into consideration. Studying experiences will provide the district with the essential information needed to make positive adjustments and improve educational practices for teachers and students.

<div align="center">

Research Questions

</div>

Central Research Question

What are the experiences of kindergarten through grade five teachers when implementing RTI in the general education classrooms?

Sub-Question One

What are the experiences of novice and experienced kindergarten through grade five teachers who have implemented RTI?

Sub-Question Two

How does RTI data collection contribute to decision-making for kindergarten through grade five teachers implementing the RTI process?

Sub-Question Three

What are the suggestions of kindergarten through grade five teachers for implementing RTI within the general education classrooms?

<div align="center">

Definitions

</div>

The following terms are defined below in their usage throughout this dissertation:

1. *Collective Responsibility*- a shared belief that every organizational member is responsible for ensuring the student learner is held to a high standard (Buffman et al., 2009)

2. *Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)*- a federal act that modified the No Child Left Behind Act that measures student achievement and grants a state report card in performance (Department of Education, 2015).

3. *Evidence-Based Practice* – strategies supported by peer-reviewed research to improve student academic performance (Fuchs et al., 2017).

4. *General Education Teacher* – an educator who teaches all elementary subject areas using the standards-based curriculum (Werts et al., 2014).

5. *Inclusive Education*- a least restrictive environment that includes all students within the general education classroom (Giangrecco, 2019).

6. *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)* – a federal law implemented to ensure Free and Appropriate Public Education services are given to all students. Allows for implementing Response to Intervention (Fuchs et al., 2012).

7. *Intervention-* targeted and purposeful instruction that involves careful monitoring (Denton, 2012).

8. *No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)-* a federal law adopted in 2001 to ensure all students have access to education provided by high-quality teachers (NJ DOE, 2020).

9. *Professional Development-* developing new skills and strategies to expand and utilize knowledge in the classroom (Sandilos et al., 2020).

10. *Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)-* active engagement in professional learning in collaboration with colleagues to enhance student achievement (Fred et al., 2020)

11. *Progress Monitoring-*measuring performance frequently to analyze improvement toward goals (Preston & Wood, 2016).

12. *Self-efficacy-* a person's belief in how well they can execute a plan (Bandura, 1977).

13. *Social Cognitive Theory-* learned behaviors formed through observation or direct experiences of others (Bandura, 1971).

14. *Special Education Teachers-* trained professionals who adapt general education curricula to meet the needs of students with disabilities (Werts et al., 2014).

Summary

Although RTI, or a similar multi-tiered support system, is a federal mandate in many states, many elementary teachers' questions still need to be answered. Understanding teachers' perspectives and knowledge of the RTI process will allow educational stakeholders to prepare professional development opportunities better to ensure that not only the needs of students are

being met but those of teachers as well. Building self-efficacy for teachers will allow for student growth and development, realizing there is a correlation between teacher efficacy and student achievement.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

A systematic review of the literature was conducted to explore kindergarten through grade five teachers' experiences and self-efficacy with implementing RTI strategies in a public education system in suburban New Jersey. Chapter Two offers a review of the research on this topic. The theory of self-efficacy in inclusive education, the literature encompassing kindergarten through grade five general education teachers' beliefs and self-efficacy toward intervention strategies, and the Social Cognitive Theory are discussed in the first section. The discussion is followed by a review of related literature on the evolution and effectiveness of intervention practices, factors related to kindergarten through grade five elementary teachers' training in RTI strategies, and teachers' experiences with collaboration in the general education classroom. Lastly, RTI, as it relates to special education, is analyzed. A literature gap identifies the need for more research on general education elementary teachers' intervention strategies in an inclusive learning environment.

Theoretical Framework

The framework for this theory is based on the social cognitive and self-efficacy work of Albert Bandura (1977;1986). These theories contribute to the understanding of the problem of teachers' attitudes when implementing Response to Intervention (RTI) strategies throughout the classrooms. Bandura (1986) developed the theory that one's success is determined by self-efficacy present in certain situations. The self-efficacy theory focuses on how well one believes they can perform within a given situation (Bandura, 1977). While the theory of self-efficacy (1977) stands alone, it remains a component of the social cognitive theory. This literature review highlights how the self-efficacy theory relates to kindergarten through fifth-grade general

education teachers' experiences implementing intervention strategies.

Related Literature

Social Cognitive Theory

Due to this research exploring attitudes toward implementing RTI, research begins by examining the social cognitive theory introduced by Albert Bandura (1977). Starting with the Social Learning Theory (SLT), Bandura (1977) described social learning as behavior patterns formed through observing others or direct experiences. The social learning theory combines traditional learning theories, such as behaviorism, and a cognitive approach to learning. Due to the intense focus on mental factors being an essential aspect of learning, the social learning theory was later modified by Bandura (1986) to be the social cognitive theory. The main component of this theory is modeling. Modeling behaviors helps to transform these behaviors into habits. This theory came about through observational learning, notably the Bobo Doll experiment (Bandura et al., 1961). In this experiment, researchers exposed young children to videos of adults acting aggressively toward an inflatable doll. After the aggressions occurred, adults were either positively rewarded, received no consequence, or were punished; those children who viewed the video of the adults receiving an award or no punishment were more likely to show aggressive behaviors toward the same inflatable doll. After completing this research, Bandura (1971) further concluded that behavior is learned through experiences, observation, and imitation. When behavior is controlled and reinforced positively, they are more easily understood and achieved. This learning theory emphasizes the relationships between behaviors, environments, and personal characteristics (Rubenstein et al., 2018).

Bandura (1977) developed this theory into four stages of observational learning: attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation. Attention is the process of observing and

taking note of behaviors. Retention involves storing the observed information in memory. Reproduction occurs when the behavior is implemented, and motivation sparks the learner to learn (Woods & Bandura, 1989). Learning is influenced by cognitive, behavioral, and environmental factors (Bandura, 1991).Bandura's studies reinforce that humans are aware that their behaviors have inevitable consequences. Teachers' characteristics in education refer to their personal beliefs and motivations. These experiences are related to Bandura's theory of self-efficacy.

Applying the social cognitive theory to education requires the same principle of self-reflection and positive self-efficacy. Kindergarten through fifth-grade general education teachers can learn through the observation of others. Observational learning is successful when educators have an open mind, are reflective in their knowledge, and have high levels of self-efficacy. Learning through observation is an effective way of creating a positive and inclusive classroom setting. The social cognitive theory requires self-regulation and the incorporation of personal beliefs. When one believes they can educate all learners, the motivation to achieve this goal becomes greater. Self-efficacy is a significant component of the social cognitive theory (Love et al., 2019).

Theory of Self-Efficacy

Albert Bandura (1977) developed a theory focusing on the value of self-confidence. Bandura, a professor from Stanford University, originally proposed the term self-efficacy after extensively studying human behaviors. The self-efficacy theory is a person's belief in how well they can execute a plan (Bandura, 1977). The self-efficacy theory focuses on self-determination and self-reflection. Bandura believes that those with a positive outlook and strong confidence will give themselves more challenging tasks to complete and strive to succeed. In contrast, those

with low self-efficacy will experience stressors and a more pessimistic view.

Bandura (1977) determined that those with high levels of self-efficacy will see challenges as something they must overcome to succeed. The self-efficacy theory was developed through close observations and can be applied throughout many situations. Although this theory has a wide range of applications, when correlating self-efficacy to the field of education, a great deal of research has been completed on teacher efficacy. Teacher efficacy focuses on a personal judgment of how well one can execute one's knowledge to deal with certain situations (1977). While Albert Bandura was the first to define *self-efficacy*, teachers' efficacy has been an area of repeated research.

Applying self-efficacy to the field of education creates a self-reflective environment. Educators with high levels of self-efficacy tend to take on challenges and create a positive learning environment. Bandura (1977) stated that people's beliefs determine how well they can execute their action plans. Self-efficacy plays a significant role in K through five educators' ability to implement intervention strategies. Teaching in an inclusive classroom requires special education strategies to be implemented daily. These strategies involve differentiating instruction, applying necessary modifications/adaptations, and adjusting teaching styles. A general education teacher working towards meeting the diverse needs of all children requires a powerful sense of self-efficacy. Researchers Savolainen et al. (2020) conducted a study that firmly focused on identifying the relationship between teachers' attitudes and their self-efficacy beliefs toward inclusion. The results of this study reflect the significance of self-efficacy. The authors noted that regardless of gender, an increase in self-efficacy leads to a growth of more positive attitudes. It is a challenging environment that requires training to make it successful. If the challenge is not welcome, the learning environment will be affected.

Related Literature

The self-efficacy of kindergarten through fifth-grade teachers toward RTI, inclusive education, and the need for collaboration within an inclusive setting is explored by examining related literature. The literature shows commonalities in teacher training and exploring the least restrictive environment. The need for collaboration and training has dramatically increased since RTI and inclusive classrooms grew over the last two decades. Literature related to teacher efficacy, RTI, teacher training, collaboration, and the relationship between RTI and special education will be reviewed in this section.

Teacher Efficacy

Self-efficacy as a predictor of engagement has been a focus of research on inclusive education (Buric & Macuka, 2017). Researchers applying self-efficacy theory to elementary education have found parallels between teacher efficacy and attitudes (Gesel et al., 2021; Kiel et al., 2020; Saloviita, 2020; Emmers et al., 2020; Buric & Macuka, 2017). When studying teachers' experiences and emotions of joy, pride, and love, those who have expressed these feelings have displayed greater self-efficacy, which correlates to engagement. Researchers have also explored how self-efficacy influences an inclusive classroom setting. It was determined that teachers with experience in instructing students with disabilities displayed higher levels of self-efficacy (Emmers et al., 2020). After much research, self-efficacy appears to be the leading variable in teachers' attitudes toward inclusion education. However, Werner et al. (2021) outline two additional components that would increase teacher efficacy and improve overall attitudes toward inclusion. Knowledge of inclusion policy and school support of inclusive education are two other variables that must be addressed when discussing teacher efficacy (Werner et al., 2021).

Self-Efficacy Factors

Buric and Macuka (2017) scaled teacher emotions, work engagement, and self-efficacy. Analyzing the data collected within confidential surveys, the authors yielded a strong correlation between self-efficacy and how positive or negative emotions influence work engagement. Similarly, Emmers, Baeyens, and Petry (2019) explored teachers' attitudes and how their self-efficacy influences inclusive education in a higher-education school setting. The authors looked at three pillars that create a successful inclusive classroom. These pillars were inclusive culture at the base, inclusive practice, and inclusive policy. While focusing on these aspects, the attributes of age and gender of teachers contribute to the overall acceptance of inclusive education. Demographics are an essential element to consider as they influence teachers' attitudes. More traditional teachers are less likely to have an open mind towards inclusive education, thus developing a more negative attitude towards this practice.

In all aspects of work, self-efficacy has a noteworthy influence. Moe, Pazzaglia, and Ronconi (2010) have argued that three things are needed for job satisfaction. These three elements of job satisfaction are to teach effectively, experience high self-efficacy about their job, and be able to handle a variety of teaching tasks. The authors concluded that the more teachers view themselves as successful in managing teacher challenges (high self-efficacy), the more they experience happiness and gain job satisfaction.

When measuring teachers' attitudes toward RTI and inclusive education, the Teachers' Attitudes Towards Inclusion Scale (TAIS) is often used to provide quantitative measures of self-efficacy (Saloviita, 2018). Several items on the scale are good predictors of what influences teachers' attitudes by measuring elementary teachers' perspectives. Understanding what

negatively affects teachers enables school districts to provide training and professional development. Positive teacher attitudes were more prominent among special education teachers than general or subject-area teachers (Saloviita, 2018). Using this data, the idea of collaboration comes to the surface. The higher levels of self-efficacy produced by interventionists and special education teachers can positively impact general education teachers.

Positive Attitudes

Behaviors and attitudes are two significant components of the social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986). Due to these two elements strongly influencing K-5 general education teachers' experiences, researchers have observed and measured teachers' attitudes toward meeting the needs of all learners. Several variables positively influence general education teachers' attitudes toward inclusion (Saloviita, 2020). Teachers' attitudes are calculated through the Teacher Efficacy to Implement Inclusive Practices scale. Attitudinal variables, teacher training, work experience of students with special needs, prior contact, and environmental factors are all dynamics that affect teachers' self-efficacy toward the implementation of RTI and inclusive education. One direct result of these measurements was the severity of the learning disability. A mild disability resulted in a more positive attitude towards inclusion, while a more severe disability led to a more challenging attitude. Researchers have also focused on comparing the attitudes of general education teachers and special education teachers, placing the target focal point on their self-efficacy (Desombre et al., 2019). These researchers hypothesized that a correlation would exist between the attitudes of general and special education teachers and their self-efficacy. Research showed that special education teachers measured a more positive attitude and higher self-efficacy than general education teachers.

Negative Attitudes

It is a universal truth throughout education that not all children learn the same way (Jortveit & Kovac, 2021). Due to these varied learning styles, teachers need to implement differentiated instruction so that each child has a successful learning experience. Various research studies have yielded related results; interventionists and special education teachers demonstrate a more positive attitude and higher self-efficacy than general education teachers (Saloviita, 2020; Desombre et al., 2019). After careful analysis of these results, standard variables play a role in this correlation. Many teacher characteristics are associated when examining the existence of negativity toward students with disabilities (Koenen et al., 2019). Teacher burnout, a supportive learning style, self-efficacy in classroom management, and years of experience are the primary teacher characteristics that impact an attitude negatively. For general education teachers' self-efficacy to be higher, differentiation and innovative strategies must be adopted (Kiel et al., 2020). For these negative attitudes to transform positively, teacher training of general education teachers in these new strategies is something to be considered.

<div align="center">**Evolution of RTI**</div>

Legislature

RTI was first introduced in the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2002) and further defined through the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA, 2004). NCLB (2002) was signed into law by President George W. Bush. NCLB was built on the foundation of student achievement for all types of learners and accountability for schools to meet these needs. This accountability came through the form of standardized testing and showing evidence of steps being taken for at-risk learners. Providing evidence of these preventative measures is where RTI comes into play. The premise of RTI is to take evidence-based interventions and avoid academic failures and misidentification of struggling learners. Across the globe, many countries have a

similar preventative approach to learners' needs (Nilvius et al., 2021). This approach is designed

to monitor progress and assess students through a tiered intervention approach (Preston et al.,

2016). The primary purpose of RTI is to implement early intervention processes to identify

students with learning disabilities (LD) and provide needed services. Due to the inclusion of RTI

in the Individuals with Disabilities Act, RTI is often perceived as a special education process.

However, throughout many states, the responsibility falls within the general education classroom

setting (Berkeley et al., 2020). The responsibility falls on states to define and guide local school

districts in implementing RTI. With stakeholders being responsible for guiding districts on RTI,

the data collection process to identify students in need of special education services varies

(Gersten et al., 2017). As the most intensive intervention, special education services are still

questioned regarding whether the services should be a component of the RTI process or stand-

alone (Berkeley et al., 2020; Svensson et al., 2019; Thomas et al., 2020).

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) was signed into law by Barack Obama in 2015,

replacing the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 (ESSA, 2015; NCLB, 2001). The

signing of this federal law gave states flexibility in meeting the educational needs of all students

and provided more flexibility in student achievement accountability (Lee, 2018). The ESSA

encourages states to promote personalized learning and accountability for struggling learners and

students with special needs. This act supports multi-tiered support systems (MTSS), such as RTI,

as states promote using evidence-based practices to meet the achievement needs of all students.

Personalized learning is not only for students who are classified as having learning disabilities

but should be implemented for all students. Due to the implication of customized learning,

district and school-wide interventions are used to support positive student outcomes (Bohanon et

al., 2021).

Implementing RTI

Multi-Tiered Support Systems (MTSS), such as RTI, are appropriately designed to meet the learning needs of all students. Although RTI is often used to support and identify struggling or at-risk students, RTI also provides opportunities for extension and enrichment to students whose needs go beyond grade-level standards. Adapting instruction to meet the needs of all learners is one way to ensure children's success (Buffum et al.,2018; Gillon et al., 2023). The needs of struggling learners are diverse. Students with learning disabilities, lack of family support, ELLs, and behavioral/emotional problems all contribute to students becoming at-risk and falling behind academically (Dietrichson et al., 2021). Although Tier I of RTI occurs in the general education classroom setting, collaboration between general education teachers and specialists serves the diverse needs of students by combining their areas of expertise (Gomez-Najarro, 2020). The Response to Intervention (RTI) model offers a beneficial way in which general education teachers and specialist teachers, such as English Language Learners, Reading Specialists, and elementary math coaches, can collaborate to meet students' needs (2020). This model can thrive in an inclusive setting, as it targets a wide range of elementary students' needs. After completing this research on whether RTI successfully enables collaboration, the findings can be applied to Teacher Education Programs. The RTI framework provides teachers with beneficial information to make data-based decisions. The results of RTI enable teachers to see areas in which they can increase professional development (Al Otaiba et al., 2019). There are many reasons why general education teachers have a low self-efficacy towards inclusive education, with teachers' training being one. When implementing the RTI process, it is vital for

training in RTI strategies to occur. Frequently, districts provide a list of interventions that may be implemented without regard for the student's learning needs. It is critical before the development of an intervention list that schools take the time to analyze the reason students are falling behind in their learning during the core instruction of Tier One (Sonju, 2019). Levels of efficacy regarding instructing students with disabilities affect the implementation of RTI. Teachers can confidently apply intervention techniques during training in an inclusive classroom (Thomas et al., 2020).

Levels of Support

As a multitiered support system (MTSS), RTI is a systematic approach to target students' individual needs and to identify struggling learners. The RTI process is often depicted in a pyramid formation showing three levels of support: Tier One, Tier Two, and Tier Three. Tier One is simply core instruction. This tier provides support for all students. As Tier One progresses, students in need of supplemental interventions move into Tier Two. Few students will move into Tier Three, which requires providing intensified support to students who fall significantly below grade level (Buffman et al.,2018).

Tier One Interventions

Tier One of the Response to Intervention process occurs in general education classrooms and is often referred to as the foundation of instruction. While most students' needs will be met during this curriculum-based instruction, some learners will fall behind, creating a gap in their progress (Sutherland et al., 2023). Throughout the Tier One process, open communication lines with families must be established. Parent conferences, weekly updates, addressing immediate concerns, and informing parents of the procedures and goals of the RTI process aid in student success (Weingarten et al., 2020). Standards-based assessments and district-approved curricula

are often used to identify students whose learning needs may need additional support. Universal screenings, such as standards-based math assessments and reading assessments through running records, are given to all students in the general education classroom. All students are progress monitored three times a year: the beginning, middle, and end. Beyond these benchmark assessments, students struggling to achieve the grade level standards should be identified as needing additional support. This identification process should occur as frequently as every three weeks to ensure students are not falling far behind (Arias-Gundin & Llamazares, 2021; Buffum, 2018). Under IDEA (2004), schools are required to provide high-quality instruction and evidence-based intervention strategies for any student who falls under the Students with Learning Disabilities (SLD) category (Fien et al., 2021).

High-quality reading and mathematics instruction occurs throughout Tier One of the RTI process. Here, the standards-based curriculum is taught through evidence-based practice and differentiated instruction. During this tier, universal screenings identify struggling learners who can use further support (Nilvius et al., 2021). Differentiating instruction and progress monitoring throughout the general classroom setting helps target the needs of all learners. When students fail to reach the academic achievement grade-level goals, teachers adapt their instruction to provide classroom support and address their students' learning needs. After making the appropriate learning adjustments, educators may see students at risk of falling behind their learning targets. These students needing supplemental support further advance to Tier Two of the RTI process.

Common Tier One Misconceptions

When students fail in the classroom by falling below a certain standard, educators often begin the habit of ability grouping. Ability grouping places students into homogenous groups based on their prior attainment level (Mazenod et al., 2019). While this may seem appropriate for

Tier One, the purpose of Tier One instruction is to guarantee that grade-level curriculum is being delivered to all students. During ability grouping, teachers adjust their instructional practices to meet the perceived ability of a small group of students. Recent research suggested that although meeting the needs of diverse learners is the intended outcome, ability grouping hinders progress and impacts students' academic and social behaviors (Papachristou, 2022; McGillicuddy, 2020; Mazenod, 2019). The focus of Tier One is core instruction. Effective research-based practices implemented by the classroom teacher should be put into practice. A research study completed by Wexler et al. (2023) confirmed the need for evidence-based practices, including diverse opportunities for student practice with peers, immediate corrective feedback, scaffolding, and modeling. Tier One is the general education classroom, and interventions should not replace grade-level instruction but be in addition. If removing a student from grade-level instruction and teaching below grade level, the student will continually fall below grade level (Buffum et al., 2018).

Tier Two Interventions

When students are academically achieving at a different rate than their peers, supplemental instruction in a small group setting becomes the next level of intervention. Tier Two becomes an intensified level of intervention by limiting group size and length of intervention duration (Vaughn et al., 2012). Most of the intensified interventions occur in reading achievement. While reducing the group size is beneficial in many cases, and a widely used intervention approach, Wanzek et al. (2018) further researched and concluded that positive intervention experiences come from explicit instruction throughout these intervention groups.

To target the needs of students during Tier Two intervention, many RTI models suggest a small group instruction model of about three to five students for approximately 30 minutes a day,

three to four days a week. During this time, whether reading or math support is given, students receive additional support that is developed based on the learning needs of the students. Often, receiving this instruction outside the general education classroom is enough for students to progress academically and return to the classroom setting for most of their learning day. However, appropriate interventions and the evidence-based teaching strategies used throughout the Tier Two setting continue to fall short of the students' learning needs. In that case, Tier Three implementation is considered a means of a more intensified support system.

Once students enter Tier Two, the question of duration and retainment surfaces. Measuring responsiveness to Tier Two interventions will determine one of three things. Whether learners may exit the program, returning to Tier One, remain in Tier Two for a prolonged period, or proceed to Tier Three for further intensified intervention support (Van Norman et al., 2020; Milburn et al., 2017). The criterion must be consistent, reliable, and measurable in evaluating students' responsiveness. For Tier Two interventions to be successful, treating the cause, not the symptoms, should be the priority (Buffum, 2018). When targeting the cause of student struggles, reflection and questioning are essential to understanding why mastery was not achieved.

Common Tier Two Misconceptions

Students who have not yet mastered a specific grade-level standard instructed by the general education teacher progress to Tier Two, receiving explicit supplemental services. Tier Two is designed to support student efforts within the general education classroom and should not be a prolonged intervention. This intervention should be within eight-fifteen weeks (about three and a half months), with the student's goal returning to Tier One without gaps (Sonju, 2019). Throughout school districts, many students *live* in Tier Two for extended periods without progress monitoring (Braun et al., 2018). The goal of Tier Two intervention is to analyze and

instruct the standard or learning target the student failed to master. Tier Two interventions are often identified using measures, such as state test results or generalized summative tests to group states based on low test scores. Grouping students this way is ineffective Tier Two support, as learning needs are not considered. For Tier Two to produce effective results, collaboration among teacher teams, evaluation of the standards, progress monitoring, and trained interventionists based on students' needs are fundamental. Classroom teachers must be actively involved in the process, and the learning must be timely, flexible, and connected to classroom instruction and assessments (Brain et al., 2018; Rogers et al., 2020; Sonju, 2019). When moving students into Tier Two support, it is essential to ensure the cause of the problem is being targeted, not a symptom of the problem. There is a distinct difference between students with skill-based needs and students with will-based needs (Buffum et al., 2018). Placing these two types of students together is why Tier Two will fail to meet the needs of academically at-risk students.

Tier Three Interventions

While Tier One and Tier Two involve closing short-term gaps, Tier Three is for students who need to catch up. The prerequisite and foundational skills required to accel within grade-level standards are directly taught and accelerated throughout this Tier. The learning needs become more individualized after Tier One and Tier Two implementation fail. Students move to the final stage in the RTI process, Tier Three. Instruction is intensified throughout this tier, and modifications usually occur (Svensson et al., 2019). Depending on the RTI model adopted by each school district, many schools use special education services as Tier Three intervention. Due to its intensified nature and instruction provided to groups of one to three students. However, in some RTI models, failure to make academic progress after Tier Three intensified intervention

strategies may indicate a learning disability (Thomas et al., 2020). Whether the model uses Tier Three as special education services or not, an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) determines a student's ability to receive special education services by law within the classroom and across all school settings.

While the multi-tiered intervention approach has become more popular since the IDEA (2004), the types of interventions, evidence-based strategies, progress monitoring, and data analysis resources still need to be improved throughout many school districts (Thomas et al., 2020). Students may be progressing through the necessary tiers of RTI. However, there remains the question of the progress being made. Is RTI a *wait to fail* approach, as Zirkel (2017) described? Or what are the direct impacts of the effectiveness? Many students spend most of their time in Tiers One and Two, so they are often denied the special education services they require. On the contrary, in many cases, Tier Three of RTI is only used for special education and strictly for students who become classified as having a learning disability. While there are students who require special education services after the efforts of Tier One and Tier Two were insufficient, there are also students who need intensified instruction to close the achievement gap without a learning disability (Rogers et al., 2020).

Common Tier Three Misunderstandings

A major misconception of Tier Three is that it is reserved for students with an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). The goal of RTI is to meet the learning needs of all students. A student entering Tier Three usually has learning gaps from previous years and requires remediation, with or without a learning disability. When RTI is being implemented correctly, it is easy to see that diverse learners' needs are being met by the educator best suited to meet those needs. The barrier between general and special education has been removed, and

regardless of classification, appropriate interventions are implemented for all students. For Tier

Three to be successful, a collaborative effort must take place. General education teachers, special

education teachers, or specialists must all work together for the needs of all students (Rogers et

al., 2020).

Universal Screenings and Progress Monitoring

RTI Screeners

Universal screening collects reliable and valid data to measure students' learning needs

and inform instructional decisions. Universal screening provides benchmarks and help identify

students who may be at-risk learners for early intervention. Universal screenings target those

significantly challenged individuals; academically, behaviorally, or both, and place them into

Tier Three intensified support settings. Instead of waiting for students to fail, their needs can be

addressed immediately. These screenings are a critical component of RTI as a first step where

students' needs can be addressed early (Buffum, 2018; Troester et al., 2022). Many universal

screenings are administered to all students, which can become extremely time-consuming and

may take several of the first few weeks to complete. Buffman et al. (2018) argued the need for

universal screenings only for students new to the school or students who dalready been identified

as needing intensive intervention from previous years. Teacher-created assessments and

screeners can be used more quickly and efficiently for all students, while the need for a deeper,

universal screener may be saved for a small group of at-risk students (Hyson, 2020). While the

use and need for universal screenings continue to be a debated topic among researchers, data-

driven schools are critical in meeting the learning needs of all students. However, assessments

often take up ample instructional time and are not administered appropriately. Understanding

what is expected and the purpose of the data is what drives the success of decision-making

(2020).

Progress Monitoring

Interventions throughout Tier I of the RTI process can be called *preventions*. The goal of Tier One is to provide preventive measures by continually reassessing and monitoring student success before summative benchmarks. Throughout the general education classroom setting, progress monitoring enables educators to adjust their instruction to meet the needs of their students (Clemens et al., 2020; Dietrichson et al., 2021). Progress monitoring is assessing student performance in areas in which they were labeled at risk, whether through a universal screening process or another evidence-based measure. Progress monitoring occurs often and should be done to show growth in core instruction or intervention. Curriculum-based measurements (CBM) are commonly used assessments to monitor student achievement. CBMs are research-based tools that require weekly data collection and analysis to determine the needs of all learners (Bundock et al., 2018; van den Bosch et al., 2019). Curriculum-based measurements are widely used throughout reading, mathematics, and writing to evaluate needs, make appropriate instructional decisions, and identify at-risk learners who require additional support. They are standardized in design, easy to administer, and produce data-driven decision-making on students' academic skill levels (Bundock et al., 2018; Conoyer et al., 2023). While CBMs are a valuable and adequate way to monitor progress, they require training and support from educators to be effective (Bundock et al., 2018).

Additionally, teacher and grade-level team development of end-of-course assessments, daily evaluations through formal and informal evaluations, curriculum assessments, and district or state-wide benchmarks have a role in monitoring progress and improving student learning

(Buffum, 2018). CBMs are widely used throughout mathematics and reading to gauge student progress. However, with progress monitoring reading comprehension, there remains a lack of tools and little teacher training. CBMs are widely used for decoding and fluency and are not often recognized for measuring reading comprehension. Especially throughout the upper elementary level, struggles with reading comprehension are often predictors of needed interventions (Bogaert, 2023; Kaizu & Tamaki, 2023).

Several factors influence the effectiveness of RTI on students' academic achievement. Researchers look at a variety of causes that correlate to the effectiveness, such as teacher efficacy and training toward differentiated learning strategies, the complexity of the program, curriculum, and support resources (Werner et al., 2021; Nichols et al., 2017; Jaeger, 2023). Scholars have recognized the importance of education training in the relationship to implementation and student success. Ultimately, teachers' experiences and understanding determine the effectiveness of the RTI program (Al Otaiba et al., 2019; Benedict et al., 202; Castillo et al., 2022). With Tier One support being provided to all students in the general education classroom, teachers are responsible for implementing evidence-based practices throughout their instruction. However, obstacles are often encountered due to the resources and curriculum in place.

Evidence-Based Practices and Professional Development

With the signing of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) in 1965 by Lyndon B. Johnson, the Title IV section placed focus on federal funding research and training (ESEA, 1965). Educational research and training were now at the forefront of public education. Professional development and frequent training help to support teacher education and confidence. (Crispel & Kasperski, 2021; Kiel et al., 2020; Gesel et al., 2021). Teachers with experience and training exert higher levels of self-efficacy, impacting overall classroom success.

This success is defined as positive attitudes, a welcoming environment, and overall student achievement (Kiel et al., 2020). A recent meta-analysis concluded that professional development in teachers' knowledge, skill, and self-efficacy had yielded positive teacher and student outcomes. The researchers' study focused on data-based decision-making, in-service teacher training, and how implementing this training informs student intervention (Gesel et al., 2021). Training in the data-based models of intensified interventions can positively impact student outcomes.

Collaboration

Collaboration among teacher teams has been a strong focus throughout many professional development opportunities, as it has developed strong results in growth and improvement. Throughout our schools, three models of collaboration are typically adopted: a whole-school model community of learners, within-school teacher teams, and across-school models where schools learn from one another (Lipscombe et al., 2023). With the increased expectations of inclusive classroom settings and the need for Tier Three RTI support, general and special education teachers have equal responsibilities to educate diverse learners within the same four walls (Da Fonte & Barton-Arwood, 2017; Jortveit, 2022). Teacher preparation programs instruct preservice teachers in collaborative skills (Da Fonte & Barton-Arwood, 2017). When training these teachers, the focus is placed on strategies to diminish potential barriers and advance student outcomes.

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)

Developing in the mid-1990s, PLCs became a new paradigm that occurred throughout public schools within professional development practices. A shift has occurred from traditional lecture-style educational training to active collaboration (Wang & An, 2023). Multi-tiered

support systems, like RTI, are implemented correctly when collaboration is seen on a daily basis.

Professional Learning Communities are essential to the RTI process. Building PLCs begins with

the educator mindset of collective responsibility. Connecting back to Bandura's self-efficacy

theory (Bandura, 1986), when teachers are given the opportunity to grow professionally, those

opportunities translate into practice. When building this teacher efficacy, Donohoo, Hattie, and

Eells (2018) argued that efficacy growth begins when instructional decisions positively impact

student learning. Through collective responsibility, teachers rely on one another to influence

student outcomes and ensure elevated levels of learning can be achieved by all students (Friesen

& Brown, 2022; Buffum, 2018).

Collaboration among colleagues builds self-efficacy and enhances the collective

responsibility mindset. Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) are designed as opportunities

for experts to come together with a common goal of analyzing student learning outcomes. The

purpose of PLCs is strictly to improve student learning. When looking to make improvements,

collaboration, training, and reflection are three universal areas of professional development.

PLCs build a culture of collective responsibility with the understanding that classrooms are no

longer isolated. The most effective way to target students' needs is through the knowledge a

team of professionals can provide (Townley, 2020; Buffum, 2018).

Professional Development

Proper implementation of multitiered support systems, such as RTI, requires professional

development to be ongoing. Coaching is one avenue of professional development that can be

used to support elementary teachers (March et al., 2020). The implementation of evidence-based

practices throughout school-wide support systems promotes the success of all students. Including

research discoveries and evidence-based practices into the classroom's daily routine is called

implementation science. Partnering with implementation science is the need for professional development. March et al. suggested that job roles should incorporate professional development as an integral aspect. Academic coaches involve the training of educators by experts in a specific area, such as mathematics or literacy, in evidence-based practices. These coaches are indirect influencers on student achievement by providing classroom teachers with appropriate training in intervention strategies.

Many districts across the United States have instituted interventionists at the Tier two support level, such as reading and math specialists. However, systems coaching has been a concept that has recently begun to surface (March et al., 2016). Systems coaching facilitates routines, programs, and resources to support school professionals when implementing RTI strategies. System coaches analyze data and provide evidence-based practices to support school leaders in meeting the needs of all students. A principal element of the successful implementation of RTI is to assure educators that it is not a program of new initiatives but rather building on what already exists in our schools (Arden & Benz, 2018). Adult buy-in is a critical element for the RTI program to be effective. The behaviors of adults have a direct impact on students. When provided with professional development and continued coaching services, behaviors will be positive. Although it is not enough to rely on professional development alone for change in practice, instituting on-going growth opportunities that are job-embedded will help to cultivate adult behavioral changes. Allowing time to practice implementation strategies, provide feedback, and institute the feedback with reflection will increase the likelihood of RTI sustainability.

Resources for RTI

For RTI to be effective, there must be a correlation between evidence-based instruction

throughout the intervention tiers and strong, supporting curricula. More often than not, there appears to be a disconnect in curriculum and instruction among the three tiers (Benedict et al., 2021). While there is evidence to support the process of RTI, there needs to be more professional development and resources in place for educators to demonstrate effectiveness. When examining RTI's impact on all learners, it is crucial to analyze what elements are vital and what needs to be improved from the eyes of first-hand educators (Bester & Conway, 2021). The challenges teachers must overcome to implement RTI successfully must be addressed with other stakeholders to ensure these interventions meet all learners' needs and are appropriately implemented per the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004).

The most effective resource to support RTI is developing an RTI school-based team. Having staff members deemed specialists in a particular area can help determine appropriate interventions, analyze student data to pinpoint the needs, and develop a schedule of when and how these supports can be implemented throughout the school day. A shared consensus on RTI goals must be created to construct a strong leadership team. A shared consensus usually involves commitment and complete buy-in. For this reason, finding team members who can commit to the cause is challenging if the team members have any underlying doubts. Creating a team involves ensuring all opinions are heard and inquiries are addressed. A successful team has inquiry-driven members willing to identify supporting research and will dig deep to develop a successful RTI process for educators and students (Buffum et al., 2018).

<div align="center">**Response to Intervention and Special Education**</div>

Due to RTI being prevalent throughout IDEA (2004), the data of RTI is to be used to determine the classification of a child in need of special education services (Gartland & Strosnider, 2020). With RTI being a tiered intervention model, many think of Tier Three as a

level of special education. In most cases, Tier Three intervention is completed by special educators and involves intensified levels of support. However, Tier Three intervention differs from special education services (NJCLD, 2005). IDEA (2004) promotes early intervention and allows special education funds to be allocated for struggling learners who are not classified under the special education category. Although these intervention strategies are implemented to support struggling learners, they should not be the sole element in developing a student's Individualized Education Plan (IEP) (Hendricks & Fuchs, 2020). Following the lack of intervention success, specific protocols and elements must be implemented to determine special education eligibility. RTI may provide stakeholders with reliable data to support the need for special education services; however, a comprehensive evaluation must also be completed to ensure the intervention strategies failed to meet the student's needs.

The Least Restrictive Environment

The Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) often needs to be more understood by educators, leading to a challenging attitude toward inclusive education (Giangrecco, 2019). The LRE provision often appears to justify segregation versus enabling inclusion. Many educators need clarification on the true meaning of the LRE. Teachers must gain the training to ensure this environment thrives within the general education classroom walls. Though students with disabilities have been included in general education classroom settings over recent years, there still appears to be segregation within the direct classroom (Giangrecco, 2019). Research shows that delivery of instruction and segregation within the school are two distinct differences that have affected the success of an LRE environment. Evidence-based practices can be relied upon to ensure quality instruction and collaboration for the inclusion of students and the ability to meet all students' needs, whether going through the process of RTI or receiving special

education services. Kindergarten through grade five general education teachers should not only accept the least restrictive environment but be motivated to know that this learning environment will meet the needs of all students and cultivate student success.

Co-Teaching

Similar research has taken place, identifying the positive effects of co-teaching. Training in co-teaching requires both general and special education teachers to work together and apply differentiation strategies that will be fluid within classroom instruction. Understanding the importance of preparing for collaboration between general and special education teachers provides insight into creating positive, well-trained environments. These collaborative settings offer discussion opportunities and open a dialogue about differentiation and modifications. Differentiation is unique to an individual's progress, and the least restrictive environment can be met by incorporating co-teaching in the general education classroom. Co-teaching is a way to address all student needs in the classroom. Having more than one teacher in the classroom allows the teacher to meet the needs in the Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky, 1934/1962) of what children can do with assistance from others.

Co-teaching is an effective best practice for those at-risk students and students with special educational needs placed in the least restrictive environment. Co-teaching teams are essential to students' success, as these teams influence one's self-efficacy. Austin (2001) interviewed twelve New Jersey teachers; the researcher concluded that both general and special education teachers felt their co-teaching experience was beneficial. General education teachers expressed that they had grown professionally working with a special education teacher colleague. In contrast, special education teachers stated they became more aware of content knowledge from their co-teachers' expertise (2021). With evidence of this positive collaboration,

teachers' self-efficacy will take a more positive outlook, and therefore, student achievement will be significant within those co-teaching classroom settings.

Another component of successful collaboration is modeling an appropriate setting. By modeling specific spaces, upcoming teachers can see the value in this co-teaching, inclusive environment (Gomez-Najarro, 2020). A successful collaborative space begins with both teachers applying their expertise to meet the needs of all learners in the classroom. For this expertise to develop, teacher training must take place and be frequent as the field of education frequently changes. Due to many special education teachers being certified K through 12, there is a vast amount of content knowledge to be learned. A complimenting co-teaching strategy is the creation of fact sheets (Da Fonte & Barton-Arwood, 2017). General education teachers develop content knowledge fact sheets for their special education teaching partners. At the same time, special educators develop fact sheets of IEP knowledge, differentiation strategies, and student characteristics. A positive co-teaching relationship will be produced by complimenting one another's strengths and weaknesses.

Individualized Education Plan (IEP)

The Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EHA, 1975), renamed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEIA, 2004), established the Individualized Education Plan (IEP), which states the needs of each student receiving special education services. Before IDEIA, students were classified under the special education category using a discrepancy model that measured student achievement and ability. However, with the passing of IDEIA, a child's response to research-based interventions may now identify students as having a learning disability (Raben et al., 2019). To rely solely on the RTI model to identify struggling learners as having a learning disability (LD) would not be an educated decision. Although RTI has provided

necessary interventions for at-risk students through its tiered instructional approach, students

who have a cognitive LD, such as autism spectrum disorder or intellectual disabilities, may not

respond to the implementations. Using RTI data alone cannot identify students with LDs, and

further testing is required for an IEP to be written and put into practice.

The IEP process is procedural, beginning with the pre-referral process followed by five

additional steps. The RTI model and interventions taking place throughout qualify as the pre-

referral. Interventions were put into place to assess student learning outcomes. Some

interventions will prove effective with minor changes needed, while other students need further

evaluation if a more intensified learning need is present. Following the pre-referral: 1. A referral

begins the formal evaluation process with a parent providing informed consent for their child to

be evaluated for special education services; 2. evaluation of the child; 3. eligibility determination

based on the evaluation results, does the child have a disability, and will this disability affect the

student's performance that requires special education; 4. development of an IEP; 5. Least

Restrictive Environment (LRE) placement (Wohl, 2022).

Classification

The RTI approach is often recommended to reduce the number of referrals to special

education. Before a special education classification, general education and special education

teachers must collaborate while using the RTI model throughout the general education classroom

setting. All three tiers of RTI require strong coordination between evidence-based instruction,

shared knowledge, training, and administrative support. For RTI to be successful, collective

understanding must be present, and collaboration efforts should be witnessed throughout

instruction. Research has concluded that although general education and special education

teachers deem it necessary to have collaboration and professional development throughout RTI,

there is a lack of support or time given that allows these opportunities (Benedict et al., 2021; Gomez-Najarro, 2019).

When students enter Tier Three of the RTI process, many schools believe that students now enter special education. However, entering Tier Three does not indicate the child has a learning disability and needs to be classified. At this stage in the RTI process, students require highly intensified inventions. The RTI team may decide that the staff member best suited to meet these students' needs would be the special education teacher. The IDEA (2004) allows special education funds to be used for students who are not classified if that teacher already supports students with IEPs. While RTI is a process implemented to identify at-risk students and provide appropriate support, IDEA (2004) purported that RTI should not be used as the criteria to classify students with a learning disability and should never delay or deny a special education comprehensive evaluation.

Multidisciplinary teams (MDTs) are responsible for using multifaceted, comprehensive assessment procedures when identifying students with a learning disability. Many of these teams use standardized test scores and achievement to determine eligibility for special education. With RTI, using targeted instruction and progress monitoring is a significant component to account for student success at each Tier. This data can provide insightful information to these team members when determining eligibility (Hajovksy et al., 2022).

Data-Driven Decision Making

A recent court case ruling, *Endrew F. vs. Douglas County Schools* (2017), brought awareness of progress for students with disabilities and the accountability of that progress. The Supreme Court ruled that more is to be done for students who have Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) to ensure they receive education tailored to their needs and lends itself to student

growth. Monitoring student progress toward IEP goals and objectives is the responsibility of the special educator. Annual goals and objectives must be measurable and ensure every student will make appropriate progress (Sayeski et al., 2019; Filderman et al., 2023). The collection of data is not only crucial for students with IEPs but for all students. Within a data-driven school culture, administrators and teachers analyze to inform. By evaluating student performance through data analytics, educators can influence their instruction, identify achievement gaps, and make connections between achievement gaps and interventions. Many districts recognize the need for data-based decisions. However, Swain et al. (2022) reported that teachers indicate many data collection barriers when monitoring progress. A lack of time, little resources, and limited training impact the resistance to data collection. For RTI and IEP processes, progress monitoring is integral to ensuring students' academic needs are met. Data collection is equally important as the curriculum being practiced (Filderman et al., 2023; Swain et al., 2022).

RTI and English Language Learners

Many English Language Learners (ELLs), or Culturally and Linguistically diverse students (CLDs), are referred to special education evaluations due to a lack of appropriate RTI interventions and little professional development in instructing ELLs. Legislation has been passed to safeguard the rights of English Language Learners and ensure assessments are unbiased, including that any deficiencies are not due to language (ESSA, 2004; No Child Left Behind, 2002). Many things contribute to the disproportionate number of ELLs classified in special education, such as a lack of professional development and limited resources (Ruiz, 2020; Counts et al., 2018). When RTI is considered a means to special education or an added responsibility for teachers, CLDs are greatly affected. All students receive Tier One RTI services; however, due to many educators' lack of knowledge on instructing CLDs, these

students fail to be supported to the greatest extent (Kalyanpur, 2019).

The lack of efficacy educators have in instructing CLDs leads to the overidentification of CLDs in special education departments. Once these students are referred and evaluated by the child study teams, research suggests that 50% receive a special education classification (Becker & Deris, 2019; Kalyanpur, 2019). School administration must consider the lack of resources, inadequate knowledge of language support, and teacher efficacy when analyzing the number of CLDs referrals for special education. The Castañeda vs. Pickard court case (1981) argued that ability grouping led to segregation and low achievement due to lack of English fluency. This case ruling establishes a three-prong test to ensure the appropriate support is given to non-native English-speaking students. Educational programs and support must be proven effective and based on educational theory (Coady et al., 2019).

Collaborating with an English Language specialist within Tier One of RTI would ensure these students' intervention needs are being targeted. The push-in model allows these specialists to support all students inside the general education classroom and co-teach to provide the most appropriate support. Throughout Tier One, CLDs have access to grade-level curriculum but often need specific support in bridging gaps where confusion might lie. Common gaps include limited background knowledge, low-level vocabulary, and the need for visual representations. Having teacher teams determine and address these students' needs throughout Tier One will lead them to academic success.

Summary

While teacher efficacy has been studied in various forms (Buric & Macuka, 2017; Herman et al., 2018; Kiel et al., 2020; Savolainen et al., 2020), when researching inclusive elementary classrooms that support intervention approaches, *efficacy* is a blanket term when

reporting on experiences. Albert Bandura (1977; 1986; 1999) developed the theory of self-efficacy and the social cognitive theory. Both approaches involve understanding human behaviors and learning through observation. Using these theories, researchers can better understand teachers' attitudes and how these attitudes are connected to teaching in an inclusive classroom environment while implementing the process of RTI. Using self-efficacy and social cognitive theories to explore the literature on RTI, the themes of teacher efficacy, teacher training, and collaboration are commonly discussed. Much research has been done on the least restrictive environment (Giangrecco, 2019). Due to the least restrictive environment mandate, inclusive classroom settings arise. With the rise of inclusive classrooms, general education teachers are learning to collaborate with their special education colleagues and other specialists to implement co-teaching models and intervention strategies (Jortveit & Kovac, 2022). Collaborating and implementing intervention strategies requires high levels of self-efficacy and a positive mindset (Salovitta, 2018; Desombre et al., 2019; Koenen, 2019; Werner et al., 2021).

RTI is a process that involves a culture of shared responsibility and a common consensus as a means to the overall goal of meeting the needs of all learners. Educators adapting their instructional practices to meet these needs is standard practice. Since RTI or another form of MTSS was established in IDEA (2004), these practices are intervention strategies now collected as data for at-risk students. RTI begins within the general education classroom setting, and teachers' experiences with what this entails tend to vary. Through research, two commonalities shared were lack of training and administrative support. Having collaboration and a supportive school environment creates a thriving learning atmosphere.

A gap in the literature exists, as teacher efficacy towards inclusive education and RTI relates to teacher training (Crispel & Kasperski, 2021) in intervention and special education

strategies. Research supports the understanding that teacher efficacy and observational learning relate to student success. By examining the experiences of elementary teachers' environment, researchers can support the need for observational training by applying the social cognitive theory. Children, as well as adults, learn by the observation of others' behaviors. Applying this theory to teachers' experiences with RTI, professional development should be an active and observational process. Developing a shared consensus requires most educators to see the effects before buying into the process. Research supports RTI as a collaborative team effort; however, the gap lies in the training and efficacy of teachers.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this intrinsic case study was to discover and describe teachers'

experiences of implementation of the RTI program for kindergarten through grade five general

education teachers at state-ranked suburban New Jersey schools.

At this research stage, the RTI program's effectiveness will be generally defined as a

multi-tiered evidence-based intervention approach to identify at-risk learners.

Research Design

For this research study, a qualitative approach is appropriate due to the need to

understand and describe kindergarten through fifth-grade elementary teachers' experiences with

the RTI program and focus on how these experiences influence the program's implementation.

The research design that will be used is the case study approach. The case study approach is a

research design focusing on the studied individuals' experiences. Studied individuals' experiences

are the preferred method when presenting *why* or *how* questions to be studied (Yin, 1994). A

case study involves studying a real-life case in a contemporary setting (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

What is important to note is that for a case study methodology to be used, it must be bounded by

time and place. Case studies occur in natural settings and are investigated using multiple sources

(i.e., interviews, surveys, and observations). According to Yin (2018), case studies allow the

focus of a *case* to be explored with depth, and the researcher allows a real-world perspective to

be explored.

Using the case study research design to explore kindergarten through fifth-grade teachers'

experiences with the RTI process, I can gather evidence through first-person accounts, which are

the most reliable (Moustakas, 1994). Conducting interviews with teachers who have previously

implemented the RTI process within their classrooms will allow for theme development. Qualitative research requires one-to-one interviews with open-ended questioning. This type of questioning lends itself to gathering sufficient evidence to support the research. While the RTI process has been in place within elementary classrooms since IDEA (2004), questioning the program's success requires asking for first-hand accounts of those involved. The researcher's job in the case study process is to conduct interviews that create a comfortable environment for the interviewee. Using multiple sources, one-to-one interviews, focus group interviews, and document analysis, sufficient evidence can be gathered to support the research questions. The decision of a case study design will allow me to explore my participants' experiences in their unique situations (Yin, 2018), focusing on the specific phenomena of their experiences with implementing the RTI process in their classrooms. Analyzing the effectiveness of RTI through the lens of those currently implementing the strategy will generate data that stakeholders can use to make appropriate and necessary changes to ensure all students' needs are met.

Research Questions

Central Research Question

What are the experiences of kindergarten through grade five teachers when implementing RTI in the general education classrooms?

Sub-Question One

What are the experiences of novice and experienced kindergarten through fifth-grade teachers who have implemented RTI?

Sub-Question Two

How does RTI data collection contribute to decision-making for kindergarten-fifth grade teachers implementing the RTI process?

Sub-Question Three

What are the suggestions of kindergarten through fifth-grade teachers for implementing

RTI within the general education classrooms?

Setting and Participants

Setting

The research occurred in two state-ranked elementary schools in a large suburban New

Jersey school district. This multiple case study research will occur in two elementary school

buildings. This research study referred to these schools as Schools one and two. The choice to

research individuals throughout this setting was made purposefully. Due to this district

implementing the RTI program within elementary schools over the last seven years, the

experience will be able to be recorded. Although these elementary schools are part of a large

district with eight other elementary schools, the buildings under research are highly rated in the

state. These elementary schools welcome new teachers from outside districts and offer various

professional development opportunities. Due to the RTI program being part of the elementary

classrooms for over six years, experience with the program can be analyzed. This school district

has undergone multiple administrative changes over the last three years. Due to the leadership

changes, the RTI guidance question will be one of the research components. Another component

of this elementary school is the diverse community. The suburban town has immense diversity,

and each grade level is unique. Having such a wide range of cultures adds a research element that

contributed to the overall results.

Participants

This study included elementary general education teachers from kindergarten through

fifth grade. These participants were from various age groups ranging from 22 to over 50 and

currently teach core elementary content areas. Participants were male and female from diverse backgrounds with multiple education levels. These individuals were placed in focus groups depending on their years of experience. The participants ranged from a grouping of novice teachers to a grouping of experienced teachers. Clustering the participants by the extent of experience contributed to theme analysis. There were 10 participants, as many grade-levels of kindergarten through fifth grade have three classroom teachers per grade level per building in this New Jersey suburban school district.

Recruitment Plan

My case study explores kindergarten through fifth-grade elementary teachers' experiences with implementing the RTI process. The sample pool consists of 153 teachers, with a sample size of 10 elementary teachers. The type of sample that was used to gather my research participants was purposive sampling. Using purposive sampling allowed the researcher to select individuals and research sites that best met the defined criteria to understand the phenomena in study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Due to the demands of the elementary teacher's career and home life, I anticipated difficulty with a willingness to participate and limited availability. I received informed consent from my 10 participants through an e-signature Google form and reminded my participants of this informed consent throughout their participation.

<div align="center">

Researcher's Positionality

</div>

In this case study, a pragmatist framework focuses on taking the viewpoints of others into account when gathering evidence to formulate the study's conclusions. My goal as a pragmatist is to find a solution to real-world problems using multiple sources and the experiences of others (Creswell & Poth, 2018). My case study focused on elementary teachers' experiences while implementing RTI.

Interpretive Framework

The need for multiple resources when answering my research question led me to apply the pragmatic interpretive framework. A pragmatist approach gives the researcher freedom of choice, with methods, procedures, and techniques that best fit the needs of the design (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This approach allowed me to explore elementary teachers' experiences by gathering evidence through their actions and observations (Clarke & Visser, 2019).

Philosophical Assumptions

Creswell and Poth (2018) discussed the importance of philosophy throughout qualitative research. The authors stated that readers may directly say or deduce a researcher's philosophical assumptions. However, what is important to note is that beliefs can change over time.

Ontological Assumption

My ontological assumption is that of reality through experience. Realities are constructed based on learning from the view of others. Truth comes from fact and is developed through observations and experiences. As a researcher, my ontological assumption is to use the participants' experiences to report multiple perspectives when developing themes. Considering comments, participants' experiences, and perspectives concludes accurate findings. From a pragmatist viewpoint, research should focus on a study's outcomes, actions, and situations (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Epistemological Assumption

When conducting a qualitative study, the epistemological assumption means "that researchers try to get as close as possible to the participants being studied" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 21). Developing a relationship between the researcher and participants is essential for understanding. My epistemological assumption is that knowledge is produced when multiple

sources collect data to support a vital research question. Spending time within the field of participants is beneficial in research, as first-hand observations eliminate misconceptions. As a researcher, spending ample time within your participants' field allows you to take on the role of an insider, collecting direct quotations, observations, and compelling evidence.

Axiological Assumption

The third component of philosophical assumptions in qualitative research is the axiological assumption. This practice involves acknowledging values and biases present within the researcher. "All researchers bring values to a study, but qualitative researchers make their values known in a study" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 21). Although it is essential to be accurate in our findings and presentation of data, it is equally important to report our values and biases actively. A component of my axiological assumption would be based on my Christian upbringing; these values are incorporated throughout my daily life and are not subsided while actively researching. Keeping my upbringing in mind, my values directed the goal of my research, as I was personally invested in helping the research process become meaningful. However, stating these positionalities helped to alleviate research limitations and inaccuracies.

Researcher's Role

Working as a special education elementary teacher for a decade, I have witnessed the RTI process being utilized. However, the RTI process has yet to prove to me that it has been used to its full potential, as many educators are unaware of how to properly implement RTI within their respective classrooms. Many students who become classified with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) need more data throughout the RTI system to account for attempted interventions. The lack of intervention contributed to significant academic gaps throughout elementary school. Although I am a teacher within the school district studied, being such a large district, I have not

had previous working relationships with the participants, thus no assumptions formed. My goal

for this case study is to explore elementary teachers' experiences with the RTI process, as I

believe that when the process is taken seriously and implemented correctly, it will be successful

in closing the achievement gap in education and meeting the diverse needs of the students within

the walls of their classrooms. As this case study's researcher, I explored the participants' school

setting from the lens of a similar, diverse school. However, I disclosed my school of employment

and made the participants aware of my case study purpose and goal. By using numerous sources

and member checking, I was transparent and accurate in my findings.

Procedures

The nature of a qualitative study focuses on human subjects as the participants. Using

elementary school teachers as part of my study sample required permissions to be granted by the

site in study, Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, and informed consent received by my

participants. Due to this case study requiring many data collection, triangulation was applied.

Data Collection Plan

Multiple data collection forms are used throughout case study research to understand the

research problem. When a research question focuses on the *why* and *how*, a case study design is

beneficial (Yin, 2018), and the data collection helped to provide further insights into the

proposed research questions; the data was collected using individual interviews, focus group

interviews, and document analysis. Data triangulation occurred using the same data collection

methods with a different participant group and school to contribute to the overall validity and

reliability of the case study (Yin, 2018).

Individual Interviews

Case studies require the researcher to understand the issue or problem more deeply. One

of the best ways to understand this case is through conversation between the interviewer and interviewee; knowledge is gained (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As a qualitative researcher, the interviewer can understand specific experiences from the point of view of the participants and begin to create new meanings. Through individuals' first-hand accounts, I can decipher the meaning and understand their point of view of the research case. One-to-one interviews help the researcher collect data from those who have experienced the phenomena and develop a description based on the *what* has been shared and the *how* they experienced the phenomena (Moustakas, 1994). For my case study research, interviews were essential in collecting evidence of one's experiences and emotions. This experience is specific to implementing the RTI process within an New Jersey state-ranked elementary school. These experiences can only be measured quantitatively. These interviews should start with open-ended general research questions and become more specific as the relationship between the interviewer and interviewee develops. The researcher recorded these interviews through multiple devices and with the utmost accuracy. The recordings were precisely transcribed and ready for data analysis. This analysis used the horizontalizing procedure. Horizontalizing shows that the interviewee's experiences are meaningful and equal to the study (Moustakas, 1994).

The participants in my study were 10 elementary general education teachers. Before the interview, I obtained permissions and established a comfortable site. The interview sites consisted of two elementary schools in the same school district. While each discussion occurred, they were transcribed, establishing a positive rapport with the participants. A comfortable environment allowed the participant to put aside vulnerabilities and be open for discussion.

Table 1

Individual Interview Questions

1. Tell me about your elementary teaching experience thus far? (RQ1)

2. How many years have you been teaching? (RQ1)

3. How would you describe your overall experience? (RQ1)

4. How do you feel about the RTI process? (RQ1)

5. How has the RTI process been implemented in your classroom? (RQ2)

6. What is your experience with RTI success? (RQ1)

7. How does the data collected from RTI influence your instruction? (RQ2)

8. How do you feel about the collection of RTI data? (RQ2)

9. How does the acceptance of RTI implementation influence its effectiveness? (RQ3)

10. How do you feel about additional RTI training in schools? (RQ3)

11. How comfortable do you feel using a variety of interventions throughout your classroom? (RQ1)

12. How do you differentiate your instruction and meet all students' needs? (RQ2)

13. What else would you like to contribute to this study? (RQ3)

Question one functioned as the grand tour question, opening the conversation between the interviewer and interviewee (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Questions two through six required discussion about the RTI process and experience with the implementation, while questions seven through twelve are geared toward feelings, emotions, and personal beliefs. This line of questioning provided substantial evidence for the phenomena in question.

Document Analysis

Mining for data from documentation is a prevalent way to gain valuable information to support case study research (Yin, 2018). RTI documentation was requested from my participants for further analysis completed by the researcher. A review of RTI documentation was analyzed to synthesize the reported student data with the interview and focus group responses. The RTI process is data-driven and requires reporting the collected data into an online RTI portal. The records that were analyzed remained confidential by removing any student demographics. The statistics gathered from the documented intervention strategies helped to make connections to the reported self-efficacy of the teacher participants.

Focus Groups

Focus group interviews are qualitative research methods that place participants into groups based on specific characteristics. A focus group may include stakeholders who share a common experience or can relate to the case study. The goal is for these participants to influence each other and bring forth a robust conversation and comprehension for the researcher with multiple viewpoints contributing (Dilshad & Latif, 2013). While one-to-one interviews are critical in analyzing participants' points of view, focus group interviews provided another layer of examination. While the researcher asked the focus group about the same experiences with implementing the RTI process, the commonalities between experiences and noticeable differences were worth noting. They largely contributed to the theme development and description.

Table 2

Focus Group Questions

1. Why does your school implement the RTI process? (RQ1)

2. How valuable is this data in school decision-making? (RQ2)

3. What is your experience with RTI meetings? (RQ1)

4. What is the training and support offered by the administration with RTI? (RQ1)

5. What is your experience with RTI outcomes? (RQ1)

6. What else would you like to contribute to this study? (RQ3)

The focus group questions concentrate on questions geared more toward the administrative level. Asking these questions to the focus group allowed for an open conversation where the participants shared the same experiences and feelings.

Data Analysis

Individual Interviews and Focus Group Data Analysis Plan

Individual interviews and focus group interviews analysis consisted of the same procedures. Review of transcripts took place several times to check accuracy. These transcripts went through analysis through the memoing process. The researcher took notes by writing short phrases and ideas concerning the interviewees' responses (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The memoing process helps identify interview aspects that can be coded or categorized. The researcher can take these categories and develop themes by applying codes. The creation of theme development of shared ideas and detailed descriptions were formed from the analysis of interview responses.

Document Analysis Data Analysis Plan

After gathering documents that display RTI data, analysis begins to determine the validity of the documents and to thoroughly read to make sense of what has been collected. A thematic analysis was conducted to recognize ongoing patterns. Determining common themes

and placing these themes into categories to analyze further influenced the emerging results (Yin, 2018). Once the thematic analysis was completed, the document analysis results were compared to the themes found among the interview processes. By comparing the results amongst each other, codes began to repeat which contributed to the study's results.

Trustworthiness

Credibility

Credibility refers to the truth of the findings. Credibility answers the question: How accurately does the researcher represent the findings (Polit & Beck, 2010)? Three measures were taken to establish credibility throughout the research: data triangulation, member checking, and prolonged engagement in data (Stahl & King, 2020).

Triangulation

Triangulation is using multiple means of data collection to establish research credibility. Using various sources develops patterns that can be analyzed to generate conclusions. The sources of data collection this research underwent were individual interviews, focus group interviews, and document analysis. All interactions were recorded and transcribed throughout the data triangulation to ensure accuracy. The questioning that took place established a rapport between the researcher and participants. Self-awareness during the interview is essential in establishing credibility (Koch, 1994).

Member Checking

After the interview process, participants received a copy of the transcriptions to review for accuracy. They were able to read the evidence and validate the collected information. Due to the nature of my study focusing on elementary teachers' experiences, it was essential to ensure the accuracy of the transcriptions. Member checking, also known as participant validation,

establishes credibility through accuracy checks (Birt et al., 2016). During the member-checking

process, the participants can clarify any misconceptions, and the analysis summary can be

checked for accuracy.

Prolonged Engagement

Being part of the same environment for an extended period of time helped to build

trustworthiness among participants and the researcher. Prolonged engagement is crucial in

establishing credibility, although it presents challenges (Lincoln & Guba, 1993). Being present

within the elementary schools with the participants built a certain trust and allowed for any

clarification of misinformation. As the researcher, working alongside the participants in the

studied schools allowed relationships to develop and maintain accuracy

Transferability

Transferability refers to the ability of the studies' findings to be transferred to another

context (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004). For transferability to be successful, the characteristics

of my participants, setting, context, and culture are described in detail. This description of more

information is called *thick description* (Lincoln & Guba, 1993). To ensure my study can be

transferred into other contexts, situations, and times, full details were recorded regarding my

experience through the data collection process. By recording this process in detail, future

researchers may be able to apply the evidence easily.

Dependability

Dependability puts *trust* in trustworthiness (Stahl &King, 2020). By establishing

dependability, future researchers can replicate the study based on the details provided by the

current researcher. Throughout this research, I was able to establish dependability through the

data collection methods and descriptions. The descriptions outlined the significance of the study

and were supported by the literature. Another way of showing dependability is through peer scrutiny. Understanding that the results of my data collection were analyzed by my peers and other researchers, called for the utmost care in accuracy and interpretation.

Confirmability

Confirmability is the final aspect of establishing trustworthiness throughout qualitative research. During the confirmability process, the evidence found based on the study's findings is a trust representation of the participants, with no bias presented by the researcher (Shenton, 2004). To ensure confirmability, I was as transparent as possible in my data collection process and analysis. I created an audit trail by transparently detailing these processes (Lincoln & Guba, 1993). This audit trail described the theme development and explained how the conclusions were achieved.

Ethical Considerations

Permissions

Considering this case study involved elementary teachers within a public school district, many permissions and approvals were needed to be granted before the beginning of this research. A research approval letter was submitted to Liberty University's IRB. Moving beyond Liberty University, for research to be conducted within the elementary schools, a research request was needed, and approval was granted from the school district's superintendent. Following district approval, I gained informed consent from my research participants, requiring their signatures. This consent form was initially approved by the IRB and used to ensure confidentiality was upheld throughout this research project.

Other Participant Protections

Ethical obligations exist to respect and protect the participants (King et al., 2019). My

participants were informed in written form through e-mail that their participation was entirely voluntary. I also reminded them verbally prior to conducting individual and focus group interviews. Confidentiality of the participants and research site were established and ensured throughout my study. I included a confidentiality note listing the appropriate pseudonyms and obtain written consent from the participants and school district when establishing research site consent. I informed my participants that they can withdraw from the study anytime and provide a copy of the completed research if they wish to obtain one. To further enhance study security, any collected data is kept on a password-protected hard drive, only accessible by the researcher and committee members, and destroyed after three years if supporting documentation is not necessary to include in my formal dissertation.

Summary

A case study approach exploring the experiences of elementary general education teachers' implementation of RTI in a suburban New Jersey school district was chosen to allow for the freedom of many data collection methods to be applied. This case study focused on two elementary schools with 10 teachers being participants. Individual interviews, focus group interviews, and document analysis were used in both research sites, providing data triangulation and allowing for extensive data analysis. Throughout the data collection process, trustworthiness was at the forefront, and participants were reassured of their confidentiality to yield the collection of the most accurate results.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this case study is to discover and describe the experiences of general education elementary teachers' implementation of the RTI process. The aim is to analyze the challenges and successes of the participants' experiences and identify areas that can assist stakeholders when creating school policies and procedures. Chapter Four begins with participant descriptions using pseudonyms. Each study participant is discussed, creating a portrait contributing to the study's results. The goal of this case study is to examine elementary teachers' experiences with the Response to Intervention program and how their experiences may influence implementation. Direct quotations are used throughout participant descriptions to support the research questions and theme development. Following participant discussions, results are discussed with the supporting code and theme development. Research questions are addressed in detail with participant quotations to support them. Chapter four concludes with a summary to restate the results provided.

Participants

The study features 10 general education elementary teachers employed by the Parsippany School District. The district implemented a Response to Intervention (RTI) system for several years. The general education teachers varied in their level of teaching experience from currently being in their first year to over 30 years. Participants in this study were selected by their building principals, who were given the criteria for purposive sampling. Purposive sampling was completed, as participants needed to fall into a specific category, being a general education teacher, and the case study design should be structured prior to the start of data collection (Yin,

2018). Participants' identities remained confidential with the use of pseudonyms. While presenting this study's findings, quotations from all participants are used. These quotations are direct and displayed verbatim, including any verbal slang or speech errors.

Maria

Maria is a female teacher with prior student teaching experience. She is teaching for her first full-time position in kindergarten. This school year being the first time she is implementing an intervention program, Maria describes her overall teaching experience, "Overall experience has been great. I love doing this. It's something I've always wanted to do." Maria detailed her first-year experience with a positive tone stating, "Yeah, so, everything's new to me at this point. All the processes and curriculum so I'm kind of getting to know everything I wanted." Proceeding with a discussion of these new processes, Maria discussed her feelings towards the RTI process. Maria asserted, "It's a little intimidating to me. It's very confusing to me."

Alyssa

Alyssa is a new, full-time female teacher. She has previous experience in third and fifth grade as a long-term substitute, with her first year full-time currently in second grade. Alyssa describes her experience thus far as, "Overall, I think it's a good experience. I can't really complain. I have a good group of students. There are days where's it's a little more hectic, but I think overall it's alright." When introducing the topic of RTI, Alyssa described,

> So, our RTI process is kind of daunting. I'm not too familiar with it. I've never really done it and it just seems like there's not enough information on it for me to do it. So, it's very daunting. I try to avoid it as much as I can.

Devin

Devin is a full-time female third grade general education teacher. Devin is in her second year and has expressed some anxieties towards education. She expressed:

> I've always wanted to be a teacher. I remember in first grade I would line up my dolls and I'd pretend to drink coffee. So, I've never not wanted to be a teacher. But these two years have been very overwhelming.

> This overwhelming feeling was felt once again when the RTI process was introduced in

conversation stating, "Sometimes it can get overwhelming, and I feel like I'm not doing it as much as I would want to."

Matthew

Matthew is a full-time male third grade general education teacher who is currently in his third-year teaching in a general education classroom. He previously taught for two years as a fourth-grade teacher in a different school district. Overall, Matthew has demonstrated a positive attitude toward teaching, saying,

> I absolutely love it. It's been really an excellent experience getting to work with children and help them learning and grow and also being in a school system and a district and helping the community too. It's a great profit.

> Matthew's experience towards RTI is comprised of a multi-district viewpoint. Summing

up is opinion stating, "I feel honestly with my opinion that it takes a little while to get going with some children." Matthew feels as though, within his classroom, he is providing all the necessary support he can but where students benefit come from outside the general education supports.

Amelia

Amelia is a female fourth grade general education teacher with nine years of teaching experience, currently finishing up her tenth year. She has completed one year in fifth grade, one year in second grade, and is now in her eighth year of fourth grade. All her time was spent in the Parsippany school district. She describes her overall teaching experience positively stating, "Overall, I'd say that I had had a great experience with my ten years here. I've been able to work with many different grade level partners as well as co-teachers and a good population of students." Regarding the RTI process, Amelia states:

I feel that from my understanding so far, it's a little bit misunderstood in terms of the different tiers and how we should be placing children and how we should eventually get them tested and its funding. It's a little bit confusing about the steps we're supposed to take.

Josie

Josie is a female fifth grade general education teacher with 24 years' experience. She has previously taught kindergarten and fourth grade. For 22 years, Josie was teaching in the same elementary school with a recent move of two years to a new elementary school within the same district. Due to Josie's vast amount of experience, she personally describes her feelings towards the profession:

So, I love being a teacher. I love going behind my classroom door and doing things the way I believe they need to be done for the benefit of my students. What I don't love about teaching is how much is has changed over the years. The pendulum is definitely swung in the opposite direction where now a lot more of the administration staff and faculty have a lot more say as opposed to what we can do and can't do in our classroom

as opposed to us making decisions that are right for our students.

When moving to specifics of RTI, Josie responded, "Honestly I'm very confused every time I have to do anything related to RTI. I need to reach out to somebody who's willing and able to fill out the information."

Jean

Jean is a female full time general education teacher with eighteen years' experience. Currently teaching fourth grade, she has previously taught third and fifth grade. Simple and to the point, she describes her overall teaching experience, "I mean it's been great. I love it, there's positives and negatives but overall, I really enjoy teaching this age group specifically fourth grade." Regarding her experience with the RTI process, Jean states:

I think I'm still a little unsure of the process. So, our guidance counselor has held lunch and learns and she sends us information on what it is and how to actually go through the process of it. But I feel like we've had no formal training on kind of what it is and be like what we're expected to do. That because I feel like we're doing everything anyways so, I understand the goal, but I don't understand the whole I guess process of it.

Leah

Leah has been teaching for 22 years within a general education classroom setting. She has experience in grades first through third with her current grade level being first grade. Leah describes her experience as:

I mean overall I love being with kids. I love working with them. That's really what kind of keeps me going. Over time, some of the things that have been put on the

teachers from the administrative point of view like that can be frustrating.

Touching upon the RTI process, Leah described her experience as somewhat overwhelming stating,

> I feel like once you kind of know how to use the system and how to go in there and update the service logs for kids it's not as overwhelming but in the beginning I remember thinking my gosh am I clicking the right thing? I remember thinking it was kind of overwhelming once everything is kind of set up for student, I find it a lot easier to use now.

Kayla

Kayla is a female general education teacher with 28 years in the district with sixteen years in fifth grade and twelve years in third grade. She describes her experience saying, "I love being a teacher. I've worked for some great administrators. I've had some amazing students and families. So overall, I would say I've had a great teaching experience when implementing RTI, Kayla expresses,

> I feel like it doesn't always work. I feel like there are times when students sometimes need interventions that are either or not available to them because they don't quite qualify based on the criteria that we've been given yet we see struggles within the classroom and feel like there's outside supports that should be available but are not available.

Vanessa

Vanessa is a female general education teacher with 32 years' experience. Beginning as a preschool teacher, moving into the elementary school domain with second and third grade. She

moved on to 25 years in first grade and now in her second year in kindergarten. Vanessa

describes these 32 years, saying,

> I love what I do. I love being with children. I love helping them learn. There are
>
> moments where I'm overwhelmed by the amount of data that needs to be collected, a
>
> meeting that I have to attend, but overall, my experience has been good.

Having 32 years' experience has given Vanessa the opportunity to practice many different

programs and initiatives. Vanessa describes the RTI process as,

> I do think though that the RTI program not the program itself, but going through it is a
>
> very long process and I don't feel I always get the help that the kids need in
>
> kindergarten or first grade because they are so young.

Table 3

Teacher Participants

Teacher Participant	Years Taught	Grade Level
Maria	One	Kindergarten
Alyssa	One	Second Grade
Devin	Two	Third Grade
Matthew	Three	Third Grade
Amelia	10	Fourth Grade
Josie	24	Fifth Grade
Jean	18	Fourth Grade
Leah	24	First Grade
Kayla	28	Third Grade
Vanessa	32	Kindergarten

Results

As data from individual interviews, focus group interviews, and RTI documentation were

analyzed, results were derived from categories created using codes. Coding was completed by

identifying the repetition of words or phrases and noticing the significance of such. After the

completion of code development, themes began to develop.

Theme Development

After the collection of data using triangulation through individual interview, focus group

interviews, and documentation analysis, themes emerged. After coding the collected data,

appropriate themes were assigned. Five common themes surfaced: education, implementation

acceptance, classroom interventions, more training needed, and job satisfaction. These themes

supported with codes can be found in Appendix C and are listed below on table four.

Table 4

Codes and Themes

Codes	Repetition of Information	Themes
#1 confusing	eight	Familiarity
#2 lack of understanding	four	
#3 uncertainty	two	
#4 expectations	six	
#5 program support	nine	Implementation Acceptance
#6 data	15	
#7 time consuming	five	
#8 small groups	nine	Classroom Interventions
#9 differentiation	10	
#10 learning needs	16	
#11 comfortable	seven	
#12 support	18	Additional Training
#13 frustration	six	
#14 overwhelming	eight	
#15 great experience	four	Job Satisfaction
#16 love what I do	nine	
#17 administration	10	
#18 tiring	seven	

Theme #1: Familiarity

This theme emerged due to the consistency of overwhelmed, frustrated, and confused feelings throughout the interview processes and looking at RTI documentation. Focusing first on document analysis, it can be noted that due to the overwhelming lack of information being inputted or the information among inputters lacking consistency, a theme of needing further education develops. This documentation parallels what was also stated throughout the interviews, and reasons for this can be found in interview statements. A commonality was found between statements made by Josie, Maria, and Alyssa. Josie shared, "Honestly, I'm very confused every time I have to do anything related to RTI. I need to reach out to somebody who's willing and able to fill out the information." Josie further clarified that RTI is something she does not ever use:

> My experience with it is that I don't ever look at it. So, at the beginning of the school
> year, I always read what their modifications are going to be and most of the time I'll
> print them out and just hang them in front of me so I know those students but as for
> remembering to input other information and then there's a new student that I want to
> get started in the RTI process, the process is so redundant and horrible that I tend not to
> do that unfortunately, I tend to ignore it

Maria shares a similar thought when expressing her understanding of RTI,

> It's a little intimidating to me. It's very confusing to me. There's a lot I don't know
> about it and I know that I need to know about it to help my kids properly and advocate
> for them in the right ways. So yeah, very overwhelmed.

Alyssa feels as though she lacks understanding and education on the process of RTI sharing,

> So, our RTI process is kind of daunting. I'm not too familiar with it. I've never really

done it and it just seems like there's not enough information on it for me to do it. So,

it's very daunting. I try to avoid it as much as I can.

Josie, Maria, and Alyssa's feelings towards the RTI process seem to stem from having little

education on the program which accounts for the little understanding.

Theme #2: Implementation Acceptance

The theme of implementation acceptance is derived from codes of program support, data,

and time consumption. These codes support the implementation of a program. Throughout

individual interviews, focus group interviews, and recorded RTI data, there have been repetitious

thoughts and feelings towards the implementation of RTI. Regarding acceptance of the RTI

program, Jean stated,

I don't think many of us do. It's kind of shoved down our throats. So, I don't think it's

really accepted, but I think maybe if it was more user friendly or maybe if we had

training in it, or maybe if it was proven effective, then we would be more accepting of

it.

Continuing with this frustration, she added:

Formally, I've had to go through the IR&S process, but the RTI paperwork and data

I've had to fill out honestly, I don't really keep up with it. I know we're supposed to do

the updating of the service logs with what strategies we're using for specific students in

our class that need intervention, but I don't keep up with updating partly because I

don't have the time

Part of RTI acceptance is having meetings to discuss a child's progress and interventions

being put in place. Within the Intervention and Referral Services (I&RS) process is where these

meetings take place. This process is where a team of stakeholders, those with experience with the child and those in charge of decision-making, present data collection about a student needing extra support and interventions and make decisions about the next steps to take. This topic was discussed during focus group interviews, with Josie stating, "It takes a really long time to move the process along, so you meet, and it seems like there are factors that get in the way." This time-consuming data collection process reiterated among participants is also evident through the recorded data analyzed. There are very few service logs documented with none to completion. This information is parallel to the experiences expressed throughout participant interviews.

Theme #3: Classroom Interventions

The RTI process begins inside the elementary classrooms. Interventions for all learners are used to meet diverse learning needs. The theme of classroom interventions emerged from the codes of small group, differentiation, learning needs, and comfort. As a ten-year teacher, Amelia feels her confidence and comfortability using interventions in her classroom growing. "I think through the years I've gotten more comfortable providing those interventions based on student needs." Matthew has expanded upon these classroom interventions stating, "I feel very comfortable using them. First everyone here at the school has been incredibly helpful." Getting more specific in types of interventions, Matthew continues,

> We have different centers. We have different groups. The work is differentiated. One group might be working one set of equations, one group might be working at something else completely different. I might be calling another group over in a small group setting to my table. So, the work itself is differentiated. So, I would say overall the directions, the procedures within the classroom are presented in many different ways for all types of learners.

The implementation of classroom interventions appears to be an area of comfortability for this study's participants, with Maria sharing, "I feel pretty comfortable but I do like to see things being implemented before I go ahead and do it just so I can see some sort of expectation." By Maria, Amelia, and Matthew sharing these thoughts, it can be noted that there is a comfort level using interventions whether a novice or experienced teacher.

Due to every study participant verbally explaining their classroom interventions, ways in which they differentiate, and their comfortability in doing so, it can be concluded that interventions are occurring inside most elementary classrooms. However, when gathering the appropriate RTI documentation there is little evidence of these interventions taking place. The work being done inside the classroom by the general education elementary teachers is not consistently being documented. Having little RTI documentation evidence to analyze supports the experiences previously shared amongst participants regarding the idea of data collection being cumbersome and overwhelming.

Theme #4: Additional Training

The following codes contributed to the additional training theme: overwhelming, frustration, and support. Maria immediately spoke up about her concerns with RTI, "I understand like that I need to have measurable data on student growth. But that's about the extent of it." This experience is followed by a feeling that additional RTI training in schools is "definitely necessary, especially I feel like there's a growing rate of students in need of individualized instruction and different levels of support."

Josie agrees with the idea of needing more training being that RTI is a district expectation stating,

I think honestly if we have to use it, then we need to be trained better on it. And I also

think that when they're trying to think of things to train us on maybe they look at

things that are more beneficial. If you're going to make us put information into RTI

then teach us an easy, simple way to go about doing it.

Showing a similar experience in regard to administrative expectations and supports, Jean

contributed her thoughts on additional RTI training through means of a professional development

day (P.D.),

I mean, I would love that if the district is going with this, in this direction, and if

they're saying it's going to help students- that's great. A P.D. training give us

something so that we feel more comfortable using it and does research really back it up

that it's something useful? Or is it just something that we need to do to appease the

higher-ups?

When completing document analysis, RTI data taken from the general education teachers

is to be inputted into the software program to keep track of what interventions are taking place

and how often. The RTI data is reported through service logs. However, the lack of RTI data that

is documented in this program and the inconsistencies across grade levels reiterate the need for

more training, as stated by the majority of this study's participants.

Theme #5: Job Satisfaction

Although the RTI process has been shown to be burdensome and frustrating to this

study's participants, a positive theme was developed with job satisfaction. Participant statements

centered around codes of great experience, love what I do, student-centered, and confidence in

ability. Leah, an elementary teacher of 22 years, states that,

Overall, I love being with the kids. I love working with them. That's really what kind of

keeps me going. Over time, some things that have been put on the teacher from the

administrative point of view like can be frustrating but I found that if you have support

from your administrators that can make for a positive environment to work in and

support from your parents as well that is also important. Trying to think but it's really

my love for the job that is working with the kids and even sometimes when the job can

be frustrating, that's what I just think about the kids and that's kind of what makes it all

worth it

Veteran teacher of 32 years, Vanessa, continues to show a love of teaching saying,

I love what I do. I love being with the children. I love helping them learn. There are

moments where I'm overwhelmed by the amount of data that needs to be collected or

meetings that I have to attend but overall, my experience has been good.

A strong component of job satisfaction and teaching efficacy stems from administration,

which has been noted by many of this study's participants. Describing her overall teaching

experience of 24 years, Josie comments,

So, I love being a teacher, but I love going behind my classroom door and doing things

the way I believe they need to be done to benefit my students. What I don't love about

teaching is how much it has changed over the years. The pendulum is definitely swung

the opposite direction when now a lot more of the administrative staff and faculty have

a lot more say as opposed to what we can and can't do in our classrooms as opposed to

us making decisions that are right for our students.

Having a similar experience although being in year two of teaching, Devin went on to say,

My overall experience like good feelings and bad feelings. I'm going to be honest, I've

I always wanted to be a teacher. I remember in first grade I would line up my dolls and

I'd pretend to drink coffee. So, I've never wanted to not be a teacher. But these two

years have been very overwhelming. I think that there's so much we have to do and

there's so much we're dealing with not just in the classroom but also outside. All of the

expectations that we need to meet. I think it's very overwhelming, but I am happy with

the job. I'm very happy to be teaching kids and it really is very rewarding, and I

think that's what kind of motivates us and just seeing our students succeed. But yeah, I

would say it's a little tiring.

Job satisfaction is a key component of building higher levels of self-efficacy. This study's

participants still have positive attitudes towards their teaching careers even with the obstacle of

RTI being present among them. Novice and experienced teachers shared experiences of loving

what they do with a child-centered attitude. Leah provides the perfect summary stating, "Even

when the job can be frustrating, I just think about the kids and that's what kind of makes it all

worth it." This realization shows that although the teaching career comes with many demands, at

the center of it all is the students and that is what creates a feeling of satisfaction.

<center>**Research Question Responses**</center>

This section addresses the research questions presented in chapter three. The answers to

these questions are supported by study participants' direct quotes taken from individual and

focus group interviews. Document analysis was also implemented to add an additional layer of

support.

Central Research Question

What are the experiences of kindergarten through grade five teachers when implementing

RTI in the general education classrooms? This study's participants shared a common perspective

in being successful in the implementation of a variety of interventions throughout their

classrooms but encountered challenges when recording data to support RTI implementation efforts and strategies being implemented. Amelia states, "I think through the years I've gotten more comfortable providing those interventions based on students' needs. I don't think I'm very comfortable knowing where those fit in what different tiers they would fit into." Knowing what interventions students need and implementing a variety of strategies to help students succeed is where many teachers find their greatest amount of success. Where the difficulties lie is having to complete a rather time-consuming process of data collection and recording to prove interventions are taking place inside the classroom. Josie noted that she feels comfortable using a variety of interventions in her classroom, but it has been difficult to accept the RTI program, positively saying,

> I think we don't know enough about the RTI program for us to accept it. So, we're all
> pretty negative about it. It's just another thing that we have to do, another job that has
> to be done outside of teaching. So actually, when you the words RTI or the letters RTI
> It makes me frown.

Sub- Question One

What are the experiences of novice to experienced kindergarten through grade five teachers implementing RTI in the general education classrooms? After interviewing novice and experienced teachers who are currently implementing RTI, their experiences, although occurring in different settings, have many commonalities. Vanessa shares her experience of RTI as a veteran kindergarten teacher. She explains,

> I think it depends on the grade level because I teach kindergarten, and so there's a lot of
> RTI to do and you don't really see it go anywhere; then all the sudden I feel like in the
> second grade the teacher often sees the same child and they have the same concerns but

then they have to show their data. And then right around third grade is where all of a

sudden, my goodness, this child needs help, and if you go back, it's been happening

most times since kindergarten. So that's my frustration is a lot of times I do it knowing

The child might not get exactly what I think they need but I'm showing them look

we're doing this and there's a paper trail, and I'm hoping if there's an earlier paper trail

then maybe they'll start to get some testing done or some services.

Josie, a fifth-grade teacher, responded to Vanessa using her RTI experience stating,

I'm on the fifth-grade end and I feel like why bother? If nothing has come into play by

fifth grade, why am I going to bother? It's a lot of time that you have to put into it and

it's not going anywhere.

This conversation briefly describes RTI experience on opposite grade level ends. Both teachers

have over 22 years in elementary education.

Maria, a first-year teacher of kindergarten, shared her experience being, "So I'm kind of

just dipping my feet in the water figuring out how." Maria's experience with RTI is only just

beginning, as she is in the very early stages, however she noted that the process, "It's a little

intimidating to me. It's very confusing to me." This statement describes how Maria believes the

process can be daunting, although she has little experience with it thus far. Leah tells of her

experience with RTI stating:

So, in the beginning it was really overwhelming, especially when we started using it. I

think we had one or two staff meetings where the guidance counselor kind of showed

us how to walk through and fill things out for a student who might be struggling

or requests assistance. I feel like once you kind of know how to use the system and

how to go in there and update the service logs for kids. It's not as overwhelming but in

the beginning, I remember thinking, my gosh.

Leah's experience describes that when implementing RTI, the use of the program is where the uncertainties seem to arise.

Devin also discusses her experience with implementing RTI, touching upon both the collection of RTI data and interventions stating:

Okay, so I have not put any students into RTI documents. Okay, so I've never done that

before but something that I do is seating, timers, I put students who need to sit next to

me. With what I'm implementing, I mean it obviously depends on student to student

but just the everyday things that I do within the classroom I think are helpful.

This summary of experience describes Devin's feelings toward not only the documentation but the interventions she purposely places throughout her classroom. With the interventions she has implemented, Devin feels that they have been helpful with her struggling learners whether academic or behavioral.

Kayla speaks on her experience with RTI, having a 28-year background sharing:

I feel that it doesn't always work. I feel that there are times when students sometimes

need interventions that are not available to them because they don't quite qualify based

on the criteria that we've been given yet we see struggles within the classroom and fee

l like there's outside supports that should be available but are not available

This narrative describes her experience with RTI being inconvenient and not providing the needed support for her students.

Sub-Question Two:

How does RTI data collection contribute to decision-making for kindergarten through grade five teachers implementing the RTI process? In response to RTI data collection having an impact on instructional decision-making, Jean, a fourth-grade teacher with eighteen years' experience, stated:

It really doesn't because we know what they need. We are with them every day for six and a half hour a day. It's not something that a website or forms are going to help us get to know the child any better or give us better strategies. It's helping our struggling learners based on how we know they learn. Maybe they need graphic organizers. Maybe they need more intensive instruction. But it's nothing that the form on the RTI website is going to help us. It's kind of like what being a teacher is which I think not to toot our own horns, but I think all of the teachers in my school meet the needs of the students based on knowing what they need to get to grade-level.

Jean's response brings to light the narrative of teachers knowing their students' needs the best and are meeting those needs daily. Matthew, a third-grade teacher currently in year three of his career, describes how RTI data influences his instructional decision making saying:

I feel like the data has influenced my instruction because I've been able to see exactly how they are working and the areas that they need support. So, before the 504 plan was implemented, we even looked at the data of what the student was doing with their work habits, with their actual work and used that to come up with a plan for that.

Being a relatively new teacher, Matthew sees the benefits of collecting RTI data and using it to make appropriate adjustments. Alyssa discusses a slightly different narrative when it comes to the RTI data collection:

So, I think as a teacher it's truly a lot to do and to handle just because you want to be

present. You don't want to sit there and take down the notes constantly and you don't

want to sit there and just be on your computer. You want to build that relationship, but

also show them all the strategies you do but sometimes writing every little step down

becomes another thing you need to do on your checklist and then teachers or I personally

feel like okay, I can't give enough attention to my student because I'm so worried about

writing down every little step that I do perfect

This experience described focused on building teacher-student relationships and data collection impedes the relationship building process.

Devin (novice teacher) explains that although she does not feel she is educated on the process enough that, RTI data remains valuable:

I think that it could be so great, but I think that because I'm not as knowledgeable about

the whole process that I can't contribute to that data. So, I think that the whole idea is

amazing but I think that we need more training on it so we can actually contribute to it.

Elaborating on this same thought, Alyssa continues,

Yeah, I think that essentially the idea of it is really good and the purpose of it is

beneficial but what we actually practice here, for me at least as a new teacher, it doesn't

seem as beneficial because I'm not collecting the proper data exactly.

This narrative describes the potential RTI data has but there are gaps present that need to be filled to be a successful implementation. Amelia looks at RTI data as a way of diagnosing students' needs and being able to provide direction of support:

> It could either lead me referring to a different program if I feel that is necessary, but I think collecting data on different concepts is important because then we can see if it's a student who's having difficulty learning overall the subject or just a concept. So, keeping that data up to date can help us give more of a diagnostic about a student's needs.

Using RTI data in this way influences the type of support needed to be provided whether by the general education teacher or in a new setting.

When analyzing RTI data documentation to contribute to this research question, there is very little data documented which correlates to the responses provided throughout the interview process. Supporting this idea, Josie asserts that the collection of RTI data, "I think it's annoying and I think it's difficult to access. I wish it was more available and you didn't have to search for it to find it and things like that."

Vanessa does personally use data to influence her instruction, however states that it is not easy to collect the data,

> It definitely influences my instruction greatly, especially for the children that I am most concerned about. So, I do jot down the strategies that they want me to use, and I make little notes for myself to say whether it's helping or it's not helping. I do find that sometimes it is hard to collect the data in a kindergarten classroom because they change so much from day to day. But I'm just like everyone else, you're just trying to

do the best that you can.

Sub-Question Three:

What are the suggestions of kindergarten through grade five teachers for implementing

RTI within the general education classrooms? Vanessa provides insight from a kindergarten

teacher's experience saying:

As far as being a kindergarten teacher, I feel like we're the first line of defense in the

sense of trying to narrow down what we noticed with the child who was struggling and

trying to be very specific as to 'Is it following directions?' 'Is it attention deficit? Is it

something else? And then trying to make the parents aware of what is happening within

the classroom as early as possible. I never want parents to feel surprised by the

progress report or what the first-grade teacher might say next year.

This narrative describes the difficulty kindergarten teachers have as the early defense line for

struggling students. By bringing this to light, there is a suggestion in using RTI to inform parents

and target the struggling learners as early as kindergarten.

Devin makes suggestions for aspiring teachers or those new to the field of teaching stating:

I just wish that aspiring teachers just had more background knowledge and more

training on RTI. It's really important that teachers and aspiring teachers, it doesn't

matter if they're special ed., I think that we need that training because you're always

going to have a student who needs support. So, I feel like that's one thing I would love

that we need more training.

This suggestion of having more background knowledge and training provided by Devin has been

a common theme throughout this research study. Alyssa had a similar suggestion stating, "I

would love for them to add more training in our program in our professional development just so that I can further grow in my teaching career and further support my students' needs."

Maria brings the idea of collaboration with her suggestion for improving RTI implementation sharing,

> If there were teachers I could collaborate with, if my mentor was very fluent on the process it would be really helpful. It seems nobody is fluent on the process so I'm not really able to go to anyone for clear guidance except for the guidance counselor.

Maria believes collaboration among colleagues or mentor relationships is key for appropriately implementing RTI.

In order to build fluency in RTI among district educators, the majority of this study's participants return to the idea of training, suggesting this is made more readily available. Leah suggests:

> I'm hoping my feedback may be helpful and training or refresher courses become available for teachers so that when you sit down with the program it's not overwhelming or daunting at first. If people will make training more available or refresher courses more available within the districts it doesn't seem so daunting to teachers.

Jean agrees with the suggestion of additional training, making the statement, "I personally don't really understand, or I guess have not been trained on what the process is and what our end goal is of all this."

Along with the idea of more training comes the suggestion of teacher discretion. The understanding by administration that teachers know their students' needs. Kayla suggests,

I think sometimes it should be left up to the teacher's discretion. I also think that when

there's data and evidence that kids need support that we shouldn't always have to jump

through hoops to get the help that the kids need.

This narrative advocate that other stakeholders should give teachers flexibility and more input into the needs of their classroom learners.

During focus group conversation with novice teachers, the discussion took place of the amount of time it takes students to receive the needed support due to the formality of the RTI process impeding the work being done by the teachers. As Devin stated, while the other focus group members agreed:

The outcome kind of drags and it doesn't really get to the point. I know I'm not an

expert but I see the kid every single day. I work with the kid; you would think that

I have some sort of say to be like okay I've done this and get to the point of how we can

do more beyond Tier one.

This same narrative was briefly echoed among the focus group consisting of experienced teachers, with Kayla asserting:

It takes a really long time to move the process along. So, you meet, and it seems like

there are factors that get in the way. So some of us who know taught for a bazillion

years and you have an ESL child that's clearly not just your typical ESL child they're

just not progressing and after two to three to four years of talking about the being ESL

and monitoring and we're going to these IR&S meetings you feel like you've got a lot

of evidence that kind of proves a child is not progressing even with the intervention

you have in place and you still can't get services for that child. So, I think that's a

super frustrating part of the process.

Summary

Individual interviews, focus group interviews, and RTI documentation were thoroughly analyzed and coded. These codes were further developed into themes. The identified themes can be seen throughout the responses to the research questions. Based on the responses to each question, more similarities were present than differences among ten general education teachers' experiences with the implementation of RTI.

Overwhelmingly similar responses provided a strong insight into the need for teacher training of RTI, support needed from administration or colleagues, and teacher acceptance of implementation. Although all the interviewed teachers appear to be satisfied with their careers, stating they love what they do, the evidence that can be gathered from this case study is that many of the teachers express a feeling of being overwhelmed, uncertain, and lacking time to complete their expectations. Teachers' experiences with RTI thus far reveal that RTI is a program that will require more support, more training, and more time to be implemented satisfactorily. Administration and other stake holders are needed to meet the teachers' needs which will, in turn, meet the needs of students.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

This intrinsic case study focused on exploring and describing the experiences of kindergarten through fifth-grade general education teachers regarding implementing the RTI program at two state-ranked suburban elementary schools within one school district in New Jersey. Past research on RTI focused on the impact multi-tiered support systems, such as RTI, have on the diverse needs of learners (Fuchs & Vaughn, 2012; Gomez- Najarro, 2020). Research question responses are presented in the Summary of Thematic Findings that highlight emergent themes. An Interpretation of Findings is conducted to generate newly formed knowledge about RTI. Chapter Five moves on to include Implications for Policy and Practice. These implications are recommended for stakeholders with the new knowledge gained from the evidence provided through this study's participants. Empirical and Theoretical Implications occur, noting the relevant literature and learning theories in connection with this case study. Finally, chapter five concludes with any Limitations and Delimitations and recommendations for future research with a case study summary.

Discussion

Summary of Thematic Findings

Five themes emerged following the data gathered through individual interviews, focus group interviews, and document analysis. The emergent themes were education, implementation acceptance, classroom interventions, additional training, and job satisfaction. These themes are discoverable through the presentation of the research questions with participant responses correlating to each theme developed within Chapter Four. Through participant responses,

commonalities were discovered, and coding was conducted to generate overall themes. Establishing themes provides deeper insights, establishes relationships, and leads to more meaningful, nuanced findings.

Interpretation of Findings

This research explored the experiences of ten elementary general education teachers implementing RTI throughout their classroom settings. The development of this research established five themes by analyzing the relationships among participant responses. These themes have resulted in the formation of three interpretations.

Additional Training Needed to Gain Further Teacher Support

The emergent theme of additional training was quite apparent due to the repetition in participant responses surrounding the need for further training and professional development. When educators are provided with the appropriate and necessary training in RTI, the training will lead to an increase in teacher efficacy which will, in turn, help to bolster further support for implementation of the RTI program. When teachers are trained well in a district program, confidence is gained, and this ultimately affects the program's success. Conversely, without the appropriate training, negative connotations will be associated with the RTI process, which will lead to feelings of frustration and being overwhelmed. The majority of the study's participants are supportive of the idea of additional training, understanding that having this training will mean an increase in student success. Novice and experienced teacher participants expressed interest in additional training.

Alyssa, a novice teacher, mentioned that due to being a new teacher, she feels she needs the training in RTI more than other teachers with more experience. Unknowingly to her, Josie, a teacher of over 24 years, has also expressed her need for additional training. The feelings of

being overwhelmed, frustrated, and tired reported by the study's participants have the potential to be repressed when they are given the proper training and resources. When training is provided, knowledge is built. Teachers being more knowledgeable in specific areas will help to build their confidence and overall teaching efficacy.

Teacher Burnout

The thematic findings of this study revealed strong feelings from teachers feeling tired, overwhelmed, and unsupported. Many of my study's participants expressed beliefs that programs, such as RTI, that are heavily reliant on data collection and providing evidence of completing interventions are just another demand being placed on teachers by administrators. With more responsibilities, teachers come to a point of feeling burned out and exhausted.

One participant, Devin, remarked that although she has always wanted to be a teacher, there are expectations outside of the classroom being placed on her by administrators that need to be met. These expectations increase the overwhelming feeling that initially starts in the classroom with behaviors and classroom management. Being a multitasker is synonymous with being a teacher. Multitasking is something preservice teachers are already aware of when signing on for this rewarding career. However, the responsibilities and requirements district administrators place on teachers is a strong cause of teacher burnout.

Another participant, Leah, contributed a similar feeling where the workload being put on teachers from administrators is where the frustration begins, and this is something she has seen change negatively over time. Like Leah, Josie made a specific reference to being able to shut her classroom door and teach the way she feels is best for her students. This seems to be a lost art now with administrators dictating not only the content that needs to be taught but how it is taught. With an increase in workload and administrative dictation, it is no surprise to see an

increase in teacher burnout. Overall, the participants in this study are highlighting elements contributing to teacher burnout which needs to be addressed by stakeholders. Examining teacher workloads, offering training programs, and fostering a supportive work environment are initial steps to mitigate the negativity experienced by teachers and prevent burnout.

Knowledge in the RTI Process

This study highlights the thematic findings related to classroom interventions. Participants offered many ways in which they use interventions throughout their classrooms daily. Although the use of interventions and differentiation is something all participants feel confident in, there is little knowledge in how these interventions relate to the RTI process. Going hand-in-hand with the need for more training, being knowledgeable of the RTI process will help all students succeed. RTI is a process that is not selective to just a few learners, but it helps to target the learning needs of all students. When analyzing some of the participants responses to RTI, it became evident the need for the RTI process to be taught and for more teachers to be aware of the purpose behind a tiered support system.

One participant, Amelia, shared that although she feels greatly confident in knowing what her students' needs are and how she can best target those needs, she does not know how it fits into the framework of the RTI process. This is a clear example of teachers who are already putting interventions into place and are unaware that by doing this the RTI process has already begun. Being educated on the tiers and how the support system operates would eliminate some negative feelings surrounding the process.

Implications for Policy or Practice

The findings of this study provide valuable insights for a range of stakeholders, including policymakers, building administrators, teachers, parents, and students. The study's thematic

findings from the participants' first-hand experiences highlight positive feelings about the job:

teaching children. All participants expressed their love for educating children and helping them

to learn and be upstanding citizens. However, the mandates and responsibilities are beginning to

hinder these positive attitudes. This study lays the foundation for policymakers and other

stakeholders to examine what teachers' needs are and prioritize these needs to create a positive

work environment. Policymakers can use these insights to create training programs for both

administrators and teachers on RTI implementation. Policymakers can explain the rationale

behind multi-tiered support systems, present evidence to support RTI, and design a user-friendly

system.

Implications for Policy

The results of this study provide important information for policymakers. By applying the

insights gathered through the experiences of teachers, policymakers can make informed

educational decisions that will advance educational strategies and provide successful outcomes.

The first recommendation for policymakers is to establish and define distinct tiers of the RTI

process being implemented. The goal of multi-tiered support systems is to provide stronger

levels of support for students in need. At the moment, the participants of this study are unclear as

to the varying levels of support and the qualifications students need when progressing through

the support tiers. Policymakers need to define standards, expectations, goals, and progress

monitoring that determine each support level.

Once the RTI levels are clearly defined, it is recommended that policymakers ensure

consistency by implementing a user-friendly online database. As study participants stated, the

current online portal is confusing, and many are unaware of how to use the program correctly. If

policymakers plan to continue the use of the current online RTI system, it is imperative that the

necessary steps are taken to ensure this portal is easy to navigate, instructions are clear, and training on the specific program are provided to ensure consistency and confidence.

Implications for Practice

The findings of this study recommend that building administrators, such as principals and content-area supervisors, are trained alongside the teachers in the RTI process. By training administration and educators, there will be clear expectations across the board. Multi-tiered support systems use a tiered approach to enhance student outcomes through evidence-based intervention strategies (Grapin et al., 2019). Although most teachers are using interventions in their classrooms daily, evidence-based interventions should be outlined for educators to use when targeting specific skills. After having been trained alongside teachers, building administrators should work with their staff members to create interventions, timelines, and a smart, user-friendly data collection approach. Having a systematic intervention system that is clearly defined, targets students' needs, and is created with the input of all stakeholders will be what creates success.

Both students and parents play an essential role in student learning. The findings of this study suggest that the RTI program's implementation depends on understanding the varying levels of student support and the support provided at all levels. This understanding is beneficial to all stakeholders including parents and students. Parental knowledge and support in the RTI program are essential in aiding student growth.

Empirical and Theoretical Implications

This section explores the empirical and theoretical implications of the findings from this qualitative study. Through in-depth interviews and document analysis, this research uncovered more insights contributing to existing research. The empirical and theoretical contributions

highlight the study's significance and lay the foundation for future research to identify gaps and enhance theories in RTI. By connecting these findings to the existing literature and theories outlined in Chapter Two, future research and practical applications in the RTI process can be informed.

Empirical Implications

RTI was introduced in the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2002) and defined further within the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004). RTI has a primary purpose of monitoring and assessing students' progress through a tiered intervention using evidence-based practices to target students' learning needs (Nilvius et al., 2021). Previous research has revealed that adapting instruction to meet the needs of students is critical to ensure children's success (Buffum et al., 2018; Gillon et al., 2023). This study's findings corroborated the importance of adapting instruction to meet the needs of all learners through the participants' experiences and comfortability with implementing classroom interventions and differentiating instruction throughout their general education classrooms.

Mazenod et al., (2019) previously defined ability grouping as placing students into homogenous groups based on their prior level of attainment. Ability grouping is often associated with Tier One of RTI instruction, as this study's participants also revealed. However, previous research contradicts the usage of ability grouping in the general education classrooms. While the intended outcome is positive, meeting students' diverse learning needs, in actuality the process hinders students' progress and can have a negative impact on academic and social behaviors (Papachristou, 2022; McGillicuddy, 2020; Mazenod, 2019). In my study, it emerged that elementary general education teachers often use ability grouping to differentiate and provide interventions for students. While this practice has positive intentions of addressing students'

learning needs, previous research supports that interventions should complement rather than replace grade-level instruction to ensure successful learning outcomes.

Prior research detailed in Chapter Two revealed that for a multi-tiered support system such as RTI to have proper implementation, professional development must be not only provided but on-going. For RTI to be successful, educators must be assured that it is not a new district initiative being implemented but it is a program that is intended to build on resources and strategies that currently exist throughout elementary schools (Adren & Benz, 2018). The findings of my study emerged a theme of implementation acceptance. It is essential for educators to *buy in* to RTI for the program to produce effective results. One way to ensure teacher buy-in is through professional development. The need for additional training was repeated consistently throughout my study, which is further confirmed by previous research outlined throughout Chapter Two. An integral aspect of targeting students' needs is being provided with knowledge from a team of professionals who are experts in specific areas. Coaching is one way to incorporate professional development and ensure evidence-based practices are being practiced and implemented daily within classrooms (March et al., 2020).

Theoretical Implications

It is clear after reviewing how this study aligns with theoretical frameworks discussed in Chapter Two that multiple theories provide different perspectives on this research. The theory that aligns to this study is the theory of self-efficacy. The self-efficacy theory developed by Albert Bandura (1977) is the person's belief in how well one can execute a plan. This theory suggests that when an individual has a prominent level of self-confidence, they will strive to succeed with a positive outlook. On the contrary, an individual with low levels of self-confidence will have more negative experiences with continual stressors influencing their outlook and

perspective. This study's findings align with the self-efficacy theory (1977) due to participants demonstrating low levels of self-efficacy toward the RTI process which has created negative connotations toward the whole idea.

Bandura's self-efficacy with the Social Cognitive Theory highlights the need for additional training as discovered through theme development. The Social Cognitive Theory stresses the idea of observational learning. Learning is comprised of cognitive, behavioral, and environmental factors (Bandura, 1991). With the need of additional training identified through my participants' experiences, applying the Social Cognitive Theory will help guide the direction in which professional development should be completed. Through observational learning and modeling, educators can observe trainers and other colleagues to acquire new knowledge in RTI. Through reinforcement and feedback, educators can better understand the areas in which they are succeeding and areas that require further improvements can be identified. By means of active engagement, critical thinking, and problem solving, educators can not only learn the RTI process but internalize the process, integrating the new knowledge into their existing schema.

Limitations and Delimitations

This section addresses the limitations and delimitations that occurred throughout this study's research. Limitations are constraints that this study encountered that were not controllable. In contrast, delimitations are intentional restrictions created by the researcher. Delimitations are boundaries set that define and focus the overall study.

Limitations

The primary limitation encountered during this study was found in sampling. This study focused on participants among two elementary schools. While the purpose of this study was elementary based, the findings are limited in inclusiveness. Another limitation was the veteran

teachers' past experiences creating an involuntary bias toward program implementation. Having many years in the district generates certain biases to be formed from past practices. These experiences have the potential to influence results.

Delimitations

Due to this research being a multiple case study, delimitations were created through purposive sampling. The included participants were taken from two elementary schools in the same district with only general education teachers being part of the sample. Using general education teachers was deliberate due to their similar class sizes and experiences with grade-level curriculum. Class size, similar schedules, and curriculum provide a strong basis for measuring RTI experiences. The purposeful selection of general education teachers as the sample size in this study, despite its inherent limitations, serves to establish a consistent baseline reflective of comparable class sizes, curriculum expertise, and scheduling, enhancing the reliability and validity of the findings within the specifications.

Recommendations for Future Research

Considering the sample size limitations of this current study, future research can be conducted to include educators from higher education levels, such as middle and high school, who may implement a multi-tiered support system like RTI. By broadening the sample size, insightful findings may emerge for the researcher to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges and successes educators have when implementing the RTI program. The sample size can be broadened by welcoming more participants to this study and expanding to include additional school districts throughout New Jersey and other states. Using other districts will provide a more in-depth, comprehensive look at the RTI process, where the various experiences will help to target program strengths and weaknesses.

Another recommendation to be considered is conducting this study quantitatively. Numerical values can be assessed using coding and thematic mapping. Using a survey method with a larger population size would provide quantitative data that may be used to inform school districts and various stake holders on the RTI experiences of their teachers, showing correlations between experiences and RTI student success.

Conclusion

Case studies provide holistic, real-world perspectives when having a desire to understand social phenomena (Yin, 2018). The findings of this multiple case study were answers to the *why* and *how* research questions developed surrounding the desire to understand general education elementary teachers experiences with the RTI process. This research underscores the connection between Bandura's social cognitive and self-efficacy theories (1977) by highlighting the current negative connotations towards the RTI program and identifying the need for additional training. It is concluded that the negativity surrounding the RTI process stems from high teacher demands with little training and a lack of knowledge and expertise surrounding it.

Overall, this study offers valuable insights into the field of education, identifying areas for policymakers and district administrators to explore and to guide improvements, developing effective RTI programs that support both teachers and learners. The findings highlight the necessity of administrative support, including for educators, emphasizing the importance of stakeholder collaboration in creating and implementing a successful RTI program.

References

Alahmari, A. A. (2020). Classroom teachers' perceptions of response to intervention

implementation: A qualitative interview study. *Journal of Educational and Psychological*

Researchers, 17(65), 42-75. Retrieved from:

https://www.iasj.net/iasj/download/195f688344a0f433

Al Otaiba, S., Wagner, R. K., & Miller, B. (2014). "Waiting to fail" redux: Understanding

inadequate response to intervention. *Learning Disability Quarterly, 37*(3), 129-133.

https://doi.org/10.1177/0731948714525622

Al Otaiba, S., Baker, K., Lan, P., Allor, J., Rivas, B., Yovanoff, P., & Kamata, A. (2019).

Elementary teacher's knowledge of response to intervention implementation: A

preliminary factor analysis. *Annals of Dyslexia, 69*(1), 34-53.

https://doi.org/10.1007/s11881-018-00171-5

Arden, S. V., & Benz, S. (2018). The science of RTI implementation: The how and what of

building multi-tiered systems of support. *Perspectives on Language and Literacy, 44*(4),

21-25.

Arias-Gundín, O., & García Llamazares, A. (2021). Efficacy of the RtI model in the treatment of

reading learning disabilities. *Education Sciences, 11*(5), 209.

https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci11050209

Bandura, A., Ross, D. and Ross, S. A. (1961). Transmission of aggression through imitation

of aggressive models. *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, *63*, 575-582.

Bandura, A. (1977). Self-efficacy: Toward a unifying theory of behavioral change.

Psychological Review, 84(2), 191-215. https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295X.84.2.191

Bandura, A. (1986). *Social foundations of thought and action: A social cognitive theory*.

Prentice Hall.

Bandura, A. (1991). Social cognitive theory of self-regulation. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes, pp. 50,* 248–287. 10.1016/0749-5978(91)90022-L

Bandura, A. (1999). Social cognitive theory of personality. *Handbook of personality: Theory and Research,*154–196. Guilford Press.

Becker, G. I., & Deris, A. R. (2019). Identification of Hispanic English language learners in special education. *Education Research International,* 2019, 1-9. https://doi.org/10.1155/2019/2967943

Benedict, A. E., Brownell, M., Bettini, E., & Sohn, H. (2021). Learning together: Teachers' evolving understanding of coordinated word study instruction within an RTI framework. *Teacher Education and Special Education, 44*(2), 134-159. https://doi.org/10.1177/0888406420930686

Berkeley, S., Scanlon, D., Bailey, T. R., Sutton, J. C., & Sacco, D. M. (2020). A Snapshot of RTI implementation a decade later: New picture, same story. *Journal of Learning Disabilities, 53*(5), 332-342. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022219420915867

Bester, S., & Conway, M. (2021). Foundation phase teachers' points of view on the viability of response to intervention in their school context. *South African Journal of Education, 41*(1), 1-12. https://doi.org/10.15700/saje.v41n1a2058

Birt, L., Scott, S., Cavers, D., Campbell, C., & Walter, F. (2016). Member checking: A tool to enhance trustworthiness or merely a nod to validation? *Qualitative Health Research, 26*(13), 1802-1811. https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732316654870

Bogaert, R., Merchie, E., Aesaert, K., & Van Keer, H. (2023). The development of the reading comprehension—Progress monitoring (RC-PM) tool for late elementary

students. *Frontiers in Education*

(*Lausanne*),* 8https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2023.1066837

Bohanon, H. S., Wu, M., Kushki, A., LeVesseur, C., Harms, A., Vera, E., Carlson-Sanei, J., &

Shriberg, D. (2021). The role of school improvement planning in the implementation of

MTSS in secondary schools. *Preventing School Failure, 65*(3), 230

-242. https://doi.org/10.1080/1045988X.2021.1908215

Brante, G. (2009). Multitasking and synchronous work: Complexities in teacher work. *Teaching*

and Teacher Education, 25(3), 430-436. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2008.09.015

Buffman, A., Mattos, M., & Weber, C. (2009). Pyramid response to intervention: RTI,

professional learning communities, and how to respond when kids don't learn.

Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree Press.

Buffum, A. G., Mattos, M., Malone, J., Cruz, L. F., Dimich, N., & Schuhl, S. (2018). *Taking*

action: A handbook for RTI at work. Solution Tree Press.bu

Bundock, O'Keeffe, B. V., Stokes, K., & Kladis, K. (2018). Strategies for minimizing

variability in progress monitoring of oral reading fluency. *Teaching Exceptional*

Children., 50(5), 273–281. https://doi.org/10.1177/0040059918764097

Buric, I., & Macuka, I. (2017). Self-efficacy, emotions, and work engagement among teachers:

A two-wave cross-lagged analysis. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, *19*(7), 1917–1933.

Retrieved from https://doi-org.ezproxy.liberty.edu/10.1007/s10902-017- 9903-9

Castillo, J. M., Scheel, N. L., Wolgemuth, J. R., Latimer, J. D., & Green, S. M. (2022). A

scoping review of the literature on professional learning for MTSS. *Journal of School*

Psychology, *92,* 166-187. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsp.2022.03.010

Clarke, E., & Visser, J. (2019). Pragmatic research methodology in education: possibilities and

pitfalls. *International Journal of Research & Method in Education*, *42*(5), 455–469. https://doi.org/10.1080/1743727x.2018.1524866

Clemens, N. H., Lee, K., Henri, M., Simmons, L. E., Kwok, O., & Al Otaiba, S. (2020). Growth on sublexical fluency progress monitoring measures in early kindergarten and relations to word reading acquisition. *Journal of School Psychology, 79,* 43-62. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsp.2020.01.003

Coady, M. R., Ankeny, B., & Ankeny, R. (2019). Is language a 'right' in U.S. education?: unpacking *Castañeda's* reach across federal, state, and district lines. *Language Policy*, *21*(3), 305–329. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10993-021-09604-1

Conoyer, Wagner, K. B., Janssen, K. K., Jewell, J. D., & McKenney, E. L. W. (2023). Exploring curriculum-based measurement in elementary science: Investigating two vocabulary-matching formats. *Assessment for Effective Intervention.*, *48*(4), 211–216. https://doi.org/10.1177/15345084231179442

Counts J., Katsiyannis A., Whitford D. K. (2018). Culturally and linguistically diverse learners in special education: English learners. *NASSP Bulletin*, 102(1), 5–21.

Creswell, J.W. & Poth, C.N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: choosing among five approaches* (4th ed). Thousand Oaks, California: Sage

Crispel, O., & Kasperski, R. (2021). The impact of teacher training in special education on the Implementation of inclusion in mainstream classrooms. *International Journal of Inclusive Education, 25*(9), 1079-1090. https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2019.1600590

Da Fonte, M. A., & Barton-Arwood, S. M. (2017). Collaboration of general and special education teachers: Perspectives and strategies. *Intervention in School and Clinic, 53*(2), 99-106. https://doi.org/10.1177/1053451217693370

Dee, T. S., & Jacob, B. (2011). The impact of no child left behind on student achievement. *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management, 30*(3), 418-446. https://doi.org/10.1002/pam.20586

Denton, C. A. (2012). Response to intervention for reading difficulties in the primary grades: Some answers and lingering questions. *Journal of Learning Disabilities, 45*(3), 232-243. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022219412442155

Desombre, C., Lamotte, M., & Jury, M. (2019). French teachers' general attitude toward Inclusion: The indirect effect of teacher efficacy. *Educational Psychology (Dorchester-on-Thames), 39*(1), 38-50. https://doi.org/10.1080/01443410.2018.1472219

Dietrichson, J., Filges, T., Seerup, J. K., Klokker, R. H., Viinholt, B. C. A., Bøg, M., & Eiberg, M. (2021). Targeted school-based interventions for improving reading and mathematics for students with or at risk of academic difficulties in grades K-6: A systematic review. *Campbell Systematic Review, 17*(2), e1152-n/a. https://doi.org/10.1002/cl2.1152

Dilshad &Latif (2013) Focus group interview as a tool for qualitative research: An analysis. *Pakistan Journal of Social Sciences, 33*(1)

Elementary & Secondary Education Act, P.L. 89-10 (1965). https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/STATUTE-79/pdf/STATUTE-79-Pg27.pdf

Emmers, E., Baeyens, D., & Petry, K. (2020). Attitudes and self-efficacy of teachers towards inclusion in higher education. *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, 1–15. doi:10.1080/08856257.2019.1628337

Every student succeeds act (ESSA). Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) | U.S. Department of Education. (n.d.). https://www.ed.gov/essa?src=rn

Fien, H., Nelson, N. J., Smolkowski, K., Kosty, D., Pilger, M., Baker, S. K., & Smith, J. L. M.

(2021). A conceptual replication study of the enhanced core reading instruction MTSS-reading model. *Exceptional Children, 87*(3), 265-288. https://doi.org/10.1177/0014402920953763

Filderman, M. J., McKown, C., Bailey, P., Benner, G. J., & Smolkowski, K. (2023). Assessment for effective screening and progress monitoring of social and emotional learning skills. *Beyond Behavior, 32*(1), 15-23. https://doi.org/10.1177/10742956221143112

Fred, H., Meeuwen Pierre, V., Ellen, R., & Marjan, V. (2020). How to enhance teachers' professional learning by stimulating the development of professional learning communities: Operationalising a comprehensive PLC concept for assessing its development in everyday educational practice. *Professional Development in Education, 46*(5), 751-769. https://doi.org/10.1080/19415257.2019.1634630

Friesen, S., & Brown, B. (2022). Teacher leaders: Developing collective responsibility through design-based professional learning. *Teaching Education (Columbia, S.C.), 33*(3), 254-271. https://doi.org/10.1080/10476210.2020.1856805

Fuchs, D., Mock, D., Morgan, P. L., & Young, C. L. (2003). Responsiveness-to-intervention: Definitions, evidence, and implications for the learning disabilities construct. *Learning Disabilities Research and Practice, 18*(3), 157-171. https://doi.org/10.1111/1540-5826.00072

Fuchs, L. S., & Vaughn, S. (2012). Responsiveness-to-intervention: A decade later. *Journal of Learning Disabilities, 45*(3), 195-203. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022219412442150

Gallup. (2014). *State of America's schools: A path to winning again in education*. Retrieved from //www.gallup.com/services/178709/state-america-schools-report.aspx

Gartland, D., & Strosnider, R. (2020). The use of response to intervention to inform special

education eligibility decisions for students with specific learning disabilities. *Learning*

Disability Quarterly, 43(4), 195-200. https://doi.org/10.1177/0731948720949964

Gersten, R., Jayanthi, M., & Dimino, J. (2017). Too much, too soon? unanswered questions from

national response to intervention evaluation. *Exceptional Children, 83*(3), 244-254.

https://doi.org/10.1177/0014402917692847

Gesel, S. A., LeJeune, L. M., Chow, J. C., Sinclair, A. C., & Lemons, C. J. (2021). A meta-

Analysis of the impact of professional development on teachers' knowledge, skill, and

self-efficacy in data-based decision-making. *Journal of Learning Disabilities, 54*(4), 269-

283. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022219420970196

Gillon, McNeill, B., Scott, A., Arrow, A., Gath, M., & Macfarlane, A. (2023). A better start

literacy approach: effectiveness of Tier 1 and Tier 2 support within a response to

teaching framework. *Reading and Writing., 36*(3), 565–598.

https://doi.org/10.1007/s11145-022-10303-4

Gomez-Najarro, J. (2020). An empty seat at the table: Examining general and special education

teacher collaboration in response to intervention. *Teacher Education and Special*

Education, 43(2), 109-126. https://doi.org/10.1177/0888406419850894

Graneheim, U. H., & Lundman, B. (2004). Qualitative content analysis in nursing research:

Concepts, procedures and measures to achieve trustworthiness. *Nurse Education Today,*

24(2), 105–112. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.nedt.2003.10.001

Grapin, S. L., Waldron, N., & Joyce-Beaulieu, D. (2019). Longitudinal effects of RtI

implementation on reading achievement outcomes. *Psychology in the Schools, 56*(2),

242-254. https://doi.org/10.1002/pits.22222

Hajovsky, D. B., Maki, K. E., Chesnut, S. R., Barrett, C. A., & Burns, M. K. (2022). Specific

learning disability identification in an RtI method: Do measures of cognitive ability

matter? *Learning Disabilities Research & Practice*, *37*(4), 280-293.

https://doi.org/10.1111/ldrp.12292

Heller, K. A., Holtzman, W. H., & Messick, S. (1982). *Placing children in special education: A strategy for equity*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.

Hendricks, E. L, & Fuchs, D. (2020). Are individual differences in response to intervention influenced by the methods and measures used to define response? Implications for identifying children with learning disabilities. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*. Advanced online publication. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022219420920379

Hyson. (2020). *The data-driven school: collaborating to improve student outcomes.* Guilford Publications.

Individuals With Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004, PL 108-446, 20 U.S.C. §§ 1400-1415. https://www.wrightslaw.com/idea/idea.2004.all.pdf

Jaeger, E. L. (2023). The potential for common core and response to intervention as intersecting initiatives: Supporting readers who struggle with high-level standards. *Reading & Writing Quarterly, ahead-of-print(ahead-of-print),* 1-16. https://doi.org/10.1080/10573569.2023.2172496

Jones, K. (2016). *The relationship between teachers' perceptions of response to intervention (RTI) implementation factors and self-reported RTI implementation efforts.*

Jortveit, M., & Kovač, V. B. (2022;2021;). Co-teaching that works: Special and general Educators' perspectives on collaboration. *Teaching Education (Columbia, S.C.), 33*(3), 286-300. https://doi.org/10.1080/10476210.2021.1895105

Kaizu, A., & Tamaki, M. (2023). Predicting reading achievement through progress monitoring

in elementary school. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education, ahead-of-print(ahead-of-print)*, 1-16. https://doi.org/10.1080/02568543.2023.2187489

Kauffman, J. M. (1999). How we prevent the prevention of emotional and behavioral disorders. *Exceptional Children, 65*(4), 448–468. doi: 10.1177/001440299906500402

Kalyanpur, M. (2019). Challenges in implementing response to intervention with culturally and linguistically diverse student. *The International Journal of Diversity in Education, 19*(2), 45-56. https://doi.org/10.18848/2327-0020/CGP/v19i02/45-56

Kiel, E., Braun, A., Muckenthaler, M., Heimlich, U., & Weiss, S. (2020). Self-efficacy of teachers in inclusive classes. How do teachers with different self-efficacy beliefs differ in implementing inclusion? *European Journal of Special Needs Education, 35*(3), 333-349. https://doi.org/10.1080/08856257.2019.1683685

King, N., Horrocks, C., & Brooks, J. (2019). *Interviews in qualitative research*. Sage.

Kirk, S. A., & Bateman, B. (1962). Diagnosis and remediation of learning disabilities. *Exceptional Children*, *29*(2), 73-78. https://doi.org/10.1177/001440296202900204

Koch, T. (1994). Establishing rigour in qualitative research: The decision trail. *Journal of Advanced Nursing, 19*(5), 976–986. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2648.1994.tb01177.x

Koenen, A., Vervoort, E., Kelchtermans, G., Verschueren, K., & Spilt, J. L. (2019). Teachers' daily negative emotions in interactions with individual students in special education. *Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders, 27*(1), 37-51. https://doi.org/10.1177/1063426617739579

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1993). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Sage.

Lipscombe, K., Buckley-Walker, K., & Tindall-Ford, S. (2023). Middle leaders' facilitation of

teacher learning in collaborative teams. *School Leadership & Management, 43*(3), 301-321. https://doi.org/10.1080/13632434.2023.2215803

Love, A. M. A., Toland, M. D., Usher, E. L., Campbell, J. M., & Spriggs, A. D. (2019). Can I Teach students with autism spectrum disorder?: Investigating teacher self-efficacy with an emerging population of students. *Research in Developmental Disabilities, 89,* 41-50. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ridd.2019.02.005

March, A. L., Castillo, J. M., Daye, J. G., Bateman, L. P., & Gelley, C. D. (2020). Qualitative investigation of RtI coaches roles, responsibilities, and experiences supporting schools participating in a state level RtI implementation project. J*ournal of Educational and Psychological Consultation, 30*(2), 210-250. https://doi.org/10.1080/10474412.2019.1687310

March, A. L., Castillo, J.M. Batsche M. G., & Kindcaid, D. (2016). Relationship between systems coaching and problem-solving implementation fidelity in a response-to-intervention model. *Journal of Applied School Psychology, 32*(2), 147-177, DOI: 10.1080/15377903.2016.1165326

Mazenod, A., Francis, B., Archer, L., Hodgen, J., Taylor, B., Tereshchenko, A., & Pepper, D. (2019). Nurturing learning or encouraging dependency? teacher constructions of students in lower attainment groups in English secondary schools. *Cambridge Journal of Education, 49*(1), 53-68. https://doi.org/10.1080/0305764X.2018.1441372

Milburn, Lonigan, C. J., & Phillips, B. M. (2017). Determining responsiveness to tier 2 intervention in response to intervention: Level of performance, growth, or oth. *The Elementary School Journal.*, *118*(2), 310–334. https://doi.org/10.1086/694271

McGillicuddy, D., & Devine, D. (2020). 'You feel ashamed that you are not in the higher

group'—Children's psychosocial response to ability grouping in primary school. *British Educational Research Journal, 46*(3), 553-573. https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.3595

McLaughlin, M. J. (2010). Evolving interpretations of educational equity and students with disabilities. *Exceptional Children, 76*(3), 265-278. https://doi.org/10.1177/001440291007600302

Moè, A., Pazzaglia, F., & Ronconi, L. (2010). When being able is not enough. The combined value of positive affect and self-efficacy for job satisfaction in teaching. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *26*(5), 1145-1153. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2010.02.010

Moustakas, C. (1994). *Phenomenological research methods*. Sage Publications.

National Center for Learning Disabilities. (2020). What is RTI? *RTI Action Network*. Retrieved from: http://www.rtinetwork.org/learn/what/whatisrti

Nichols, S. L., Castro-Villarreal, F., & Ramirez, A. (2017). Response to Intervention: Instructional challenges for teachers in high-needs contexts. *Teachers College Record, 119*(9), 1–30.

Nilvius, C., Carlsson, R., Fälth, L., & Nordström, T. (2021). Tier 2 interventions within the RtI-Model for developing students' word decoding - a systematic review and meta-analysis. *Cogent Education, 8*(1) https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2021.1994105

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001, Pub. L. No. 107-110, § 101, Stat. 1425 (2002).

Oberle, E., Gist, A., Cooray, M. S., & Pinto, J. B. R. (2020). Do students notice stress in teachers? associations between classroom teacher burnout and students' perceptions of teacher social–emotional competence. *Psychology in the Schools, 57*(11), 1741-1756. https://doi.org/10.1002/pits.22432

Papachristou, E., Flouri, E., Joshi, H., Midouhas, E., & Lewis, G. (2022). Ability-grouping and

problem behavior trajectories in childhood and adolescence: Results from a U.K.

population-based sample. *Child Development, 93*(2), 341-

358. https://doi.org/10.1111/cdev.13674

Polit, D. F., & Beck, C. T. (2010). Generalization in quantitative and qualitative research: Myths

and strategies. *International Journal of Nursing Studies*, *47*(11), 1451–1458.

https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijnurstu.2010.06.004

Preston, A. I., Wood, C. L., & Stecker, P. M. (2016). Response to intervention: Where it came

from and where it's going. *Preventing School Failure, 60*(3), 173-182.

https://doi.org/10.1080/1045988X.2015.1065399

Raben, Brogan, J., Dunham, M., & Bloomdahl, S. (2019). Response to Intervention (RTI) and

changes in special education categorization. *Exceptionality Education International.,*

29(2), 59–71. https://doi.org/10.5206/eei.v29i2.9402

Rogers, Smith, W. R., Buffum, A. G., & Mattos, M. (Mike W. (2020). *Best practices at tier 3.*

Intensive interventions for remediation, elementary. Solution Tree Press.

Rubenstein, L. D., Ridgley, L. M., Callan, G. L., Karami, S., & Ehlinger, J. (2018). How teachers

Perceive factors that influence creativity development: Applying a social cognitive theory

perspective. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 70*, 100-110.

https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2017.11.012

Ruiz. (2020). Beyond traditional Response to Intervention: Helping rural educators understand

English learners' needs. *Rural Special Education Quarterly.*, *39*(1), 35–53.

https://doi.org/10.1177/8756870519894661

Saloviita, T. (2020). Attitudes of teachers towards inclusive education in Finland. *Scandinavian*

Journal of Educational Research, 64(2), 270-282.

https://doi.org/10.1080/00313831.2018.1541819

Sandilos, L., Goble, P., & Schwartz, S. (2020). Burnout and teacher-child interactions: The moderating influence of SEL interventions in head start classrooms. *Early Education and Development, 31*(7), 1169-1185. https://doi.org/10.1080/10409289.2020.1788331

Savolainen, H., Malinen, O., & Schwab, S. (2020). Teacher efficacy predicts teachers' attitudes. Towards inclusion – a longitudinal cross-lagged analysis. *International Journal of Inclusive Education,*1-15. doi:10.1080/13603116.2020.1752826

Sayeski, Bateman, D. F., & Yell, M. L. (2019). Re-envisioning teacher preparation in an era of Endrew F.: Instruction over access. *Intervention in School and Clinic., 54*(5), 264–271. https://doi.org/10.1177/1053451218819157

Shenton, A. K. (2004). Strategies for ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research projects. *Education for Information*, *22*(2), 63–75. https://doi.org/10.3233/efi-2004-22201

Sonju, B. (2019). *Best practices at tier 2: supplemental interventions for additional student support, secondary*. Solution Tree Press.

Stahl, N. A., & King, J. R. (2020). Expanding approaches for research: Understanding and using trustworthiness in qualitative research. *Journal of Developmental Education, 44*(1), 26-28.

Sutherland, Lesner, T., Kosty, D., Lussier, C., Smolkowski, K., Turtura, J., Doabler, C. T., & Clarke, B. (2023). Examining interactions across instructional tiers: Do features of tier 1 predict student responsiveness to tier 2 mathematics intervention? *Journal of Learning Disabilities., 56*(4), 243–256. https://doi.org/10.1177/00222194221102644

Svensson, I., Fälth, L., Tjus, T., Heimann, M., Gustafson, S., Göteborgs universitet, Gothenburg University, Samhällsvetenskapliga fakulteten, Psykologiska institutionen, Department of

Psychology, & Faculty of Social Sciences. (2019). Two-step tier three interventions for

children in grade three with low reading fluency. *Journal of Research in Special*

Educational Needs, 19(1), 3-14. https://doi.org/10.1111/1471-3802.12419

Swain, K. D., Hagaman, J. L., & Leader-Janssen, E. M. (2022). Teacher-reported IEP goal data

collection methods. *Preventing School Failure, 66*(2), 118-

125. https://doi.org/10.1080/1045988X.2021.1980849

Thomas, E. R., Conoyer, S. J., & Lembke, E. S. (2020). Districtwide evaluation of RTI

Implementation: Success, challenges, and self-efficacy. *Learning Disabilities Research*

and Practice, 35(3), 118-125. https://doi.org/10.1111/ldrp.12226

Townley, A. (2020). Leveraging communities of practice as professional learning communities

in science, technology, engineering, math (STEM) education. *Education Sciences, 10*(8),

190. https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci10080190

Troester, K., Raines, R., & Marencin, N. (2022). Universal screening within an RTI framework:

Recommendations for classroom application. *Perspectives on Language and*

Literacy, 48(1), 21-25.

van den Bosch, R. M., Espin, C. A., Pat-El, R. J., & Saab, N. (2019). Improving Teachers'

Comprehension of Curriculum-Based Measurement Progress-Monitoring Graphs.

*Journal of Learning Disabilities, 5*2(5), 413-427.

https://doi.org/10.1177/0022219419856013

Van Norman, E. R., Nelson, P. M., & Klingbeil, D. A. (2020). Profiles of reading performance

after exiting tier 2 intervention. *Psychology in the Schools, 57*(5), 757

-767. https://doi.org/10.1002/pits.22354

Vellutino, F. R., Scanlon, D. M., Sipay, E. R., Small, S. G., Pratt, A., Chen, R., & Denckla, M.

B. (1996). Cognitive profiles of difficult-to-remediate and readily remediated poor

readers: Early intervention as a vehicle for distinguishing between cognitive and

experiential deficits as basic causes of specific reading disability. *Journal of

Educational Psychology, 88*(4), 601-638. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-0663.88.4.601

Wang, N., & An, B. G. (2023). Improving teachers' professional development through

professional learning community: Voices from secondary school teachers at Malaysian

Chinese independent schools. Heliyon, 9(6).

https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2023.e17515

Wanzek, J., Stevens, E. A., Williams, K. J., Scammacca, N., Vaughn, S., & Sargent, K. (2018).

Current evidence on the effects of intensive early reading interventions. *Journal of

Learning Disabilities, 51*(6), 612-624. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022219418775110

Weingarten, Zumeta Edmonds, R., & Arden, S. (2020). Better together: Using MTSS as a

structure for building school–family partnerships. *Teaching Exceptional Children.,

53(*2), 122–130. https://doi.org/10.1177/0040059920937733

Werner, S., Gumpel, T. P., Koller, J., Wiesenthal, V., & Weintraub, N. (2021). Can self-efficacy

mediate between knowledge of policy, school support, and teacher attitudes toward

inclusive education? *PloS One, 16*(9), e0257657-e0257657.

https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0257657

Werts, M. G., Carpenter, E. S., & Fewell, C. (2014). Barriers and benefits to response to

intervention: Perceptions of special education teachers. *Rural Special Education

Quarterly, 33*(2), 3-11. https://doi.org/10.1177/875687051403300202

Wexler, J., Swanson, E., Shelton, A., Kurz, L. A., Bray, L., & Hogan, E. (2023). Sustaining the

use of evidence-based tier 1 literacy practices that benefit students with

disabilities. *Journal of Learning Disabilities, 56*(2), 145

-160. https://doi.org/10.1177/00222194211065499

Wohl, J. W. (2022). A better idea: Utilizing the department of education's rulemaking authority

to   reform the special education process. *Administrative Law Review, 74*(3), 621.

Wood, R. & Bandura, A. (1989). Social cognitive theory of organizational management. *The Academy of Management Review, 14*(3), 361-384.

Yin, R. K. (2018). *Case study research and applications: Design and methods*. SAGE Publications, Inc.

Yin, R. K. (1994). *Case study research: Design and methods (2nd Ed*.). SAGE Publications, Inc.

Zirkel, P. A. (2017). RTI and other approaches to SLD identification under the IDEA: A legal update. *Learning Disability Quarterly, 40*(3), 165-173. https://doi.org/10.1177/0731948717710778

Appendix A

Letter of Participation Consent

Consent

Title of the Project: Teachers' Experiences of the Response to Intervention Model

Implementation in State-ranked New Jersey Schools: A Qualitative Case Study

Principal Investigator:

Kimberly Myers

Doctoral Candidate

School of Education

Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be a novice or

experienced full-time licensed general education elementary teachers, kindergarten through grade

five, which will naturally be a minimum of 22 years of age and above. Taking part in this research

project is voluntary. Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding

whether to take part in this research.

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

The purpose of this intrinsic case study was to discover and describe teachers' experiences of

implementation of the RTI program for kindergarten through grade five general education

teachers at state-ranked suburban New Jersey schools.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

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

1. Participate in an in-person, one-to-one, audio-recorded interview that will take approximately 30- 45 minutes to complete.

2. Participate in an in-person, audio-recorded focus group, either the novice focus group or the experienced group dependent on their status, that will take 30 minutes. There will be 2 focus groups created- one for novice teachers and one for experienced teachers. Each participant will be placed in a group according to their status.

3. Review audio-recorded interview transcripts and the developed themes through the process of member checking. Member checking will require you to review the transcription and the developed themes to validate the results (15-20 minutes). This will confirm the accuracy and reliability of my study.

4. Provide RTI documentation for the researcher to further analyze.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

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

Benefits to society include enhancing Response to Intervention (RTI) literature with teachers' experiences as the focus and using data collected to identify needs in future professional development opportunities.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

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

I am a mandatory reporter. During this study, if I receive information about child abuse, child neglect, elder abuse, or intent to harm self or others, I will be required to report it to the appropriate authorities.

How will personal information be protected?

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

- Participant responses will be kept confidential by replacing names with pseudonyms.

- Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.

- Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in focus group settings. While discouraged, other members of the focus group may share what was discussed with people outside of the group.

- Data collected from you may be shared with other researchers. If data collected from you is reused or shared, any information that could identify you, if applicable, will be removed beforehand.

Data will be stored on a password-locked computer and in a locked filing cabinet secured with the researcher having possession of the key. After five years, all electronic records will be deleted, and all hardcopy records will be shredded.

Recordings will be stored on a password-locked computer until participants have reviewed and confirmed the accuracy of the transcripts and then deleted. The researcher and members of her doctoral committee will have access to these recordings.

Is study participation voluntary?

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

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

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you, apart from 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.

<u>Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?</u>

The researcher conducting this study is Kimberly Myers. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at _____. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, ████████████████████████████

<u>Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?</u>

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the IRB. Our physical address is Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA, 24515; our phone number is 434-592-5530, and our email address is irb@liberty.edu.

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

<u>Your Consent</u>

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

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received

answers. I consent to participate in the study.

☐ The researcher has my permission to audio-record me as part of my participation in this

study.

_____

Printed Subject Name

_____

Signature & Date

Appendix B

Participation Recruitment Letter

Dear Potential Participant,

As a doctoral candidate in the School of Education department at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a PhD degree in Curriculum and Instruction. The purpose of my research is to discover and describe teachers' experiences of implementation for kindergarten through grade five general education teachers at a state-ranked suburban New Jersey school, and I am writing to invite you to join my study.

Participants must be licensed general education elementary teachers, kindergarten through grade five, who will naturally be a minimum of 22 years of age and above. They must be novice or experienced elementary general education teachers ranging in age from 22 to over 50 years old and must teach core elementary content. Participants will be asked to take part in a one-on-one, audio-recorded, in-person interview (30-45 minutes), and take part in an audio-recorded focus group (30 minutes per group). There will be two focus groups created- one for novice teachers and one for experienced teachers. Each participant will be placed in a group according to their status. Following the audio-interviews, participants will be given a transcription of their interview to review for accuracy (15-20 minutes). Participants will also have their Response to Intervention (RTI) data analyzed by providing the documentation participants have created within the RTI system. Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but participant identities will not be disclosed.

To participate, please contact me at _____ to schedule an interview/etc.

A consent document will be given to you in person prior to the one-to-one interviews taking place. The consent document contains additional information about my research. If you choose to participate, you will need to sign the consent document and shortly thereafter we will begin to conduct the interview.

Sincerely,

Kimberly Myers

Kimberly Myers

Liberty University Doctoral Candidate

Appendix C

Doctoral Research Site Consent Letter

Kimberly Myers

Ph.D. Candidate Liberty University

████████████████████

████████████

████████████

November 17, 2023

Dr. Robert ████

████████████████████████

██████████████

██████████████

Dear Superintendent ████,

As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am writing to request

your permission to conduct dissertation research within the ████████████████████████

████, specifically focusing on teacher participants. My research entitled, *Teachers'*

Experiences of the Response to Intervention Model Implementation in State-ranked New Jersey

Schools: A Qualitative Case Study, aims to contribute to understanding teachers' self-efficacy in

the Response to Intervention (RTI) implementation process.

Involving educators from ████████ as participants in my research would provide valuable insights and contribute to the improvement of educational practices. Participants will be asked to schedule individual interviews, be placed in focus groups for additional interviews, and provide completed RTI documentation to myself for analysis. The research will adhere to ethical guidelines and maintain respect, confidentiality, and privacy.

My outline of the research process is as follows:

1. **Research Objective, Purpose Statement, & Significance**: This qualitative case study focuses on teachers' experiences of implementing Response to Intervention (RTI) and the implementation design for meeting students' needs at the elementary level. The case study aims to explore and articulate the experiences of kindergarten through fifth-grade general education teachers regarding implementing the RTI program at state-ranked suburban New Jersey schools.

   Addressing the success of RTI in an elementary classroom setting will impact special education referrals and the overall school climate. When analyzing teachers' perceptions of RTI and their experiences with their implementation, stakeholders can make the appropriate changes to ensure teachers are confident in their roles and that students' needs are being met appropriately. This study's results may create professional development opportunities and adjust administrative support to build teachers' efficacy toward RTI.

2. **Participant Involvement:** This study's results may create professional development opportunities and adjust administrative support to build teachers' efficacy toward RTI. These

individuals will be placed in focus groups depending on their years of experience. They will range from teachers with zero to five years of experience and over five years of experience. Grouping the participants by the amount of experience will contribute to theme analysis. The number of participants will be approximately ten.

3.   **Ethical Considerations:** Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Confidentiality of the participants and research site will be established and ensured throughout my study. I will include a confidentiality note listing the appropriate pseudonyms and obtain written consent from the participants and school district when establishing research site consent. Due to document analysis being a form of data collection, any names, staff and student, or identifying features will be removed prior to the analysis process. I will inform my participants that they can withdraw from the study anytime and provide a copy of the completed research if they wish to obtain one. To further enhance study security, I will keep any collected data on a password-protected hard drive and destroyed when necessary.

4.   **Timeline:** My goal is to begin my dissertation research starting January 2024.

5.   **Benefits:** Participating in this study entails indirect advantages, including contributing to the existing knowledge on RTI practices, sharing beneficial experiences and strategies with fellow education professionals, and reflecting on data-driven decision-making practices both during and after the survey study.

I understand that obtaining permission for research involving educators is a significant decision. If granted permission, I am committed to working closely with my fellow educators to ensure minimal disruption to the teaching and learning process.

Thank you for considering my request. If you choose to grant permission, please respond by e-mail to _____. I look forward to the possibility of collaborating with colleagues and administrators to advance educational research and practice.

Sincerely,

Kimberly Myers

Liberty University Doctoral Candidate

Appendix D

Sample Interview Transcript

Dissertation Meeting with Jamie (2024-03-18 12:30 GMT-4) - Transcript

Attendees

Josie, Kimberly Myers

Transcript

This editable transcript was computer generated and might contain errors.

Kimberly Myers: Good afternoon, firstly thank you for taking time out of your busy schedule to meet with me. I would like to give you some brief background information on my goal behind this research is to further my understanding of the response intervention process by hearing firsthand accounts of teachers experiences by listening to those who are part of this RTI process. I will hopefully be able to influence administrators and increase future self-efficacy towards RTI. I want to first thank you for volunteering to participate in this interview. I really appreciate your willingness to share your insights and expertise with me. This interview will consist of 13 questions regarding your experience with the RTI process. It has been implemented throughout your school district. This interview will be audio recorded and transcribed to ensure accuracy and that any results that are yielded will be reliable.

Kimberly Myers: I want to remind you that your participation in the study is completely voluntary, and any data collected will be kept confidential using pseudonyms anytime throughout this process. If you wish to exit, please just let me know. And let's begin.

Kimberly Myers: So, my first question for you is just if you could tell me a little bit about your Elementary teaching experience thus far.

Josie: So, I am in my 24th or fifth year of teaching. I've taught the grade levels of kindergarten fourth grade and fifth grade. I was at one Elementary School for the majority of my career about 21 years or 22 and now I am in a new Elementary School in the same district, and I am teaching fifth grade currently.

Kimberly Myers: Perfect. Thank You already answered my second question, which was how many years you've been teaching?

Josie: 24 or 5

Kimberly Myers: Perfect. Thank you. And how would you describe your overall experience?

Josie: with RTI?

Kimberly Myers: Not specifically RTI. Just like your overall teaching experience. How do you feel about it?

Josie: So, I love being a teacher, but I love going behind my classroom door and doing things the way I believe they need to be done for the benefit of my students. What I don't love about teaching is how much it has changed over the years. The pendulum is definitely swung in the opposite direction where now a lot more of the administrative Staff and faculty have a lot more say as opposed as to what we can do and can't do in our classroom as opposed to us making decisions that are right for our students.

Kimberly Myers: Thank you. We're gonna get a little more specific with RTI. So how do you feel right now about the RTI process?

Josie: Honestly, I'm very confused every time I have to do anything related to RTI. I need to reach out to somebody who's willing and able to help fill out the information

Kimberly Myers: Okay, thank you. How has the RTI process been implemented in your classroom?

Josie: So, what we are supposed to do is every time we do any sort of make accommodation for a student that is in our classroom. We are to document it in the RTI computer program and oftentimes I forget to do that because it's redundant but also, I see the benefit of it because then you're able to justify that you're meeting the needs of the students that are in the process already.

Kimberly Myers: Perfect. Thank you. Has your experience been successful with RTI so far?

Josie: My experience with it is that I don't ever look at it. So, at the beginning of the school year, I always read what their modifications are going to be and most of the time I'll print them out and just hang them in front of me. So, I know those students but as far as remembering to input other information and then if there's a new student that I want to get started in the RTI process the process is so redundant and horrible that I tend to not do that unfortunately. I tend to ignore it.

Kimberly Myers: Perfect. Thank you. How does the data collected from RTI influence your instruction?

Josie: So, the thing is though when you have a principal like mine. You are held accountable for that kind of thing and you are expected to go back and look and even if you don't do it, you will often get a spreadsheet that offers you information on what you are and are not doing so I do think that it keeps you focused on the needs of that individual student in the progress that they're making. Can you ask me the question again? Because I think I forgot something.

Kimberly Myers: Yeah, how does the data collected influence your instruction?

Josie: yeah, so, if they're not making progress then what changes do we need to make a lot of times the team will meet and talk about other ways that we can solve issues or try to change things up because you might only have one idea on how you want to work with the student that might not be working. So sometimes you hear other people's perspectives is helpful like the basic skills teachers and stuff.

Kimberly Myers: Perfect. Thank you. And how do you feel about the collection of RTI data? I think you already kind of touched upon that you feel it's a bit redundant and things like that.

Josie: Yeah, I think it's annoying and I think it's difficult to access. I wish it was more, Available and not you didn't have to search for it to find it and things like that.

Kimberly Myers: Thank you. How does the acceptance of RTI implementation influence its effectiveness should be it like acceptance with teachers. So, accepting RTI program, how would that influence the effectiveness?

Josie: I think we don't know enough about the RTI program for us to accept it. So, we're all pretty negative about it. It's just another thing that we have to do another job that has to be done outside of teaching so actually when you say the words RTI or the letters RTI It makes me frown.

Kimberly Myers: Thank you. How do you feel about additional RTI training in schools?

Josie: I think honestly if we have to use it, then we need to be trained better on it. And I also think that when they're trying to think of things to train us on maybe they look at things that are more beneficial if you're going to make us put information into RTI then Teach us an easy simple way to go about doing it.

Kimberly Myers: Perfect. Thank you. How comfortable do you feel using a variety of interventions throughout your classroom?

Josie: very comfortable

Kimberly Myers: And how do you differentiate your instruction to me all students' needs?

Josie: small group work and one-on-one meetings things like that

Kimberly Myers: Thank you. And my last question is just what else would you like to contribute to this study?

Josie: None at this time.

Kimberly Myers: I'm gonna thank you very much for your time. I greatly appreciate it.

Josie: You're welcome.