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Teachers' Perceptions of Collaboration for Early Literacy in a Response to Intervention Model

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This is to certify that the doctoral study by

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Walden University
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Abstract

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MA, Pennsylvania State University, 2001

BS, Buffalo State College, 1993

Doctoral Research Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Abstract

Collaboration among teachers positively affects both teachers' professional development and students' reading achievement. However, teachers face challenges in collaboration with colleagues. Current research focusing on the collaboration experiences between general education classroom teachers and reading interventionists is absent. The purpose of this study was to understand teachers' perceptions of the challenges they face in collaboration with shared goals in a reading Response to intervention (RTI) model. Collaboration theory served as the framework of this basic qualitative study. Research questions were designed to understand the perceptions of general education classroom teachers' and reading interventionists' collaborative experiences in a reading RTI model. Four general educators and five reading interventionists were interviewed. Data were analyzed using Saldana's code-to-theme approach. The findings revealed three themes: teacher interactions, student support, and structures and limitations. The results from this study indicated that participants experienced challenges, including time constraints, scheduling conflicts, initial lack of teacher buy-in, and lack of administrative support as well as felt the mandatory reporting form for weekly meetings was limiting. All participants perceived teacher meetings based on a shared goal provided an instructional focus and benefited students' reading achievement. It is recommended that teacher preparation programs and school districts plan for all teachers to receive professional development and continuous support focused on working collaboratively to increase student achievement in early reading skills. The social impact will support early reading achievement for at-risk students in Title 1 schools and move towards closing the achievement gap, resulting in all students making academic gains in reading.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents who instilled in me a strong work ethic and a love of learning at a young age. This dissertation is also dedicated to my loving husband, Eric Lemkin, and my children, Darren, Brendan, and Olivia. Their unwavering support, understanding, and faith in me throughout this process helped me successfully complete the doctoral journey and achieve my goal.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Effective teacher collaboration positively influences student achievement in reading (Gatcho & Bautista, 2019; Mora-Ruano et al., 2019; Ronfeldt et al., 2015; Shakenova, 2017). Teacher team members in a reading response to intervention (RTI) model must work together to successfully meet the instructional needs of all students within the multitiered framework (Dorn et al., 2016; Shakenova, 2017). The problem is that both general education classroom teachers and reading interventionists face challenges in collaborating with shared goals in a reading RTI model. Though there is plentiful literature on the collaborative experiences between general education classroom teachers and special education teachers in RTI models, current research that focuses on the collaboration experiences between general education classroom teachers and reading interventionists does not exist; therefore, I conducted the current study to address this gap in the literature (see Gatcho & Bautista, 2019; Glazier et al., 2017; Pieters & Voogt, 2016).

Similar pedagogical understanding and shared instructional practices are essential for effective collaboration between teachers working with struggling readers. General education classroom teachers and reading interventionists must share common language for reading interventions, literacy assessments, and data analysis (Dorn et al., 2016). Teacher-based teams (TBTs) or professional learning communities (PLCs) have the potential to create authentic collaboration opportunities for teachers (Pieters & Voogt, 2016). Such meetings are intended as collaboration time for all teachers directly involved

in the planning and execution of instruction across all tiers of an RTI model (Liebfreund & Amendum, 2017).

Collaboration helps teachers feel more supported and provides an environment for both teachers and students to grow (Banerjee et al., 2017; Ketterlin-Geller et al., 2015). However, not all teacher interactions are true collaborations (Glazier et al., 2017; Little, 1990; Lortie, 1975). Surface-level politeness and cooperation among colleagues allow for teachers to continue to work in isolation rather than creating interdependence among teacher team members (Shakenova, 2017). Administrative support, a mutual understanding of collaboration, and adequate time during the school day for teachers to meet all play major roles in decreasing teachers' feelings of isolation and boosting teachers' confidence. These supports positively affect the collaborative climate of the school and result in an increase in student achievement (Ostovar-Nameghi & Sheikhahmadi, 2016; Reeves et al., 2017). Furthermore, Mora-Ruano et al. (2019) stated that collaboration among teachers can permeate the school and positively affect the community.

Background

Many early readers struggle with basic foundational skills (Liebfreund & Amendum, 2017). Even with numerous policy initiatives addressing reading achievement, many students fail to exhibit a basic level of reading achievement in primary grades (Liebfreund & Amendum, 2017; Rasinski, 2017). According to Jones et al. (2016), many students identified as struggling readers need early literacy interventions to strengthen basic foundational reading skills. In a Midwestern state, primary grade

general education students who are identified as at-risk for reading failure are required to receive supplemental reading interventions in addition to core classroom reading instruction to improve their skills and read at grade level (Auletto & Sableski, 2018). Districts are able to select from a list of state-approved supplemental reading programs and choose an intervention delivery model that meets the needs of their students.

RTI is a framework for improving students' achievement and preventing future reading difficulties based on individual student needs (Auletto & Sableski, 2018; Sharp et al., 2016). In this multitiered model, the amount and type of service a student receives is based on results of ongoing progress monitoring (Sharp et al., 2016). While the origins of RTI are found in special education, general education classroom teachers and other intervention teacher team members use a continuous cycle of assess, plan, teach, and repeat within the framework to help students make gains in order to close the achievement gap and prevent reading failure in the future.

According to Dorn et al. (2016), teacher team collaboration between general education classroom teachers and reading interventionists is at the heart of a successful reading RTI for all students. Teachers who collaborate need to have common goals that reflect the beliefs and values of all teacher team members (Shakenova, 2017).

To facilitate opportunities for teachers to engage in collaboration with colleagues, TBTs or PLCs have become commonplace in many districts. In this Midwestern state, TBTs are part of the state improvement process that focuses on continuous improvement in teacher communication and decision-making. The collaboration between general education classroom teachers and reading interventionists is mandated as part of the state

improvement process to ensure that struggling readers receive the support needed to develop foundational early literacy skills.

Even with collaboration time built into teachers' schedules in the form of TBTs or PLCs, teacher teams face many challenges as they attempt to make collaboration meetings effective and meaningful (Fluijt et al., 2016; Glazier et al., 2017). Shifting from a culture of teacher isolation to a culture of teacher collaboration has many complexities to consider. Lortie (1975) attributed much of the reason for teacher isolation to the physical separation of teachers throughout the workday and the very limited opportunities for teacher interaction. Teacher isolation perpetuates teacher autonomy, and the realization of effective collaborative teacher relationships requires building trust among colleagues and the willingness to engage in meaningful dialogue (Ostovar-Nameghi & Sheikhahmadi, 2016). Along with shared values and working together to identify common goals, a positive attitude toward collaboration is not only a necessary component of effective collaboration but promotes teacher job satisfaction and positively influences student achievement (Banerjee et al., 2017; Little, 1990; Ostovar-Nameghi & Sheikhahmadi, 2016; Shakenova, 2017).

Building administrators are responsible for the professional growth and development of their staff, including creating a culture of collaboration among teachers (Ketterlin-Geller et al., 2015). Principals and other administrative leaders can support teacher collaboration by establishing norms that encourage teachers to build relationships beyond being cooperative and collegial (Tichenor & Tichenor, 2019). Setting the tone for teachers to feel comfortable, yet willing to be vulnerable enough to share ideas, requires

an ongoing effort (Glazier et al., 2017; Vangrieken et al., 2015). When teacher teams include specialists with different professional backgrounds, administrators can support collaborations by implementing structures that facilitate time for teachers to meet and build trusting relationships (Ketterlin-Geller et al., 2015; Liebfreund & Amendum, 2017). It is important to investigate teachers' perceptions of teacher collaboration in an early literacy RTI model because the research on this topic is lacking, and it is needed to determine the collaborative experiences of general education classroom teachers and reading interventionists (Gatcho & Bautista, 2019; Glazier et al., 2017).

Problem Statement

The problem is that both general education classroom teachers and reading interventionists face challenges in collaboration with shared goals in a reading RTI model. Though there is plentiful literature on the collaboration experiences between general education classroom teachers and special education teachers with RTI models, there is no current research focused on the collaboration experiences between general education classroom teachers and reading interventionists (Gatcho & Bautista, 2019; Glazier et al., 2017; Pieters & Voogt, 2016). It is important to understand the experiences of general education classroom teachers and reading interventionists who engage in collaboration in a reading RTI model because teacher collaboration focused on reading instruction and intervention are linked to an increase in student achievement (Fluijt et al., 2016; Gatcho & Bautista, 2019; Shakenova, 2017). Furthermore, the collaboration between teachers in RTI models can strengthen instructional alignment across all tiers to benefit student reading achievement (Dorn et al., 2016; Liebfreund & Amendum, 2017).

However, not all teacher interactions are the same as collaboration (Little, 1990; Lortie, 1975; Pieters & Voogt, 2016; Shakenova, 2017). Teachers need to navigate interpersonal relationships and learn how to engage in more than surface-level collegiality (Gatcho & Bautista, 2019; Little, 1990; Pieters & Voogt, 2016).

Recent research on teacher collaboration tends to focus on collaboration as a single construct and does not allow for a more in-depth investigation into content-specific collaborative relationships (Reeves et al., 2017). Although there are numerous recent quantitative studies of generalized teacher collaborations using survey methods, there is little qualitative research on teacher collaborations in a reading RTI model (Gatcho & Bautista, 2019; Glazier et al., 2017).

In some states, mandates require districts to use TBTs or PLCs as a way to ensure regular, documented teacher collaboration. The Department of Education of this Midwestern state requires teachers in Title 1 buildings to meet in TBTs, which are intended to focus on on-going communication and decision-making towards continuous improvement. An increase in team planning time comes from the idea that through peer conversation and shared pedagogy, teachers will construct knowledge that can positively influence their teaching practice and ultimately increase student achievement (Glazier et al., 2017; Hargreaves, 2019; Johnston & Tsai, 2018; Little, 1990). Allowing adequate time for teacher teams to collaborate in substantive ways is a barrier for some schools (Glazier et al., 2017; Tichenor & Tichenor, 2018). Furthermore, Glazier et al. (2017) found that even schools with regularly scheduled teacher team meetings have limited opportunities for productive collaboration.

Additional challenges limiting effective teacher collaboration include establishing a common understanding of collaboration, navigating interpersonal relationships between team members, and identifying shared goals (Mora-Ruano et al., 2019; Pieters & Voogt, 2016; Shakenova, 2017). Teachers who see collaboration as a threat to privacy and teacher autonomy may push back and reject the opportunity to delve into deeper level collaborative conversations with colleagues (Akiba et al., 2019; Lortie, 1975). As building leaders, administrators can support effective collaboration between teacher team members by creating a collaborative culture in the building. Imposed or administratively regulated team meetings are counterproductive to creating a collaborative culture in a building (Hargreaves, 2019; Ostovar-Nameghi & Sheikhahmadi, 2016; Shakenova, 2017). According to Barfield (2016), a sense of trust and collegial authenticity is essential for teachers to willingly accept the idea of becoming vulnerable and participating in sometimes difficult conversations. Furthermore, teaching teams consisting of educational professionals with differing areas of expertise need time to learn to navigate roles and develop trust among teacher team members (Al-Natour et al., 2015).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to understand teachers' perceptions of the challenges they face in collaboration with shared goals in a reading RTI model. Though there is plentiful literature on the collaborative experiences between general education classroom teachers and special education teachers with RTI models, there is no current research focused on the collaboration experiences between general education classroom teachers and reading interventionists (Gatcho & Bautista, 2019;

Glazier et al., 2017; Pieters & Voogt, 2016). It is important to understand the experiences of general education classroom teachers and reading interventionists who engage in collaboration in a reading RTI model because teacher collaboration focused on reading instruction and intervention are linked to an increase in student achievement (Gatcho & Bautista, 2019; Shakenova, 2017).

Research Questions

RQ1: What are general education classroom teachers' perceptions of their collaborative experiences with reading interventionists in a reading RTI model?

RQ2: What are reading interventionists' perceptions of their collaborative experiences with general education classroom teachers in a reading RTI model?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study was collaboration theory, as posited by Colbry et al. (2014). This theory addresses ongoing interaction between people with shared goals. Because teachers are working together to increase student achievement in a reading RTI model, the use of collaboration theory aligns with the design of investigating teachers' collaborative experiences in a reading RTI model. Shakenova (2017) stated that collaboration is not a one-time event but rather a continuous exchange of ideas during everyday activities. Additionally, the collaboration between teachers with differing professional backgrounds and teaching positions requires effort, commitment, and time to develop (Al-Natour et al., 2015). Therefore, it was appropriate to use collaboration theory as the conceptual framework for this study to investigate teachers' perceptions of the

challenges they face in collaboration with shared goals in a reading RTI model. Tenets of collaboration theory are discussed and analyzed further in Chapter 2.

Nature of the Study

In this study, I employed a basic qualitative study design. Qualitative research is consistent with understanding individuals' perceptions through inquiry to create meaning from the participants' experiences (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Qualitative research aligned with my purpose statement and research questions because I used open-ended, individual interview questions generated from the literature review and conceptual framework to understand the phenomenon of teachers' perceptions of the challenges they face in collaboration with shared goals in a reading RTI model.

Definitions

Collaboration: The act of working together and sharing values that influence one's practices, a product, or an outcome (Shakenova, 2017).

Teacher-based teams (TBTs) or professional learning communities (PLCs): Groups of teachers who share practices, norms, and values to positively influence student learning (Akiba et al., 2019; Pieters & Voogt, 2016).

Early literacy: The skills, knowledge, and attitudes children have about literacy before formal schooling (Piasta, 2016; Pinto et al., 2017).

Emergent literacy: The skills, knowledge, and attitudes children have about literacy before formal schooling (Piasta, 2016; Pinto et al., 2017).

Response to intervention (RTI): A multitiered intervention system that employs evidence-based practices to match the instructional needs of students (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2017; Gomez-Najarro, 2019; McCrary et al., 2017).

Reading interventionist: A professional teacher who has advanced background and training in identifying and delivering reading instruction to match the needs of struggling readers and increase students' reading abilities (Gatcho & Bautista, 2019).

Teachers' perceptions: The thoughts or mental images a teacher has about an event or professional activity that are shaped by background knowledge and life experiences (Bentea & Anghelache, 2012).

Assumptions

I assumed that all participants of the study provided honest and truthful responses and did not give responses they felt I would prefer to hear as a fellow teacher within the school district. It was also assumed that the general education classroom teachers and reading interventionists responded to the interview questions based on actual experiences rather than generalizations or hearsay from other teacher colleagues.

Scope and Delimitations

The study participants were limited to general education kindergarten, first, and second grade classroom teachers and the reading interventionists they collaborate with as part of the RTI model to support struggling readers. As a result, the findings of this study are specific to primary grade collaboration experiences only. The participants are representative of the primary teachers in the district.

The collaboration between general education classroom teachers and reading interventionists is critical to improve the early literacy skills of struggling readers in an RTI model (Liebfreund & Amendum, 2017). It is important to focus on the experiences of the teacher team members who collaborate and execute reading interventions with struggling students to gain insight from their perspective. Although instructional coaches, building administrators, and district level administrators support instructional practices and promote collaboration among teacher team members (Ketterlin-Geller et al., 2015; Liebfreund & Amendum, 2017; Tichenor & Tichenor, 2018), they do not participate directly in the reading RTI teacher team collaborations and were excluded in this study.

Limitations

Research study participants were solely comprised of general education kindergarten, first, and second grade classroom teachers and the reading interventionists that work with them as part of a reading RTI model in a Title 1 urban school district in a Midwestern state. The data collected were limited to specific teacher teams in a specific public school district; therefore, the results are not generalizable to other grade levels, other RTI models, or to other school districts due to differences in demographics.

Furthermore, both general education classroom teachers and reading interventionists may not have wanted to admit they have not effectively collaborated with colleagues or have experienced negative collegial relationships in their teacher teams. Current state policies mandating the implementation of TBTs for teacher collaboration do not require teachers to receive formal training on how to collaborate effectively. Educators may not feel comfortable reporting any challenges limiting collaboration

efforts or admitting they need additional professional support to develop their interpersonal skills (Pieters & Voogt, 2016).

A further limitation was that, as an employee of the district where the study took place, I have my own ideas about teacher team collaboration. To enhance the accuracy of the study, I used member checking, a common strategy for verifying researcher credibility, to solicit feedback from the participants following data collection (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Finally, because data collection occurred during the time when U.S. citizens were sheltered in place due to Covid-19, data collection occurred by phone rather than face to face, which prevented the observation of participants' body language during individual interviews.

Significance

This study addressed collaborative relationships between teacher team members (see Tichenor & Tichenor, 2018) and added to the body of research on collaborative relationships between general education classroom teachers and reading interventionists. This study is unique because it offers an original contribution regarding teachers' collaboration experiences in a reading RTI model (see Glazier et al., 2017). By exploring a reading RTI model using collaboration between general education classroom teachers and reading interventionists, the findings of this study could contribute to an increased understanding of teacher-to-teacher collaboration, resulting in positive gains in student achievement in early literacy, teacher pedagogy, and teacher instructional practices, all which benefit Title 1 education and influence closing the achievement gap. Replicating this study in other settings may contribute further to understanding the perceptions of

collaboration between general education classroom teachers and reading interventionists in a reading RTI model. Furthermore, the mission of Walden University is to affect positive social change. As noted in Walden University's (2017) framework of social change and leadership, the collaboration between partners as change agents is a key feature of social change.

Summary

Effective teacher collaboration focused on reading instruction and intervention is linked to an increase in student achievement (Gatcho & Bautista, 2019; Shakenova, 2017). Researchers have stated that when teacher team members are working to improve the early literacy skills of struggling readers in an RTI model, there is a need for improved, deep collaboration between general education classroom teachers and reading interventionists (Liebfreund & Amendum, 2017). Although some states and districts have set time aside in teachers' schedules to meet with colleagues, teachers face many challenges when transitioning from teaching in isolation to teaching in a collaborative culture (Glazier et al., 2017).

Chapter 1 included a discussion of teacher collaboration in the school setting. The conceptual framework of collaboration theory was provided. Since extant research on this topic was absent, the purpose of this basic qualitative study was to understand teachers' perceptions of the challenges they face in collaboration with shared goals in a reading RTI model. In Chapter 2, I will provide a review of both seminal and recent research on collaboration, collaboration theory, RTI as a framework for reading intervention, supplemental reading programs, and meeting the needs of struggling readers.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Over the last few decades of school reform, emphasis has been placed on teacher collaboration to combat the negative effects of teacher isolation (Lortie, 1975; Shakenova, 2017) and positively influence student achievement (Glazier et al., 2017; Hargreaves, 2019). The expansion of TBTs or PLCs is intended to set aside time for teacher teams to analyze student data, share instructional practices, and plan for cohesion across all tiers of instruction (Hargreaves, 2019; Leibfreund & Amendum, 2017). Research has indicated that communication among members of teacher teams and adequate opportunities for collaboration focused on reading instruction and intervention is linked to an increase in student reading achievement (Gatcho & Bautista, 2019; Mora-Ruano et al., 2019; Shakenova, 2017).

The problem is that both general education classroom teachers and reading interventionists face challenges in collaboration with shared goals within a reading RTI model. Though there is plentiful literature on the collaboration experiences between general education classroom teachers and special education teachers in RTI models, there is no current research focused on the collaboration experiences between general education classroom teachers and reading interventionists (Gatcho & Bautista, 2019; Glazier et al., 2017; Pieters & Voogt, 2016). It is important to understand the experiences of general education classroom teachers and reading interventionists who engage in collaboration in a reading RTI model because teacher collaboration focused on reading instruction and intervention are linked to an increase in student achievement (Gatcho & Bautista, 2019; Shakenova, 2017). The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to

understand teachers' perceptions of the challenges they face in collaboration with shared goals in a reading RTI model.

States have mandated that districts provide opportunities for teachers to engage in instructional collaborations; however, even with time set aside for teacher team collaborations, there are many challenges impeding the collaboration experience for teachers (Fluijt et al., 2016; Glazier et al., 2017; Johnson & Tsai, 2018). In addition to limited time for collaboration, interpersonal relationships between teacher team members can lead to trust issues (Barfield, 2016; Pieters & Voogt, 2016). Teachers need to be able to speak openly about divisive issues and learn to negotiate with team members in order to benefit from collaborative relationships (Barfield, 2016). Teachers who feel unheard or marginalized will not gain from collaborative efforts by the team and, in fact, may develop negative feelings towards the collaborative experience (Banerjee et al., 2017; Glazier et al., 2017; Hersi et al., 2016).

The lack of a common definition of what collaboration between teachers really is makes sharing a common experience difficult to analyze (Pieters & Voogt, 2016). Researchers have described collaboration as a continuum ranging in depth of engagement or interaction (Pieters & Voogt, 2016; Vangrieken et al., 2015). Additionally, in many research studies, the collaboration model was structured differently, making the findings ungeneralizable (Reeves et al., 2017).

Administrators are responsible for creating a culture of collaboration among teachers (Banerjee et al., 2017; Hargreaves, 2019; Ketterlin-Geller et al., 2015). Although TBT or PLC times may be set aside to provide for such opportunities, collaboration

between teachers must be authentic and not forced for teachers to develop trusting relationships and share professional goals with one another (Barfield, 2016; Glazier et al., 2017; Hargreaves, 2019; Ostovar-Nameghi & Sheikhahmadi, 2016). Teachers are members of a community of practice that is fluid rather than static and requires continuous attention to members' relationships to develop over time (Glazier et al., 2017; Vangrieken et al., 2015). Teacher members working together as part of an intervention team, such as a reading RTI model, are involved in a collegial partnership that requires them to engage beyond simple solutions. According to Ketterlin-Geller et al. (2015), administrators need to accommodate collaborations for general education teachers and intervention teachers working in an RTI model, so all teachers involved have adequate opportunities to share instructional practices and responsibilities.

To support such efforts, districts and building-level administrators have the responsibility of making sure teachers are provided the time in their schedule to meet regularly because teachers' work schedules rarely allow for deep collaboration to occur (Tichenor & Tichenor, 2018). Administrators can promote collaboration by implementing organizational structures, such as common planning periods, that provide time for teachers to meet during the school day (Ketterlin-Geller et al., 2015; Liebfreund & Amendum, 2017). Establishing meeting norms and providing checklists and agendas are ways to provide structure and clear expectations for collaboration meetings (Ketterlin-Geller et al., 2015; Tichenor & Tichenor, 2019). When teacher teams include specialists, such as reading interventionists or special education teachers, creating a schedule with

floating planning periods on different days and times may help facilitate collaboration with multiple teachers (Ketterlin-Geller et al., 2015).

Under the RTI umbrella, there are many variations of instruction and numerous supplemental programs and approaches to support young readers with emergent literacy. Programs with efficient screening measures will allow teachers to identify students' early literacy needs and create flexible groupings that focus on specific early literacy skills in a RTI model (Gersten et al., 2017). A typical model for RTI is a pyramid model with three tiers that increase instructional needs and intervention time on task from Tier 1 to Tier 3 (Dorn et al., 2016; Gersten et al., 2017; Sharp et al., 2016).

In a reading RTI model, there are benefits of cohesion across all tiers of instruction in the learning environment (Harlatcher et al., 2015; Leibfreund & Amendum, 2017). According to Dorn et al. (2016), the collaborative relationship between general education and reading interventionists is a significant contributing factor to the success of RTI reading interventions for all students. Teachers working together to provide both core and intervention support must navigate their roles (Hersi et al., 2016) and share common language for reading interventions, literacy assessments, and data analysis (Dorn et al., 2016). Furthermore, Dorn et al. called for instructional alignment across all tiers of a reading RTI because this creates scaffolding and enables a more fluid transfer of knowledge across multiple settings for struggling readers. In some states, general education students who are identified as struggling readers are required to receive extra reading intervention outside of general education classroom instruction (Auletto & Sableski, 2018).

Literature Search Strategy

I obtained relevant literature for this study from databases accessed through Walden University's online library. The primary library database used was Education Source. The Google Scholar citation tracker was used to conduct searches for citations in seminal research to identify more recent publications. I used the following keywords to search for relevant literature: *collaboration, teacher collaboration, school leadership, collaboration theory, teacher collaboration and student achievement, teacher teams, teacher-based teams (TBTs), professional learning communities (PLCs), collaboration challenges, teacher collegiality, reading intervention, response to intervention (RTI), reading instruction, early reading interventions, co-teaching, RTI models, multitiered systems, struggling readers, early literacy achievement, early literacy skills, emergent literacy, foundational reading skills, struggling readers in primary grades, phonological awareness, phonics, supplemental reading programs,* and *teacher professional development for collaboration.*

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study was the collaboration theory, as posited by Colbry et al. (2014). This theory addresses ongoing interaction between people with shared goals. Because teachers are working together to increase student achievement, the use of collaboration theory provides a framework for investigating teachers' collaborative experiences in a reading RTI model. Colbry et al. stated that collaboration could be investigated from three different levels: interpersonal, intraorganizational, or interorganizational. Investigating the professional, collaborative interactions between

teacher team members aligns with the researchers' interpersonal theory of collaboration. In this study, the collaboration between general education classroom teachers and reading interventionists was studied. The common goal of all educators is increasing student early literacy foundational skills.

When the reading interventionists are working with general education classroom teachers in a reading RTI model, they are collaborating to meet the instructional needs of students at all levels of a multitiered intervention framework so all students make adequate growth in reading (Dorn et al., 2016). When given meaningful learning opportunities with colleagues, teachers develop collaborative relationships and learn from each other. Creating collaborative school cultures promotes teacher collaboration, and teachers are more likely to work together (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2009). Additionally, Shakenova (2017) stated that collaboration is not a one-time event but rather a continuous exchange of ideas during everyday activities. The collaboration between teachers with differing professional backgrounds and teaching positions requires effort, commitment, and time to develop with training (Al-Natour et al., 2015).

Based upon a constructivist perspective, knowledge is constructed rather than received (Juvova, Chudy, Neumeister, Plischke, & Kvintova, 2015). When teachers work collaboratively, they build knowledge that then influences their instructional practices.

Literature Review Related to Key Concepts and Variable

Teacher Collaboration

Historically, Lortie (1975) considered the problem of teacher isolation in research on collaborative cultures in schools. The three different types of isolation include isolation due to the physical separation of classrooms, resulting in teachers working in isolation with students all day; feelings of psychological isolation between teachers; and adaptive isolation resulting from the sense of being too overwhelmed to meet demands and expectations (Lortie, 1975). When teachers' daily work was conducted without regular peer interactions, a lack of teacher creativity and instructional practices resulted in limited student achievement and overall school improvement (Lortie, 1975).

Subsequent researchers have suggested teacher collaboration as a way to combat teacher isolation, resulting in positive student achievement (Little, 1990; Ostovar-Nameghi & Sheikhahmadi, 2016; Shakenova, 2017). Teacher collaboration has been identified as a major contributor to teachers' job satisfaction, which is a core component of an effective teacher (Banerjee et al., 2017; Bush & Grotjohann, 2020; Mostafa & Pai, 2018). By reducing feelings of isolation, teacher collaborations boost teacher confidence that results in an increase in student achievement (Johnson & Tsai, 2018; Ostovar-Nameghi & Sheikhahmadi, 2016; Reeves et al., 2017).

Collaboration Versus Cooperation

Little (1990) further investigated teachers' professional relationships and concluded that not all teacher collaborations are authentic. Daily interaction between teachers is not true collaboration (Glazier et al., 2017; Little, 1990). Additionally, many

teacher groups that appear to be close-knit may be collegial and have surface-level politeness among members but are not collaborative (Gatcho & Bautista, 2019; Glazier et al., 2017). Teacher cooperation is defined as teachers giving consent to each improving their own work, while teacher collaboration is the act in which teachers are working together and share obligations and decision-making (Hord, 1986; Shakenova, 2017). Teachers can be cooperative by providing basic assistance to colleagues without having a common vision or shared goals (Shakenova, 2017). Furthermore, Little stated that sharing materials, interacting in a friendly manner, and story-swapping are conditions that allow teachers to remain independent and continue to teach in isolation.

In contrast, teachers who have shared values and decision-making, which influence their learning and student achievement, are collaborating (Shakenova, 2017). Moving towards joint work, or creating interdependence, increases demands for collective autonomy and authentic collaboration (Little, 1990). The collegial, friendly end of the collaboration spectrum is where collaboration is contrived and does not allow for teachers to become engaged to some degree in disequilibrium where critical colleagueship moves far beyond simple solutions (Glazier et al., 2017). It is at the opposite end of the collegial spectrum where true collaboration can occur.

Challenges

Over the last few decades of school reform, emphasis has been placed on teacher collaboration. Structured opportunities for teacher collaboration within the school day provide time for teachers to work together in substantive ways (Glazier et al., 2017; Ronfeldt et al., 2015). Teacher collaboration is not limited to teacher meetings and may

include coteaching, coaching, observation, reflection, and mentoring from professionals outside of the school (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Hargreaves, 2019; Johnson & Tsai, 2018). The implementation of PLCs or similar TBT meetings has become part of the school collaborative culture.

However, realizing effective teacher collaboration has not been easily achieved (Bush & Grotjohann, 2020; Hargreaves, 2019; Vangrieken et al., 2015). Various structural limitations, navigating interpersonal relationships, lack of administrative support or direction, the absence of shared goals, and teacher resistance due to the loss of autonomy are some of the challenges that teachers face.

Glazier et al. (2017) found that even schools with regularly scheduled teacher team meetings have limited opportunities for productive collaboration. Similarly, teachers' daily schedules rarely allow time for deep collaboration to occur between colleagues (Akiba et al., 2019; Johnson & Tsai, 2018; Tichenor & Tichenor, 2018). Some collaboration difficulties include literacy in all subject areas especially when including a reading interventionist since support teachers' roles are not always made clear within teacher teams (Gatcho & Bautista, 2019). Tension can arise between teachers with diverse backgrounds and differing values and goals (Akiba et al., 2019). Furthermore, teacher members of collaborative teacher teams need common goals that are decided on jointly (Shakenova, 2017).

In contrast to teachers in other countries, such as Finland and many Asian countries, who have nearly triple the time for planning and collaboration, U.S. teachers spend upwards of 80% of their work time instructing with only 3-5 hours a week for

planning and collaboration (Reeves et al., 2017; Tichenor & Tichenor, 2018). Recommendations to accommodate scheduling constraints and limited time for teachers to meet include strategic scheduling by administrators. Creating common planning periods in the master schedule for grade level and content area teams would provide regular meeting opportunities within the school day. Faculty meetings can be structured for teacher teams to collaborate and substitute coverage can be provided during the school day to allow teachers release time to meet (Tichenor & Tichenor, 2018).

For teachers to participate in authentic collaborations that positively influence student reading achievement, teachers need opportunities to develop trusting relationships with colleagues (Pieters & Voogt, 2016). Directives from administrators requiring teachers to collaborate rather than allowing trusting relationships to develop over time are counterproductive and can result in contrived congeniality and pose a threat to teacher professional autonomy (Johnson & Tsai, 2018; Ostovar-Nameghi & Sheikhahmadi, 2016). Interpersonal relationships between teacher team members can pose challenges to collaborative opportunities (Fluijt et al., 2016; Pieters & Voogt, 2016). Being viewed as the expert and the inability to keep a critical stance can hinder interactions between teacher team members, further limiting the authenticity of interactions and the ability to develop close relationships with other members on the team (Pieters & Voogt, 2016). Furthermore, Fluijt et al. recommend that teaching team reflection be used as a mechanism for building trust within the team as well as promoting challenges for professional growth.

General education classroom teachers and reading interventionists are expected to collaborate to meet the unique learning needs of students in an RTI model. Teachers may have shared goals, but collaborative interactions, including taking on the role of a critical friend or navigating a perceived hierarchy within a teacher team, are skills that teachers are not trained for (Glazier et al., 2017). Furthermore, Gomez-Najarro (2019) recommended that both general education and intervention teacher preparation programs provide more preparation for teacher collaboration at each level or tier of RTI. Results from a study of preservice teachers indicated that the participants rated collaboration low in importance, prompting the researchers to recommend university-based teacher programs implement more experiences to strengthen collaborative habits among preservice teachers (Bush & Grotjohann, 2020).

In a case study by Hersi et al., (2016), the researchers found that teachers in a collaborative coteaching model struggled to negotiate conflict and responsibilities which created feelings of frustration and left some teachers feeling marginalized. With the expansion of PLCs and TBTs as indicative of the emphasis on teacher collaboration, Glazier et al. (2017) recommended preservice teacher programs prioritize collaboration skills for the workplace just as much as coursework on pedagogy. For teachers already in the field, professional development and teacher training opportunities to develop the necessary interpersonal and communication skills for deep collaboration should be provided by the district or building level leadership (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). In Darling-Hammond et al.'s (2017) review of 35 studies, 32 incorporated some elements of teacher collaboration, which engaged teachers in problem-solving and professional

learning resulting in an increase in student achievement. This supports research findings that when students are instructed by teachers that participate in districtwide collaborative professional development, student achievement in reading increases (Banerjee et al., 2017).

Tichenor and Tichenor (2019) found that although teachers acknowledged the value of professional collaboration in schools, results from an exploratory survey suggest that teachers do not regularly participate in collaborative activities within their TBT or PLC groups. Analysis of open-ended survey questions revealed that although teachers rated their participation in collaboration opportunities in teacher teams as low, many teachers reported participating in collaborative activities such as planning in grade level peers and improving teaching (Tichenor & Tichenor, 2019). Miscommunication about goals, misunderstandings about what collaboration actually is, and a lack in time built in teachers' schedules limit teachers' willingness to engage in deep collaboration (Pieters & Voogt, 2016; Tichenor & Tichenor, 2019). Additionally, long-standing norms of teacher autonomy result in some teachers' unwillingness to develop a professional community with peers (Little, 1990).

Lack of Common Definition of Teacher Collaboration

Research findings that indicate the benefits of teacher collaboration have yielded mixed results due to the inconsistency of the definition of collaboration (Mora-Ruano et al., 2019; Reeves et al., 2017). The range of definitions has led to a gray area of what collaboration really is (Pieters & Voogt, 2016). Furthermore, definitional inconsistencies make it difficult to pinpoint what practices or procedures make teacher collaboration

effective or ineffective and which variables may contribute to the results (Reeves et al., 2017).

Research on Pros/Cons of Teacher Collaboration

Effective collaborations among teachers can positively affect not only a school but a community (Mora-Ruano et al., 2019). According to Ketterlin-Geller et al. (2015), a collaborative culture within a school is not an intended outcome but instead provides an environment for both teacher and student growth, resulting in an increase in student achievement. Furthermore, teacher collaborations have the potential to spur grass-roots efforts promoting positive social change in schools (Barfield, 2016).

In a research review, Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) echoed these findings and stated that teachers who work collaboratively can positively change their school culture, which is one of seven factors of effective professional development. In all of the research studies reviewed, Darling-Hammond et al. found an increase in student achievement when students' classroom teachers participated in collaborative professional development projects and instructional learning experiences. When teachers coteach or work in teams, students feel more supported (Mora-Ruano et al., 2019).

Through collaborative learning experiences, teachers may gain the confidence to try new instructional strategies and reflect on teaching practices, that may result in making positive changes to their instructional decision making (Banerjee et al., 2017; Reeves et al., 2017). Additionally, participation in teacher collaboration has a positive effect on job satisfaction (Banerjee et al., 2017; Mora-Ruano et al., 2019), improved teacher morale, and a reduction in teacher absenteeism (Shakenova, 2017). Many of the

teachers participating in building level collaborative professional development have differing specializations and often work together in inclusive classrooms or in an RTI model.

In contrast, researchers have stated that due to the relatively new research topic of teacher collaboration influencing student achievement, the empirical evidence is limited (Mora-Ruano et al., 2019). Findings from their research investigation indicate that for a positive effect to be seen, teachers need to discuss student achievement (Mora-Ruano et al., 2019). Furthermore, recent research on teacher collaboration tends to focus on collaboration as a single construct and does not allow for a more in-depth investigation into content specific collaborative relationships (Reeves et al., 2017).

Contrived collegiality, or administrators requiring that teachers work together, is a type of administrative control (Hargreaves, 2019). Forcing relationships and predetermining teachers' roles within a collaborative team undermines the development of relationships and teachers' willingness to work together. Feeling vulnerable in a contrived collaborative relationship may result in teachers working on new ideas in teacher teams reporting negative and uncomfortable feelings when collaboration required assessing or commenting on other teachers' work resulting in decreased job satisfaction (Banerjee et al. 2017; Reeves et al. 2017).

Prior studies of teacher collaborations involving teacher teams tend to focus on special education teachers and general education classroom teachers (Pieters & Voogt, 2016) rather than general education classroom teachers and reading interventionists working collaboratively in a reading RTI model (Gatcho & Bautista, 2019; Hersi et al.,

2016). Therefore, since collaboration in reading intervention is underrepresented in the literature, this study is unique and will add to the body of literature which addresses the collaborative experiences of general education classroom teachers and reading interventionists working with struggling early readers in a reading RTI.

Meeting the Needs of Struggling Readers

Despite numerous policy initiatives and educator's efforts to support students in reading in early grades, increasing student reading achievement in primary grades has been a struggle nationwide (Rasinski, 2017). Educational researchers and policymakers continue to examine instructional practices and student reading achievement to prevent future reading difficulties and increase academic gains (Auletto & Sableski, 2018). In a Midwestern state, general education students who are identified as struggling readers must receive additional reading interventions in addition to core classroom instruction (Auletto & Sableski, 2018). The use of supplemental programs or approaches which match the instructional needs of low-skilled general education students requires teachers to have a sophisticated understanding of the beginning reading process. Teachers need to analyze student data to identify weaknesses, or gaps, in early literacy skills, prescribe and execute interventions that match students' instructional needs.

Since not all students have the same instructional or intervention needs, Jones et al. (2016) stated that a differentiated approach to grouping students and targeting skills can help teachers meet students' most pressing needs. Recent research in the area of early literacy intervention supports the efficacy of small reading groups for primary grade students (Coyne et al., 2018; Gersten et al., 2017; Wanzek et al., 2016). Additionally,

Rasinski (2017) advocated for structured, systematic, and authentic interventions beginning as early as possible in kindergarten. Likewise, Piasta (2016) noted the importance of supporting emergent literacy experiences through both systematic and intentional instruction for all students but particularly for students at risk for later reading difficulties.

Reutzel (2015) provided early literacy research findings suggesting which literacy skills should take precedence for instruction and intervention to ensure emergent readers develop a strong literacy foundation. The National Reading Panel (2000) stated the importance of phonemic skills and alphabet knowledge as essential for students to make gains towards reading proficiency (Adams, 1990; Ehri & Flugman, 2018; Reutzel, 2015). The National Early Literacy Panel's (2008) meta-analysis further noted that alphabet knowledge is the single best predictor of reading and writing success in later years.

RTI

RTI is a service delivery model that provides students with appropriate instruction based on students' individual instructional needs (Fletcher & Vaughn, 2009 in Kaminski & Powell-Smith, 2017; Sharp et al., 2016) without waiting for failure (Gillis, 2017). The roots of RTI come from various fields but have most recently emerged from the 2004 reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (Preston et al., 2016). In recent years, RTI has been used as a preventative framework for general education students who are struggling to make adequate gains in general education classroom settings (Preston et al., 2016; Sharp et al., 2016).

Models differ among local school districts and may be influenced by state mandates (McCrary et al., 2017). These comprehensive frameworks provide differentiated levels of support which are commonly divided into three groupings called tiers (Kaminski & Powell-Smith, 2017; Preston et al., 2016) and increase with intensity to accelerate student reading achievement (Coyne et al., 2018; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2017; Wanzek et al., 2016). Students' instructional needs are assessed and continuously progress monitored to ensure students receive reading interventions that match their individual needs (Gillis, 2017; McCrary et al., 2017).

A multitiered RTI model provides a structure for all students to receive skill specific support from the general education classroom teacher or a reading interventionist (Dorn et al., 2016). The intent is for students to receive and respond to less intensive interventions before receiving more intensive interventions (Coyne et al., 2018; Wanzek et al., 2016). Tier 1 refers to whole group or core instruction where all students receive evidence-based instruction (Solari et al., 2018). Tier 2 reading intervention instruction is often small group support for students not making adequate reading progress in Tier 1 (Solari et al., 2018; Wanzek et al., 2016). At the emergent literacy level, Tier 2 groups focus on interventions that target foundational literacy skills and are preventative in nature (McCrary et al., 2017; Wanzek et al., 2016). If a student makes adequate reading gains as a result of Tier 2 instruction, then movement to Tier 1 would be appropriate (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2017). Consequently, if a student is not positively responding to Tier 2 instruction, then a more intensive support is needed. Tier 3 provides more intensive and individualized intervention for students with more significant instructional needs

(Kaminski & Powell-Smith, 2017). Multitiered systems are designed to allow for fluidity across tiers as continuous progress monitoring identifies students' instructional needs and placement (Stentiford et al., 2018). Within any RTI model the intervention must supplement, not supplant, core reading instruction (Stahl, 2016).

Supplemental Reading Programs

Researchers have advocated for addressing the lack of adequately developed early literacy foundational skills in young readers. Rasinski (2017) and Castles et al. (2018) recommended focusing on the mastery of early literacy competencies through a balanced, developmentally informed approach. In addition to the focus on developing a strong foundation through a balanced literacy approach, researchers have suggested the use of a supplemental reading program to help teachers meet the instructional needs of students at risk for reading difficulties within the context of the general education classroom (Solari et al., 2017).

Struggling readers who are not otherwise receiving support services may benefit from the use of a multisensory intervention approach to move letter and sound learning experiences from short- to long-term memory (Carson & Sorin, 2016). Focusing early reading interventions on phonemic skills and alphabet knowledge is essential for struggling readers to develop strong foundational skills (Adams, 1990; Ehri & Flugman, 2018; Reutzel, 2015). Additionally, the systematic attention to letters and letter patterns when decoding, along with integrating encoding instruction, may be what is so beneficial to low-skilled readers in primary grades (Piasta, 2016; Report of the National Reading Panel, 2000). In particular, teachers who are able to diagnose and prescribe specific early

literacy deficits in early readers can identify and provide the appropriate code-based or meaning-based intervention (Spear-Swerling, 2015). Meeting the needs of students at their point of weakness addresses the gaps in their skills and provides the appropriate support needed to increase their literacy foundation.

Jones et al. (2016) stated that not all poor readers need support with decoding, as found in code-based intervention programs or approaches. The researchers noted that some low-skilled students need more meaning-based interventions, and their needs are not being addressed by solely focusing on a code-based approach. Likewise, Piasta (2016) called for more emphasis on meaning-focused skills rather than code-focused skill programs and approaches to enhance early literacy experiences. Piasta argued that both code-based and meaning-based abilities are necessary for students to develop skills for reading achievement.

In a Midwestern state, general education students who are identified as struggling readers are required to receive extra reading intervention outside of general education classroom instruction (Auletto & Sableski, 2018). The district selected as the research site in this study has implemented building reading interventionists to use a state-approved reading program when working with primary grade general education classroom teachers in an RTI model to meet the intervention requirements.

Summary and Conclusions

States across the country are requiring reading interventions for general education students identified as struggling readers to close the reading achievement gap (Auletto & Sableski, 2018). The choice of an intervention delivery model and the selection of a

supplemental program is at the discretion of the school district. In an RTI model, general education classroom teachers and reading interventionists are part of teacher teams that engage in teacher collaboration with the shared goal of improving students' reading achievement. Teacher team collaboration is linked to student reading achievement (Gatcho & Bautista, 2019; Ronfeldt et al., 2015; Shakenova, 2017). The problem is that both general education classroom teachers and reading interventionists face challenges when collaborating on shared goals in a reading RTI model (Fluijt et al., 2016; Glazier et al., 2017; Shakenova, 2017).

Teacher team members are positioned to work together to positively influence student achievement. However, there are many challenges to teacher team collaborations. The absence of a shared vision, navigating interpersonal relationships, lack of training on how to communicate beyond collegial politeness, and scheduling constraints, all hinder effective teacher collaboration (Barfield, 2016, Fluijt et al., 2016; Glazier et al., 2017). When teachers feel included and valued in the collaborative process, they are more likely to benefit from teacher team collaboration and welcome the opportunity to continue in the collaboration process (Banerjee et al., 2017; Barfield, 2016; Dorn et al., 2016). Teachers with different educational backgrounds working together in a reading RTI model require time to build trusting relationships (Glazier et al., 2017; Vangrieken et al., 2015). Additional professional development and building level support may be provided by administration and district level personnel (Ketterlin-Geller et al., 2015).

Addressing low literacy skills in early grades can help to prevent future reading difficulties (Auletto & Sableski, 2018; Piasta, 2016; Rasinski, 2017). Focusing early

reading interventions on phonemic skills and alphabet knowledge is essential for struggling readers to develop strong foundational skills (Adams, 1990; Ehri & Flugman, 2018; Reutzel, 2015). RTI is a framework for meeting students' individual instructional needs and preventing future reading failure (Auletto & Sableski, 2018; Sharp et al., 2016).

This study examined teachers' perceptions of the challenges they face when collaborating on shared goals in a reading RTI model. This study will contribute to the field of education because it will provide insight to policymakers, teacher preparation programs, and district personnel that can be used to advocate for educational practices, including teachers' professional needs, so struggling readers benefit from teacher collaboration. Findings from this study may also help general education classroom teachers and reading interventions understand the importance and benefits of teacher collaboration, whether it is a part of a reading RTI model or not.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to understand teachers' perceptions of the challenges they face when collaborating on shared goals in a reading RTI model. The problem is that both general education classroom teachers and reading interventionists face challenges when collaborating on shared goals in a reading RTI model. Though there is plentiful literature on the collaborative experiences between general education classroom teachers and special education teachers in RTI models, there is no current research focused on the collaboration experiences between general education classroom teachers and reading interventionists (Gatcho & Bautista, 2019; Glazier et al., 2017; Pieters & Voogt, 2016).

In Chapter 2, I provided a concise synopsis of the current literature on collaboration, collaboration theory, RTI as a framework for reading intervention, supplemental reading programs, and meeting the needs of struggling readers. In this chapter, the research design and rationale as well as the methodology used for this study are described. Included in the description of the methodology is a discussion of the logic for the participant selection; instrumentation; and procedures, including the plan for data collection and analysis. The role of the researcher and any issues with trustworthiness are also explained. I conclude the chapter with a brief summary.

Teacher collaboration focused on reading instruction and intervention is linked to an increase in student reading achievement (Gatcho & Bautista, 2019; Mora-Ruano et al., 2019; Shakenova, 2017). Improving collaboration between general education classroom teachers and reading interventionists has a positive influence on struggling readers in an

RTI model (Leibfreund & Amendum, 2017). However, not all teacher collaborations are true collaboration (Gatcho & Bautista, 2019; Glazier et al., 2017; Little, 1990), and there are challenges to developing and growing a collaborative culture within a school. In this study, I interviewed general education classroom teachers and reading interventionists who work in a reading RTI framework to understand their perspectives of their collaboration experiences.

Research Design and Rationale

I conducted this basic qualitative research study to investigate and understand teachers' perceptions of the challenges they face in collaboration with shared goals in a reading RTI model. The participant pool was limited to primary grade general education classroom teachers and reading interventionists who work in elementary buildings that have implemented a reading RTI model that has a reading interventionist as part of the teacher team. Diversity within the participant pool was based on the different roles teachers have in the reading RTI model.

The research questions that formed the basis for this study stemmed from the collaboration theory framework and my review of the recent literature on the topic of the challenges of teacher collaboration. The two research questions that guided this study were:

RQ1: What are general education classroom teachers' perceptions of their collaborative experiences with reading interventionists in a reading RTI model?

RQ2: What are reading interventionists' perceptions of their collaborative experiences with general education classroom teachers in a reading RTI model?

According to Ravitch and Carl (2016), a basic qualitative research study is most appropriate for study such as this because it is used to inform the field with findings from the participants' perspectives specific to the research questions posed. In a basic qualitative research study, open-ended questions aligned with the research question driving the research study are used to gather the information that is then analyzed for patterns, themes, and coded (Lewis, 2015). The interview questions are created to provide rich, meaningful insight into each participant's individual experience (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

Other qualitative research designs did not align with the research questions guiding this study and were rejected. An ethnographic design is appropriate for investigating a culture's characteristics (Babbie, 2017), and this study did not focus on a cultural group. A phenomenological design is used when the researcher is seeking to understand the lived experience of a participant (Babbie, 2017), and this study was not focused on a single event or phenomenon but rather on ongoing collaboration experiences. I did not use participation action research as a design because this study was not investigating the needs of a community with the intent of developing a plan for a change to occur. Finally, a longitudinal design was not selected because observing variables over time would not generate data to inform me of teachers' collaboration experiences in a reading RTI model.

A quantitative research method would have been inappropriate for gathering the data necessary to inform the research questions posed in this study. Quantitative research methods are amenable for providing statistics and involve the use of variables

(Burkholder et al., 2016). Survey research or sampling pools would not allow for the thick, rich, detailed experiences of participants to be captured the way individual interviews would. Surveys and sampling pools also do not allow the researcher to probe for more detailed responses or ask additional questions to gain a deeper understanding of participants' experiences. A correlational research approach tests for relationships between two variables (Babbie, 2017). This approach did not align with investigating teachers' collaboration experiences because there were no variables. Since no comparison was being investigated, a causal-comparative research design was not appropriate either.

Role of the Researcher

For this basic qualitative study, I acted as a data collection instrument to gather, analyze, and categorize information that reflects the participants' perceptions of their collaboration experiences (see Rubin & Rubin, 2012). As an employee of the school district under study, I have met and have casual, collegial professional relationships with many teachers throughout the district. None of my experience in the district has been supervisory. Due to the closer working relationships I have with the teachers in my current school building, they were excluded from this study. Additionally, to avoid researcher bias and support the credibility of the study, I introduced myself as a doctoral student, used open-ended questions and probes that did not prompt or lead participant responses, remained cognizant of maintaining the role of an objective and careful listener during all interviews, and conducted member checking (see Birt et al., 2016). No monetary benefit was offered to participants.

Methodology

Participant Selection Logic

I used a purposeful sampling strategy because only general education classroom teachers and reading interventionists working in an early reading RTI model were invited to participate. Purposeful sampling allows the researcher to select individuals and sites for specific reasons, such as a common experience in the phenomenon being investigated (Creswell, 2012; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). In purposeful sampling, the researcher should select potential participants from the pool that are the best match for the criteria for the study (Palinkas et al., 2015).

The inclusion criteria for this study were that participants must be a primary grade general education classroom teacher or reading interventionist, work in the early literacy RTI model, and work in elementary buildings that have had an early literacy RTI model since the 2016–2017 implementation. There were approximately 56 teachers who had been in their current positions and working with the same teacher team members for the duration of the RTI model implementation who best met the criteria. One of the buildings with this RTI model was the building where I currently work; therefore, it was not included in the study. Of the remaining 10 buildings, two have had staffing changes to the reading interventionist position. The staffing changes in both buildings include reading interventionists who are new to the position and have had less than 1 school year of collaborative experience in the RTI model with their teacher team. Therefore, these two reading interventionists and the general education classroom teachers in these buildings were not invited to participate.

The school district superintendent gave consent for the study to be conducted. The participant pool consisted of a population of educators including up to eight reading interventionists and 48 general education classroom teachers. The office of teacher personnel provided me with a list of teachers and reading interventionists that met the criteria for this study. I sent a letter of invitation to each of the possible participants through district email. Participants were selected from the pool of responses to ensure perspectives from both general education classroom teachers and reading interventionists were represented as well as educators with varying levels of experience (see Palinkas et al., 2015). Participants were asked to respond to my personal email address to accept the invitation to join the study. The teachers who agreed to be a part of the study were emailed a letter of consent, including a request for a time and date for an interview. Data saturation occurs when data collected ceases to produce new information or themes; therefore, the sample size for this study was dependent on saturation and could not be predetermined (see Fusch & Ness, 2015; Moser & Korstjens, 2018; Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Instrumentation

The data collection instrument used for this study was an interview protocol I created (see Appendix). Using the interview protocol ensured that the same open-ended questions were asked of each participant in the same order (see Appendix). Rubin and Rubin (2012) recommended researchers prepare an interview protocol and anticipate using it as a guide to keep the focus of the interviews. In addition to the prepared

interview protocol, I actively listened to participants' responses and asked additional probing questions to elicit rich descriptions.

The interview protocol (see Appendix) consisted of 10 open-ended questions that allowed the participants to respond any way they chose. Colbry et al. (2014) stated that collaboration theory embodies the interaction between people with shared goals. The interview questions were generated from the conceptual framework and provided the opportunity for both general education classroom teachers and reading interventionists to describe their perceptions of their collaborative experiences focused on shared goals in order to improve reading achievement in a reading RTI model. Using *what* and *how* to begin questions provides the opportunity for descriptive responses as found in qualitative instrumentation (Babbie, 2014). I designed the interview questions to address the two research questions guiding this study and information obtained from the literature review.

Because data collection occurred during the time when U.S. citizens were sheltered in place due to Covid-19, data collection occurred by phone rather than face-to-face, individual interviews. I used the QuickTime Player Application on a MacBook Air to audio record the individual interviews via speaker phone. The audio documentation of participants' responses to the interview questions was uploaded and saved into separate audio files for transcription. Audio files were saved using codes (P1 for Participant 1, P2 for Participant 2, etc.) in place of participant names to ensure individuals' confidentiality.

Procedures

The school district's office of teacher personnel identified and provided me with contact information for all the general education classroom teachers and reading

interventionists eligible to participate in the study. A pool of participants was established by selecting teachers who met the criteria of the study. I used a purposeful selection process to determine participation in the study that reflects the different perspectives of the participant population (see Moser & Korstjens, 2018; Ravitch & Carl, 2016) of educators due to their different roles in the reading RTI model. Individual interviews were used for data collection until saturation of information occurred (see Fusch & Ness, 2015; Moser & Korstjens, 2018; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). If too few teachers had responded to the initial request for participation in the study, resulting in an insufficient amount of data collected, I would have sent additional rounds of invitations until there was saturation of information from participant interviews to answer the research questions.

I emailed a letter of invitation to 8 of the 11 reading interventionists and all the general education kindergarten, first grade, second grade classroom teachers who work with them in the elementary buildings with an early literacy RTI model. The letter stated that the voluntary interview would last approximately 30 minutes and would be audio recorded for verbatim transcription.

Three reading interventionists were excluded from the study; two were new to the position and one worked in the same building as I did. Once teachers responded to the letter of invitation, I sent a letter of consent to the participants who committed to joining the study. Included in the letter of consent was a request for a date and time for a phone interview to be conducted. If participants wished to change the date and time of an interview, communication in the form of a text, phone call, or email was used to

determine a more convenient time for an interview. All interviews were conducted outside of school hours by phone. Holding the interviews on evenings, vacation days during a scheduled school break, or weekend times away from the school building allowed the participants to speak more freely regarding workplace collaborative structures and collegial relationships. Establishing a comfortable and convenient environment helps put the participant at ease (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

At the beginning of each interview, I reviewed the information provided on the invitation letter to provide a clear explanation of the purpose of the research and what the participant could expect during and after the interview. Teachers were reminded that participation in the study was voluntary, and they could terminate the interview at any time with no repercussions. Following each interview, participants were thanked for their time, and I reiterated what the next steps would be.

All interviews were recorded, saved, and labeled with a participant code to a file stored on a MacBook Air. Each participant received a summary of their interview electronically and was asked to review the summary of their transcript as evidence that I had interpreted the interviewee's responses accurately. Participants were instructed to contact me should they have any additional questions, concerns, or find any discrepancies in the transcript of their interview. Saturation of data was determined when interview data collection was not generating new information and further coding was not possible (see Fusch & Ness, 2015; Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Data Analysis Plan

Qualitative data were generated by open-ended questions during individual interviews with participants. All interviews were recorded using the QuickTime Player Application on a MacBook Air for transcription and analysis. Individual interviews were transcribed verbatim using the qualitative data analysis computer software NVivo (QSR International 2020, Version 12). I manually analyzed and coded each transcript by adhering to Saldana's (2016) analysis procedures which follow a streamline codes-to-themes or categories model. Codes are descriptive or inferential labels assigned to qualitative data units that help organize data (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Saldana (2016) recommended initially open coding data which can be used to identify initial categories and then analyze for emergent themes. The combining or connecting of codes into categories is a move towards consolidated meaning (Saldana, 2016).

The qualitative data analysis software NVivo (QSR International 2020, Version 12) was used to manage my data analysis by storing all information collected from interviews, locating words or phrases within interviews, or sorting and organizing data (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). I conducted the analytical work by reviewing the data, preliminary coding by making connections between information and descriptions provided by participants, identifying categories, emerging themes, and emerging patterns. By following Saldana's (2016) procedures for qualitative coding and data analysis, I was able to provide insight of how the participants perceive their collaborative experiences within an early reading RTI model. At the conclusion of the data analysis, each participant was emailed a copy of the findings to verify validity.

Issues of Trustworthiness

I ensured the trustworthiness of my qualitative research study by implementing strategies introduced by Guba and Lincoln in the 1980s (Morse, 2015; Xerri, 2018). The terms used for these strategies include credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. Shenton (2004) stated that credibility is involved in establishing that the findings or outcomes are believable. To support the credibility of my study, I used well-established methods, including individual interviews, purposeful sampling, Saldana's (2016) code-to-theme approach for data analysis, and member checking. The use of member checking actively involves the participants to validate the summary of findings generated from their responses (Birt et al., 2016).

According to Morse (2015), the use of a peer debriefer is intended to prevent bias and provide critical feedback to the researcher by reviewing the data and the accuracy of the data collection. I used a peer debriefer who was familiar with qualitative methodology, qualitative data collection and analysis, and had experience in public school settings.

Xerri (2018) asserted that conducting research within the district where the researcher is employed is advantageous because it allows the researcher to capitalize on their knowledge of the context and more readily build relationships with participants. I conducted my research in the district where I am employed. This also contributed to the opportunity to build a good rapport with participants, which increased their trust so they felt comfortable responding openly to the interview questions.

In qualitative research, no two situations will ever be the same. However, a researcher can increase the dependability of a study (Shenton, 2004). I increased the dependability of this study by including a very descriptive account of the research design implementation, interview protocols, data collection and analysis, member checking, and peer debriefing. The goal of confirmability is to ensure findings of the research reflect the participants' experiences and ideas, rather than the biases of the researcher (Shenton, 2004). I supported the conformability of this study by accurately analyzing the data generated by participant interviews and interpreting the views of the participants accurately. Providing a detailed methodological description helps the reader follow an audit trail to trace step-by-step procedures to which the results can be corroborated (Shenton, 2004; Xerri, 2018). Journaling and self-assessment throughout data collection and data analysis also supported the confirmability of my study (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Transferability is the way qualitative studies can be applied to broader contexts, yet maintain the uniqueness of the original study (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Methods I used to establish transferability include providing detailed descriptions of multiple aspects of the study (setting, participants, context, data, limitations, and delimitations) so other researchers can understand the investigation. Although results of this study cannot be replicated, researchers may make a comparison regarding the applicability of the findings to other educational settings. Ravitch and Carl (2016) asserted that readers have to take into account different contextual factors and not expect to replicate a study that will yield the exact findings.

Ethical Procedures

Once the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Walden University's approval (no. 07-31-20-0673493) was received to conduct this research study, there were ethical concerns I had to consider as I proceeded to ensure beneficence. Other than the initial letter of invitation using school district email, all other communication between me and participants took place using personal emails and personal phone numbers.

Formal consent was secured from all participants prior to scheduling or conducting interviews. The consent form included the purpose of the research, an explanation of my role as a researcher, the procedures for the study, steps to retain confidentiality, and that participation in the study was voluntary and may be terminated at any time. Participants were reminded that they were encouraged to ask questions at any time during the research study for clarification or information related to any part of the research study process.

Participants were informed that their identity and all responses given in the interview would be kept confidential. Each participant's name was given a code. I used codes such as P1 for Participant 1 and P2 for Participant 2. Using codes or pseudonyms preserves participants' confidentiality (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Prior to each interview, participants were reminded of their right to withdraw from participation as well as an assurance of confidentiality. Since some participants may have felt that they are responding to interview questions negatively towards a building level structure, or a fellow teacher team member, it was important to reassure them of the ethical, protective measures established for this study.

Throughout the research study, all paper and electronic documentation, my personal laptop computer, and audio recordings were secured in my home office in a locked cabinet. Every effort was made to reassure participants that they could trust I would not have any documentation from this research study in my school office or school building. All paper documents and electronic files will be destroyed 5 years after the completion of the study.

Summary

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to understand teachers' perceptions of the challenges they face when collaborating on shared goals in a reading RTI model. Purposeful sampling was used to identify participants who meet the criteria for this research study. Individual interviews using an interview protocol (see Appendix A) I created were conducted with participants. The interview protocol (see Appendix A) of 10 questions was used to gather participants' collaborative experiences in a reading RTI model. Data collected from interviews were analyzed using Saldana's (2016) code-to-theme approach to identify codes, categories, emerging themes, and patterns.

Protocols for identifying participants within the school district, the invitation letter to participate, and obtaining participant consent, were all followed as per Walden University's IRB guidelines for proposal approval. Ethical considerations, including procedures for retaining participants' confidentiality, have been provided. Considerations for supporting issues of trustworthiness throughout the study have been detailed. I will present the setting, data collection, data analysis, and the results of this study as related to each of the research questions in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this study was to understand teachers' perceptions of the challenges they face in collaboration with shared goals in a reading RTI model. In interviews, I asked the participants 10 questions about teachers' collaboration experiences. These interview questions were designed based on the conceptual framework and research questions and are discussed in detail later in this chapter. The two research questions that guided this study were:

RQ1: What are general education classroom teachers' perceptions of their collaborative experiences with reading interventionists in a reading RTI model?

RQ2: What are reading interventionists' perceptions of their collaborative experiences with general education classroom teachers in a reading RTI model?

The following sections in this chapter include a description of the setting, demographics, data collection, and data analysis. Additionally, I discuss evidence of trustworthiness, present the results of the study, and conclude the chapter with a summary.

Setting

I conducted this study at the conclusion of the fourth year of an early literacy RTI model that targeted struggling readers in primary grades in an urban Title 1 public school district in a Midwestern state. As a part of the school improvement process, the RTI model requires teacher team members to collaborate during TBT meetings that focus on continuous improvement in teacher communication and decision-making. While teacher team members are expected to collaborate, both general education classroom teachers and

reading interventionists face challenges in collaboration with shared goals in a reading RTI model. In this chapter, I present the results of nine interviews with general education classroom teachers and reading interventionists about their perceptions of their collaborative experiences with shared goals in a reading RTI model.

Demographics

I selected a sample of 48 general education classroom teachers and eight reading interventionists working in an early literacy RTI model in the Title 1 district using purposeful sampling and invited them to participate in the study. Data saturation was reached when participant interviews were not generating new information for coding. I interviewed nine participants representing nine different school buildings scattered throughout the district. Five participants were reading interventionists and four participants were general education classroom teachers. All participants were female. Two participants were African American, and seven were European American. Due to Covid-19 restrictions, all interviews were conducted by phone outside of school hours. Participants' teaching experience ranged from 9 to 30.5 years.

All five of the reading interventionists held master's degrees and a state K–12 reading endorsement. Two of the 5 reading interventionists held a bachelor's degree in special education and were former special education teachers. Three of the reading interventionists had bachelor's degrees in elementary education and were former general education classroom teachers. Three of the 4 general education classroom teachers had a master's degree. One of the general education classroom teachers was currently working on completing a master's degree. Of the four general education classroom teachers, one

was a kindergarten teacher, one was a first-grade teacher, and two were second-grade teachers.

The district selected the Orton-Gillingham (OG) multisensory approach for early reading intervention to supplement the core curriculum as part of the framework for the RTI model. All participants received training in the OG approach as part of the RTI implementation. Two of the 4 general education classroom teacher participants shared that they did not receive the OG training until after the conclusion of the first year of the RTI model. All other participants received training in the summer prior to the implementation of the reading RTI model.

Data Collection

I interviewed the nine participants over a period of 3 weeks using an interview protocol. Each participant was interviewed once for about 30 minutes. All interviews began with a review of the purpose of the study as well as having the participant consent to participate in the study and have the interview recorded for later transcription. Data were recorded using the QuickTime Player Application on a MacBook Air. As part of the audio-recording procedure, I conducted the interviews via phone and projected them on speakerphone. The audio documentation of participants' responses allowed me to upload the audio files for verbatim transcription using NVivo, Version 12 (QSR International 2020). Interviews continued to generate new data until data saturation was achieved when no data became redundant (see Saldana, 2016). Because no new codes or themes occurred to contribute to the identification of themes, I determined a sufficient number of participant interviews had been conducted.

No variation occurred in the data collection protocol. However, after sensing the initial participant's hesitation when responding to the first question, I reiterated that there were no right or wrong answers to any of the questions and assured that participant her answers should reflect her personal experiences. Additionally, I reminded her identification would be coded, and no identifiers would be included in the final report. These assurances were repeated as part of the protocol script with all other participants for consistency.

Data Analysis

I used several phases of data analysis to move from coded units to larger representations including categories and themes. The phases of data analysis included (a) data preparation, (b) grouping and chunking of similar data, (c) coding (creating nodes in NVivo), (d) clustering, (e) identification of themes, (f) corroborating the accuracy of findings, and (g) interpreting findings. The first phase was data preparation. Immediately following each interview, the audio recording of the interview was uploaded into the NVivo program for transcription. Once each upload was completed, I listened to the audio while I read along with the transcript on the laptop screen. This aided my ability to ensure that each transcription was precise because the transcription service was not 100% accurate. Transcripts required editing due to misspellings and punctuation errors.

The second phase of data analysis involved consolidating and chunking similar data. First, I entered all nine interview transcripts into the qualitative software program NVivo in further preparation for data analysis. I read through each transcript and used NVivo to highlight reoccurring words, phrases, or sections. The NVivo software

program, Version 12, helped to organize the data by allowing me to identify theme nodes, or collection references about a specific theme or relationship, and move the information into columns (QSR International 2020). The use of theme nodes in NVivo is comparable to Saldana's (2016) analysis procedures, which allow for a streamlined codes-to-themes or categories model. Rather than using different highlighter colors, the NVivo program placed colored dots in front of the text to reflect similar responses. Each time I coded a transcript in the NVivo program, it allowed for an iterative review of previously coded data to ensure all data within a chunk reflected similar responses. This phase of data analysis resulted in 13 chunks of data generated from the interviews.

The third phase of data analysis involved moving coded text into columns within the NVivo program. Since the nodes had assigned colors based on similar meanings, data were clustered into columns, referred to as families in the NVivo program. Further refinement of the data resulted in the creation of child nodes, or subgroups, for a more specific organization. This phase of data analysis resulted in seven clusters. In the fourth phase of data analysis, I assigned codes to the columns, or clusters of data, and created groups that led to the identification of four preliminary themes. The fifth phase involved further reduction of the four preliminary themes into three final themes, which were exclusive and pertained to the two research questions.

The sixth phase of data analysis was ensuring the validity of the data. I used data generated from individual interviews, kept detailed notes in a researcher's journal, and used a peer reviewer to corroborate findings. Member checking was conducted after each interview was completed. Immediately after the audio recording was uploaded for

transcription, I edited for accuracy and used the transcript to compile a summary of the participant's responses to the interview questions. Each participant was emailed a summary of their responses to confirm that I had interpreted their responses accurately. Birt et al. (2016) stated that the use of member checking actively involves the participants to validate the summary of the findings. All participants were asked to review the summary of their interview and respond via email if they requested any changes or clarification of the information presented in the summary. Only one participant requested clarification to one of her responses.

The use of a peer debriefer is intended to prevent bias and provide critical feedback to the researcher by reviewing the data and the accuracy of the data collection. (Morse, 2015). I used a peer debriefer who was familiar with qualitative methodology, qualitative data collection and analysis, and had experience in public school settings. Additionally, the peer reviewer had extensive experience using the qualitative data analysis software, NVivo12. I provided the peer reviewer with the background of the study, interview transcripts, and access to the NVivo program file containing all coded data and analysis. The peer reviewer and I met virtually for 1-hour sessions on five separate occasions via Zoom. During the Zoom meetings, the peer debriefer confirmed that the data collection and data analysis accurately represented the findings generated by the interviews and answered the research questions.

To avoid researcher bias and support the credibility of the study, I sought to examine my own beliefs, judgements, and practices that might have influenced data interpretation or data analysis (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I made notes in a researcher's

journal throughout the data collection and analysis phases of the study and used notations within the NVivo program as a record of reasoning and interpretation of data and findings. The data collection, data analysis, and interpretation of findings were reported in a narrative format, and the findings of the study were visually represented with a table to compliment the narrative, including excerpts from interview data. There were no elements of the data that did not support the emerging themes. I found no discrepant cases in the data. All data were aligned to the research questions.

Data Analysis Results

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to understand teachers' perceptions of challenges they face in collaboration with shared goals in a reading RTI model. Ten interview questions about teachers' and reading interventionists' perceptions of the challenges they face when collaborating on shared goals in a reading RTI model formed the basis of the interviews. Participant responses to these 10 questions provided educators' perspectives of the reading RTI model implemented in kindergarten, first grade, and second grade in nine Title 1 buildings in a large urban district in a Midwestern state. These responses create a portrait of the collaboration experiences of teachers with different roles in the RTI, including the perceived benefits and challenges teachers experienced. Three themes emerged about teachers' perceptions of challenges the face in collaboration with shared goals in a reading RTI model: (a) teacher interactions, (b) student support, and (c) structures and limitations.

Theme 1: Teacher Interactions

Both general education classroom teacher participants and reading interventionist participants expressed similar perspectives about their collaborative experience in the areas of teacher meetings and conversations, shared goals, instructional planning and curriculum, teacher growth, and interpersonal relationships. They focused on the importance of working together to meet the instructional needs of students while also increasing their professional knowledge. Participants felt it was beneficial to have frequent, focused meetings to analyze student data and plan for instruction. Participants used the term *focus meetings* rather than shared goal, which is found in the literature (see Akiba et al., 2019; Glazier et al. 2017; Shakenova, 2017).

The collaborative conversations between teacher team members served as an opportunity to share instructional strategies to support each other as teachers prepared lessons to meet the needs of struggling readers. P7 offered that she was able to "take new things from the reading interventionist" and "pick her brain." All members of the teacher team had been trained in OG and shared a common understanding of how the OG methodology can be used to supplement the core curriculum. Two participants shared that they had not received OG training prior to the reading RTI implementation but did receive professional development before Year 2 of the implementation. The importance of cohesion of the curriculum across all tiers of RTI aligns with findings presented in the literature review (Leibfreund & Amendum, 2017).

All participants expressed the importance of having intrinsic motivation, self-reflection, and a growth mindset to benefit from teacher collaboration opportunities. These facets of teacher buy-in, noted in the literature review, contributed to the

collaborative framework of the reading RTI model by supporting teachers' willingness to continue learning (Fluijt et al., 2016). Additionally, once trusting relationships had been established, teachers were more comfortable being vulnerable and welcomed the collaborative nature of the RTI model. P9 stated, "Being open to working with a partner, or others on the team, was a great support because I don't know everything." Three participants noted that developing trusting relationships with teacher team members takes time and cannot be forced. Participants' experiences were found to be similar to other teacher collaboration models described in Chapter 2 (see Banerjee et al., 2017; Glazier et al., 2017; Reeves et al., 2017; Shakenova, 2017).

Theme 2: Student Support

All participants agreed that having an additional person to work with when planning and delivering intervention lessons was beneficial for student learning. P3 offered that the current collaborative reading RTI model gave "teachers a focus and students get what they need." These sentiments were echoed by participants who felt that giving students the individualized support needed will also help them feel successful in their growth. One reading interventionist share her concern that if the general education teachers are not conducting reading interventions based on individual student needs outside of the established RTI schedule, then students will not make adequate gains. Participants' perspectives of supporting students' individual instructional needs aligned with the literature review (Coyne et al., 2018; Dorn et al., 2016).

Theme 3: Structures and Limitations

All participants expressed wanting more time in the schedule for both collaboration with other teacher team members and implementation of lessons during RTI times. For example, P7 stated that "there is not enough time" and "no one common time" for planning with the team members outside of the one formal TBT meeting a week. P4 stated that the greatest challenge was time and that "I wish I could work with the reading interventionist more, but cannot fit it all in." P2 also noted that she was frustrated that the "reading interventionist is always scheduled to be in another room" and cannot be flexible to make changes to the daily schedule. Additionally, the participants expressed frustration with the limited time they have with students who have chronic absenteeism. P7 said very concisely, "the schedule, that's a challenge" and "there are no additional minutes to give when kids are always missing school. When are we supposed to get them caught up? They just keep getting further behind."

Due to the limited time for collaboration in the daily schedule, teachers always look for time in their day to have meaningful conversations with colleagues. P6 stated that she talked to her teacher team members about the reading RTI model, "literally every single day, multiple times a day." These informal meetings are often "incidental conversations that occur during a transition time or before school starts" (P1). Often teachers just "pop in and say, hey, what do you think about this idea?" (P3).

The different roles of the participants within the RTI model provided a view from two perspectives most apparent in their responses to interview questions related to scheduling challenges. When scheduling times for the reading interventionist during daily RTI, the general education classroom teachers said they had several specialists' schedules

to consider as well as the need to be flexible with building level initiatives (speech therapist, English language learners, special education teacher, guest speakers, volunteers, visiting programs) which sometimes conflicted with or limit the daily RTI schedule.

The reading interventionists expressed their frustration that RTI times were sometimes compromised due to the general education classroom teacher and building administration making changes to the daily schedule without their input. The reading interventionists perceived that the general education classroom teachers and building administration did not value or prioritize their contribution, the importance of the RTI model initiative, or their voice on the collaborative team. Furthermore, reading interventionists felt frustrated that they were expected to change their schedule to accommodate other specialists or special programs without advanced notice. P1 stated, "It's hard for me to create a schedule that works for everyone" and "classes are always changing." Additionally, P3 stated that she had been told that "they don't have time for this." The participants' perceptions of their collaborative experiences about scheduling conflicts and time constraints confirm findings in the literature review (see Akiba et al., 2019; Glazier et al., 2017; Johnson & Tsai, 2018; Tichenor & Tichenor, 2018).

Four of 5 reading interventionist participants offered that they did not feel they had administrative support as part of the reading RTI model, which negatively affected initial teacher buy-in. Additionally, 3 of 4 general education classroom teachers also agreed that their principals were not supportive and did not prioritize the reading RTI model. P4 stated that "if your principal is not on board, that's a problem." These

perceptions corroborate finding in the literature review regarding the importance of administrative support to achieve positive teacher team collaboration experiences (Tichenor & Tichenor, 2018).

All participants agreed that the formal TBT 1 hour meeting was not enough time for adequate data analysis, documentation of instructional strategies, planning assessments., and preparing lessons. P3 offered that, “although we get focused on data, there’s not enough time to ever look at practice.” Teachers were left feeling overwhelmed and unable to meet the expectations of the administration and state policy guidelines for TBTs. While all participants agreed that filling out the required TBT form during meetings was viewed as “unnecessary busy work” (P1), they agreed that it helped keep the focus of the meeting. P6 stated that the form “should be more like a narrative or something more than what it was.”

All participants acknowledged a lack of formal training to learn the skill of collaboration. They stated that the expectation was that teachers would just begin to collaborate, but had never received clear direction or support from the building administrator or district level personnel. P2 noted, “We were never told we were getting a reading interventionist. She just showed up one day. And we were like, what does she do and do I have to work with her?” A lack of formal teacher collaboration training also was found by Gomez-Najarro (2019), as noted in the literature review.

Participants’ responses to interview questions regarding collaboration suggest continued confusion of authentic collaboration versus teacher cooperation and collegiality due to a lack of formal collaboration training. Seven of the 9 participants

provided descriptions of teacher cooperation among team members and believed that they were collaborating. P4 described teacher collaboration as "talking about research-based strategies and following research." Two participants described teacher collaboration as it is presented in the literature review. These two teachers used terms aligned with the research, such as shared work and decision making (Little, 1990). P9 offered that "sharing responsibilities" is a critical component of collaboration. This data echoes research findings found in the literature review, which states daily interaction and collegiality between teachers is cooperation, not collaboration (Hord, 1986; Shakenova, 2017).

Table 1 shows excerpts related to the theme and subthemes of teacher interactions. Table 2 shows excerpts related to the theme and subthemes of student support. Table 3 shows excerpts related to the theme and subthemes of structures and limitations. All three themes relate to RQ1 and RQ2.

Table 1

Excerpts From Interviews Related to Theme of Teacher Interactions

Theme	Subtheme	Interview Excerpts
Teacher interactions	Teacher conversations/ teacher meetings	Our discussions are centered around data from screenings and assessments, both individual and group tests, sharing of targeted research-based interventions and sharing resource ideas to best meet student needs. *(Participant 5)*
		I talk with my teacher team literally every single day. Sometimes it's in TBT meetings, but mostly it's whenever we get a chance. The TBT meetings are only once a week and we talk about what we are going to do next throughout the week. *(Participant 9)*
	Shared goals	Having a shared goal helped to focus teacher collaboration. *(Participant 2)*
		Being on the same page benefits students because we're both targeting the same skills. *(Participant 9)*
	Professional growth/ growth mindset	Working together enables us to increase student engagement and achievement by assessing each other's expertise in a more efficient way. We can work smarter not harder. *(Participant 5)*
		Having someone on the same wavelength as me is important for my growth. *(Participant 7)*
	Instructional planning/ curriculum/ Orton-Gillingham	It was great that we all got to attend training together. I use OG with all my students even when it is not RTI time. If I didn't have the training, I wouldn't what she was doing with my students and wouldn't be able to support her. *(Participant 7)*
		We agreed to both use OG with our RTI groups rather than just using it for the low kids. Since we are both trained, it makes sense to have them all get the OG sensory lessons. *(Participant 4)*

Table 2

Excerpts From Interviews Related to Theme of Student Support

Theme	Subtheme	Interview Excerpts
Student support	Small group support	Small groups allow for individual development of reading skills and the opportunity to practice. *(Participant 1)*
		Smaller groups of students and having an extra support staff made RTI times more manageable. I could really focus on the students in my group and not other things happening in the room. *(Participant 7)*
	Targeted instruction	They are getting exactly what they need. *(Participant 6).*
		Students get the support they need when they need it. Not two or three years later when the gap is so wide. *(Participant 3)*
	Orton-Gillingham	OG's multisensory strategies allow me to give all my students good instruction even when it's not RTI time. *(Participant 5)*
		OG helps them remember the information better. It's tactile so it sticks with them. I think we need OG for all kids. *(Participant 1)*

Table 3

Excerpts From Interviews Related to Theme of Structures and Limitations

Theme	Subtheme	Interview Excerpts
Structures and limitations	Time constraints	The biggest challenge is allowing sufficient time to implement all aspects of the [RTI] plan, such as scheduling and implementing instruction. *(Participant 1)*
		I can only work with one class at a time. There's just not enough time in the day to have groups in all the classes I service. *(Participant 8)*
	Professional development	I've never had a professional development on teacher collaboration; nothing comes to mind. *(Participant 4)*
		It's like it was an assumed skill. You just woke up the next day and we had these things [teacher teams]. *(Participant 2)*
	TBT meetings/ documentation	The meetings are nowhere near enough time to do all the planning and preparing for RTI groups. All I remember is we had to watch a video that showed us how to fill in the form during a [TBT] meeting. *(Participant 6)*
		The form should be more like a narrative or something. It's antiquated. We waste time making stuff up that fits in the boxes instead of taking about real stuff like planning lessons. *(Participant 2)*
	Administration	My principal does not understand the RTI initiative or the importance of making sure all teachers were trained in OG. We had to fight for that. She also said she couldn't give us all common planning times. *(Participant 7)*
		A lot of our issues stem from a lack of communication. We don't know what's going on if we're not informed by our leaders. *(Participant 9)*
	Attendance	It's really hard to stay consistent with the model. If our kids attend sporadically, then we don't have data for that, and now we have to catch them up. *(Participant 9)*
		Students are sometimes absent for days at a time. They come back and it's like starting over every time. They are already so low. They can't afford to miss any days. *(Participant 8)*
	Understanding of collaboration	We talk every single day and have a team effort. *(Participant 6)*
		Working toward a common goal and sharing the work, rather than in a silo. *(Participant 3)*

Evidence of Trustworthiness

To support the credibility of my study, as specified in Chapter 3, I used well-established methods, including individual interviews, purposeful sampling, Saldana's (2016) code-to-theme approach for data analysis, member checking, a researcher's journal, and a peer reviewer. After each individual interview, I sent a synthesis of the transcript to participants to make sure I had interpreted their responses accurately (Birt et al., 2016). Only one of the participating general education classroom teachers or reading interventionists asked for any corrections or modifications to the information I provided them.

Transferability is the way qualitative studies can be applied to broader contexts, yet maintain the uniqueness of the original study (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Methods I used to establish transferability include providing detailed descriptions of multiple aspects of the study (setting, participants, context, data, limitations, and delimitations) so other researchers can understand the investigation. Although results of this study cannot be replicated, researchers may make a comparison regarding the applicability of the findings to other educational settings and may yield different results. Ravitch and Carl (2016) asserted that readers have to take into account different contextual factors and not expect to replicate a study that will yield the exact findings.

Shenton (2004) stated that the researcher can increase the dependability of a study. To achieve this, I included a very descriptive account of the research design implementation, interview protocols, data collection and analysis, member checking, and conducted inquiry audits using a peer reviewer. The peer reviewer reviewed and assessed

transcripts, emerging categories during coding, and the final themes which answered the research questions. I selected the peer reviewer because of this person's knowledge and expertise in qualitative data collection and analysis; including the use of a qualitative data management program NVivo, and teaching experience in public education systems. The peer reviewer is currently a graduate assistant NVivo Tutor in the Walden Academic Skills Center and a Walden doctoral candidate. I provided the peer reviewer with the background of the study, interview transcripts, access to the NVivo file containing all stages of coding with colored coded analysis, and a copy of the final report. In a virtual meeting, the peer reviewer provided feedback which supported the accuracy of the information provided and sufficiently answered the research questions. Additionally, journaling in a researcher's notebook and self-assessment throughout the data collection and data analysis process supported the confirmability of my study.

Summary

Three themes emerged from interviews with general education classroom teachers and reading interventionists who were asked about their collaborative experiences with shared goals in a reading RTI model. Themes emerged in the areas of teacher interactions, student support, and structures and limitations.

Among the collaboration benefits reported by participants were teacher team conversations based on shared goals, which provided a focus for the team. Participants agreed that because all teacher team members were trained in OG, they shared a common understanding of the OG approach and how it was to supplement the core curriculum. Other benefits included an increase in teacher opportunities to try new strategies and

having support from other teacher team members. This support was most often through teacher modeling, sharing instructional strategies, coplanning, debriefing after lessons, and goal setting.

However, both general education classroom teachers and reading interventionists reported challenges. Most notably, challenges were presented by scheduling conflicts and time constraints. The different roles of the participants within the reading RTI model provided insight from two perspectives. The general education classroom teachers felt that there was often not enough time in their day to accommodate specialists' schedules and building-wide initiatives. In addition, specialists' schedules are not flexible and often result in a loss of reading RTI time for the class. Reading interventionists expressed frustration with scheduling conflicts that compromise their reading RTI time in classrooms. Many reading interventionists felt they were expected to accommodate scheduling changes without advanced notice. A lack of administrative support was reported by most reading interventionists and contributed to the initial lack of teacher buy-in.

The participants reported that the required weekly collaboration sessions, TBTs, did not provide sufficient time to effectively and adequately analyze data and plan for reading RTI instruction. All participants stated that the lack of common planning time among teacher team members resulted in the need for incidental conversations throughout the day outside of the formal TBT meetings. Additionally, all agreed that filling out the mandatory state documentation was limiting and antiquated.

Data from this study also revealed that 7 of 9 participants believed they were engaging in teacher collaboration. However, based on the definition of teacher collaboration by seminal researcher Little (1990), the participants were describing cooperation with colleagues.

Participants reported that students' reading achievement was supported by providing for additional time focused on targeted skills and individual needs. The data revealed that participants perceived opportunities for teacher interactions as beneficial for teachers as well as students. According to a veteran teacher of the school district, teachers' interactions in the RTI model were beneficial because teachers learned new strategies from each other and were developing trusting relationships which will increase teachers' willingness to collaborate in the future.

Teachers' perceived challenges reported included limited time, scheduling conflicts, administrative support, and excessive student absenteeism. Concerning teacher collaboration training, all nine participants stated they never attended professional development training to collaborate with teacher team members effectively. Two participants recalled a brief training from the state explaining how to complete the mandatory documentation during a TBT meeting. All participants agreed that teacher collaboration training prior to the implementation of the reading RTI model and placement of reading interventionists in buildings may have positively influenced initial teacher buy-in and their understanding of authentic collaboration. In the next chapter, I will share the interpretation of the findings, the limitations of the study, and recommendations and implications of the results.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Effective teacher collaboration positively influences student achievement in reading (Gatcho & Bautista, 2019; Mora-Ruano et al., 2019; Ronfeldt et al., 2015; Shakenova, 2017). Teacher team members in a reading RTI model must work together to successfully meet the instructional needs of all students within the multitiered framework (Dorn et al., 2016; Shakenova, 2017). However, both general education classroom teachers and reading interventionists face challenges in collaborating with shared goals in a reading RTI model.

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to understand teachers' perceptions of the challenges they face in collaboration with shared goals in a reading RTI model. It is important to understand the experiences of general education classroom teachers and reading interventionists who collaborate in a reading RTI model because teacher collaboration focused on reading instruction and intervention is linked to increased student achievement (Gatcho & Bautista, 2019; Shakenova, 2017). Teachers' experiences and perspectives with this RTI model could be used to inform teacher professional development, implement change, improve the status quo, or guide future research.

In this study, I employed a basic qualitative research study design. Qualitative research is consistent with understanding individuals' perceptions through inquiry to create meaning from the participants' experiences (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Qualitative research aligned with my purpose statement and research questions because I used open-ended, individual interview questions generated from the literature review and conceptual

framework to understand the phenomenon of teachers' perceptions of the challenges they face in collaboration with shared goals in a reading RTI model.

The key findings of the study are summarized with respect to the three emergent themes: teacher interactions, student support, and structures and limitations. Among the teacher interaction benefits reported by participants were teacher team collaborative conversations based on shared goals, which provided a focus for the team. Participants agreed that because all teacher team members were trained in OG, they shared a common understanding of the OG approach and how it was to supplement the core curriculum. Other positive perceptions reported included an increase in teachers' opportunities to implement new strategies and support from other teacher team members. This support occurred most often through teacher modeling, sharing instructional strategies, coplanning, debriefing after lessons, and goal setting. Participants also felt that the RTI model supported students' reading achievement due to the targeted instruction of lessons and small student groups.

However, both general education classroom teachers and reading interventionists reported structural challenges and limitations that were mostly presented by scheduling conflicts and time constraints. The different roles of the participants within the reading RTI model provided insight from two perspectives. The general education classroom teachers felt that there was often not enough time in their day to accommodate specialists' schedules and building-wide initiatives. Furthermore, they felt that specialists' schedules were not flexible and often resulted in a loss of reading RTI time for the class. Reading interventionists expressed frustration with scheduling conflicts that

compromised their reading RTI time in classrooms. Many reading interventionists felt they were expected to accommodate scheduling changes without advanced notice, and their contribution to the RTI was then devalued. Most reading interventionists expressed the absence and inadequacy of administrative support, which contributed to an initial lack of teacher buy-in.

The participants reported that the required weekly collaboration sessions, TBTs, did not provide sufficient time to effectively and adequately analyze data and plan for reading RTI instruction. All participants stated that the lack of common planning time among teacher team members resulted in incidental conversations throughout the day outside of the formal TBT meetings. Additionally, all agreed that filling out the mandatory state documentation was limiting and antiquated.

Data from this study also revealed that 7 out of 9 participants believed they were engaging in teacher collaboration. However, based on the definition of teacher collaboration by seminal researcher, Little (1990), the participants were actually describing cooperation with colleagues.

All general education classroom teachers and reading interventionists perceived that students' reading achievement was supported by the additional time focused on targeted skills and individual needs coupled with a small group instructional setting.

Interpretation of the Findings

In this section, I describe how the findings reported in this research confirm, disconfirm, or extend knowledge in the discipline. These descriptions were compiled by comparing the research findings with what was found in the literature review and

presented in Chapter 2. This section also includes an analysis and interpretation of the findings in the context of the conceptual framework presented in Chapter 2.

The literature review supplied abundant academic research about the benefits of teacher collaboration (e.g., Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Ketterlin-Geller et al., 2015: Mora-Ruano et al., 2019). Effective collaborations can positively affect a school community (Mora-Ruano et al., 2019), increase student achievement (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017), and create an environment for both teacher and student growth (Ketterlin-Geller et al., 2015). The results of the current study confirm these findings and add knowledge on the positive experiences of general education classroom teachers and reading interventionists working in a reading RTI model. Participants in this study reported that having opportunities to engage in frequent, meaningful conversations focused on a shared goal, strengthening interpersonal relationships, and learning new skills and strategies together and from each other were perceived as positive, collaborative experiences in the reading RTI model. Furthermore, participants perceived their experience as positive in regard to supporting students by targeting individual skills and providing small group instructional opportunities. The results of this study confirm findings that when a reading RTI model is implemented using student data to drive instructional decisions, teachers perceived benefits for all students (see Preston et al., 2016; Sharp et al., 2016).

The literature review revealed that teachers do not have the training for collaboration skills, including taking on the role of a critical friend or navigating interpersonal relationships within a teacher team (Glazier et al., 2017). Researchers have recommended that both general education and intervention teacher preparation programs provide more

training in collaboration skills (Bush & Grotjohann, 2020). The results of the current study confirm these findings because all teachers interviewed stated they had not received any formal training to learn the skill of collaboration prior to or during the implementation of the reading RTI model.

The literature review also disclosed that teachers face many challenges when collaborating in teacher teams. Various structural and scheduling limitations, navigating interpersonal relationships, lack of administrative support or teacher-buy-in, and the absence of shared goals are common obstacles to collaboration (Bush & Grotjohann, 2020; Hargreaves, 2019; Leibfreund & Amendum, 2017; Vangrieken et al., 2015). The findings of the current study confirmed that scheduling conflicts and time constraints were challenges for all teacher team members regardless of their different roles within the RTI model. The findings revealed that most teachers felt that the absence of administrator support negatively affected initial teacher buy-in, resulting in a delay when developing teacher team member relationships.

Furthermore, administrators' inability to create common planning schedules for teacher team members compromising the reading RTI model instructional time for other building-wide initiatives suggested that their principal did not value their collaborative efforts. Although both groups are part of the reading RTI model teacher team, the general education classroom teachers and reading interventionists also voiced challenges specific to their other team members' roles. Like their frustration about feeling unvalued by the administration, sometimes reading interventionists felt interpersonal relationships suffered because their role was not viewed as a priority by other teacher team members.

In seminal research that was presented in the literature review, Lortie (1975) stated that teacher isolation was a significant reason for a lack of teacher collaboration in schools. Teachers' daily schedules and the physical separation of classrooms restrict regular peer interaction, resulting in limited student achievement and overall student achievement (Lortie, 1975). As a result, classrooms operate as silos with teachers and students working in isolation. The current study confirmed that even with more recent state policies and initiatives that require weekly TBT meetings for teacher collaboration, teachers stated that there was not enough time to have meaningful data-based discussions, fill out the required state form, share instructional practices, and plan for the reading RTI model. All the interviewed teachers reported that in addition to the mandatory weekly TBT meeting, they regularly engaged in informal, incidental planning conversations with teacher team members whenever possible to sufficiently plan for reading RTI lessons. What often appears to be collaboration between teachers is actually cooperation (Glazier et al., 2017; Little, 1990). Teachers can be collegial, professional, and cooperative without sharing responsibilities or decision-making (Gatcho & Bautista, 2019; Glazier et al., 2017; Hord, 1986; Shakenova, 2017). Having shared goals is an important move towards interdependence, and shared work is the evidence of collaboration (Little, 1990). The findings of this study confirmed that what often looks like collaboration is often cooperation. When asked to define teacher collaboration, 7 of the 9 teachers interviewed described cooperation rather than authentic collaboration. Only two of the teachers interviewed used terms aligned to the research, such as shared work and decision-making.

Limitations of the Study

General limitations of the study described in Chapter 1 were the small sample size and the focus on primary grade general education classroom teachers and reading interventionists who work in a specific reading RTI model in a Title I urban school district in a Midwestern state. Some educators may not have felt comfortable reporting any challenges they experienced when collaborating with peers or admitting that they needed additional professional support to develop their interpersonal skills (see Pieters & Voogt, 2016). A further limitation was that, as an employee of the district where the study took place, I had formed my own ideas about teacher team collaboration. Because interviews were conducted during Covid-19 restrictions, data collection occurred by phone rather than face-to-face interviews. This restriction limited my ability to observe participants' body language during individual interviews.

However, I took reasonable measures to address some of these limitations. One such measures was inviting all participants to review a summary of their interview transcripts to be certain their responses were interpreted accurately. I reviewed each transcript to be sure no researcher-biased interactions occurred or were included and controlled for participant bias by using purposeful sampling, which allowed for participant representation from different school buildings, grade levels, and teacher roles within the teacher teams. Additionally, general education classroom teachers and the reading interventionist that work in the same building where I worked at the time of the study were excluded from this study.

To support the credibility of this study, I used well-established methods, including individual interviews, purposeful sampling, Saldana's (2016) code-to-theme approach for data analysis, and member checking. According to Morse (2015), the use of a peer debriefer is intended to prevent bias and provide critical feedback to the researcher by reviewing the data and the accuracy of the data collection. I used a peer debriefer who was familiar with qualitative methodology, qualitative data collection and analysis, and had experience in public school settings.

Xerri (2018) asserted that conducting research within the district where the researcher is employed is advantageous because it allows the researcher to capitalize on their knowledge of the context and more readily build relationships with participants. I conducted my research in the district where I am employed. This contributed to the opportunities to build good rapport with participants, which increased their trust so they felt comfortable and responded openly to the interview questions.

In qualitative research, no two situations will ever be the same; however, a researcher can increase the dependability of a study (Shenton, 2004). I increased the dependability of this study by including a descriptive account of the research design implementation, interview protocols, data collection and analysis, member checking, and peer debriefing. The goal of confirmability is to ensure the findings of the research reflect the participants' experiences and ideas rather than the biases of the researcher (Shenton, 2004). I supported the conformability of this study by accurately analyzing the data generated by participant interviews and interpreting the views of the participants accurately. Providing a detailed methodological description helps the reader follow an

audit trail to trace step-by-step procedures to which the results can be corroborated (Shenton, 2004; Xerri, 2018). Journaling and self-assessment throughout data collection and data analysis also support the confirmability of the current study (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Transferability is the way qualitative studies can be applied to broader contexts, yet maintain the uniqueness of the original study (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The methods I used to establish transferability include providing detailed descriptions of multiple aspects of the study (i.e., the setting, participants, context, data, limitations, and delimitations) so other researchers can understand the investigation. Although results of this study cannot be replicated, researchers may make a comparison regarding the applicability of the findings to other educational settings. Ravitch and Carl (2016) asserted that readers have to take into account different contextual factors and not expect to replicate a study that will yield the exact findings.

Recommendations

Multiple researchers have stated that effective teacher collaboration positively influences achievement in reading (see Gatcho & Bautista, 2019; Mora-Ruano et al., 2019; Ronfeldt et al., 2015; Shakenova, 2017). Yet, the literature review revealed that teachers face challenges in collaborating with shared goals. Scholarly literature confirms that there is plentiful literature focused on the collaboration experiences between general education classroom teachers and special education teachers; however, the collaboration experiences between general education classroom teachers and reading interventionists do not exist (Gatcho & Bautista, 2019; Glazier et al., 2017; Pieters & Voogt, 2016). This

study was designed to collect the collaboration experiences and perspectives of general education classroom teachers and reading interventionists collaborating with shared goals in a reading RTI model. The perspectives of the interviewed teachers aligned with the finding in the literature review. However, the small sample of teachers does not provide enough data to generate generalizable findings. Further research is necessary to corroborate and expand the limited findings in this study.

Although this study may be replicated in other educational settings with similar conditions, including reading RTI teacher teams with reading interventionists as part of the teacher team, no two studies will yield the results. Future research studies may also focus on the use of a larger sample of participants even in the same district.

The literature review revealed the terms collaboration and cooperation are often used interchangeably but are actually two different actions (Gatcho & Bautista, 2019; Glazier et al., 2017; Little, 1990; Shakenova, 2017). This study confirmed the misunderstanding as data revealed that 7 of 9 participants believed they were engaging in teacher collaboration but were actually describing teacher cooperation as stated by Little (1990). Because authentic collaboration involves a shared goal among teacher team members, the development of a shared goal may bring focus and a clearer understanding of collaboration. A recommendation is to address the inaccurate understanding of collaboration and cooperation by better preparing teachers with explicit experiences for each through professional development opportunities focused on building interpersonal relationships, shared goal-setting, and authentic collaboration in the workplace.

Finally, administrative support of teacher collaboration increases teacher buy-in for team collaboration (Tichenor & Tichenor, 2018) and building administrators create teacher collaboration opportunities via scheduling common planning periods (Banerjee et al., 2017). A recommendation is that future research is conducted to address administrators' experiences in regard to their role in developing and positively affecting teacher collaboration within schools.

Implications

The results of this study may affect positive social change because it provides an original contribution regarding teachers' collaboration experiences in a reading RTI model. Insights from this study exploring a reading RTI model using collaboration between general education classroom teachers and reading interventionists may contribute to an increased understanding of teacher-to-teacher collaboration, resulting in positive gains in student achievement in early literacy, teacher pedagogy, and teacher instructional practices, all of which benefit Title I education and influence closing the achievement gap. Findings from this study may also help school administrators create professional development and on-going training for all teachers as they shift towards professional collaboration experiences as part of teacher teams. Creating opportunities for teachers to develop interpersonal relationships with appropriate collaboration times as a part of the daily schedule supports earlier research findings regarding the importance of effective teacher collaborative relationships and adequate collaboration opportunities for all teacher team members. Furthermore, the collaboration between partners as change agents is a key feature of social change (Walden University, 2017).

Conclusion

Multiple researchers have stated that effective teacher collaboration positively influences student achievement in reading. Research findings also indicate that teachers face challenges that limit effective teacher collaboration, such as establishing a common understanding of collaboration, navigating interpersonal relationships between team members, adequate time in the daily schedule to meet, and identifying shared goals. In a Midwestern state, teacher teams, including general education classroom teachers and reading interventionists, are required to provide reading RTI for primary grade general education students who are identified as at-risk for reading failure. The evidence from this study suggests that teachers need professional development and on-going support from administrators to engage in authentic collaboration in order for the potential of teacher team collaboration to be fully realized.

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Appendix: Interview Protocol Form

Open-Ended Interview Questions:

1. How long have you been a general education classroom teacher or reading interventionist?
2. What does it mean to collaborate?
3. What collaboration are you involved in?
4. How do we teachers collaborate?
5. What professional development trainings have you had in regard to collaboration?
6. What structures and supports need to be in place to make collaboration successful?
7. What do you know about Response to Intervention?
8. What are the benefits of the early reading RTI model at your school?
9. What challenges do you encounter when teaching within the RTI model?
10. How does your TBT collaborate for your RTI model?