

# Reading Specialist's Perceptions and Roles in Implementing Response to Intervention

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## Abstract

The roles of reading specialists differ from campus to campus throughout the study site due to varied implementations of Response to Intervention (RTI). To ensure that students were receiving consistent interventions based on their needs, the site needed to examine how and when instructional services were delivered to struggling students, as well as the role of the reading specialist in the process.

## Problem

RTI is a multi-tiered intervention model used as a early **preventative measure** to monitor academic progress and **assist struggling students** in becoming literate members of our global society by using research based strategies provided by a highly qualified person (Bender, 2009; Buffum, Mattos, & Weber, 2010; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006).

The implementation of the RTI framework in one large suburban school district had created challenges for reading specialists. There were **inconsistencies in the level of knowledge among reading specialists** and how RTI was implemented in schools.

Due to this vagueness, the roles and responsibilities of reading specialists differed from campus-to-campus throughout the study site. As a consequence, students were **not receiving consistent interventions** based on their needs, which caused the RTI process to be ineffective for struggling students based on lower benchmark scores and informal reading assessments.

This research studied the reading specialist's perceptions, experiences, and roles in implementing RTI. The information collected could lead to a better understanding of RTI by reading specialists and improved staff development on RTI by the district.

## Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the perceptions, experiences, and roles of reading specialists as the RTI framework was implemented at the elementary school level.

## Relevant Literature

### Conceptual Framework

This study was guided by Vygotsky's **social constructivist learning theory**, which holds that understanding is built through interactions, observations, and experiences.

### Research Studies

Congress passed the NCLB Act (2002) and IDEA Act (2004) to demand high quality instruction for all students to have the reading on grade level by 2014.

General education and special education students were not receiving sufficient interventions based on their needs (Fuchs & Fuchs 2006).

Student groups formed on targeted needs did not occur (Allington, 2009; Bursucks & Banks, 2010; Lose, 2008).

The RTI process allowed reading specialists, teachers, counselors, administrators, and special education to collaborate and share resources and knowledge (Fuchs, Fuchs, & Vaughn; Mellard, Frey, & Woods, 2012).

Based on results of a survey, the primary functions of reading specialists are those of assessment, instruction, and leadership (Al Otaiba & Hosp, 2008; Bean et al., 2002; IRA, 2010)

## Research Questions

**RQ1** What were the reading specialist's understanding of the RTI process?

**RQ2** How did reading specialists describe their roles and responsibilities in implementing RTI?

**RQ3** What were the experiences and challenges of elementary school reading specialists in implementing RTI?

**RQ4** What staff development support did reading specialists provide to classroom teachers regarding implementing RTI?

## Procedures

### Design

- Qualitative case study

### Sample

- 4 elementary level certified reading specialists
- E-mails sent out to all reading specialists asking for volunteers
- Respondent names were placed in a hat and 4 were selected
- Large suburban district in southwestern Texas

### Data Sources

- Survey
- Semi-structured Interview
- Focus Group
- Diary

### Procedures

Data collection procedures took approximately 6 to 8 weeks to collect survey, conduct interview, conduct focus group, to transcribe, code, and input data into a word program on the computer.

## Data Analysis

Listened to audio-tapes, and transcribed interviews and focus groups. Highlighted themes and patterns and related responses back to literature.

## Findings

Lack of understanding the RTI process and determining ways to support struggling readers

Change in process of identifying student for small group intervention; process requires too much documentation and assessment of students

Lack of funding and resources to implement interventions; lack of collaboration/communication between interventionist and classroom

Lack of effective staff development.

## Limitations

The study was limited in

- Only elementary school reading specialists participated in study
- Only one school district was used
- Six week timeframe for data collection
- Sample size

## Conclusions

The findings suggest that

- Reading specialists had similar perspectives and understandings of RTI
- Gaps in knowledge concerning RTI
- Variations in defining and describing RTI
- Challenges exist in implementing RTI.
- Require continuous staff development

### Recommendations

- District can use this study to establish more collegial and collaborative discussions on RTI between reading specialists
- Use this study to direct staff development training for reading specialists
- Create a professional learning community as a resource to those working with struggling students.

## Social Change Implications

The findings can contribute to positive social change by leading administrators, instructional support teachers, and reading specialists to an increased understanding of the RTI process, and thereby improving RTI implementation procedures for struggling readers and subsequently increasing student achievement.

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