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Middle School Teacher Perceptions About Response to Intervention Instruction to Improve Literacy in English-Language Arts Classrooms

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This is to certify that the doctoral study by

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has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
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Abstract

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MA, University of West Georgia, 2015

BS, University of West Georgia, 2010

Project Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Abstract

The local problem under study was that a non-Title I school implemented a 25-minute response-to-intervention (RTI) remediation block to address the fact that students were scoring below proficiency on literacy assessments; however, teachers were unsure of how to best use this time to improve literacy instruction and were unsure which RTI strategies would work best in the time provided. The purpose of this study was to examine teacher perceptions when implementing RTI strategies within the remediation period to improve student literacy. The conceptual framework for this qualitative study was based on Piaget, Vygotsky, and Dewey's constructivism theory. The research questions addressed teacher perceptions of reasons for declining literacy rates and the effectiveness of the 25-minute remediation block and RTI interventions to improve student literacy. 10 Interviews were conducted with purposefully sampled participants who taught English-Language Arts at the focus school. Data were analyzed inductively using segment and thematic coding. Results indicated that teachers needed fluidity when implementing the 25-minute remediation period, instruction should be based on student need, and teachers felt they needed a "resource toolbox" to refer to for specific reading deficits. Using the findings of this study, secondary schools could provide school-wide professional development to improve teacher understanding when implementing a new program such as RTI. This study contributes to social change by potentially increasing teacher understanding of implementing RTI, which could, in turn, increase student literacy achievement since it may strengthen the effectiveness of implementing RTI in the secondary classroom.

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this project study to my husband and children. Without your help and support over the last four years, this project would not have been possible.

Acknowledgments

I have many people that have supported me on this journey, and I am so thankful for each of you! First, I would like to thank my husband, Rick, who has been so incredibly supportive and patient with me while I worked on this project. Thank you for endlessly supporting me and always doing what you could to make sure I was able to focus on my schoolwork. To my children, Ryder and Talyn, thank you for being so patient with me as there were many nights you heard "not tonight, I have schoolwork." No matter how many times you heard that phrase, you always understood. To my mom and stepdad, Lori and Jeff, you were two of my biggest cheerleaders and I am so thankful for all the times you helped when I was busy with schoolwork. You were always supportive, and I will never be able to fully explain how much I appreciate that. To my father, Eddy, thank you for always asking me if I was studying and making sure I stayed on top of my work. I could always tell how proud of me you were for pursuing this degree. Each of you was an integral part to this process and I would never have made it through without you.

My doctoral committee has been inspiring, encouraging, and always readily available when I needed support. Thank you to Dr. Heather Caldwell, Dr. Tim Lafferty, and my URR Dr. Matthew Basham for your many hours of feedback and support in seeing this study through to the end.

A doctoral study is a journey unlike any other, and I am very thankful for all who supported me along the way. I could never have done it without the support, patience, and encouragement that I received from many people. I am forever grateful to each of you and thank God that you were all in this with me!

Table of Contents

List of Tables

Section 1: The Problem

Student growth and achievement in education are consistently discussed at the national, state, and local levels. All stakeholders want students who can be successful inside the school building as well as in life beyond secondary school. Lacking basic reading and writing skills is a tremendous disadvantage to students, which is why literacy is often at the forefront of growth and achievement conversations (Sandell, 2020; Jones, 2020; Batt II, 2020). Literacy affects multiple facets of life including health and the economy (Mahdi, 2020).

Currently, the global adult literacy rate is 85% (Murray, 2021). In the United States, literacy has been an issue that the education community has been trying to improve for years (Mallette, 2004). The U.S. Department of Education estimated that more than half of adults aged 16 to 74 lack proficiency in reading and read below a sixth grade reading level (PR Newswire, 2020). The literacy rates for fourth grade students who can read proficiently has hovered around 35%, and 82% of students who are receiving free or reduced lunches are reading below proficiency by the fourth grade. As of 2015, the average literacy score of an adult in the United States was 272, while the international average was 267 (National Assessment of Adult Literacy, 2020). A recent study found that after school closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic, students only gained 63%–68% of grade-specific reading skills during the 2019–2020 school year (Bao et al., 2020).

In this section, I introduce the problem, purpose, and approach to investigating teacher perceptions of their use of RTI within an extended learning time remediation

period to improve student literacy rates. I also provide an overview of the current literature on RTI and extended learning time in the classroom.

The Local Problem

Literacy rates are a concern for educators across the state of Georgia as well as in the local school district. While literacy encompasses many areas of learning, for this study the focus was on literacy regarding reading comprehension, which is a component of the English-Language Arts Georgia Standards of Excellence. Literacy scores have not improved enough over the past ten years according to the Georgia Department of Education (2019). Only 39.9% of Georgia's students performed proficient or distinguished on the 2018 Georgia Milestones Assessment in English Language Arts. This was only a slight increase from 39.4% in 2017 (Georgia Department of Student Achievement [GOSA], 2018). Although Georgia literacy scores have increased slightly from 2015 to 2017, the overall literacy score dropped from 266 to 262 between 2017 and 2019 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). Not only is poor literacy affecting Georgia's students, but adults as well. An estimated 23% of adults read at the lowest level scored, which indicates a difficulty in comprehending the most basic textual information (McKoon & Ratcliff, 2016).

The problem that prompted this study was that Jenkins Middle School (JMS; a pseudonym) had implemented a 25-minute response-to-intervention (RTI) remediation block to address the fact that students were scoring below proficiency on literacy assessments; however, teachers were unsure of how to best use this time to improve

literacy instruction and struggled to identify and implement strategies to improve literacy instruction.

Student literacy scores were declining at JMS, a non-Title I school, and teachers were struggling to improve literacy instruction in English-language arts (ELA). Over the past 3 years, the current eighth grade class has seen a reduction in proficiency on the Georgia Milestones English-Language Arts test of at least 1% per year. In 2017, 59.3% showed proficiency; in 2018, 58.4% showed proficiency; and in 2019, 57.2% showed proficiency. Teachers had been unsuccessful in trying to improve student literacy scores despite implementing several strategies and instructional tools to target areas of need. JMS administration implemented a 25-minute RTI remediation block to address the fact that students were scoring below proficiency on literacy assessments and that student groups were reducing in proficiency as they progress through the grade levels. JMS is part of the Warren School District (a pseudonym) which is in a rural part of Georgia. The school district has 10,000 students enrolled, and 55% of the schools within the district are labeled as Title I eligible.

Changes had occurred at the school due to the change from the Georgia Performance Standards to the Georgia Standards of Excellence that demanded that teachers help students to become critical thinkers and problem solvers who will be ready to compete with their peers around the world for employment or admissions into college (Georgia Department of Education, 2010). The school also experienced a change in student population and had a higher number of students who receive free and reduced lunch in comparison to years past. According to the GOSA (2018), JMS had 252 students

identified as economically disadvantaged in the 2015–2016 school year and 435 students identified as economically disadvantaged in the 2017–2018 school year. For the 2018–2019 school year, the demographics of the school mostly stayed the same (GOSA, 2019). Although the school had seen a larger number of economically disadvantaged students enroll, JMS still was not identified as a Title I school. Without Title I status, the school could not afford a literacy coach; therefore, the remediation period for RTI was created to allow more time in ELA classes for individualized or small group instruction.

In the state of Georgia, schools receive a College and Career Readiness Performance Index (CCRPI) score for each school year. The CCRPI score "is a comprehensive school improvement, accountability, and communication platform for all educational stakeholders that will promote college and career readiness for all Georgia public school students" (GADOE, 2019). The CCRPI score is made up of four components for middle schools: content mastery, progress, closing gaps, and readiness (GADOE, 2019). Content mastery determines if students are ready for the next grade level based on state-mandated test scores; if students are demonstrating growth relative to academically similar students; if student subgroups are making improvements in achievement rates; and if students are participating in activities that prepare them for and demonstrate readiness for the next level, college, or career (GADOE, 2019; Perry, 2015).

For the 2017–2018 school year, JMS scored a 58.1 out of 100 on content mastery, a 70.1 out of 100 on progress, a 6.3 out of 100 on closing gaps, and an 82.2 out of 100 on readiness with an overall score of a 59.4 out of 100 (see Table 1). This was a significant reduction from an 82.3 out of 100 in the 2016–2017 school year. Within the closing gaps

score, the score that measures the growth and achievement of subgroups was the lowest scoring category for JMS, and the school was identified as needing improvement in all areas except teaching students with disabilities in social studies. This means that the school's subgroups did not make adequate progress in comparison to their peers across the state (GADOE, 2018). In comparison to the district and the state, JMS scored significantly lower in this area. The district student subgroup score was 80 and the state score was 78.8 (GADOE, 2018). For the 2018–2019 school year, JMS saw a significant improvement in standardized scores, receiving an overall CCRPI score of 81.4 with a content mastery score of 69.6, a progress score of 89.7, a closing gaps score of 100, and a readiness score of 84 (GADOE, 2019). Each score was out of 100.

The CCRPI score was difficult for the staff at JMS to process because they had never received such a low score before. According to the principal, many teachers felt disappointed in their work and the administrators stated that they were concerned that the GADOE would be stepping in to monitor the school's policies and practices. Per the school faculty meeting agenda, the CCRPI score prompted school administrators to increase instructional time in mathematics and ELA with the 25-minute remediation period, increase the focus on targeted professional learning, increase the focus on literacy in all content areas, increase data-based discussion in staff professional learning communities (PLCs), create math and reading support classes for sixth and seventh grade, and conduct an ongoing evaluation of what was working and what needed improvement throughout the year.

On the 2018 Georgia Milestones Assessment, 64% of JMS students performed as beginning or developing learners in ELA. When reviewing Lexile levels of the 2018 Georgia Milestones Assessment, 36% of sixth grade students read below the stretch band, 31% of seventh grade students read below the stretch band, and 38% of eighth grade students read below the stretch band. According to an ELA teacher at the school, teachers at JMS acknowledged that many students were reading at a basic or below basic level and that remediation time was needed. However, teachers were struggling to improve literacy scores within ELA classrooms. Many teachers at the middle grade level felt that they were unable to teach a child who was below grade level how to read. One teacher, who identified several students on her roster as reading significantly below grade level, discussed that she was at a loss on how to help a child in the eighth grade learn how to read. Another teacher claimed that she had tried every strategy she knew, including pulling from her Student Support Team experience, but was still unsuccessful in seeing the growth that was needed to make improvements. An ELA teacher stated that the teachers felt that they were ill equipped in helping a student learn to read and help them be prepared to take the Georgia Milestones in the spring that would present them with grade-level reading material. Another ELA teacher explained that students were coming to her with such major reading gaps that she was unsure of how to help them begin to read on a basic level, much less on grade level. Students were missing basic literacy skills that made it difficult for them to be successful on the Georgia Milestones Assessment at the end of the year, and teachers at JMS felt unsure of how to support them.

JMS took action to emphasize the importance of literacy across all content areas. On the Teacher Keys Effectiveness System, Georgia's teacher evaluation system, all teachers had to cite an area of literacy for their professional learning goal for the 2018–2019 school year. The importance of literacy in the classroom was also included in the School Improvement Plan. According to the plan available online, the school goal was to achieve at a rate that will maintain levels of growth required to close achievement gaps in literacy as defined by the state as 3% and 6% of the gap between achievement and 100%. The school also reached out to the district's Department of Academics to provide professional development (PD) throughout the school year for all academic areas. Improving student's literacy and overall test scores on the Georgia Milestones Assessment was made a priority within the school. To improve test scores, they decided that teaching should focus on the needs of each child.

To meet the needs of each child, teachers were told to implement RTI during a 25-minute remediation period that was built into every mathematics and ELA class period. Students were in these classes for 100 minutes, and teachers were expected to teach their curriculum for 75 minutes and deliver remediation for 25 minutes. Teachers were given flexibility on how and when they implemented this period but were told that it was nonnegotiable. Although teachers were given the flexibility to implement the remediation period as they saw fit, one ELA teacher noted that the time felt awkward, and it was difficult to shift from class time to remediation time. Another ELA teacher stated that she was willing to implement the time in her classroom but felt that she did not have enough guidance to implement it effectively.

Teachers were also placed into PLC groups to discuss strategies and resources for the 25-minute remediation period that were scheduled to meet once a week per grade level and twice a month per content area. Administration also offered PD opportunities throughout the school year to assist teachers with implementing RTI during their remediation block. Most of the PD opportunities were reading and writing strategies that are beneficial to teaching the curriculum but not necessarily remediation strategies.

Only one PD opportunity was based on a remediation strategy that was presented by a school district representative. This PD opportunity was offered to help teachers with implementing the cloze reading strategy outlined by Fisher and Frey (2014). Teachers felt comfortable with this strategy by the end of the PD opportunity, but according to one teacher, they were still struggling with implementing the strategy during the remediation period because they found it difficult to work with a small group of students on a strategy and keep the remainder of the class on task.

Although teachers acknowledged that the remediation period can be useful, one ELA teacher commented that, even after PLC meetings and PD opportunities, they were not prepared enough to implement RTI effectively in the time allotted. Overall, teachers understood that there was a need for the 25-minute remediation period but felt they needed more direction and resources to implement it effectively.

After implementation of the 25-minute remediation period for 1 year, JMS received the 2018–2019 CCRPI score and received an 84.1, which was a significant increase from the previous year. For content mastery, the school received a 69.6, which was an 11.5-point increase. For progress, JMS scored an 89.7, which was an increase of

19.6 points. For closing gaps, JMS scored a 100, which was a 93.7-point increase. In reading, JMS scored an 84, which was a 1-point increase. The staff at JMS was ecstatic about this increase from the previous year; however, they still felt unsure of which strategies and implementations worked. According to an ELA teacher, so many strategies were implemented during the previous school year that it was difficult to discern what worked and what did not.

For the 2019–2020 school year, teachers continued to implement various RTI strategies within the 25-minute remediation period with hopes that they would continue to see improvements in student literacy scores that spring. However, due to COVID-19, the school was closed for the remainder of the year in March of 2020. Testing was cancelled, and students and teachers shifted to online learning.

As of May 2020, the school system had begun to consolidate school areas to reduce the amount of the fiscal budget that goes towards building maintenance. This prompted the superintendent to move all eighth grade students to the area high schools, making each high school a Grade 8–12 campus. Although this moved teachers out of JMS's building, the staff decided to continue with the 100-minute remediation block for all sixth and seventh grade math and ELA classes. The principal also added an additional 50-minute extended learning time course for students who needed extra support following an extended period out of school during the COVID-19 closure from March 11th through the end of the school year. During this closure, students were given online assignments, and many teachers feel that there would be students with significant learning gaps that will need to be addressed during the 2020–2021 school year.

This problem is relevant to the larger educational situation as noted by the focus of school systems on improving literacy. A 2017 Deloitte study found that 1.7 million adult Georgians are low literate (Georgia Literacy Commission, 2018). This issue is creating a multigenerational literacy problem because low literate parents are unable to help their children foster a love of literacy at a young age. At the time of the study, 65% of Georgia's third graders were not reading at grade level. This prompted the state of Georgia to create the Georgia Literacy Commission to address Georgia's literacy deficiency. The commission created a framework for ongoing conversations to find ways to improve literacy in both adults and children across the state of Georgia (Georgia Literacy Commission, 2018).

Based on the Deloitte findings, the GADOE (2019) also created a Literacy Task Force to oversee various grants and professional learning modules to improve literacy rates in the state of Georgia. The National Assessment of Educational Progress and the Institute of Educational Sciences (2017) showed that Georgia's students were at a 35% proficiency rate in reading in Grade 8, ranking Georgia's eight grade students 27th out of 52 states and provinces in the United States. These literacy rates triggered several state literacy initiatives including the Striving Readers Grant and the Literacy for Loving, Learning, and Leading project, which is known as Georgia's L4 Plan (GADOE, 2018). Included in Georgia's L4 Plan is a holistic approach consisting of four pillars to educate the whole child. Teachers are encouraged to use evidence-based strategies and a personalized approach to learning. As part of this plan, the state created a Literacy Task Force that collaborates with schools and parents to ensure that, "all children are on the

path to reading proficiently by third grade and beyond" (GADOE, 2018, p. 1). Due to this implementation, certain schools that receive specialized funding have been equipped with literacy coaches, who support teachers across content area in all aspects of literacy, and identify specific strategies to increase literacy scores. Many schools have created their own literacy teams within their buildings, which consist of their literacy coach, administration, and classroom teachers.

Although Georgia is making strides to improve, the state is listed as having the second highest dropout rates, which directly correlate with low literacy (Dell 'Antonia, 2012). According to HealthCare Georgia Foundation (2019), it is estimated that a quarter of the adults living in Georgia may be illiterate, which calculates to a number around 1.5 million people. Therefore, Georgia's Literacy Task Force is producing materials and overseeing grants that provide literacy instruction to the whole child, which includes providing supports outside of the school building (GADOE, 2019).

In 2013, the state of Georgia adopted the Common Core State Standards that they then adapted to the Georgia Standards of Excellence. These standards were designed to ensure that high school graduates are college and/or career ready while also upholding the expectation that students enter the workforce or college with the ability to compete with fellow teens in the United States and around the world (GADOE, 2010). According to Wixson and Lipson (2012),

> The portrait of students who meet the Standards includes several attributes commonly identified as good habits in the areas of ELA—attributes such as (a) demonstrating independence; (b) building strong content knowledge; (c)

> responding to the varying demands of audience, task, purpose, and discipline; (d) comprehending as well as critiquing; (e) valuing evidence; (f) using technology and digital media; and (g) understanding other perspectives and cultures. (p. 388)

With a focus on literacy, Georgia legislatures hoped that this change in conjunction with the Literacy Task Force and the Georgia Literacy Commission would spark an increase in literacy rates across the state.

Rationale

The literature reflected that low literacy rates presented substantial problems for students and society and have been an ongoing concern for legislators, educators, and the general public (Fleary & Ettienne, 2019; Gallagher & Greenburg, 2019; Rea, 2020). Rea (2020) noted that while the literacy gap has improved significantly in the last 100 years in the United States, overall literacy has remained stagnant. In the following subsections, evidence of the problem at JMS is presented as well as the need for conducting the study at the local level. This is followed by an introduction to the problem as it appears in literature.

Evidence of the Problem in the Local Setting

The problem that prompted this study was that JMS implemented a 25-minute RTI remediation block to address the fact that students were scoring below proficiency on literacy assessments; however, teachers were unsure of how to best use this time to improve student literacy achievement. While the school saw a 10-point increase in the CCRPI score from 2016 to 2017, the school's score dropped from 82.3 in 2017 to 59.4 in 2018. JMS scored 17 points below the district average and 16.8 points below the state

average. This decrease was very disappointing to the staff at JMS. When speaking to administrators, they described the decrease in the school's CCRPI score as very disheartening and eye opening. Both administrators felt that the school had very large achievement gaps that needed to be addressed, specifically regarding literacy. In a PLC discussion, many teachers on staff also felt very disappointed in the CCRPI score results but also expressed the need for new tools and strategies to help struggling readers.

As previously discussed, teachers at JMS were charged with implementing RTI within a 25-minute remediation period to improve student literacy rates. However, only one ELA teacher on staff has been adequately trained in implementing the multitiered RTI framework. Another ELA teacher stated that she felt unsure of how to properly use the time allotted to improve student literacy achievement. I chose to focus on this problem for the current study to explore the experiences of the teachers and their perceptions of the use of RTI in their literacy interventions practice.

A primary role of the classroom teacher is to provide instruction that meets the needs of all students. Many teachers find this difficult when there are varying ability levels within one class setting, but this can be addressed with one of the four tiers within the RTI framework (Castro-Villarreal et al., 2014). The teachers at JMS were instructed to use Georgia's RTI model, which consists of three tiers of instruction during the 25-minute remediation block; however, many teachers were concerned with implementing RTI with fidelity within that time frame. According to the National Center on Response to Intervention (2012), "RTI is a multi-level prevention system intended to provide

evidence-based support to students with academic challenges, and to identify appropriate instruction and related supports to produce successful student outcomes" (pp. 2–3).

Many collaborative meetings and discussions were held at JMS to discuss improving student achievement. Faculty and staff reviewed several pieces of data to identify areas of weakness and students that needed the most intensive instruction. During many of these meetings teachers discussed resources, grouping and differentiation strategies, and schedule changes that could be made to help students address their areas of weakness. The teachers at JMS were struggling to improve literacy instruction within ELA classrooms. Many teachers referenced a lack of resources, a lack of understanding RTI, and a lack of time to make substantial changes to improve the school's drastic decline in its CCRPI rating. One teacher stated that she was struggling to improve literacy instruction and addressing all the various gaps that students have. Another ELA teacher also mentioned that she felt overwhelmed with the task at hand because she felt that she did not have the knowledge and resources to adequately plan differentiated lessons to meet each student's needs. This statement aligns with Liu and Ramsey's (2008) reported high levels of stress resulting from teachers struggling to improve student achievement.

I designed this study to determine teachers' perceptions of strategies used while implementing RTI to address declining student achievement scores. Much attention has been paid to RTI since its inception with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 2004, and there has been much interest in schools implementing RTI into their everyday practices to improve student achievement (Burns et al., 2013; Fisher & Frey,

2012). However, many teachers feel that they are underprepared when implementing RTI within the classroom setting. Research has shown that for RTI to be successful there must be supportive leadership from administration, ongoing PD, and teachers should be provided with resources to assist implementation (McKenna et al., 2014). Researchers have also suggested that implementing RTI inappropriately could influence the fidelity of the RTI model implementation, thus assessing the strategies used with the RTI model should be explored (Thomas et al., 2020).

When speaking to teachers at JMS, many felt that they did not have enough guidance from administration in implementing the remediation period. One teacher with multiple years of experience mentioned that she felt that she did not have the tools she needed to implement RTI in the remediation period. Incorporating evidence-based instruction into teachers' methods can increase students' academic achievement (Harlacher, et al., 2010) Many teachers requested more strategies to implement during the remediation period, so administration brought in the district reading specialist. The district reading specialist initially felt that the teachers would not be able to adequately implement the tiers of RTI in the 25-minute remediation period. Despite her reservations, she spent a half day providing training to all ELA teachers at JMS. During that training, the district reading specialist taught teachers how to use the cloze reading strategy. While this strategy is research based and useful in small group settings, the teachers at JMS were still unsure of how to use the strategy with a classroom of 25 or more students. One ELA teacher mentioned that while the cloze reading strategy was a good strategy, she

was unsure of how to implement that with a small group and keep the rest of her students on task during the remediation period.

The teachers at JMS were concerned with their ability to improve literacy instruction in ELA. According to an ELA teacher at JMS, teachers had shown concern with implementing the 25-miute remediation block effectively. More specifically, an ELA teacher stated that the block of time felt awkward and did not flow well from instruction time. While teachers were concerned that the time allotted did not seem to fit with instruction, administration stated that the teachers were allowed fluidity with the time to make it work within the context of the classroom. Administration went on to say that mandating time on how it was to be used was avoided to give teachers flexibility in implementation. Despite their reservations, "teachers are responsible for applying the intervention procedures with fidelity in order to ensure the accuracy of intervention implementation" (Alahmari, 2019, p. 895).

Evidence of the Problem in the Literature

With regards to improving literacy instruction in ELA, teachers are the most important factor (Oliveira et al., 2019). Therefore, it is essential that teachers be given research-based strategies for intervention instruction. The success of RTI also depends on thoughtful assessment of student learning to create thoughtful instruction. Teachers implementing RTI must understand how to assess student learning and create assessments tailored to the students' complex needs as well as be provided with support to provide evidence-based interventions (Alahmari, 2019).

Bandura (1982) found that people undertake and perform with confidence those tasks that they feel themselves as being capable of handling. A sense of agency to complete a task motivates involvement and successful perseverance (Bandura, 1982). As Bandura (1997) noted, “Unless people believe they can produce desired effects by their actions, they have little incentive to act, or to persevere in the face of difficulties” (p. 170). The influences of teachers’ beliefs on their instructional and classroom practices have been considerably supported by many researchers (Ghasembolanda & Hashimb, 2013; Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk-Hoy, 2001). With adequate supports and ongoing PD, teachers may develop a better understanding of which strategies work best when implementing new teaching practices in their classroom.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine teacher perceptions when implementing RTI strategies within the remediation period to improve student literacy achievement. The remediation period was designed for teachers to use 25 minutes a day to provide remediation to students who were struggling and acceleration to those who were on grade level. Since the Common Core State Standards have resulted in unsatisfactory literacy scores, a systematic intervention model is needed (Jaeger, 2016). RTI could be the intervention model that helps close achievement gaps by providing a framework to individualize instruction and improve student achievement if teachers are given the resources and time they need to implement it effectively (Buhain, 2015; Hurley et al., 2017). The intent of this study was to examine teacher perceptions when implementing RTI strategies within ELA classrooms at JMS and determine what supports and resources they may need to consistently improve student achievement.

Definition of Terms

Many terms that were used in this study are used in the field of education and educational literature. These terms are defined in this subsection.

At-risk students: Students who perform below grade level of their counterparts either academically or behaviorally (Vaugh & Fletcher, 2012)

Differentiation: Providing a group of students or individual students with a tailored curriculum to meet their individual academic needs (Tomlinson, 2014).

Fidelity: The degree to which interventions are implemented as designed or planned (Ehlers-Zavala et al., 2010).

Literacy instruction: "The ultimate goal of literacy instruction is to build a student's comprehension, writing skills, and overall skills in communication" (Alber, 2010, p. 1).

Research based: Programs and studies that incorporate suggested strategies or recommendations that have been researched generally and proven to make change (Keller-Margulis, 2012).

RTI: "A systematic data-based method for identifying, defining, and determining students' academic or behavioral difficulties by monitoring student progresses and making decisions about the necessary instructional modifications or intervention intensity, which is based on a three-tiered model" (Little, 2012, pp. 69–70).

Student achievement: "The most common indicator of achievement generally refers to a student's performance in academic areas such as reading, language arts, math, science and history as measured by achievement tests" (Cunningham, 2012, p. 1)

Title I: A federally mandated program that provides funding for "local agencies for individuals who are economically disadvantaged" (Phillips, 2017, p. 1).

Significance of the Study

Low literacy rates can have long-term consequences for students and their communities (Dunwoody, 2017; Rea, 2020). This study addressed a local problem related to a non-Title I school's implementation of a 25-minute RTI remediation block to address the fact that students were scoring below proficiency on literacy assessments. However, teachers were unsure of how to best use this time to improve literacy instruction and struggled to identify and implement strategies to improve literacy instruction. It is important to address the improvement of student literacy in the ELA classroom because literacy drives multiple areas of learning (Hite & McGahy, 2015; Poolman et al. 2017; Tolar et al., 2014). Through this study, educators may understand specific resources and strategies to use when implementing RTI at the secondary level.

The school district that JMS is situated in was facing a budget deficiency over the next 5 years estimated to be around $5 billion. The community has seen a loss of businesses and revenue as corporations move away from the rural location. The current superintendent began making strides to offset this budget deficiency through facility and personnel adjustments. According to Dunn (2018), "Not all members of the educational policy community feel that schools should receive more funding for PD and additional teachers for intervention/assessment programming or to promote learning" (p. 7). This created strain on the classroom teachers because they had fewer support staff and student growth continued to decline. If the 25-minute remediation block proves to be successful,

this could be a budget-friendly way of addressing student achievement without the necessity of hiring additional staff. Instead, those funds could be used to purchase resources for teachers to use during the remediation period.

By identifying ways the remediation block could be successful, it could also be shown an effective way for JMS to implement RTI without the use of a literacy specialist because the school cannot afford one at this time. Due to the forecasted budget issues, JMS has had a loss of teacher allotments. The administration worked to offset this loss with creative scheduling as much as possible, but the students and teachers were still seeing the effects of this loss through a higher workload and larger class sizes.

Effective RTI instruction may lead to positive social change by helping to improve literacy instruction, providing a list of resources and strategies that teachers have identified to work efficiently in the time allotted, and offering support suggestions to administration (Whitfield, 2019). Increased student achievement will increase the morale of both the teachers and the students and could contribute to improving the learning environment at JMS.

Research Questions

I designed this study to address the problem of teachers being unsure of how to best use remediation time to improve literacy instruction and how to identify and implement reading strategies within the time allowed. When students do not perform well on state-mandated assessments all stakeholders are affected, and teachers are placed under more pressure at the local, state, and national level. If schools do not show improvement on their yearly CCRPI scores (i.e., closing achievement gaps, support given

to students, climate rating, etc.), they face higher penalties in the state of Georgia (GADOE, 2015). The concept of constructivism assisted in understanding teachers' teaching styles to understand how they could improve student achievement and if the 25-minute remediation period was useful. The following research questions guided this study:

RQ1: How do teachers implement RTI during the 25-minute remediation period to improve literacy instruction?

RQ2: What resources or support do teachers perceive they need to use RTI more consistently in their classrooms?

Review of the Literature

Teachers must frequently make decisions on how to best implement instruction for each student within their classroom. The conceptual framework that guided this study was the constructivist learning theory. Teachers actively problem solve with students to provide the best education for them. Learners will construct new meaning through critical thinking as well as build on prior knowledge. Teachers that use a constructivist framework in their classroom create student-centered lessons that focus on problem solving, inquiry, higher order thinking skills, independent thinking, and application to construct meaning and ideas (Schweitzer & Stephenson, 2008). The constructivist thinking model guides students through questioning, discovery, and authentic engagement.

I conducted a review of the literature to analyze the current research on teacher perceptions when implementing RTI strategies within the remediation period to improve

literacy instruction using RTI. I searched for peer-reviewed journals, books, and previously published dissertations through the Walden Thoreau, ProQuest, Education Research Complete, ERIC, and Google Scholar databases. The search included the terms: *literacy, literacy instruction, RTI, remediation, teaching literacy, literacy strategies, research-based literacy strategies, literacy-based instruction, PD, history of RTI, motivation, best practices in teaching, extended learning time, middle grades literacy instruction,* and *middle grades RTI implementation.* Some of the literature located was published prior to Walden University's accepted 5-year publication window when the keyword was response to intervention. These articles contained rich information that was significant to the study and valuable to the research. While there have been many studies done investigating various aspects of RTI, there are few studies that reviewed RTI as used in a specified time frame within a secondary setting. The literature is organized in the following subsections: conceptual framework, implementing RTI, the historical context of RTI, and RTI in the middle grades' classroom.

Conceptual Framework

Teachers who effectively utilize RTI in their classroom take induction level knowledge and create a framework to deconstruct lesson plans to identify methods of differentiation while incorporating best practices to meet the needs of all learners (Harris, & Sparkman, 2009; McEneaney et al., 2006). With the various tiers in RTI, teachers have specific protocols to follow, and they must construct and apply various decisions about instruction to match the needs of each student. At each tier, teachers need to adjust the instruction to match the need of each student in intervention. The decision making that

teachers make is responsive and reflective of the progress that each student makes towards learning.

The constructivist learning theory has been the driving force in spearheading the movement towards RTI (Gordon, 2009). Constructivism is a philosophy of learning that is founded on the learner's experiences; within constructivism, it is believed that humans build their own knowledge base of the world around them (Lee, 2012; Meyer, 2009). Constructivism identifies the construction of new knowledge by combining prior knowledge, new information, and readiness to learn. As new information is presented, learners determine which concepts to accept and how to arrange this information with their traditional view of the world (Buchinger, 2012; MacKenzie, 2011). Constructivism has been presented by many theorists, including Piaget, Dewey, Vygotsky, and Bruner, who have all added to the theory. Although each of their philosophies differ, together they define constructivism. Vygotsky (1978) and Bruner (1963) contributed to the foundation of the constructivist theory; however, Piaget (1971) formulated ideas of the theory of constructivism founded upon an understanding on the psychological development of children. Piaget believed that children learned through stages of development and discover and construct meaning through each stage of development. Similarly, Dewey (1938) believed that learning follows doing an action and that education was a social process.

Piaget (1971) believed that learning takes place in multiple stages: the sensorimotor stage, the stage of concrete operations, and the stage of formal operations. The sensorimotor stage takes place from birth to 2 years of age and contains six stages in

which the infants organize reflex actions. The stage of concrete operations is broken into two substages: preoperational thought (ages 2–7) and concrete operations (ages 7–11). During this stage, children move to classifying objects and developing the ability to hold ideas in their mind simultaneously while problem solving is going on. Finally, the stage of formal operations (ages 12–adulthood) is characterized by abstract and logical thinking, complex verbal and problem-solving abilities, and hypothesis formation (Olley, 2020). With Piaget's theory of constructivism, teachers must make a curriculum plan that enhances their students' logical and conceptual growth through considering which stage of development the student is in.

According to Schumaker (2009), all teachers should have a conceptual awareness comprised of the basic theories of learning to provide learning strategies instruction in diverse ways to help at-risk students be successful in the general education curriculum. Schumaker further explained that teachers have the expertise to improve the students' academic skills by helping them to master certain skills before advancing to the next skill or concept; however, teachers should examine their teaching practices to help students gain proficiency.

These basic literacy theories, as they pertain to this descriptive, qualitative project study, provided a practical approach to literacy instruction with RTI. Bartle (2009) identified the characteristics of students who struggle with reading include weaknesses in the five key areas of reading: phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension. Those five key areas of reading are the building blocks that point to academic skill development in literacy (Bartle, 2009). I could have chosen many learning

theories to comprise the conceptual framework of this study, but the principles held within constructivism closely compare to that of the RTI. The RTI model and constructivism beliefs were established as a method to help at-risk students achieve academic success by delivering supplemental instruction based on student data of those unsuccessful in core curriculum (McClearly et al., 2013; U.S. Department of Education, 2007).

The constructivist theory and student learning align closely to RTI. Constructivism may seem contradictory to the philosophy of the RTI model; nonetheless, the constructivist teaching strategies support the RTI theoretical foundation for improving student achievement by using data-based information as the core for academic progress. The principles of RTI could be embraced by school leadership who believe that quality constructivist teaching is part of effective instruction that can result in more students experiencing academic achievement (Aloise et al., 2014)

According to the constructivist model supported by Piaget (1971), Vygotsky (1978), Dewey (1938), and Cambourne (2001), teachers benefit from being in learning settings that deliberately and consciously go beyond mere how-to PD. Johnston (2010) argued effective implementation of Tier 1 intervention requires increasingly expert teachers collecting instructionally useful data on each student as well as their own teaching and constructing useful instruction and productive, purposeful discourse. Through PD, the focus can be on effective instruction, prevention models, and the development of teacher expertise and efficacy. Schools must be able to provide a strong learning community for both children and for teachers (Johnston, 2010). The

constructivist view encourages school leaders to reevaluate their approach to PD as it relates to common terminology and practices. Johnston provided a framework for RTI that included PD and systemic intervention to reveal the significance of effective instructional training and teacher expertise in the context of RTI (Johnston, 2010).

Due to the high demands set forth by the state of Georgia and JMS's school district, Johnston's (2010) framework offered insights into the perceptions of teachers in meeting the needs of all students in the time allotted and their feelings towards implementing RTI during that period to improve student achievement. JMS has had a shift in the student culture over the past 10–15 years that has been difficult for many educators at the school to adjust to. In the past, the school was mostly upper-middle class students with high intrinsic motivation and highly involved parents. However, there has been an increase in low-income, economically disadvantaged students who have moved into the district. The school has also seen higher levels of student apathy and less parental involvement in school activities in recent years. The teachers at JMS have also seen a decrease in test scores with a major decrease in the 2017–2018 school year (GADOE, 2018). This led to the implementation of several initiatives in the 2018–2019 school year, including the 25-minute remediation period.

Review of the Broader Problem

Teachers who are not well trained and/or have fewer opportunities for collaboration may struggle with providing student-centered lessons (Elliott et al., 2016). The amount of training a teacher has can influence the construction of tiered interventions by classroom teachers during the RTI process (Taylor, 2017). Each teacher brings a different skillset to

their classroom regarding teaching students with learning disabilities, using various teaching strategies, motivating diverse learners, and making instructional decisions to meet each student's needs (Corbell et al., 2010).

RTI

The 25-minute remediation period was implemented at JMS with the intent that teachers use this period for RTI to improve literacy instruction. On December 3, 2004 President George W. Bush signed into law the Individuals with Disabilities Educational Improvement Act (2004). Where teachers and administrators were to use IQ achievement to identify children with educational needs, this act implemented the four-tier model of RTI. With RTI's tiered instruction, the nature of the academic intensity changes at each tier with some systems implementing a two-tier model while others implement a four-tier model (Fuchs, 2005). The state of Georgia implements a three-tiered system in which teachers are expected to deliver high quality core instruction at Tier I and evidence-based interventions and supports in Tiers II and III (GADOE, 2019). These tiers help distinguish between students with specific learning disabilities and students whose learning disabilities could be addressed with targeted instruction. For some, the implementation of RTI and the use of tiered interventions assists educators with their commitment to helping all students succeed; however, for others, RTI is one more change in the field of education. The topic has undergone much scrutiny since its inception and has been the topic of heated debates.

According to Milburn et al. (2017), a 2005 study revealed that 8% of U.S. students suffered from a learning disability, which prompted research on early

intervention models such as RTI. RTI provides targeted, small-group instruction in Tier II and further individualized instruction at Tier III. Many students who currently receive intervention within RTI models receive this targeted instruction due to reading difficulties (Philippakos & FitzPatrick, 2018). Prior to the introduction of RTI into the field of education, students were identified as having a learning disability based on the IQ-discrepancy approach. This approach was also known as the "wait to fail" approach because it could not identify students at risk until they had failed in a specific area (Fletcher, 2006). This created problems because the early intervention window was missed, and the focus was on referral services and not assessment and effective reading programming (Mather & Kaufman, 2006). Reports examining special education practices found that a student should be identified as learning disabled and provided special education services only if the instructional program offered to the student in the regular education classroom is adequate for teaching academic skills to most students but not the student being evaluated (U.S. Department of Education, 2002). For these reasons, the RTI model was created to provide tiered instruction that meets each student's needs and is provided as soon as a need is identified.

With the RTI model, teachers are to provide instruction that is tiered to meet the needs of each individual child. Framed as identification, RTI focuses on the qualities of the student, but framed as a prevention, it focuses on the qualities of instruction in relation to the student (Johnston, 2010). Students are provided with interventions within the classroom, and ongoing progress monitoring takes place to measure changes in student achievement. If a student is not showing growth with the use of an intervention,

then the teacher will increase the intensity of intervention until progress is made. The three tiers of RTI are applied differently based on the needs of individual students. Tier I interventions are applied in the regular education classroom and include the implementation of the core curriculum with fidelity and the use of differentiation to meet student needs. At Tier II, students receive more intensive interventions that can include small group instruction outside of the regular classroom setting and student participation in a research-based program that targets the student's needs. Tier III instruction provides even more intensive interventions, including small group instruction, a research-based program, or a combination of both interventions up to twice daily. Students can also move between the tiers in both a progressive and regressive manner (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006, 2007).

While there is plenty of research on implementing RTI in the elementary classroom, there is very little research at the middle school level (Vaught & Fletcher, 2012). However, middle school may be the final opportunity to remediate students who struggle with literacy. Even though evidence-based literacy interventions that are implemented with fidelity have been shown to work at the middle school level (Wanzek et al., 2013), there have been performance differences reported in students who receive intervention and students who are typically achieving students (Roberts et al., 2013). This shows that while there is a strong understanding of implementing interventions at the elementary level, there is not enough information for implementation with fidelity at the middle school level.

One reason that educators struggle to implement RTI with fidelity at the middle school level is a lack of PD. According to Castillo et al. (2018), educators need to have a firm understanding of all components of RTI to implement it with fidelity; yet many educators lack the necessary training. In addition to preservice training, it is critical that effective in-service PD is provided to educators. Despite the importance placed on PD in the literature (Kratochwill et al., 2007; O'Connor & Freeman, 2012), there is not enough research to clearly state how well PD has been used to build educators' capacity to implement RTI (Castillo et al., 2017).

PD

Teachers are continually trained on new topics throughout each school year. Most of this training revolves around learning new strategies and tools to implement in their classrooms. When implementing an RTI program, it is imperative that teachers participate in ongoing PD throughout the implementation process (O'Connor & Freeman, 2012). Research has shown that when implementing PD for RTI, structured activities should be included that directly assess educator's beliefs (Castillo et al., 2015; O'Connor & Freeman, 2012). Researchers have also indicated that implementing RTI using traditional, one-time PD models will not promote learning that lasts for educators attending the PD (Gulamhussein, 2013). Instead, PD should be comprehensive, sustained, and intensive in its approach to improve teacher and administrator effectiveness on increasing student achievement (Castillo et al., March, 2018).

According to O'Connor and Freeman (2012), many school districts have begun using RTI in the last decade, but not all are seeing students make adequate progress. This

has prompted some schools to feel lost in their RTI journey while others are moving towards giving up using it entirely. In many situations where schools are struggling to initiate or sustain momentum in their RTI journey, “there is not a coherent support structure built at the more macro level of the school system—the district level” (O’Connor & Freeman, 2012, p. 297).

PD is essential when implementing a new program or strategy in the classroom. For RTI communication and shared decision making is essential (Haager & Mahdavi, 2007). Classroom teachers need sustained support in their efforts to monitor student progress and determine effectiveness of instruction, in determining how to use daily observational data to identify modifications that may be required (Richards et al., 2007), and determining how to address time management, especially in upper grades where departmental organizations can constrain instructional schedules and limit opportunities for individualizing instruction (Walker-Dalhouse & Risko, 2009).

Intervention implementation

Many approaches to the implementation of RTI are addressed in the current literature (Duffy & Scala, 2012). Once a student has been identified as needing more intensive interventions within RTI, teachers can begin implementing interventions to meet the student’s needs. However, students must have received quality instruction before they can be identified as having a reading problem (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2008). When teachers provide effective instruction at Tier I of RTI, there will be fewer referrals to Tiers II and III (Hall, 2008). Clay (1987) suggested that many students identified as having a learning disability in reading qualified for this classification because early

instruction was not sufficient to their instructional needs. When Tier I interventions are implemented effectively it is suggested that approximately 80% of students should show adequate growth within the core curriculum (Howard, 2009). With RTI implementation it is imperative that the interventions be reliable, accurate, and easy for educators to implement within the RTI framework. If educators struggle with selecting, organizing, and implementing interventions, the RTI process is likely to be unsuccessful (Daly et al., 2007).

Research on RTI implementation is focused on putting theory into practice (Hollenbeck, 2007). Brain-based learning, the use of multiple intelligences, and direct instruction are necessary for teachers to effectively differentiate instruction and determine which skills students have acquired. At the Tier I level, teachers use their own schema to construct effective implementations of interventions. However, in today's classrooms, the needs of some student will exceed the knowledge level of the general education teacher and supports are not provided for neither the student nor the teacher to effectively meet these needs. Due to a lack of trainings, teachers are not prepared to implement the tiered reading strategies that students will need to succeed in the regular education classroom (Walsh et al., 2006). The reliability and validity of the decision-making process identifying appropriate instructional interventions is an issue with the RTI process (Otaiba et al., 2011). One study found that educators in the general education classroom identified needing improvement in writing measurable goals, utilizing consistent progress monitoring data collection and analysis to shape instructional interventions (Martinez & Young, 2011). To decide which interventions are needed, teachers must know how to

deconstruct the data that is collected from formative assessments and universal screeners. Also, teachers should be able to create a plan of action prior to the implementation of an intervention.

ELT

With RTI, it is imperative that interventions are reliable, accurate, and easy to implement. When teachers deviate from intended procedures, the curriculum and data collection can be affected. Evaluating the adequacy of general education classroom interventions is essential prior to determining if more intensive interventions are needed.

Extended Learning Time (ELT), or extended learning opportunities, include a broad range of programs that provide students with the opportunity for academic enrichment and/or supervised activities beyond the school day (National Education Association, 2008). According to Roda (2017), there is a current trend in education, especially urban areas, in which the school day is extended to attempt to close the achievement gap between low income and high-income areas. According to The National Center on Time and Learning (NCTL) database of schools with ELT, there are 982 K-8 charter and traditional public schools across the country that expand their day by at least 30 minutes (NCTL, 2015). ELT was also a component of Obama's 2010 ESEA reauthorization proposal and is an approved strategy for schools to receive federal funds for School Improvement Grants. This implementation comes from the idea that low-income students do not receive the same access to afterschool tutoring programs as high-income students and assumes that giving students more time in school will provide more learning opportunities for students (Malone, 2011). While the focus school in this study

was not extending the school day, they were removing time from science and social studies classes to add additional time to math and ELA classes.

With the increased pressure placed on schools with state mandated testing, many schools have resorted to adjusting student schedules to provide more instruction. On the one hand, Cohen-Vogel et al. (2013) argued "test-based accountability has penetrated schools in ways few of us would have imagined a decade ago. Indeed, schools- particularly those at the lower end of the performance spectrum- have changed remarkably in this climate" (p. 131). Many schools have adjusted schedules, curriculum, staffing, and many feel that today's teachers are encouraged to "teach to the test" and moving the higher performing teachers to the grade levels that are tested (Cohen-Vogel, 2011; Grissom et al., 2014). Many schools that are receiving pressure to improve student achievement on state mandated tests have turned to extending instruction for lower performing students in subjects that are tested (Midkiff & Cohen-Vogel, 2015).

Extending the school day is also supported by the federal government. The Government Accountability Office released a 2015 report that highlights the School Improvement Grants (SIG) fund. This fund, "with an average 3-year grant of $2.6 million, is the only Education program that provides funds specifically to establish extended learning time in schools" (Nowicki, 2015, pg. 2). The SIG fund was created in 2002 and helps provides funds to the lowest-performing schools in the United States. Congress has greatly increased the amount of money available in the fund from $125 million in 2007 when the fund first became available to $3.5 billion in the year 2009. By 2013 the fund had dropped to $506 million a year and remained at that level through

2015. Although there are various programs that provide funding for schools to increase achievement, the SIG fund is the only fund that provides money specifically to establish extended learning time (Nowicki, 2015).

Extending the school day is not a new concept and in fact has been in discussion by education lawmakers since 1894 when William T. Harris urged congress to increase the amount of time students spent in school. The discussion was then brought up a century later when lawmakers changed the school calendar to include 180, 6-hour days. Even with that change however, some lawmakers believed that targeted groups should have adjusted periods of time to improve learning. This led to block learning for core areas and the traditional 50-minute periods for others (Midkiff & Cohen-Vogel, 2015). With the inception of the common core state standards, extending the learning day was again brought up when states began feeling urged to enroll students in extended periods of learning time if they were identified as “not on track” (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010).

With extended learning time schools can include it in the school day or create after school programs that provide additional support. According to Koury (2013), the most widely used approaches include extending the school year, extending the school day, or offering after school programs or summer learning programs. Many reviews found that the use of extended learning time is beneficial to students and extended learning programs are four times more likely to produce positive student outcomes and studies have shown that extended learning is especially useful for students who are

economically disadvantaged, low performing, or of a racial/ethnic minority group (Koury, 2013).

At the focus school in this study, extended learning time was given to all math and ELA classes to provide targeted remediation or acceleration for students when needed. The classes were extended from 75-minute blocks to 100-minute blocks. This removed time from science and social studies however returning them to 50-minute periods. This instruction took place during the school day and did not create an extension of the traditional school day.

Implications

This study has implications for academic and social change. Informing literacy teachers on the best practices in improving student literacy in the ELA classroom. A possible project that could stem from this research would include PD on specific RTI strategies that teachers could use in their classroom during the 25-minute remediation period to target literacy instruction at the secondary level. As O'Reilly et al. (2012) pointed out, RTI is typically used with younger students. An ongoing PD plan could be developed to guide teachers in using effective literacy instruction with secondary students. The findings of the research would determine the strategies that were studied during the PD. Another possible project that could stem from this research is a position paper. The project study could present the findings and argue for or a focus for PD. Curriculum revisions as well as schedule adjustments may also be suggested because of this study. These curriculum revisions could include effective literacy strategies and RTI strategies that are integrated into teacher lessons. Each of these possibilities could

enhance the PD for the school as well as the district and could help meet the needs of the teachers and students.

Summary

The specific problem that prompted this study was that student literacy scores were declining at a non-Title I school, and teachers were struggling to improve literacy instruction in ELA. In 2015, Georgia renamed their ELA and mathematics standards to the Georgia Standards of Excellence. These standards are similar to the Common Core State Standards and the expectation is that by using these standards Georgia's students will be able to compete with students nationally and internationally. However, students have struggled to improve test scores in certain areas of the state such as the focus school (GADOE, 2019).

Section 1 includes the CCRPI index scores for the focus school and the school district to show that students were not making adequate improvements. Section 1 also includes information about the problem of low-test scores, teachers concern about implementing the 25-minute remediation period, related literature, and suggested outcomes of the study. In Section 2, I present the qualitative methodology, the design of the research, how participants were selected, and the focus of the study. In Section 2 I also discuss how relationships were established with participants, addresses ethical concerns, describes the process of data collections and analysis of the findings, and the limitations expected from the study are also discussed.

Section 2: The Methodology

In Section 1, I validated that student literacy scores were declining at a non-Title I school, and teachers were struggling to improve literacy instruction in ELA; therefore, I decided to examine what RTI implementation tools teachers believed were effective strategies to improve student literacy achievement. A basic qualitative design is a thorough examination of one setting or single subject (Creswell, 2012). In this qualitative study, I identified the perceptions of teachers related to using RTI in the 25-minute remediation block. Qualitative research is a process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem (Draper, 2004). Using this method, the researcher builds a complex, holistic picture; analyzes words; reports detailed views of informants; and conducts the study in a natural setting (Creswell, 2012). These aspects made this approach the most suitable for this project study. The qualitative method was used in this study because I conducted a detailed investigation of a single group from within the context of a limited system (see Creswell, 2012; Merriam, 2009; Stake, 2005). Because qualitative research concentrates on how individuals make sense of their experiences (Merriam, 2009), using a qualitative study to describe the perceptions of teachers regarding their experience with the remediation period was appropriate.

A descriptive research design was most appropriate to examine teacher perceptions when implementing RTI strategies within the remediation period to improve student literacy achievement within the ELA classrooms at JMS, a middle school located in Georgia (see Creswell, 2012). I used a descriptive design to “describe behaviors and to

gather people's perceptions, opinions, attitudes, and beliefs about a current issue in education" (Lodico et al., 2010, p. 12). I gathered data for this study from teacher interviews. The following research questions were the basis for developing interview questions for the teachers:

RQ1: How do teachers implement RTI during the 25-minute remediation period to improve literacy instruction?

RQ2: What resources or support do teachers perceive that they need to use RTI more consistently in their classrooms?

A qualitative approach was appropriate to capture participants perspectives about the perceived, potential influences of the remediation block on improving student literacy achievement (see Creswell, 2012). I selected key informants to participate in semi structured interviews, and the interview questions were open ended and probing to gather in-depth experiences (see Yin, 2014).

In this methodology section, I detail why a descriptive qualitative study was the best way to approach this study. I also describe why specific participants were chosen, how the relationship between the researcher and participant was established, how I gained access to participants, and how interviews were conducted. Measures that were used to protect participants from harm will also be discussed. The section also includes a description of the instruments used for data collection.

Qualitative Research Design and Approach

I used the qualitative methodology to provide an intensive description and analysis of teacher perceptions, as suggested by Merriam (2002). Because individual

perceptions were sought from each participant, a qualitative study was in order, which includes extensive data collection (Creswell, 2012). A descriptive research design was employed because it was best aligned with the goal of this study, which was to examine teacher perceptions on the use of the remediation block to improve student literacy achievement in ELA classrooms. The descriptive design allows for detailed examinations of individuals, groups, programs, or activities to create thick and rich descriptions that may yield a deeper understanding of a phenomenon (Creswell, 2012).

I investigated a modern phenomenon (i.e., teacher's perceptions of their self-efficacy in implementing RTI in ELA classrooms at JMS with the resources they had been provided and what resources teachers believe they need to be more successful) and limited the participants to a manageable number for a qualitative study. Yin (2014) used three salient points to differentiate quantitative and qualitative research that validate why a qualitative design was most appropriate for this study. First, a qualitative study allowed me to explore the problem to gain a deep understanding of the problem through enabling thick, rich narrative data to be generated. Second, using a qualitative approach allowed me to objectively view perceptions of the teachers. Finally, a qualitative design enabled the teachers' perceptions and responses to be analyzed until meaning emerged, allowing knowledge about the problem to be derived from the data.

When determining the type of design to use for this study, there were several things to consider. Grounded theory involves the construction of a theory using data that has previously been gathered and typically begins with a question (see Merriam, 2009). Within grounded theory, the data or questions lead the study with a focus on a process,

action, or interaction involving multiple individuals. The goal of this study was not to develop a theory; therefore, grounded theory was not a suitable fit for this study. Narrative research involves exploring the life of an individual and consists of telling stories of individuals and their experiences (see Merriam, 2009). Since the current study did not involve having the participants tell a narrative of an experience, narrative research was not an appropriate design. Phenomenology focuses on understanding the essence of an experience (see Merriam, 2009). This involves studying multiple individuals who have a shared experience. While I was studying several teachers with similar experiences, phenomenology was not a suitable research design for the current study because I was not attempting to understand the essence of an experience.

The quantitative method was not the correct approach for this study because it would not have allowed for an explanation and clarification of the meanings related to different aspects of students' experiences relative to academic achievement and teaching and learning (see Sanjari et al., 2014). I conducted this study to obtain an in-depth understanding of an educational process; therefore, the best design for this study was a basic qualitative study (see Merriam, 2009). The interest in this study was in the individual case, not in the particular mode of inquiry used (see Stake, 1994). Only descriptive data including frequencies and percentages of responses for each category of RTI activities were used to report the results and no statistical analysis was done. The collection and analysis of statistics required for quantitative research (see Creswell, 2012) would not have been a good match for this study because my intent was to understand teacher's beliefs on the remediation period. Quantitative research uses numerical data for

statistical analysis, and, in some cases, this method is inflexible in using observable phenomena because it oftentimes uses math or computations to report data. Quantitative researchers discount the value of rich, professional descriptive summary as seen in qualitative case studies (Lodico et al., 2010). Therefore, the quantitative method was not suitable for this study.

Participants

I conducted individual interviews with 10 educators at JMS. At the time of the study, the participants currently taught or had previously taught ELA in the middle grades at JMS. I used purposeful sampling to recruit participants because of the need to interview participants who had taught ELA and could be deemed information rich (see Creswell, 2012). Creswell (2012) suggested that purposeful sampling allows participants to be selected purposefully to gain a better understanding of what is being researched or studied. Sampling is a process that allows information to be gathered about the experiences of the teachers at the school who are selected to participate (Khan, 2014b). Purposeful sampling allowed for individuals who had specific knowledge of RTI and the use of the remediation period to be selected for participation in this study (see Lodico et al., 2010). The criteria used to select the participants included teaching at least one ELA class at JMS and being employed at the school for 2 years or more. Purposeful sampling provided a sample that could be deeply investigated to understand how low literacy achievement is influenced by instructional and curricular factors (see Merriam, 2009).

I interviewed participants until data saturation was reached. This takes place when no new information was provided from the participants or themes become redundant (see

Creswell, 2012). The sample size was contingent on the number of teachers who teach ELA at JMS and based on the study being qualitative and not quantitative. Creswell (2012) stated that using a smaller sample size could be reasonable because qualitative research is more about quality than quantity. Thorough descriptions of the JMS schoolteacher experiences were provided to allow for the transfer of findings to similar settings.

Gaining Access to Participants

Upon the study being approved by my committee at Walden University and receiving Institutional Review Board approval (Approval #01-07-21-0739590), I secured consent to conduct the study from administrators within the school and the district after meeting with them to discuss the project study and the sampling procedures that would be used. Potential participants were then contacted via email so I could explain the intent and purpose of the study as well as how the study could benefit their instructional practices and the student achievement at the school. In this email, I provided teachers with an invitation to participate in the study along with the informed consent form. This invitation also included information about protecting the identities of the participants and maintaining their confidentiality. I did not contact any of the teachers at JMS until after permission was obtained from the school administrator.

Once potential participants returned the consent forms as instructed, I then contacted them via email to schedule a time for an individual interview at their convenience. The school day lasts from 7:30 a.m.–3:30 p.m. Monday through Friday, so all interviews took place before or after those hours. All interviews took place off campus

to protect the confidentiality of the participants and to create a more comfortable environment. If in-person interviews were unavailable, interviews were held via an internet-based format, such as Zoom or Google Hangouts. Interviews took place at a public place or in conference rooms at the local library to ensure the participants' confidentiality. I scheduled the interviews to not interfere with the participants' instructional time, and emails were sent 2 days prior to the scheduled time to remind participants about the scheduled interview. This allowed participants to have the opportunity to reschedule the interview if needed.

Establishing Researcher/Participant Working Relationship

The relationship between the researcher and the participants can range from detached and impersonal to collaborative and friendly (Lodico et al., 2010). I had worked with most of the participants for approximately 4 years without any problems or negative interactions; therefore, I expected that my relationship with the participants would continue to be collaborative and the participants would be open to communication. During the interviews, I engaged the participants in discussions on improving declining student achievement through the use of the 25-minute remediation period, their perceptions of using RTI during that period, and the need to find alternative methods and/or resources to improve student literacy scores. During these discussions, I remained neutral to allow participants to feel comfortable. It was also important that I remained receptive to their ideas and alert to the fact that the relationship between a researcher and potential participants may either positively or negatively evolve over the course of a research project (see McGinn, 2008). I followed McGinn's (2008) suggestion that the

researcher should adhere to the needs of the participants with respect to their comfort and availability.

I attempted to remain true to participants' own words in the interviews and respected their views in hopes of demonstrating a neutral position to encourage an engaging relationship to reduce bias in the conversation. To avoid researcher bias, I also invited participants to review the results to ensure that my interpretations were representative of their beliefs. Ethical considerations can surface from the nature of researcher/participant relationships, which were addressed by a lack of supervisory position on the part of the researcher and the participants' ability to discontinue their participation at any given time. The participants were also given the opportunity to review their transcribed interview and discuss any point that they disagreed with. This also allowed them to further the discussion if they deemed it necessary. I expected to receive candid and realistic responses from the participants with which to explore their perceptions about literacy instruction within ELA classrooms at JMS.

Data Collection

The main source of data was collected from 10 literacy teachers at the focus school. One interview was done with each participant specific to the focus school and interviews focused on their perceptions of the phenomenon being investigated. Upon approval, interviews took place after school hours or at the suitability of the participants. The interviews were conducted, individually, off campus of the focus school at times that worked best for the potential participants. If it became necessary, plans were made to arrange interviews at another time or location that was comfortable for the participant.

Also, due to COVID-19 restrictions, virtual interview options such as Google Hangouts were utilized if needed. Relationships established among potential participants began with sharing common experiences and discussing topics such as student achievement. The tentative interview schedule that was utilized was based on the master schedule for JMS during the 2020-2021 school year. If the teacher preferred, the schedule would accommodate the participants by meeting at a time of their choice that would not interrupt instructional practices during the school day. Six of the interviews took place via Google Meet due to the various scheduling needs. These interviews took place outside of school hours, mostly in the evenings during the week. However, four participants agreed to be interviewed in person and the interviews took place at a local coffee shop off campus.

By seeking perceptions from educators, the intent was to examine teacher perceptions of the use of RTI within the remediation period to improve student literacy. I developed the interview questions to provide awareness of the problem of low literacy scores and understand teacher's perceptions of the use of the remediation period in improving student achievement. I recorded and transcribed all interviews.

Interviews

Interview questions were constructed to examine teacher perceptions of the use of RTI within the remediation period to improve student literacy. The interview questions were developed by me to provide awareness into the problem of students scoring below proficiency on literacy assessments and teachers being unsure of how to best utilize the 25-minute remediation time to improve literacy instruction. Each interview question

sought to align with one or more of the research questions listed above by determining teacher perceptions in using RTI to improve literacy instruction and/or discussing which resources or supports teachers feel would help them implement RTI more consistently in their classrooms.

At the beginning of each interview, the topic was introduced along with reviewing the contents of the informed consent document the potential participants submitted prior to the interview. Interview data of participants were collected from one interview per participant, scheduled for 45-60 minutes each. The one-on-one interviews were conducted to understand each participant's perceptions about literacy instruction within the ELA classrooms at JMS.

Merriam (2009) also stated that qualitative research is designed to meet rigor and trustworthiness that contains rich data, and the use of multiple interviews can ensure that the participants are the proprietors of the knowledge and experience as it regards the topic being investigated. Participants were asked for their permission to record all interview sessions for later transcription. The interviews allowed me to achieve a better understanding of the teacher perceptions of their literacy instruction within the ELA classrooms at JMS.

Sufficiency of Data Collection

Participants were selected to provide perspectives that were used to answer the research questions. I considered data collection sufficient when data saturation was reached. To answer research questions, I collected data through interviews and analyzed them repeatedly until no new data emerges or data saturation was reached (Yin, 2014).

Leko (2014) suggested that it can be effective and economical to conduct interviews with only a few key informants. By using a small group of participants, it allowed for more in-depth information versus capturing a wide range of information that did not support the research question (see Leko, 2014). I selected a sample of 10 participants since as the number of participants increase, the probability of providing an in-depth analysis diminishes (see Creswell, 2012). I gathered information from the participants until the information became repetitive and no new information emerged that contributed to answering the research questions (see Creswell, 2012; see Merriam, 2009).

System for Tracking Data

I audio recorded all interviews with the use of the Google Hangouts audio recording function to ensure that the actual comments of the potential were captured, and these recordings were then transcribed for reference. This also allowed me to give participants my full attention during the interviews. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym that was used as data were collected (see Creswell, 2012). I used a journal to document key points that were made during the interview.

Role of the Researcher

I was a teacher at the focus school for more than 4 years and had various leadership roles while employed there. I have been employed in the school district that the focus school resides for more than 9 years and worked at various schools within the district. In those years, I held the roles of department chair, gifted department lead teacher, response to intervention coordinator, principal advisory team member, teacher

representative for multiple Local School Governance Teams, member of the writing team for the middle grades ELA curriculum, and member of a district writing committee.

I have never held any supervisory position that included evaluations of any of the participants in the study. To ensure that no biases occurred, a peer debriefer was selected who did not hold a supervisory position at the focus school, had more than 10 years of teaching experience, and multiple years of experience with RTI, including a certification in Student Support Team. The peer debriefer also signed a confidentiality agreement to ensure confidentiality for themself as well as the participants of the study.

Data Analysis

After conducting the last interview, I began transcribing the audio recordings and proceed with data analysis. During this process, each interview was being transcribed, and participants' comments were arranged to survey for emerging themes for coding by identifying certain words, phrases, topics, and ways of thinking (see Creswell, 2012; see Merriam, 2009). Based on these coded interviews, patterns of information or categories of information emerged. From the patterns and categories of information, themes were identified. When analyzing the interviews, I made notes in a reflective journal to record my observations from the interviews and record new questions that emerged that I found interesting and informative to the focus of the study. This began the coding process which also led to the building of categories. As described by Creswell (2012), I used the language of the potential participants (i.e., small group instruction, cloze reading, etc.) to support identified themes. The analysis process followed an inductive reasoning method (see Yin, 2014) to generate, gather, and record the data that were collected. This process

entailed organizing, transcribing, analyzing, and interpreting data to discover meanings (see Yin, 2014). To examine teacher perceptions about implementing RTI strategies within the remediation period to improve student literacy scores at JMS, a descriptive summary was composed to identify commonalities. The components of constructivism and RTI that guide the coding involved synthesizing and summarizing information that related to the framework that occurred during the interviews. In this process, I allowed the data to guide me to organize and code the data as well as drive the basic structure of the coding system. However, I established a list of pre-set codes from the conceptual framework (Appendix C) and my preexisting knowledge of RTI prior to beginning the coding process.

I used Google Docs to transcribe interview transcripts and then reviewed the transcripts against the original recordings and journal notes to confirm accuracy of the transcription. Once this was completed and accuracy was ensured, I copied the data into Google Sheets with the responses for each interview question in one column for coding. This allowed for easy identification of similar words and phrases. I also used the search tool to identify similar words and phrases across interview questions. As similar words and phrases were identified, I coded similar words and phrases using different color text. I used thematic analysis to review the coded words and phrases. By color coding the text it allowed me to identify themes that emerged from the interview transcripts. Once the codes emerged, I categorized them into the major themes that I discovered. These were added to a table which I created on a Google Doc.

I used thematic analysis to review the coded words and phrases. Having the text in different colors helped me identify themes that emerged. I reviewed words and phrases multiple times and adjusted the font color to identify similarity of text. I then categorized the initial codes from the interviews into themes. As I identified similar words and phrases, the words and phrases were added to a table that I created using Google Docs. I used text segment coding, which involved using words and phrases to correlate sentences and paragraphs and in vivo coding, that included coding of participants' exact words to analyze interview data (see Creswell, 2012). I then used text segment coding to review previously color-coded groups of words or phrases. To code the interviews, I copied the responses into a Google Sheet with the interview questions serving as the column headings. This allowed each participants response to be aligned in one column to make it easier to identify words and phrases. Once all responses were transferred to the Google Sheet, I read and reread each response to identify key words or phrases. This process of reducing larger chunks was completed for each of the interview questions (see Yin, 2014). I was then able to use the search tool to search for those key words and phrases in other interview question responses. As the words or phrases were identified, I color coded them throughout the document. This process was repeated until all responses were read with key words or phrases identified and color coded. Each word or phrase that was identified was color coded using a different color for similar occurrences.

Using the filter feature in Google Sheets, I selected the color coded words and phrases and copied the text into another sheet in the document with each colored phrase

being copied in one column. Since I used a deductive approach, codes and themes were cross referenced with a priori codes but were identified during the transcription of the raw data (see Creswell, 2012). While there are many techniques to code and display data to identify themes, researchers must use a method that make connections with the data meaningful to them and the reader (see Creswell, 2012). I created and coded subcategories of each research question with a different color. Creswell (2012) and Yin (2014) asserted that as data are analyzed, subthemes will emerge.

Merriam (2009) stressed that member checks are invaluable to a study and can also aid in identifying any biases by soliciting feedback from the participants based on emerging patterns and accuracy of the interviews. By using member checks, misinterpretations and misunderstandings can be avoided which establishes credibility of the research. Member checks also assist with identifying inconsistencies, concerns, and allows for accurateness through checking with participants which should take place within 14 days of completion (see Merriam, 2009). The initial findings from the coding process were emailed to participants for them to review. Participants were then asked to give input about points that they may agree with or disagree with as well as expand on any points that they feel needed expansion. This was done to ensure accuracy, fairness, and to avoid any misinterpretations.

To establish confirmability, a reflective journal was used to sensitize me to prejudices and subjectivities while also more fully informing me on the impact of the influences on the credibility of the research outcomes (see Roller, 2012). Researcher reflexivity refers to the examination of one's own beliefs and practices during the

research process and how these may have influenced the research. Researcher reflexivity ensured that no bias existed in the research. While reviewing data I considered how my conduct during the interviews could possibly influence the outcome of the interviews, as well as how my beliefs and expectations could influence my interpretation of what was being said by the interviewee. Finally, to establish transferability, thick descriptions were used to provide a detailed account of the data collection process.

Discrepant data, or data that does not agree with responding themes, would have been reported in the findings of the study. However, no discrepancies arose during the data analysis process. By examining possible bias upfront, I was able to avoid unknowingly integrating them into my data analysis. This along with the peer debriefer and member checking prevented researcher bias as well as provided opportunity to explore alternative viewpoints of the participants during the interview process.

Data Analysis Results

There were two research questions guiding this study that focused on identifying teacher implementation of the 25-minute remediation period. The interview protocols that I developed were used to capture rich, thick descriptions of data that would assist in answering the research questions to identify how to dissolve the identified problem in the focus school (see Creswell, 2012; see Yin, 2014). The focus school was facing the dilemma of declining literacy scores on the end-of-the-year Georgia Milestones assessment. Using the data from the interview questions to answer the research questions will provide perspectives from the voices of those at the focus school to assist with addressing the problem overshadowing the district (see Creswell, 2012).

During the process of analysis, data were organized, reorganized, and categorized to reach theme saturation and determine the themes. The following research questions were used to guide the analysis of data:

RQ1: How do teachers implement RTI during the 25-minute remediation period to improve literacy instruction?

RQ2: What resources or support do teachers perceive that they need to use RTI more consistently in their classrooms?

Findings

The problem of this qualitative study is that student literacy scores were declining at a non-Title I school, and teachers were struggling to improve literacy instruction in ELA. JMS has identified a 25-minute remediation period as a solution for improving student literacy rates within their building. However, there were still a large number of students who were not showing adequate growth in relation to their peers across the state. The remediation time was implemented to allow teachers to implement RTI within the time frame as well as provide acceleration to those students who were performing on or above grade level.

Consequently, the aim of this study was to explore perceptions of teachers regarding their implementation of the 25-minute remediation period. I utilized the constructivism learning theory explained by Piaget, Vygotsky, Dewey, and Cambourne as the conceptual framework for the study as it outlined principles associated with human learning. Constructivism is “a collection of perspectives that share the common assumption that learning is the construction of meaning from experience” (Merriam &

Bierema, 2014, p. 36). The actions outlined in the constructivism theory align with the strategies that teachers are using within the framework of RTI; therefore, if utilized teachers may have the best opportunity to improve their implementation of RTI.

Teacher Demographics

Interviews were conducted with 10 teachers; all were currently teaching or have previously taught using the 25-minute remediation period at the focus school. Of the group, only two of the participants no longer work in the focus school. The group averaged 18 years teaching experience. All the teachers had experience teaching English at the secondary level of at least 2 years or more. Teacher 10 was the exception to this rule. Although teacher 10 only had one official year as an educator at the focus school, they had spent the previous school year as a student teacher in an ELA classroom at JMS. Due to this giving them 2 years working in the 25-minute remediation period setting, I decided to include them as a study participant. Some teachers also had special education backgrounds.

Table 1

Demographics of JMS ELA Teachers

Pseudonym	Number of years as a teacher	Number of years teaching at JMS	Number of Years with ELA experience
Teacher 1	15	4	15
Teacher 2	26	10	15
Teacher 3	28	4	20
Teacher 4	15	3	15
Teacher 5	15	4	15
Teacher 6	20	20	20
Teacher 7	25	20	5
Teacher 8	3	3	3
Teacher 9	33	25	33

Teacher 10	2	2	2

Results for Research Question 1

The first research question (RQ1) sought to capture how teachers were implementing RTI within the 25-minute period at the focus school. The following themes emerged during the coding and analysis of the data: fluidity, student needs, and small group instruction. Table 3 shows three themes that emerged from seeking to understand the perceptions of teachers regarding implementing RTI within the remediation period.

Table 2

Themes Identified from Data Analysis for Research Question 1

Research Question	Data Source	Themes
Describe some of the ways you try to improve student literacy in your classroom?	Interview	Teacher instruction based on student needs
Prior to the remediation period, how did you approach improving student learning in your classroom?	Interview	Fluidity of implementation
Please describe how you initially approached implementing the 25-minute remediation period.	Interview	Teacher instruction based on student needs
How do you currently implement the 25-minute remediation period?	Interview	Small group instruction Teacher instruction based on student needs
Do you implement the 25-minute remediation period the same each day?	Interview	Fluidity of implementation

Theme 1: Fluidity of implementation

An emergent theme regarding implementation was the need for fluidity. All the teachers interviewed mentioned that they did not follow a set schedule when implementing the 25-minute remediation period. Teacher 1 stated that, “I do feel like I have time to meet with kids, talk about strengths, talk about some weaknesses, and then double back and say, ok this is what we said we are going to work on.” All teachers interviewed discussed that they use the time differently to meet the needs of their students.

Teacher 5 mentioned, “We did a ton of the small group pull outs with our inclusion students,” and Teacher 2 stated, “I have a schedule, but I still like to adjust as needed based on what we are doing in class that week.” Teacher 4 discussed that she uses the time for read-aloud and work time, and Teacher 7 discussed that his use of the time changed frequently based on student needs and curriculum needs. Several teachers discussed that they did not use the time as a “specified small group” time, like was suggested by the administration, but that the time was fluid and mostly based on student needs.

Theme 2: Teacher instruction based on student needs

A major theme that emerged from the interviews was that the teachers based their day-to-day implementation on student need. For some students this included targeted, Tier 2 instruction and for others it meant providing enrichment opportunities. Teacher 2 stated that she creates “small groups that rotate between enrichment opportunities and meeting with me to reteach, etc.” and Teacher 1 stated that she is able to “meet with

students on an individualized basis and help them with things they may have missed, need a little more information on, or maybe need to be pushed a little further."

This theme emerged from interviews with each of the participants in response to several of the interview questions. Overwhelmingly the participants felt that the needs of the students were what drove the implementation of the 25-minute remediation period. This included individualized student needs as well as curriculum-based student needs. Teacher 1 stated,

> "I have time to meet with kids, talk about strengths, talk about some weaknesses, and then double back and say, ok this is what we said we are going to work on…I do have time to reteach things, like especially grammar concepts that I feel like they got and then the quiz says they didn't get it. I have a chance to double back, and call out those 8 kids, and re-teach. I do feel like, although it's flexible and they don't force a super rigid structure with it, I do feel like I have the time that I need, when I need it."

Teacher 8 stated that "as a teacher you have to change things up with how you teach. If you don't then the students and you fall into a day-in and day-out routine which can become stagnant and boring for many of our students" and Teacher 3 stated,

> "Honestly sometimes I do it at the beginning of class if I feel like that, depending on the day and the rest of the stuff we have to do. Or sometimes it is if you finish this assignment, go ahead and do this as so they are working at their own pace because it just kind of works the best."

Each teacher interview discussed that the structure of the 25-minute remediation period was based almost solely on student needs in the classroom and that may vary from class to class. For example, Teacher 5, who teaches inclusion and gifted cluster classes mentioned that she may do different things with the different classes. She states,

> "with my gifted students I can use the time for enrichment and give them time to explore more about a topic while with my inclusion classes I can spend a little more small-group or even one-on-one time with them."

Teacher 2 who has spent over 20 years as an ELA teacher and recently shifted to being a Special Education teacher mentioned that for her, the time gave her "more of an opportunity to meet the students where they needed to be" and allowed "time to figure out what those needs are in the first place."

Each teacher discussed using the time to meet various students' needs whether they be academic or emotional. Teacher 6 mentioned that she has had times when she uses the time to allow her students a mental break. As a primarily special education teacher, she stated

> "maybe once a week I will use the time for them to go outside or even play board games. I have some students with some special needs so sometimes it is nice to be able to give them a mental break. Especially in the middle of a global pandemic where students are dealing with emotions they are not accustomed to."

Teacher 10 seconded this idea stating that she used the time to give her kids a few minutes to let out some energy. She stated,

> "I taught some very high energy boys, so it was nice to have a few minutes to let them let off some steam on Fridays if they had completed all of their work. We could go outside, or I even had a mini basketball goal they could use if they did not get too rowdy."

Overall, the teachers stated that they used the 25-minutes to meet the various needs of their students. All teachers discussed how useful the time has been during the COVID-19 pandemic because they were given time to talk a little more with students and have a better understanding of what they were dealing with at home. This also helps them make academic decisions because they have a better understanding of what their students can handle emotionally, and they have time to let their students take a break if they see that they need it.

Theme 3: Small group instruction

At the secondary level it can be very difficult for teachers to implement small group instruction without an extended learning period. By including an extended learning time within the class period, teachers discussed their ability to provide immediate instruction to students through small groups. The teachers implemented this in various ways. Teacher 1 met with student groups throughout the week based on their previous days assignments, Teacher 2 and Teacher 3 both follow a schedule for which groups she met with on each day of the week, Teachers 4, 5, and 6 all mentioned that they based their groups on in class assignments during the "regular class time" each day, Teacher 7 and 8 both mentioned that they met with groups only about twice a week and based that on the previous week's assignments, Teacher 9 met with the same students each day

because they were her special education students, and Teacher 10 made her decisions based off of not only class work, but also behavior.

Teacher 10 had some sever behavior issues in her classroom and so she needed to also consider behavior when creating her groups. She mentioned that even though some students should have been grouped together due to academic ability, she could not put them together because of various behavior needs. Also, Teacher 7 had similar experiences stating that, "sometimes I had to consider student personalities when creating groups."

Overall, the teachers overwhelmingly stated that having the ability to create small groups was the most useful aspect of the remediation period. Having this time to work with students on a more individualized or small group level allowed them to get a little further in their curriculum and ensure student learning. Teacher 1 stated,

> "in the past I was unable to really get past the surface level of the standards. Now, I am able to really go a little deeper in the standard and help those that may need a little extra time. Although it is a long amount of time, I am able to work it in such a way that it is very beneficial for both me and my students."

Results for Research Question 2

The purpose of the second research question (RQ2) was to capture the resources that teachers felt were most effective to implement RTI during the 25-minute remediation period. Subthemes that emerged from these interview questions were grouped into two major themes: resources and consistency. Each teacher interviewed discussed using

various resources in the three years that the 25-minute remediation period had been implemented. Table 4 identifies the themes that emerged from seeking to determine what resources teachers perceived they needed to use RTI more consistently in their classrooms.

Table 1

Themes Identified from Data Analysis for Research Question 2

Research Question	Data Source	Themes
What resources do you use most during the 25-minute remediation time?	Interview	Multiple specific resources
Which resources mentioned do you feel are most effective in improving student literacy?	Interview	Multiple specific resources
What do you perceive would be most helpful to you in implementing the remediation period to improve student literacy?	Interview	Consistency of practice

Theme 4: Multiple specific resources

Teachers mentioned using USATestprep, IXL, Cloze Reading, NoRedInk, Articles of the Week, NewsELA, EasyCBM, ReadTheory, as well as other teacher created resources. Teacher 8 stated, “I would use many different materials such as informational articles, short stories, or even news videos to help them boost their skills.”

Teacher 7, who only had a few years’ experience teaching ELA stated, “I had a really hard time knowing where to go to find resources to help my students. It was hard to

get help because everything either had to be paid for or was for primary students." Teacher 10, who was a first-year teacher last year, stated,

> "although I had just graduated college, it was hard for me to find specific resources for my students because everything that was on their reading level was very elementary. For some of these pre-teen boys, they would be offended by that and not do the work, so it ended up being counterproductive."

While it can be easy for teachers to determine where a student is academically, many teachers struggle with finding the resources to support their students at the secondary level. Each teacher interviewed discussed the need to be able to quickly find a resource to help target their student's specific learning-gaps. Teacher 6 stated, "having a toolbox of resources that I could access to support lower-level readers would be a game changer" and Teacher 9, who has over 30 years' experience teaching special education students stated, "I didn't know how to help bring my kids up to grade level with the limited resources I was given. It would be helpful to have a 'toolbox' to turn to for help."

Teacher 6 mentioned that "even as a [Special Education] teacher it can be difficult for me to find resources that are appropriate for my students. Many resources that I find are more elementary and not age appropriate for middle school students." Teacher 1 echoed that statement and stated, "as a secondary teacher I really don't know how to teach a middle school student how to read or where to go to for resources that are not made for younger students" and Teacher 8 stated that "having somewhere to go for specific resources would be a huge help because with teachers not having as much time to plan, it would make things a lot easier."

Theme 5: Consistency of practice

Several of the participants discussed the need for consistency of practice to implement the 25-minute remediation period with fidelity. Teachers mentioned the need to stick with a school bought resource for more than one year so they can learn to use it correctly. Over the past 3 years, the school has purchased two different resources to use during the remediation period. At first the school used USATestprep. The teachers stated that they used USATestprep, but Teacher 4 mentioned, "it was a little too difficult for middle school students and there were a lot of issues with the program." Teacher 5 also mentioned,

> "I wish we would pick a program and stick with it. I realize that people were not as happy with USATestprep as they are now with IXL, but I felt like I had just gotten comfortable with all that USATestprep had to offer.

When asked what she would like to happen she stated, "I really like IXL so I would like for us to stick with that program and have some more training on how to properly use it with our students."

Additionally, several teachers mentioned that it would be beneficial to choose one digital resource and use it for multiple years. Since implementing the remediation period, administration has purchased a variety of online platforms that teachers have been asked to implement. Some of the platforms were purchased at the district level and handed down while others were purchased by school administration. Several teachers have found that the platform they have switched to this year, IXL, has been most beneficial. Teacher 5 stated that she wished that "they would pick one and stick to it." When asked about

what she felt she needed as far as resources, she stated, “honestly I would love to have PD on IXL if that is the platform we choose. I feel like I need a little more time to learn how to use it and the different ways it can be used in my classroom.” Teacher 6 supported this claim stating that she would appreciate “having some more direction on one specific tool and keeping that tool more than one school year.”

Findings of the Study Were Related to the Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study was Piaget, Vygotsky, and Dewey’s constructivism theory. Constructivism is a driving force behind RTI because students construct knowledge based on their own experiences (Gordon, 2009). The findings reflected a need of fluidity with implementation, instruction based on student needs, small group instruction, multiple specific resources, and consistency in practice.

Research Question 1 asked, How do teachers implement RTI during the 25-minute remediation period to improve literacy instruction? To answer this question, interview questions were posed related to implementation strategies that were used by teachers during the 25-minute remediation period. Teachers shared various strategies and resources that were used during their remediation period such as specific reading strategies, small group instruction, and how they implemented the time each day.

Research Question 2 asked, What resources or support do teachers perceive that they need to use RTI more consistently in their classrooms? To answer this question, interview questions were posed related to resources that teachers used while implementing RTI within the 25-minute remediation period. Teachers responded with various resources they needed but expressed difficulty in finding specific strategies they

could use for various reading deficits as well as expressed the need to stay consistent with resources that were purchased by the school.

Study findings supported the development of a comprehensive PD plan for ELA teachers at the focus school. The workshop will be focused on increasing the understanding or RTI, helping teacher understand the data that they collect, as well as provide resources for teachers to use to help improve the literacy scores of their students. By providing teachers with a "toolbox" of resources and ensuring that they understand the RTI process, teachers will feel more confident in their ability to improve student literacy achievement within their classrooms.

Discrepant Cases

When I analyzed interview and observation notes, no outliers or inconsistent conclusions were identified. Merriam (2009) indicated that researchers should look for data that may conflict with the study findings. I did not note any evidence of discrepant cases or adverse findings.

Evidence of Quality

Data validation is vital for establishing the accuracy and validity of the research findings. Researchers understand the importance of being accurate in interpretation and findings (see Stake, 1995). Findings of case studies are believed to be more accurate and convincing if the findings are derived from multiple sources of information (see Leko, 2014; see Yin, 2014). Creswell (2012) further noted that conducting member checks is another way of validating findings. Following the transcription of the interviews and data analysis, I emailed a summary of the findings to the participants to confirm accuracy.

Using the Member Check Form (Appendix D), the participants had an opportunity to review the findings and provide feedback, corrections, or edits (see Stake, 1995). This process was used for the respondent to validate the interpretation of participant feedback (see Merriam, 2009). There were no edits made or requested from the review of the findings.

To further ensure that the interview was done accurately, I used a peer debriefer. After I had transcribed the interviews and organized the data, I emailed the interview recordings, my transcriptions, and my google sheet to my peer debriefer. In the email, I included notes that I had written in my journal. The peer debriefer took several days to respond and had the same findings as I did. Once the peer debriefer had emailed me their findings, we set up a google meet to go over her findings. The peer debriefer felt that the teachers mostly discussed their need for resources and that while most teachers seemed to have a decent grasp on what RTI is, many of them discussed their struggle with what to do with the data that they have collected and finding time to really sort through it.

Limitations

Lodico et al. (2010) suggested that researchers must entail any specific limitations of their study, offering that no study is without some limitations. One such limitations of the study was that several teachers have moved, retired, or changed positions. Some of the teachers interviewed no longer taught at the focus school or had changed to a different subject area and struggled with remembering exact things that they had done while teaching with 25-minute remediation period. For example, Teacher 9 has moved to a different school in the county and no longer has 100-minute ELA classes.

Project Description

I analyzed the results of the research study to determine how to best address the problem that teachers were unsure of how to best utilize the remediation time to improve literacy instruction and their struggles to identify and implement strategies to improve literacy instruction. An analysis of the interview data led to five themes: fluidity of implementation, teacher instruction based on student need, small group instruction, multiple specific resources, and consistency of practice. Based on an analysis of the data, a logical project would be the development of a comprehensive PD based on best practices and current research. In the plan, I will provide recommendations of practices and resources that the focus school can implement throughout the year to address concerns voiced by interview participants.

The problem of student literacy scores declining at a non-Title I school, and teachers were unsure of how to best utilize this time to improve literacy instruction and struggled to identify and implement strategies to improve literacy instruction. During data analysis, I discerned that there were several factors that could be playing a part in this problem. Having a set of resources to refer to when helping struggling readers was a major factor that participants felt could help improve literacy rates at the focus school. With the study participants being secondary teachers with little to no primary reading background, many teachers felt that they were not able to adequately help their students. Also, participants felt that having a plan in place to analyze data would also be helpful in determining what resources to turn to.

A comprehensive PD session will provide more than just a “sit and get” model, which are generally not considered helpful in terms of PD. The plan will serve as a step towards building teacher efficacy by using the themes identified through data analysis to serve as the guide for identifying and planning the goals of the PD plan.

Conclusion

I designed this qualitative study to address the problem of student literacy scores declining at a non-Title I school, and teachers were unsure of how to best utilize this time to improve literacy instruction and struggled to identify and implement strategies to improve literacy instruction. To gain an understanding of this problem, I conducted interviews with those who were considered key informants or close to the issue. In Section 2, I presented the methodology of the study detailing the rationale for the study design and approach; participant selection; procedures for data collection, data analysis, and credibility of findings.

For data collection I conducted interviews with teachers who have worked with the 25-minute remediation period in an ELA setting. This included interviewing 10 teachers who worked at or have previously worked at the focus school. I transcribed, analyzed, coded, and interpreted interview data to identify emergent themes. I used member checking to ensure the findings reflected accurate accounts of the participants. Then I used the findings of the study to develop a comprehensive PD plan.

Section 3 is an outline of the project that I developed to address the findings of the study. This section includes a rationale for the selected project, a review of literature with the supporting framework, a description of the project, and the evaluation tool for

measuring the effectiveness of the plan. The subsequent project in Appendix A is a comprehensive PD plan. The project will focus on building system capacity for increased teacher implementation of the 25-minute remediation period through a PD plan focused on factors essential for the growth and advancement of the focus school.

Section 3: The Project

PD is considered a key method for effecting change in many fields, especially education. Many school systems require teachers to undergo PD opportunities each school year to improve their teaching skills (Birman et al., 2000). The project that I developed from this study was a PD training that can be implemented at JMS during PLCs throughout the school year to provide consistency and continuity. The PD will help teachers with implementing specific strategies and resources to support RTI as well as provide various ways that the teachers can use the strategies and resources within the remediation block. Many of the strategies and resources that are included in the PD are ones that teachers have been exposed to previously or have heard of before; however, interview data indicated that there were gaps in the implementation process. Therefore, I believe that the PD that I have developed will provide a necessary reinforcement of these strategies and their use within the 25-minute remediation period.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine teacher perceptions when implementing RTI strategies within the remediation period to improve student literacy achievement. Based on the findings of this study, I developed a PD program to address the needs of the teachers at JMS. The project was based on the following themes that emerged during data analysis: teachers need fluidity of implementation, teacher instruction based on student need, small group instruction, multiple specific resources, and consistency of practice. The project was developed to provide meaningful, site-specific training on the methods and the process of implementing RTI during the 25-minute remediation period. The strategies presented in the PD session will assist teachers

in implementing RTI in the period allotted as well as provide more instruction on monitoring student progress during the remediation process.

In Section 3, I provide a rationale for the project genre, a review of the current literature that guided the development of the project, a description of the project, and a project evaluation plan. I conclude with a summary of the project's implications for positive social change on local and broader audiences.

Rationale

One way to help teachers continue to grow in their field and learn new strategies is the use of PD. PD is considered an essential tool in improving classroom instruction and helping teachers stay well informed of the constant changing world of education (Guskey, 2003). Not only does PD provide teachers with learning opportunities, but it can also allow for students to benefit from what the teachers learn when resources and strategies are implemented into their classrooms.

When teachers are provided PD, the classroom learning environment is enriched (Asmari, 2016; Hilton et al., 2015). However, when teachers are given the opportunity to collaborate during their PD sessions and the sessions allow for time for classroom implementation, the PD becomes more likely to create improvements in the classroom (Smith & Robinson, 2020). Researchers have also found that PD that allows for self-guided learning in a free, open atmosphere is more effective (Akin, 2014; Culatta, 2013). When teachers and other educational leaders engage in PD that has an open atmosphere, there is an opportunity to foster knowledge and share information, exchange ideas and perspectives, and develop a team culture.

I developed a comprehensive PD plan based on the findings that emerged from interviews with JMS teachers. The plan addresses issues with supporting individual students' needs, strategies for implementing RTI in the 25-minute remediation period, and suggested research-based strategies that teachers can use in their classroom. Developing a project centered on PD is ideal to address the needs of the teachers at JMS as shared by those who participated in the study. Although using PD to effect change in education is not a new concept, the use of a comprehensive PD plan in this case will provide more than the routine PD trainings. The plan is an attempt to use PD as a collaborative learning tool for improving the implementation of RTI during the 25-minute remediation period.

Review of the Literature

In this subsection, I review the extant literature related to the project I developed. I present the framework that guided the project development, including current research and perspectives related to PD, data analysis, and remediation in the classroom. I conclude this subsection with a summary of how saturation of concepts presented in the literature was reached.

In reviewing the literature, I accessed ERIC, Google Scholar, and SAGE databases through the Walden University Library to find articles related to this project. My initial search terms included the following: *remediation, PD, support, in-service, teacher trainings, data analysis, small group instruction,* and *instructional strategies*. Using a Boolean search, I narrowed my search to only include articles published in the past 5 years, available in a full-text format, and published in peer-reviewed journals. A

review of the reference sections of the articles also helped steer my search to other articles and research. I reviewed the literature found and added it to the study until saturation was reached.

PD

Support is provided to teachers through trainings that are set up by administrators throughout the school district. PD is used frequently in education to provide information on new strategies and resources that teachers can implement in their classrooms. In fact, surveys have suggested that teachers spend an average of 10.5 days in workshops or in-service training (Sellen, 2016). Research has shown that to be most effective, the learner must experience self-guided learning in an open atmosphere (Akin, 2014; Culatta, 2013). School systems throughout the world acknowledge that teacher quality is the most critical in school factor impacting student outcomes; however, PD training often lacks clear and direct links with classroom practice (Gore et al., 2017).

Research has shown that teachers want to improve their instruction to support students who are struggling with classroom material (Bursuck et al., 2002; Williams & Coles, 2007); however, many teachers, especially general educators using an RTI model, may feel unprepared due to: (a) a lack of preparation in specific interventions (Brownell, et al., 2005), (b) lack of curriculum featuring instructional design that supports students who are struggling (Coyne et al., 2011), and (c) lack of PD to meet the needs of struggling students (Chetty et al., 2014).

Every year, school systems spend millions of dollars on PD in hopes of improving their teachers' instructional ability with the hopes of increasing student achievement

(Guskey & Yoon, 2009). Gore et al. (2017) acknowledged that leading researchers found that for teachers to deliver the highest quality PD, investment needs to be limited to fewer teachers, fewer strategies, or more resources. Gore et al. examined a pedagogy-based, collaborative PD approach known as "Quality Teaching Rounds" for its impact on the quality of teaching. Their findings demonstrated a significant positive effect on teachers' instructional pedagogy implementing research-based strategies, specifically secondary teachers when trained in smaller, content-focused groups (Gore et al., 2017). Castillo et al. (2016) examined the relationship between direct, intensive RTI skills training and job-embedded coaching on teachers' perceived skills to implement the RTI program. Their data suggested that receiving continued on-the-job mentorship and peer collaboration was positively related to increases in perceived RTI implementation skills in academic content. Furthermore, training should be focused on the application of a limited number of strategies or skills. Fullan (2018) suggested that change is more likely to occur when leaders focus on a few well-defined goals. Furthermore, PD that is focused on specific curriculum content supports teacher learning (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017).

There are many ways that districts can provide PD to teachers, and workshops are one the most common ways to do so. These take place during the school day, before or after school, or during the teachers' planning time. Typically, PD is delivered to teachers through a sit-and-get model that relies on an expert to provide information to the participants, and these type of whole-group, broadly focused trainings are typically not as effective as smaller, more targeted workshops (Sappington et al., 2012). PD programs that consider a school's situation are more successful (Boatright et al., 2014;

Montgomery, 2014; Myers, 2014). Principals and school leaders who have achieved success with PD have allowed teachers to have a voice, take control, or lead PD that is meaningful to their school context (Boatright et al., 2014; Donlan, 2014; Hudak, 2014).

Training workshops offered one or two times are unable to provide the quality sustained support needed for meaningful professional learning (Darling-Hammond, 2017). High-quality, continuous PD is essential to improving teacher and student learning (Collins & Liang, 2015; Learning Forward, 2020). Bates and Morgan (2018) noted seven crucial elements of actual professional knowledge: a focus on content, active learning, support for collaboration, modeling of effective practice, coaching and expert support, feedback and reflection time, and must occur for a constant duration. Teachers need time to implement and reflect on new instructional practices, and although some workshops address questions teachers may have, the follow-up and continuous support is usually absent (Bates & Morgan, 2018).

According to Matherson and Windle (2017), teachers want PD that is relevant, provides them with practical ways to deliver content, teacher driven, and sustained over time. Teachers are also more likely to be more willing to participate in PD when taking part in PD as a group (Sims & Fletcher-Wood, 2021). Collaborative learning can be a successful form of PD, and one of the most common types of collaborative PD is the use of PLCs, which is a model that many districts use for PD (Smith & Robinson, 2020). Teachers who work together are in a good position to realize their beliefs, reflect on instruction, and collaborate to initiate the needed reforms when implementing new initiatives (Dillon et al., 2015; Wardrip et al., 2015).

In support of the practice of common planning time or PLCs, teachers have claimed that they appreciated having a voice in what initiatives are implemented and how (Butler et al., 2015). School districts receive more value from their PD planning and investment by allowing teachers some choice (e.g., choosing trainings that are of interest to them; Cordingley et al., 2015). Castillo et al. (2016) contended that educators' skill development plays a crucial part in building their competence to implement RTI by engaging teachers in continuous cycles of learning. Castillo et al. emphasized the importance of PD focused on the critical skills and supports necessary to perform the RTI framework, such as teacher collaboration, progress monitoring, and data-based decision-making skills.

The research suggested that when implementing RTI, providing practitioners with long-term support in the form of continuous PD is vital to allow time to reflect and problem solve in collaborative groups (Greenwood & Kelly, 2017). Greenwood and Kelly (2017) indicated that most teachers expressed the need for high levels of PD and coaching for effective delivery of the RTI model. Spruce and Bol (2015) arrived at similar findings, contending that teacher beliefs and knowledge directly affect their classroom practice. In a mixed-method study, Spruce and Bol examined teacher beliefs, experience, and classroom practices about self-regulated learning. Self-regulated learning is a proactive process in which teachers set goals, select and deliver strategies, and self-monitor their instructional effectiveness. Their results supported current research indicating that there is a gap in teacher knowledge and practice. Their findings contributed to an argument for ongoing PD in the establishment of learning communities

where teachers are taught to be active in their learning and gain strategies to become self-regulated learners.

I developed the PD for this project based on insights gained from the participant interviews. The perceived relevance of a program by teachers has been found to influence the teachers' acceptance of the program (Jones & Dexter, 2014). Participants in this project engaged in relevant analysis and exploration using data and evidence from their own classrooms for a more meaningful PD experience. Job-embedded PD allows teachers to share best practices, compare ideas about what happens in the classroom, discuss and implement new strategies, and then reflect on what works and what should be changed for future practice (Jordan & Kaplan, 2014). This type of PD allows time for participants to process the material they are given, collaborate and discuss findings, and plan with peers.

Teachers' knowledge in implementing RTI play a vital role in quality of instruction and student performance (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). PD can give teachers additional knowledge and skills to use research-based practices (Wood et al., 2016). Unfortunately, many teachers have limited access to quality PD on strategies that they can use to meet the needs of all students in the classroom (Hill et al., 2013). Cramer and Gallo (2017) identified teachers' requests for training and resources when implementing a new educational initiative in Florida. They used a survey to examine the perceptions of special education teachers on the implementation of the modern state standards for students with disabilities and found that teachers who had received regular training revealed that they were more confident in implementing the measures. Likewise,

Brown (2018) showed that when teachers have continuous ongoing PD, they feel confident in implementing new practices. The author suggested that teachers who engage in PD may reflect upon their current instructional practices and make every effort to improve their future instructional practices.

PD that targets teachers' needs can produce successful educators who are skilled in improving student achievement. Targeted PD is necessary to achieve effective implementation of new interventions such as RTI. According to Darling-Hammond et al. (2017), research has shown that many PD opportunities are ineffective in supporting changes in teacher practices and student learning. Effective PD increases teachers' understanding and instructional pedagogy, which ultimately supports student achievement (Parsons et al., 2016). Parsons et al., stated that effective teacher PD is designed to meet the needs of the teachers and students, so it is imperative that PD developers recognize the needs and goals of the teachers that they are presenting to.

Progress Monitoring and Data Analysis

When improving student achievement, it is important for teachers to continually monitor the progress of their students. The RTI model has four major components: universal screening, tiered interventions, progress monitoring, and data-based decision making. Many schools that are engaging in RTI do not yet have the entire parts fully in place and implemented with fidelity (Johnson & Hutchins, 2019). Educators need progress monitoring skills to successfully achieve the three-model framework that is focused on data-based decision making (Pentimonti et al., 2017). In Tier 2 of the framework, teachers must use progress monitoring and evaluate if students are making

adequate progress with the interventions that are being used. Regular monitoring of student progress is an essential component to the RTI model because it measures if the students are making improvements and helps to determine if more intensified strategies are needed for the student to achieve growth in the targeted subject area. Progress monitoring is useful when making decisions about student learning and is used during the RTI process to help determine is a strategy is useful in helping a student improve.

Educators in all courses require reliable assessments to measure student growth. Educators must collect, graph, and make instructional changes based on academic skill data (Lopuch, 2018). Tindal et al. (2017) suggested using software technology to assist in organizing and graphing student data to design interventions based on skill deficits. A curriculum-based measurement is recommended to measure student growth and monitor RTI progress. Curriculum-based measurement is a set of standardized assessments that can be used to guide student achievement in the areas of areas of literacy and reading, early mathematics computation and application, spelling, and written expression (Hintze, et al., 2018). The use of curriculum-based measurement is a reliable way to monitor student progress during RTI and is a reliable indicator of performance on state mandated tests (Bresina et al., 2018).

With the use of progress monitoring, teachers can determine a student's performance level and their academic improvement rate. Progress monitoring data serves three main purposes: informing instruction, targeting student learning, and strengthening decision-making (Mercado, 2016). Many teachers at the focus school felt that they can adequately collect progress monitoring data but struggle with finding the time to really

interpret the data effectively. Mercado (2016) examined how the presentation of RTI progress monitoring information influenced the data-based decision making when referring students for special education services. The findings suggested a significant difference in decision-making when data were presented in graphs versus tables. The teachers in Mercado's study were able to gain a better understanding of the data when presented in a six-point graph form because it was easier to see whether the student was exhibiting growth. An implication of Mercado's study for this PD project was a need for PD for teachers on how to develop and interpret progress monitoring graphs to support decision-making for future instruction (Mercado, 2016). Since the focus school is a Google District, the PD sessions will include information on creating graphs and tables from student data with google resources. Van den Bosch et al. (2019) examined three approaches for improving teachers' curriculum-based measure graph comprehension, each differing in the extent to which reading the data, interpreting the data, and linking the data to instruction was emphasized. The teachers improved more in curriculum-based measure graph comprehension. Improvements were primarily seen in understanding the data and connecting it to teaching.

Current research indicated that when teachers use progress monitoring to make instructional decisions, student-level data improve (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2016). For example, when a teacher sees that a student in struggling with improving in a subject, the teacher can implement differentiated instruction to target the student's needs. The teacher will then collect data to see if the student improves. If the student does not show improvement, then the student may need more intensified remediation. Progress

monitoring is an iterative process, meaning that there may need to be several adjustments before a student starts showing improvement and the right instructional strategy is found. Data collection procedures are on schedules based on student needs (Lopuch, 2018). Lopuch (2018) suggested that students at higher risks for failure should be monitored more frequently.

Differentiation

Differentiated instruction allows teachers to adjust teaching strategies and materials to support a student with their individual needs. Although differentiation has gained a lot of attention and practice in research, according to Smale-Jacobse et al. (2019), little is known about the status of the evidence and the benefits that differentiation has for improving student achievement. Policymakers and researchers urge teachers to embrace diversity and to adapt their instruction to the diverse learning needs of students in their classrooms (Schleicher, 2016; Unesco, 2017). Differentiation is a philosophy of teaching in which teachers have acknowledgment of student differences and a drive to help all students succeed. Such ideas imply that teachers proactively modify curriculum, teaching methods, resources, learning activities, or requirements for student products to better meet students' learning needs (Tomlinson, 2021). When teachers deliberately plan to alter student work or adapt students lesson it is called differentiated instruction. There have been many changes in education that has created the need for differentiation. First, classrooms are becoming much more heterogenous due to policy changes that require special education students to be included in classrooms with their peers (Tomlinson, 2015), Second, the idea that all learners have different needs

and a one-sized all model does not work in the modern classroom (Subban, 2006). Policy makers stress that all students should be supported to develop their knowledge and skills at their own level (Rock et al., 2008; Schleicher, 2016) and there is the wish to improve equity or equality among students (Kyriakides et al., 2018; Unesco, 2017).

Although the idea of differentiation is well known and teachers understand what it means, many educators struggle with implementation in their classrooms (Van Casteren et al., 2017). A recent study found that teachers across different countries infrequently adapt their instruction to student characteristics (Schleicher, 2016). Struggling students may work on tasks that are too difficult for them or gifted students may practice skills they have already mastered (Tomlinson, 2021). Most teachers recognize the need to differentiate but transitioning from perception to practice can be difficult and overwhelming. This project seeks to help educators reflect of personal practice when differentiating during the 25-minute remediation period and provide educators with resources that will help them differentiate for their students.

Once data has been analyzed, teachers must determine what works versus what works best for their students by knowing the influence of their teaching strategies (Hattie, 2012a). To differentiate, a different approach must be used to engage learning through reteaching and remediation without using the same presentation again, even in a smaller group (Thomas, 2011). The practice of differentiation proposes that educators teach not out of habit or teacher preference, but in response to the students being served (Tomlinson, 2017). The purpose of differentiated instruction is to maximize student growth and individual success by adapting classroom strategies and materials to meet

students at their level regarding learning styles, needs, interests, and profiles (Anderson, 2007; George, 2005; Huebner, 2010). Differentiation includes the areas of content, the information needed to learn; process, how students will learn; and product, how students will demonstrate their learning (Knowles, 2009; Levy, 2008; Tomlinson, 2017); The environment, the flexible structure of the classroom is also another important factors that teachers need to consider when differentiating (Tomlinson, 2017). There are many components to differentiation and instruction can change based on the student and the material being covered. Data from multiple assessments such as formative, summative, and informal shape opportunities for differentiated instruction (Tomlinson, 2017; Wilhelm, 2011). A systematic approach of on-going assessments and data are needed to be sure groups remain flexible (Ankrum & Bean, 2008; Tomlinson, 2004). Teachers focus on how students approach learning then create flexibility in the presentation and student work to induce and extend the students' learning. Small groups may be a part of differentiation. Groups are shaped in flexible ways to modify instruction in response to students' readiness, interests, profile, and current needs (Ankrum & Bean, 2008; Tomlinson, 2004). Explicit teaching which clearly defines performance criteria, considers previous learning, provides demonstration, and gives students opportunities for students to engage in and apply learning through small groups and independent work is also a component of promoting student learning (Dubeet al., 2011). Differentiation focuses on where the student needs to go, how they are going to get there, and where they are going next (Hattie, 2012b). To meet the needs of all learners in the classroom, teachers must serve all students in heterogeneous classrooms that are responsive to the varied needs of

learners through modified instruction. Specific instructional strategies that are research based are most effective for meeting these needs. Effective strategies may include cooperative learning, providing feedback, inductive learning, reading for meaning, scaffolded reading opportunities, use of graphic organizers, reinforcing effort, and providing teacher clarity (Harvey, et al., 2012; Hattie, 2009, 2012b; Marzano, 2001).

Project Description

The findings from the analysis of the interviews in Section 2 served as the determinant for the necessity of adding PD sessions at the focus school. The project that was created because of this study is PD trainings that focus on implementing RTI within the 25-minute remediation period at the focus school. I developed the training to focus on the topics of differentiating instruction, resources that can be used within the period allotted, and progress monitoring with the resources given. The training modules address the specific needs and concerns participants in this project study expressed as significant for the effective delivery of the RTI program at their school. The PD will be provided during the school's pre-planning and two planning days throughout the 2021-2022 school year but can also be split into mini sessions given on various planning days that take place during the school year. If the school district is still restricting in-person PD due to COVID -19, the PD can be presented in a virtual format.

To address each of the themes identified during the study, the project will provide teachers with training in multiple areas. To address Theme 1, fluidity of implementation, the project will provide teachers with various ways they can implement the remediation period in their classroom. This part of the project will include implementation strategies

and scheduling ideas. To address Theme 2, teacher instruction based on student need, the project will help teachers understand how to collect and analyze student data to provide differentiated instruction based on student need. This part of the project will include teachers evaluating real student data to make determinations for remediation.

To address Theme 3, small group instruction, the project will address various ways teachers can implement small group instruction while also keeping other students working. This includes providing teachers with the opportunity to implement the strategies discussed and return to the following section with questions and feedback. To address Theme 4, multiple specific resources, the project will provide teachers with various resources that they can use during the 25-minute remediation period. This part of the project will involve a detailed look at each resource so teachers will be able to implement them with fidelity in their classroom. I will address the findings of Theme 5, consistency in practice, with building administration so they will see that this is a need according to their teachers. Additionally, I will also discuss implementing the current resources purchased by the school within the 25-minute remediation period.

The overall aim of this training process is to improve the teachers understanding of the RTI process and provide them with resources they can use to implement RTI within the 25-minute remediation period. The goals of the PD sessions are to allow teachers the opportunity to engage in research-based strategies to use in the remediation period to support the improvement of student literacy achievement in the ELA classroom. Teachers responsible for providing RTI to students within the 25-minute remediation period will participate in PD that will positively affect their ability to implement RTI

within the 25-minute remediation period to improve literacy scores in the ELA classroom.

Potential Resources, Supports, and Barriers

To implement the 25-minute remediation PD, I will need a variety of resources and supports. First, I will need to meet with the principal of the focus school to discuss when the PD will be presented to the faculty. I will need permission to use a site on campus to hold the PD as well as access to a projector and a copier to present materials to participants. I will provide cookies, donuts, and granola bars for the day of the workshop as well as chart paper, pens, markers, and sticky notes. The building principal will need to encourage the teachers to participate in the workshop. The teachers have at least 5 days of preplanning as well as scheduled teacher planning days throughout the year. The recommendation will be for the building principal to plan the workshop for one of these days.

A barrier that could negatively influence the workshop is that it will take up a full teacher planning day. Some teachers may feel that they have more important matters to take care of such as preparing for the school year or entering grades depending on when the workshop takes place. To combat this, I plan to make the workshop relevant to teacher needs and allow break times for them to complete tasks if possible.

Proposal for Implementation

I will meet with the principal of the focus school to review the proposed project and possible implementation dates. Once approved, I will begin to gather resources and materials for the workshop. About 3 days prior to the workshop, I will email the

participants a reminder about the workshop as well as pre-work instructions for them to complete. The workshop will take 3 full days either during a preplanning day or during a teacher planning day during the school year. During the professional learning workshop, participants will be given an overview of RTI with specific instructions on implementing Tier 2 instruction, data analysis tips, recommendations on implementing the 25-minute remediation period, and possible resources that they can use for various student's needs. All documents and resources will also be saved to a Google Drive folder that will be shared with participants for them to easily access during the school year as needed.

Roles and Responsibilities

My role is to oversee all aspects of implementation of the project. I will copy and organize all necessary materials as well as secure the training location with permission of the building principal. I will advertise the PD with the assistance of the building principal. Lastly, my role will also include facilitating the training while also evaluating its effectiveness using formative measures such as listening to participants feedback, conducting check-ins with participants, and reviewing the training evaluations with participant feedback.

While I am primarily responsible for the project, there are other people that are important in ensuring its success. The ELA teachers in the focus school are the target audience for the training and their attendance and participation is critical. Teachers will be implementing the remediation period in their classroom thus their participation, learning, and feedback will be critical. The building administration also play an important

part in the training. Principals communicate areas of focus for each school year and can negatively or positively influence teachers view on PD opportunities.

Project Evaluation Plan

It is important to determine the effectiveness of any PD that is presented to a target audience. The project will include both formative and summative measures.

Formative Assessment

Formative assessments are given throughout the presentation of material and can help facilitators make decisions about implementation. They are informal and can be accomplished through a variety of measures (Jiang, 2014). During the workshop I conduct formative assessments while facilitating the PD. The measures will include listening to participants and taking notes on their feedback during discussions, parking lot activities, and breakout sessions. Conducting these in the moment assessments will give me the ability to change course as needed to ensure that participants are receiving information that is relevant to them and their classrooms.

The project evaluation process will also include reviewing participant survey responses. This formative assessment will help to determine the perceived effectiveness of the PD and the determine what other needs attendees may need. The evaluation survey will be given at the end of the last PD session to ensure that there is time to implement follow-up sessions if needed.

Summative Assessment

A summative evaluation will be given at the end of the school year to determine the effectiveness of the PD in assisting teachers with implementing RTI within the 25-

minute remediation period. If the students take the Georgia Milestones assessment at the end of the 2021-2022 school year, the student test data can be compared with previous data to determine if the students showed more growth than in previous years.

Evaluation Goals

The PD will be structured to engage all teachers that teach ELA at the focus school. The overall goal of the PD is to provide resources for teachers to implement during the 25-minute remediation period and ensure that teachers understand how to be utilize the 25-minute remediation period to improve student literacy. The evaluation goal aligns to the overall goal of the workshop in that it will measure the learning of the participants and the transfer of that knowledge to their classrooms. Both the formative and summative evaluations will provide feedback to determine whether the outcomes and overall goals are met. Furthermore, the data from the evaluations will provide me with areas to clarify, concepts that need to be revisited, and future learning needs. The results of the evaluations may also provide information for the school district of the focus school to implement the PD across the district to increase student learning at all schools. Guskey (2002) noted that effective evaluations must include evidence of how participants utilize new knowledge and skills

Key Stakeholders

The key stakeholders for this project are the ELA teachers, the administration at the focus school, and the students at the focus school. ELA teachers are the primary stakeholders, and the PD was developed for them based on the results of the study. Although the content is focused on the ELA teachers, the building principal influences

the implementation of the 25-minute remediation period. Administration creates a focus for the building as well as provide parameters for the implementation of the remediation period; therefore, they are secondary stakeholders for the project. Finally, the students will be the ones who will benefit from the teachers implementing the material they learn at the PD session. Students will be the beneficiaries of the information that teachers glean from the training thus making them secondary stakeholders as well. As the teachers improve their implementation of targeted instruction, students may benefit through improved academic ability.

Project Implications

Findings in this study provide a rationale that teachers that do not feel that they can adequately implement a program will not bring about change in a learning environment. This research confirms that effective PD can support changing the culture and climate of a school resulting in increased student learning. Research findings further reflect that collaborative and content-focused PD can be essential in serving as a tool for addressing low student achievement (McGee & Nutakki, 2017; Wieczorek, 2017). Addressing school improvement and practices that impact student achievement without effective PD can prove to be an ineffective task.

Literacy rates at the focus school during the 2017-18 school year were below the state average. After the implementation of the 25-minute remediation period, the literacy rates at the focus school were slightly higher than the state average by 5.36 points. This shows that the 25-minute remediation period did help improve literacy at the focus school. However, the development of a comprehensive PD plan can be beneficial in

helping teachers address the students who are still not reaching proficiency on the Georgia Milestones Literacy Assessment. Increasing student literacy achievement will also have a positive impact on the community.

Further, increasing student literacy achievement allows the opportunity for more students to become citizens of the community who can give back and help the community grow in the future. Increasing the literacy rate in the area will diminish the negative repercussions of community members who are unable to function in society due to being unable to adequately read adult material such as newspaper articles, insurance materials, etc. This project can provide educational leaders with PD opportunities that lead to increased student achievement.

Low literacy rates are far reaching and is a problem in more than just the boundaries of the local school district. Identifying resources and strategies for improving the literacy rate of secondary students can be instrumental in increasing student achievement in all subject areas. Increased PD can potentially lead to significant changes in teaching and learning practices (McGee & Nutakki, 2017).

This study can contribute to the body of knowledge pertaining to quality PD, including how providing teachers with specific, research-based strategies can improve teacher performance when implementing the 25-minute remediation period. Study findings can further serve as a context for school leaders to gain insight and knowledge essential for developing high quality professional learning opportunities (Green & Allen, 2015). Results from the project evaluations can provide administrators with information

to improve PD opportunities for teachers leading to improved teacher effectiveness with subsequent improvements in student achievement.

Conclusion

The overall goal of this study was to improve student literacy achievement and decrease the number of students who are not reaching proficiency on the Georgia Milestones Literacy Assessments. The project was developed with adult learning theories to provide a comprehensive PD session that was engaging and worthwhile for those in attendance. In Section 3, I described the project, provided a theory to frame the project, and a review of literature to substantiate the development of a comprehensive PD plan. In Section 4, I describe the strengths and limitations of the project; self-analyses; recommendations for alternative approaches; and implications, applications, and directions for future research.

Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

In Section 4, I summarize the study by providing the strengths and limitations of the project as well as my recommendations. Section 4 also contains an overview of my role as a scholar, project developer, and practitioner as well as an explanation of how leadership can be effective in bring about change. I conclude Section 4 by providing a reflection on the work and the implications, applications, and direction for future research.

Project Strengths and Limitations

Strengths

This project reflects both strengths and limitations that are indicative of being internal and external to the control of the school district. One strength of this project is that the findings from the research study and current literature were used to develop the project. Another strength of the project is that data collection and the resulting themes from the interviews reflected similar needs for effecting change in the district.

Having data from those who are working with the students each day helped to structure and plan a PD to help meet the needs of the students and teachers at JMS. The data resulted in findings that guided the direction of the project to include topics that are beneficial to those that will attend the training. Providing workshops that are relevant to the participants may lead to increased teacher buy-in for the material being presented.

Although some participants were more confident in their abilities to implement RTI than others, all contributed to the findings of this study. The data gathered led me to create the project PD. Since teachers who work with students daily provided the data, I

feel that my subsequent trainings will be more effective, valid, and specific to the needs of JMS. As someone who practices in the field and understands the material presented for implementation in the classroom, I also believe that I am better able to develop relevant, hands-on workshops that are specifically focused on the needs of the participants (see Lee, 2011; Sappington et al., 2012; Schmoker, 2006). As LaCursia (2011) and Lee (2011) noted, relevance makes projects more effective.

The data from all interviews strongly pointed to the five themes: fluidity of implementation, teacher instruction based on student needs, small group instruction, multiple specific resources, and consistency in practice. Participant responses from each interview were interwoven with perceptions and remarks of others, providing the themes of this project. From these themes, I gleaned research-based practices that provide support, address analysis of student data, present teachers with a list of resources they can refer to if needed. Because teachers who attend the PD trainings reflect, collaborate, and practice, they can immediately implement their learning with their students. Training sessions allow participants an opportunity to practice and know which competencies to assess, develop sound strategies for assessing them, and experience how to match instruction with demonstrated needs, which are at the heart of the successful RTI classroom (Allington, 2009). As Tschannen-Moran and McMaster (2009) noted, ongoing PD with follow-up support and coaching has a strong effect on teacher self-efficacy beliefs. When implemented, these processes will have a lasting impact on teacher comfort and confidence that will ultimately support student progress and achievement in the school.

Limitations

One weakness of the project is that it depends on participants' level of reflection and engagement. Essential elements of effective PD include practice, self-reflection, peer support, and ongoing feedback to foster a stronger confidence in teachers for their own teaching practices (Desimone, 2009; Kennedy & Shiel, 2010). If participants are not fully engaged in the PD sessions, then they will not find the trainings to be meaningful and will not evaluate their implementation of the 25-minute remediation period. If this is the case, the trainings will have limited influence on student achievement. By utilizing student work samples and testing data as evidence presented in the PD, I sought to encourage more relevant and meaningful reflection and collaboration on the part of teachers, which is something that can lessen the impact of low engagement.

Another weakness is the size of the study. Only 10 teachers were available to participate in interviews for this study. However, the number of participants was an appropriate sample size for a qualitative study (see Creswell, 2008). Since JMS is the only school within the district using the 25-minute remediation period, I could not interview other teachers in the school district who practice RTI within their classroom. I contacted 13 potential participants and three had either moved to a different town or state and did not wish to participate or had moved to a different school district and were unavailable. This left me with 10 study participants who had experience with the 25-minute remediation period. One participant had only officially taught at the focus school for 1 year but also had an additional year of experience as a student teacher who used the 25-minute remediation period. Since this gave her 2 years of experience with the 25-

minute remediation period, I asked her to participate in the study. More input may have contributed to a more in-depth study highlighting different dimensions. More specific PD may have come from collecting additional data.

One way to address the limitations of the study would be to repeat the study in other schools that use a different type of extended learning time to provide RTI to their students. I conducted my study at a small, rural school in the southeastern United States. By repeating the study in other schools of varying sizes and with different student and teacher demographics, differences with regards to the phenomenon under study may be able to be captured.

Another way to address the limitations of this study would be to hold focus group interviews to add richer, unique data following the individual interviews. I had the option of using several types of focus group interview approaches (see Lodico et al., 2010; Merriam, 2009). Two strands of focus groups that could prove valuable to future study are homogeneous groups with participants who felt they had a greater understanding of implementing RTI as well as with a group that felt they did not have a strong understanding of implanting RTI. It would also be valuable to interview a group of intervention coaches. These focus group interviews could yield another distinct dimension of data that could provide the basis for another study.

Recommendations for an Alternative Approach

The problem that prompted this study was that JMS implemented a 25-minute RTI remediation block to address the fact that students were scoring below proficiency on literacy assessments; however, teachers were unsure of how to best use this time to

improve student literacy achievement. An analysis of data revealed that the main factors that influenced teacher's ability to implement RTI during the remediation period were the lack of resources and a lack of fully understanding how to implement RTI in the time allotted. One alternative approach would be to embed professional learning opportunities in the schedule throughout the school year. A specific amount of PD should be required yearly for all staff. Some of the PD can be mandatory and some can be self-directed if the required trainings are covered.

Scholarship, Project Development, and Leadership and Change

The research process has been a rewarding yet humbling experience. I began this process with an understanding of a problem that I wanted to research and quickly learned that I only had a surface level understanding of scholarly writing and research. Through continuous rounds of editing and feedback, I have been able to greatly improve my writing and research abilities. The process required me, as the researcher, to frame my research around a significant problem, ground everything in evidence, and learn as much about the problem as possible. That preliminary process allowed me to move into the next phase as a knowledgeable and competent researcher. As a qualitative researcher, I learned to temper my conclusions and allow the process and data to yield the answers to my questions.

My favorite part of this process was data collection and analysis. Since the current study was about the experiences of teachers, I made it my goal to listen, absorb, and understand their perspectives to the best of my ability. As I listened to the perspectives of each of the teachers, the themes began to take shape as I noted commonalities in their

responses. Transcribing and coding the data allowed me the opportunity to truly understand their experiences and have a deeper understanding of the phenomena.

My close relationship with the data allowed me to develop a project that sufficiently addresses the needs of helping teachers implement the 25-minute remediation time at JMS. In designing the project, I used research to inform the types of activities and the content that would be delivered. The most important thing I learned while designing the project was the importance of using both formative and summative evaluations. Evaluation is perhaps the most important component of the project or presentation because it allows the presenter to determine if their aims have been met. I included both formative and summative assessments in the project and now ensure that evaluation is a consistent process in any professional learning occurring within JMS.

The research and project development process has positively impacted my role as an educator. Using research findings to determine a solution to a problem is a process that I began to apply and use in my role as a classroom teacher. While in my daily work I often use data to determine where a student needs remediation, rarely have I used research to determine how to best remediate a specific problem. When seeking to determine best fit solutions to specific challenges within my own classroom, I now seek literature to support my decision making.

Project development can be a difficult yet rewarding task. When planning projects, there are many variables to be considered. One key factor to consider is the desired outcome. The outcome is what drives the direction of the project development. In planning projects, I prefer to evaluate every part that could influence the potential

implementation and outcome. I believe that proper planning ensures that a project runs smoothly and has the best outcome; however, some things will always be beyond people's control and regardless of how much planning takes place, there will always be opportunities for roadblocks, detours, setbacks, or even the project taking a completely different direction than initially expected.

My interest in developing a comprehensive PD plan grew out of the need to address the problem identified in JMS, the study findings, and an approach method to address the problem as reflected in a review of current literature. There are many and varied reasons students are struggling with scoring proficient on reading assessments; however, the focus of this study was on the academics and instructional practices. Through the study findings, I identified one prevailing influence on students performing below proficient on reading assessments: The lack of resources available for teachers to help these students fill the learning gaps at the secondary level. Therefore, I decided to develop a project to address how improvement of teacher's ability to remediate could result in increased student achievement on literacy assessments. The development of this project will help me provide a course of action JMS can use to address this prevailing issue.

Conducting this study and developing the project afforded me an opportunity to further hone my skills to improve as a scholar. Carrying out this study also allowed me to research current best practices related to providing PD opportunities and implementing remediation to struggling readers. I have gained additional insight that may prove beneficial as I continue the path of contributing to the field of education and making a

difference in the lives of others. My current role allows me to have an even greater impact on social change because as a lead teacher, I can share my research findings with my peers through collaborative training sessions. As a district curriculum specialist, I can also share my knowledge with more than just those teachers within my own building. This leads to a greater influence on student learning because my research can help those struggling readers in more than just my own school building. Scholarship enables social change, and my role as a scholar will enable me to bring about social change on a greater scale than I was previously able to reach.

Reflection on Importance of the Work

The 25-minute remediation time was implemented at JMS to help provide teachers with time to remediate struggling readers. The administration decided that the 25 minutes should be used for remediation or enrichment based on student needs. This project is important because the study revealed that teachers did not have enough resources or information to effectively implement RTI for remediation within their classroom setting. The analysis indicated that teachers needed more information on implementing RTI within the time period and more resources to use for remediating. This study is important because it may lead to improved RTI implementation at the secondary level.

The project developed from the study will provide teachers with training on implementing RTI as well as give them suggested resources to use. The results from this study may provide administration with knowledge to help teachers effectively implement RTI for their students who were struggling. With improved knowledge and a list of

possible resources, teachers will be more prepared to provide remediation to their students, which could result in improved student literacy achievement.

Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research

This study focused on identifying teacher perceptions of implementing a 25-minute remediation period to improve student literacy. In interviews, the participants reflected that they felt that they needed more resources to implement the remediation period effectively; consequently, the project I developed to address this issue was a comprehensive PD plan. The project raises questions regarding implementing the 25-minute remediation period, data analysis, and teacher resources. If the PD plan is successful, the perspectives were such that student learning and achievement would be increased.

Future researchers could expand this project by discussing other ways that teachers could implement RTI outside of the 25-minute remediation period. Future research could address how schools could implement various extended learning periods to provide remediation or enrichment opportunities for students. Another direction that future researchers could take would be to do a mixed methods study that involved teacher interviews and/or observations as well as included student progress monitoring data.

Conclusion

In this study, I examined the perspectives of 10 ELA teachers, specifically focusing on their experiences with implementing RTI within a 25-minute remediation period. The findings of the study revealed that the JMS teachers needed more training on implementing RTI and more resources to implement RTI effectively in their classrooms.

Despite the challenges of implementing a new program with little training and resources, the teachers at JMS saw exponential growth in their first year of implementation. To remedy the problem, I created a PD session to address the immediate needs of the teachers. By providing them with more training and resources, the teachers should be able to implement Tier 2 instruction with fidelity and see higher student growth in the coming years. While the project aids in the current needs of JMS, it is recommended that administration provide ongoing PD to ensure that teachers are continually receiving the support needed to implement RTI with fidelity.

I embarked on this study hoping to discover teacher perspectives on student literacy scores declining at JMS. While the answer may be multifaceted, I did identify a problem that could influence student learning at JMS. Through my study I found that teachers need more support, including PD and resources, when they are implementing RTI in their classroom setting. Through this intensive and investigative process, I completely understand the value of RTI to improve student literacy at the secondary level. This study is significant because it will help educators understand the implementation of RTI at the secondary level. I entered this journey as a committed educational practitioner but am now exiting this process as a scholar; researcher; project developer; and, most importantly, a change agent. I will continue the work to change educational outcomes for students, particularly those in underserved communities.

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Appendix A: The Project

The Why

Teachers at the focus school expressed the need for more training on implementing RTI practices within the 25-minute remediation period, analyzing the data that they collect on their students, and to have a resource toolbox that they could refer to quickly when implementing remediation strategies with their students. Having this information where it can quickly be accessed will provide teachers with the ability to better assist their students and improve student literacy scores. The structure focuses on goal setting, planning a course of action, feedback, and reflecting on progress – principles that are aligned to the constructivist learning theory.

The What

The purpose of this professional development (PD) opportunity is to optimize teacher quality through relevant pedagogical support.

The How

The structure of the PD guides teachers through each of the needs that they expressed through the interviews that took place with this study. The PD will review RTI tier 2 instruction, data analysis, and resources to use with students that have reading deficiencies. The PD will be a three-day workshop that will allow teachers time to collaborate and plan for implementation. The first day of the workshop will be presented during pre-planning of the 2021-2022 school year in July. The following two days will be follow-up days that will be scheduled during two teacher planning days throughout the school year.

Purpose

The purpose of this three-day PD is to:

- Provide teachers with an overview of RTI with a focus on tier 2 instruction
- Provide teachers with more information on analyzing student data
- Provide teachers with possible ways to implement the 25-minute remediation period to improve learning of all students
- Provide teachers with resources to support students with reading deficits

The sessions are designed to be relevant and interactive and will provide continuous support throughout the school year. The sessions are designed to provide time for collaboration and will offer continuous opportunities for practice, reflection, and planning.

Learning Outcomes

During day one teachers will understand RTI and the implementation of tier 2 resources, understand how to analyze student data, receive information on how to implement the remediation period successfully, as well as be given a list of resources that they can use during the remediation process. On day 2, participants will bring student data that they have analyzed and information on how they have been implementing the 25-minute remediation period. During this session participants will provide feedback on the implementation process after the initial training, will be given time to collaborate and plan, and will be provided any additional support needed from the facilitator. On day 3

the participants will look at student data to determine student learning and make any final adjustments on implementation of the 25-minute remediation period. AN outline of each day's agenda, activities, and timeline is listed below.

Day 1

RTI in 25-minutes

Time	Activity	Notes
9:00	Welcome & Introduction	Review the norms, goals, learning outcomes and introductions
9:15	RTI & Data analysis	Overview of RTI and analyzing data
9:45	Breakout sessions	Teachers will review student data for analysis
10:30	Break	
11:00	RTI Review	Review RTI
11:15	Remediating in 25-minutes	How to implement RTI withing the timeframe provided
12:00	Lunch	
1:00	Remediating in 25-minutes	Continue above
1:30	Teacher Toolbox	Teachers will be given a list of resources and examples of how to use them
2:00	Breakout sessions	Teachers will be provided time to become accustomed to the resources provided
3:00	**Final Discussion**	Teachers will be asked to provide session feedback and to bring student data and feedback of resources to the next meeting

Day Two

Reviewing the data

Time	Activity	Notes
9:00	Welcome	Review the norms, goals, learning outcomes and introductions
9:15	Implementation Discussion	Teachers will discuss how initial implementation of resources went
10:00	Breakout sessions	Teachers will discuss resources with peers
11:00	Break	
11:30	Analyzing Student Data Review	Review data analyzation strategies
12:00	Lunch	
1:00	Breakout Sessions	Teachers will discuss student data
3:00	Final Discussion	Teachers will be asked to provide session feedback and continue to monitor student growth and bring growth data to the final meeting

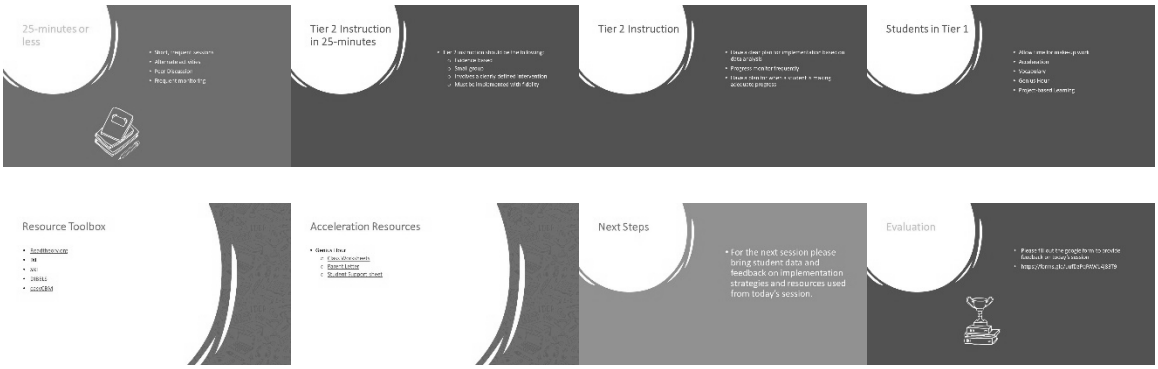
Day 3

Next Steps for Student Growth

Time	Activity	Notes
9:00	Welcome	Discuss final meeting goals
9:15	Analyzing Student Growth	Overview of analyzing student growth data
9:45	Breakout sessions	Teachers will review student growth data for analysis

10:30	Break	
11:00	Next Steps	Making determinations based on student growth
12:00	Lunch	
1:00	Breakout Sessions	Teachers will make next step determinations based on student growth data
3:00	Final Discussion	Teachers will discuss final thoughts and provide session feedback

Day 1 PowerPoint presentation



Day One Training Notes:

- During the introduction, provide context for the sessions with a brief overview of the project study that led to the creation of the learning series.
- Slide 6: participants will review their own practices when implementing the 25-minute remediation period and share their thoughts on the parking lot charts
- The parking lot charts will be labeled “Struggling Readers,” “Rating Your Understanding of RTI,” and “Student Data”
- Slides 7-11: review the RTI process and discuss each tier individually
- Slide 12: discuss what teachers should do for effective data analysis
- Slide 13-14: Share specific tools for tracking student data and analyzing the data that is collected
- Slide 15: share data analysis tips
- Slide 16 (breakout session): teachers will be given various student data and will be asked to identify trends that they see.
- Slide 19: discuss ways to implement RTI within the 25-minute remediation period
- Slide 20-21: implementing tier 2 instruction during the 25-minute remediation period; provide specific examples using various resources

- Slide 22: explain ideas for ways to keep tier 1 students busy and learning while the teacher is meeting with small groups

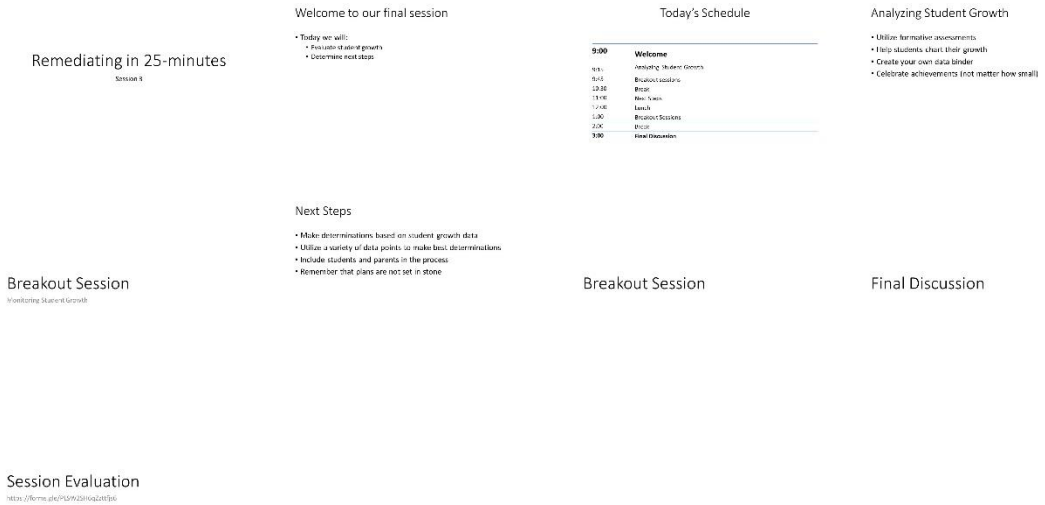
Day Two PowerPoint:

Day two session notes:

- Review the previous session in the introduction and be sure there are no lingering questions from session one
- Slide 4: have teachers discuss changes they have seen since implementing practices from session one. Have participants discuss successes and areas of weakness. Also discuss what changes teachers felt they needed to make or have made since session one.
- Slide 5 (breakout session): teachers will meet with grade level peers and continue discussion started with the group. What specific changes need to be made for your grade level?
- Slide 6: participants will view a video of teachers discussing student data in a PLC setting

- Slide 7 (breakout session): using student data, participants will participate in a PLC similar to the video that was viewed
- Slide 8: discuss final thoughts of participants and answer any lingering questions or address concerns

Day Three PowerPoint:



- Day three presentation notes: During the introduction review previous sessions and discuss changes that teachers have noted in their students. Discuss successes and area of weakness as well as if teachers noted any significant student growth
- Slide 4: overview of analyzing student growth with examples. The focus school uses multiple online platforms that measure student growth which will be reviewed by the facilitator.
- Slide 5 (breakout session): participants will be given practice student data to monitor trends in student growth.

- Slide 6: after teachers have monitored student data, we will discuss ways to plan to use the data
- Slide 7 (breakout session): participants will use previous breakout session work to plan for the next steps

Remediating in 24-minutes Session 1 & 2 Evaluation

Directions: Please choose a rating based on your thoughts about today's session

Question	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
The learning objectives were clearly stated and relevant to my needs.				
The presenter was knowledgeable about the topics and presented in a clear and engaging manner				
The learning objectives were met for today's sessions				
I gained information that will further my understanding of the role and activities of implementing RTI.				
I learned skills that will be enhance my				

effectiveness as a classroom teacher.				

What is your biggest take away from today's session?

What questions do you still have after today's session?

Please share anything that may need to change to enhance the experience of participants.

Remediating in 24-minutes Session 3 Evaluation

Directions: Please choose a rating based on your thoughts about today's session

Question	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
The learning objectives were clearly stated and relevant to my needs.				
The presenter was knowledgeable about the topics and presented in a clear and engaging manner				
The learning objectives were met for today's sessions				
day's sessions I gained information that will further my understanding of the role and				

activities of implementing RTI.				
I learned skills that will be enhance my effectiveness as a classroom teacher.				

How will you implement learning from this series into practice once you are back in your classroom? Provide two specific examples.

How has this 3-day PD series enhanced your professional growth?

In what ways did the activities and materials (scenario, discussion, reflection) enhance your learning?

What suggestions do you have to improve this professional learning series?

What additional comments do you have?

Appendix B: Interview Protocol and Interview Questions

Community & Location _____

Date/time_____

Participant_____

My name is Brittney Phinazee, and I will be facilitating this interview. The goal of this project is to explore teacher perceptions about literacy instruction within ELA classrooms at JMS and investigate the perspective of teacher self-efficacy regarding improving student literacy. As a literacy teacher I value your opinions and insights. I want to know what works and what does not with literacy instruction in your classroom. Ultimately this study will inform literacy teachers on the best practices in improving student literacy in the ELA classroom. The information gleaned from this effort will be shared with wide variety of community stakeholders throughout the region including school and district administration, board members, and community stakeholders.

You were selected through a purposeful sampling process in which I evaluated which teachers had English-Language Arts experience within the school. Between 10 and 15 participants will be interviewed during this process. Prior to the interview you were sent an introductory letter and two consent forms (one to sign and return and one to keep) prior to the session today.

The interview will take 45-60 minutes. Do you have any questions? If there are no further questions, let us get started with the first question.

[Note: the researcher will use phrases such as “Tell me more”, “Could you give me an example?”, “Could you explain that?” as prompts to solicit more detailed information when needed.]

1. To get started, let’s introduce ourselves. In your introduction, please include who you are and some information about your teaching experience with regards to literacy at JMS.
2. What are your thoughts on your student’s Georgia Milestones test scores over the past 3-5 years?
3. Did you have discussions with administration or other faculty members about student literacy scores prior to the 2019 CCRPI score release?
4. What do you feel was the biggest factor in the almost 25-point drop in the CCRPI score from 2018 to 2019?
5. Do you feel that students are coming to you with larger reading gaps than in previous years?
6. Why do you think student literacy rates have declined at JMS in recent years?
7. Describe some of the ways you try to improve student literacy scores within your classroom.
8. Prior to the 25-minute remediation time, how did you approach improving student literacy in your classroom?
9. Were you able to reach your standards as well as implement individualized and small-group instruction prior to the 25-minute remediation period?

10. What were your initial thoughts on implementing RTI within the 25-minute remediation period in your classroom?
11. Please describe how you initially approached implementing the 25-minute remediation period.
12. How do you currently implement the 25-minute remediation time in your classroom?
13. Do you implement the 25-minute remediation period the same each day or is their fluidity in how you implement it?
14. What resources do you use MOST during the 25-minute remediation time?
15. Of those resources mentioned, which do you feel are the most effective in improving student literacy?

Appendix C: A Priori Codes

The following are the list of a priori codes that I will use when coding the interview data:

- Test scores
- Student Data
- Evidence-Based Interventions
- Resources
- Progress Monitoring
- Strategies
- Interventions
- Struggling Readers
- On grade Level
- Below Grade Level
- Above Grade Level

Appendix D: Member Check Form

Please fill out this form following completion of the member check process.

Member Check Questions	Teacher 1	Teacher 2	Teacher 3	Teacher 4	Teacher 5
Was the transcript accurate?					
Were the participants views accurately portrayed?					
Do you agree with the themes that were found based on the participants response?					
Would you add any additional themes, information, etc.?					

Member Check Questions	Teacher 6	Teacher 7	Teacher 8	Teacher 9	Teacher 10

Was the transcript accurate?					
Were the participants views accurately portrayed?					
Do you agree with the themes that were found based on the participants response?					
Would you add any additional themes, information, etc.?					