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A Case Study of Elementary Teachers' Perceptions of Response to Intervention in Special Education Referrals

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Heather Abney

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
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the review committee have been made.

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Walden University
2022

Abstract

A Case Study of Elementary Teachers' Perceptions of Response to Intervention in
Special Education Referrals

by

Heather Abney

MA, Webster University, 2004

BS, Columbia College, 2000

Project Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Education

Walden University

June 2022

Abstract

Students identified as at-risk are overrepresented in special education due to specific learning disability referrals and placement. The problem is that elementary teachers' perceptions of Response to Intervention (RTI) in special education referrals need to be examined due to excessive special education referrals due to lack of individualized instruction and formative data to assess how well the RTI model is implemented. The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine elementary teachers' perceptions regarding the implementation of RTI and the influence of the model on appropriate student referrals for special education services. The conceptual framework for this qualitative project study was Vygotsky's sociocultural theory. The guiding research question for the study addressed if the RTI model supports appropriate referrals to special education. The participants consisted of a purposeful sample of eight elementary school teachers from Grades K-5 currently implementing RTI. The study used semi-structured interviews as the primary tool for data collection. Themes and open coding analyzed data. Results included common themes related to differentiated instruction, the need for additional professional development, and the lack of consistent feedback regarding implementation procedures on RTI. Based on the study findings, a 3-day professional development was developed to address teachers' needs to deliver the RTI model with increased fidelity. This project study can influence social change by increasing teachers' understanding of the RTI process and improving interventions' effectiveness. As a result, the student's academic needs are being met, which may positively impact student achievement and decrease students' referrals for special education services.

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Dedication

I want to dedicate my project research study to my mother. She has been a true motivator and my biggest inspiration, and spiritual cheerleader throughout my life. Her love, support, and guidance have helped me achieve my educational endeavors. Thank you, Mom, for always encouraging me to persevere and strive to reach my goals, even when I felt like giving up and encouraging me that with God, “all things are possible if I only believe.”

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Section 1: The Problem

The Local Problem

Response to Intervention (RTI) was used in a suburban school district in 2011 to reduce the number of students referred to and placed in special education. RTI's goal is to give students a chance to address their academic issues before being referred for special education. RTI, according to Morse (2019), is a systematic procedure that uses student performance data to match students with the types of services that will improve their chances of meeting expected learning outcomes. According to Ryan (2017), RTI should be used to intervene in the placement of students in special education as learning disabled. The only issue is a lack of individualized instruction and formative data to judge how well the RTI model is implemented. Despite all staff receiving training on implementing RTI, the number of students referred for special education services has grown. To address the role of RTI in assisting at-risk students and the effectiveness of RTI in reducing the number of students labeled as special education students, formative data pertaining to RTI implementation is required.

RTI was seen by many teachers in the local school district as an extra option for special education. It was, however, only a forerunner of individual education assessment (J.C., Director of Center for Educator Quality, personal communication, September 8, 2016). RTI is designed to assist instructors in reducing special education referrals by identifying at-risk students and delivering targeted instruction to overcome achievement gaps (Maki & Adams, 2020). Unfortunately, several reasons may play a role in this issue, including a lack of data analysis, a limited understanding of RTI, a lack of training, and a

lack of professional growth. Nevertheless, understanding the RTI program's efficacy in initiating and executing interventions that promote more differentiated instruction and evidence-based practices (EBPs) added to the amount of knowledge needed to solve this problem.

The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, which reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, was passed into law in 2002 (Duignan & Nolen, 2019). Teachers were expected to give evidenced-based instruction (EBI), practices developed from objective evidence, in the general education environment before recommending students to special education as a result of the reauthorization of the NCLB and ESEA. According to Saultz et al. (2019), NCLB's goal was to close the reading and math achievement gaps for minority students in public schools. Although teachers are required to use RTI in general education, there is a lack of formative data to evaluate the success of RTI in order to identify gaps in practice. RTI was an effective strategy for improving instructional strategies in a study (Jackson, 2016). Long et al. (2016) went on to say that teachers frequently lack the necessary training and support from school administration to identify and address issues throughout the implementation of evidence-based treatments.

Even though the district requires extensive interventions to be used and documented before implementing a special education referral, students at XYZ elementary school in the local school district are currently performing below basic reading assessments and being referred for special education. Local school district managers implemented the RTI initiative across the district to achieve the goal, although the teachers' reactions to the intervention process have yet to be studied. African-

American students made up approximately 36.1 % of South Carolina's public school population in 2017, according to the National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD, year). More than 45.1% of African-American students were identified as having specific learning disabilities (SLD). According to NCLD data from 2017, Hispanic pupils in South Carolina public schools were not disproportionately represented in special education classrooms. However, Hispanic students make up only 5.9% of the public school population in South Carolina, and 5.2 % of Hispanic children are classified as SLD. South Carolina was one of 16 states cited by the United States Government Accountability Office for significantly disproportionate identification of minority students in special education. Following this citation, the State Department of Education was ordered to use money allotted under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) to provide early intervention services such as RTI (Raj, 2016). In the 2018–19 school year, 7.1 million kids ages three to 21 received special education services under IDEA (2004), accounting for 14% of all public school pupils. Thirty-three percent of students receiving special education services have specific learning difficulties (National Center for Educational Statistics, [NCES], 2020).

According to the United States Department of Education (USDE), 6.4 million students aged three to 21 receive special education services in public schools (USDE, 2019). According to NCES, kids with specific learning disabilities make up 35% of the special education population in public schools. According to school data, African-Americans and Hispanics have higher rates of specific learning problems than any other cultural group in the United States (NCLD, 2017). Because minorities in special

education are disproportionately high, teaching is required to address children's learning needs and prevent incorrect referrals to special education. According to the NCES, (2017) assessment on the state of education in 2016, there was a racial, intellectual divide (Kena et al., 2016). A difference in academic achievement and race suggested the necessity for culturally relevant treatments to the learner's specific requirements.

Many states had adopted RTI to provide early intervention, according to Al Otaiba et al. (2019), but there were significant discrepancies in how states and schools handled the RTI process. Teachers' expertise of RTI implementation was critical to the program's success because they put it in place. Teachers are required to know how to use data to determine students' performance levels relative to their peers on benchmark examinations and design instructional plans based on their relative strengths and weaknesses for RTI to be successful for children (Al Otaiba et al., 2019). However, according to Joshi and Wijekumar's (2019) research, teachers typically have an unclear understanding of RTI and are uncertain how to deliver assessments. Teachers also said they do not know what to do with the data gathered or make instructional decisions that will benefit their students, especially those at risk of acquiring learning difficulties. As a result, RTI is ineffective without well-trained teachers.

According to Raben et al. (2019), there has been little research on how RTI implementation has affected the number of at-risk students referred to special education. In addition, RTI is a new project in many districts, even though it has been used in numerous schools. As a result, data from teacher interviews about the implementation of RTI and its effectiveness in reducing referrals of students to special education is required

in a study. To determine the RTI initiative's feasibility, qualitative research examining data from teacher interviews was required to address key issues about RTI and its role in assisting at-risk students.

Rationale

The southeastern suburban school district used RTI in response to concerns about the overrepresentation of at-risk students in special education. This multitiered intervention method employs evidence-based treatments to identify at-risk students and give support, as well as limit the number of special education referrals (Moats, 2017). Despite the school district's efforts to implement RTI to reduce unwarranted student referrals to special education, data from the suburban elementary study school's Student Intervention Team Reports (SIT) showed no decrease in the referral of students for specific learning disabilities to special education. During the 2015-2016 school year, 64 students were referred to special education; during the 2016-2017 school year, 70 students were referred; and during the 2017-2018 school year, 74 students were referred to special education.

Identifying gaps in practices linked to implementing RTI is important to addressing RTI's role in assisting at-risk students. Formative data was required to evaluate the effectiveness of RTI. Data was also required to assess the program's effectiveness in reducing the number of students labeled as special education students. According to one administrator, teachers need to be more proactive in identifying at-risk students and narrowing achievement gaps by delivering individualized instruction to target students' academic deficits and needs. Although RTI has been implemented in

numerous elementary schools, it is still a new project in many others, and there is a shortage of formative evaluation data to tell educators about RTI's success. In this study, I used a qualitative case study approach to analyze the perceptions of eight general education teachers in a southeastern suburban elementary school who are in their fifth year of using RTI. With a limited sample of individuals, Creswell (2019) suggested that the researcher provide greater in-depth inquiry and knowledge. Because there are only 400 pupils in the school and 18 general education teachers, investigating eight participants was also logical for this case study.

Data on RTI implementation is essential and how the RTI framework serves students' needs instead of referring them to special education programs. As a result, school officials have allocated resources and assisted with RTI implementation and professional development opportunities for teachers a top priority (Director of Center for Educator Quality, personal communication, December 14, 2016). Once district administrators receive formative data on teacher opinions of RTI, they will help the local district enhance RTI implementation and student expectations. This multitiered intervention method identifies and supports at-risk students using research-based interventions. To reduce referrals to special education, the RTI model is used to provide specialized instruction for at-risk students (Vatakis, 2016). Teachers must give evidence-based instruction in the general classroom before sending students to special education under NCLB (2001) and IDEA (2004). EBPs assist in the accurate identification of students with disabilities and the reduction of misidentification in special education due to a lack of interventions and differentiated instruction (NCLD, 2017). To evaluate if the

RTI method is viable in raising academic student-required success, a study that examined teachers' impressions of RTI and whether it is working to remediate at-risk students and reduce referrals to special education was needed. I aimed to examine elementary teachers' perceptions on RTI implementation and how the model affects appropriate student referrals for special education services.

Definition of Terms

According to Creswell (2018), researchers define terms so that readers can grasp the precise terminology and interpretation used by researchers. Definitions will be used in this qualitative case study to help explain words unique to RTI and relevant to this research topic. Many educational words need to be clarified throughout this study to build a thorough understanding of their significance to the situation. As a result, throughout this project case study, the researcher will use the following words and definitions.

At-risk Students: A term that is frequently used to characterize students who are more likely to fail academically or drop out of school due to conditions that may risk their ability to finish school. Homelessness, learning difficulties, low test scores, disciplinary issues, and other learning-related circumstances can affect a student's educational performance and attainment (Cavendish et al., 2016).

Differentiated Instruction: Differentiated instruction is a method of tailoring instruction to the needs of individual students (Smale-Jacobse et al., 2019).

Evidence-Based Practices: Practices with proven empirical proof of effectiveness in producing results and enhancing student outcomes when adopted are known as evidence-based practices (Freeman et al., 2017).

Progress Monitoring: Measurement of improvement in a student's skill level of learning over time to address instructional requirements and determine which evidence-based interventions are beneficial (Bjorn et al., 2016).

Response to Intervention: RTI (Response to Intervention) is a multi-tiered method that student performance data to identify and intervene early in students' instructional needs. (Morse, 2019).

Significance of the Study

This qualitative case study addressed a local issue by understanding elementary teachers' perceptions of RTI's effectiveness in referring students to special education. It also included data on the effectiveness of RTI intervention strategies in the classroom. By studying teachers' perceptions of the RTI process, the research school was able to gain a better knowledge of the RTI process and, as a result, reduce referrals of students to special education who had been classified as academically at-risk. According to Stapleton (2017), teachers' perceptions of RTI are influenced by their familiarity with the procedure. More information from this study was used to extrapolate research findings to other schools in the district and neighboring school districts to understand better how RTI is being implemented and whether it effectively supports intervention design and more appropriate referrals to special education.

In this qualitative study, I used a case study design to examine the elementary teacher perceptions regarding the implementation of RTI and the influence of the model on appropriate student referrals for special education services. Teachers' perceptions toward RTI have a major impact on how they teach and how their students learn

(Houchens et al., 2017). Case study research (Merriam, 2002) investigates contemporary occurrences in-depth and answers questions such as how and why (Yin, 2017). To examine teachers' perceptions of the RTI Initiative and to address the research study's problem, the primary question that guided this study was, "How does implementing the RTI process support appropriate referrals to special education?"

RQ1. What are teachers' perceptions of RTI in meeting the needs of at-risk students in kindergarten through fifth grade?

RQ2. How do teachers describe the influence of Response to Intervention in their instructional practices for at-risk students in the general education classroom?

RQ3. What do teachers perceive as the factors contributing to or distracting from the implementation of RTI in their school?

Review of the Literature

The purpose of this study was to examine elementary teachers' perceptions regarding the implementation of RTI and the influence of the model on appropriate referrals for students to special education services. This study's research problem was that elementary teachers' perceptions of response to intervention within the context of special education referrals had not been examined. To address the study's purpose and primary research question, a qualitative case study was chosen.

This literature review was created by searching for relevant research on the study's topic of RTI using a variety of sources and keywords. *Response to intervention, special education, learning disabilities, individualized education, student interventions, teacher referrals, behavioral referrals, educational interventions, RTI, and teachers'*

perceptions are some of the keyword search terms used to discover relevant studies.

These terms were useful in locating material in various study books, internet databases, peer-reviewed publications, and dissertations. In addition, current peer-reviewed literature was found using the Educational Resource Information Center (ERIC), Sage Premier, Google Scholar, Education Research Complete, Oxford Education Bibliographies, Academic Search Premier, and ProQuest Central. This literature aided in the investigation of this study and helped to create a comprehensive research synthesis. The literature review begins with a description of the study's conceptual framework. Following that, RTI will be examined and defined, with subsections on its history and components. After that, there is a discussion of RTI in special education contexts, followed by a description of tiered RTI systems. The review continues with a discussion of teachers' involvement in RTI.

Conceptual Framework

The sociocultural theory (SCT) of Vygotsky (1978) guides the conceptual framework of this study. Vygotsky based SCT on the idea that learning and development are founded in social interaction. In diverse social circumstances, Vygotsky referred to this social interaction as a cooperative or collaborative discourse. According to this theory, individuals, particularly infants, develop mental structure and cognition when they engage in social interactions and integrate information from those interactions with their prior knowledge (Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky was interested in the sociocultural framework in which people engage through shared experiences and connections. Humans use tools that form their culture to arbitrate their social situations. Children create

instruments that act as social functions and ways to express their demands. Internalization of these techniques leads to greater thinking skills.

The zone of proximal development, a central concept in SCT, is crucial to understanding how teachers can aid or impede students' ability to absorb and retain new information in educational settings (Vygotsky, 1978). Students' ability to expand and evolve their existing knowledge to higher levels of thinking and academic discourse is described by the zone of proximal development (Karimi-Aghdam, 2017). The environment, their educator, their qualities, and a variety of other factors all influence a student's zone of proximal growth (Eun, 2019). An influential educator, according to SCT, can increase each student's zone of proximal development, hence increasing their potential to progress and expand their present knowledge (Roth, 2020). To do so, instructors must have a thorough understanding of the subject, how students learn, and how to apply that information to improve individual students' learning capacity (Eun, 2019). Modeling, collaborative learning, discourse, and scaffolding are some of the instructional tactics that have been experimentally evaluated to help students increase their zone of proximal growth (Roth, 2020).

Teachers' perceptions of RTI and the school environment can be better understood using SCT (Ferlis & Xu, 2016; Greenfield, 2013). Vygotsky's approach promotes learning environments in which students play an active role. As a result, the student and teacher roles are reversed, with the teacher collaborating with students to foster the development of meaning from class contents (Danish et al., 2017). As a result, learning becomes a collaborative effort between students and teachers. Based on Vygotsky's SCT,

it is critical to examine teachers' perceptions of RTI in a school context, where instruction and learning occur, to understand how RTI implementation might be improved (Long et al., 2016; Maier et al., 2016). As a result, I used a sociocultural method to evaluate instructors' perceptions in this study. Finally, by outlining multiple sources of evidence to evaluate their students' various requirements, this framework's application may lead to insights that can be used to improve instructors' capacity to apply systematic and collaborative assessment procedures to help at-risk students (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020).

The RTI framework uses multitiered instruction to address children's academic and behavioral difficulties (Henderson, 2018). Providing excellent RTI implementation necessitates defined performance objectives, including adopting the RTI model and outlining stakeholder roles and responsibilities. All teachers must be willing to buy into the RTI process and have a high level of self-efficacy to contribute to RTI implementation (Douglas, 2016). When educators applied RTI, training, and support offered an organizational context that allowed for shared continuous strategies and feedback when ambiguities arose throughout implementation. Overall, RTI implementation necessitates allocating time to achieve acceptable levels of fidelity and evaluating success within 2 to 5 years of the first implementation. The framework's performance was influenced by the principles of buy-in, clear expectations, self-efficacy, supportive organization, and time to adopt RTI, which determined whether the RTI implementation process was effective or not. The approach for determining if RTI is being applied correctly allows for collaboration with teachers and administrators on their

RTI experiences. I looked at how teachers and administrators felt about the RTI framework's faithfulness regarding effective interventions, implementation techniques, enabling environments, and expected outcomes.

The purpose of RTI implementation is for teachers to be prepared with the information and training necessary to provide structured instruction and effective interventions to students with academic and behavioral difficulties. Teachers receive continual professional development to help them implement and communicate best practices and adequate progress tracking when they do so. Teachers could also benefit from observation and collaboration, such as monitoring their colleagues during learning walks to see how RTI processes and procedures are implemented and jointly enquiring and debating best practices for RTI implementation in Professional Learning Communities. Teachers can evaluate what best practices work well for their students by participating in learning walks and collaborative conversations in Professional Developments. Teachers also receive feedback on their instructional approaches and learn new skills to help them implement RTI effectively. The goal of RTI is to improve kids' academic and behavioral achievement by using effective interventions and strategies (Hougen & Eberhardt, 2017). Continuous professional development training is crucial for reducing the gap between teachers' and administrators' needs and successful methods while evaluating RTI's performance (Fisher et al., 2016; Olswang et al., 2015). Ongoing professional development improves teachers' self-efficacy and their feeling of purpose and confidence in the integrity they apply RTI (Dwonnell et al., 2015; Phillips et al., 2016).

Response to Intervention

A definition and overview of RTI can be found in this section. The purpose of RTI models and how they are used in general education settings in the United States are detailed in this study. The components of RTI are described in detail, as well as the history of RTI models. RTI is a multitiered strategy for early detection of learning or behavioral issues in students and the development of treatments to help them succeed in school (King et al., 2016). RTI is a strategy for providing early intervention to students who have been identified as having academic or behavioral issues. The use of formative data, or information acquired with suitable, meaningful proof that the skill level, mastery level, and progress toward a goal, has been encouraged due to the intervention. RTI has proven an effective and well-researched strategy for enhancing student success based on formative data (Jimerson et al., 2016; Mundschenk & Fuchs, 2016). Response to intervention enables instructors to implement research-based intervention strategies and make data-driven instructional decisions.

RTI has been emphasized in numerous research studies to improve educational experiences and outcomes (e.g., Anderson, 2017; Keller-Margulis, 2012; Preston et al., 2016). RTI, for example, could be used to identify students with academic difficulties before they are referred for special education services, according to Arden and Pentimonti's (2017) research. According to Hoover (2012), pre-referral interventions arose due to regulations requiring educators to provide all students with appropriate education and track the effects of differentiated instruction on their progress. As a result, unlike prior referral methods, RTI emphasizes early intervention to ensure that students

receive appropriate support and preventative programs before being assessed for special education services (Björn et al., 2018; Nilvius, 2020).

The premise of RTI is that all students can learn (Preston et al., 2016). The teacher evaluates the learning difficulty variables after a student is identified as having difficulties learning. Following the identification of influential factors, interventions to address learning or behavioral requirements are implemented. Interventions should begin as soon as students show signs of difficulty. All students must be assessed to determine who requires assistance before early interventions can begin. These processes were performed before general education teachers recommended students to special education, reducing student over-identification for special education. RTI is a multitiered method with three or four stages in most cases (Henderson, 2018). RTI is an individualized approach to education that focuses on modifying instruction to the requirements of individual students.

The Development of RTI

While the components and activities that make up RTI are relatively new, the defined methods and norms for implementing RTI are not (Castro-Villarreal et al., 2016; Fletcher et al., 2018; Otaola & Pitcher, 2020). The NCLB Act was significant in mandating schools to implement research-based instructional techniques to assist at-risk students (Preston et al., 2016). The need for more effective and tailored instruction has grown since the 2001 mandate of NCLB, ensuring that all students have a chance to succeed (Preston et al., 2016). The current RTI methodology was formed when the

Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) was reauthorized in 2004, according to Preston et al. (2016).

As a result of IDEA (2004), students with learning disabilities are entitled to free public education in the least restrictive environment based on their individual needs and skills. These standards apply to any student with an SLD, which is a phrase that refers to formally diagnosed language-related psychological disorders that interfere with a student's academic progress (Otaiba & Petscher, 2020). Some of the features and activities related to RTI are seen in fields other than education (Preston et al., 2016). RTI's history and growth explain its effectiveness and contribute directly to educators' performance. The more educators are trained about the development and effective practices that lead RTI, the more likely they are to implement RTI thoroughly and effectively, according to Preston et al. (2016).

Furthermore, as Zhang et al. (2019) noted, the more prepared instructors believe they are for RTI implementation, the more likely they will be successful. Many students with learning disabilities or problematic behaviors can now be taught in general education classrooms due to RTI (Jahnukainen & Itkonen, 2016; Otaiba & Petscher, 2020). With the implementation of RTI, schools began using formative assessments to track student progress and make informed decisions. The main focus of the decision-making process should be on increasing access to the curriculum in the least restricted environment possible. Early intervention services must also be considered during the decision-making process. It is critical to consider how RTI can satisfy the requirements of students without labeling them as having learning disabilities (Preston et al., 2016).

However, the process is still influenced by a number of environmental and institutional elements (Otaiba & Petscher, 2020).

Response to Intervention Model

RTI comes in various models, but most share common components and principles (Gillis, 2017). However, the most frequent RTI model has three tiers, although some schools use four-tiered models (Henderson, 2018). Starting with primary prevention in Tier 1, each tier of an RTI model represents a different instructional level. Teachers who are familiar with the RTI process are aware of the various levels of support provided on each Tier and the need to assess students, develop instruction, monitor progress, and make informed decisions about the intervention's effectiveness when students do not make adequate progress at Tier 1 (Miciak et al., 2019). RTI relies on teachers gathering and evaluating data regularly to determine whether the instruction they are providing is appropriate for the student's needs.

RTI is intended to decrease special education referrals for low-income students, minorities, and students who have not received appropriate instruction in theory (O'Connor & Freeman, 2017). Teachers should only consider a special education referral if students do not respond well to evidence-based interventions, according to Hoover and Sarris (2014). Universal screening and progress monitoring are critical for ensuring that kids receive appropriate interventions and that the interventions that have been implemented are effective. Universal screenings and progress monitoring, two fundamental parts of RTI, are discussed in the following subsections.

Key Elements of RTI

Universal screenings are one of the most important aspects of RTI that assess students at risk for academic or behavioral issues. Guidelines used throughout the universal screening process vary significantly by state, as they do for most elements of RTI (Briesch et al., 2018). Briesch et al. (2018) found that eight states (including Washington, DC) lack established criteria for universal screening processes, even though universal screening is mandated by law. In the 18 states that had created universal screening guidelines, there was just a passing mention of universal screening procedures and a hazy concept of universal screening in the context of a tiered support structure.

In contrast, 11 states make only a mere reference to specific procedures to be followed (Briesch et al., 2018). The 22 states that remained gave more detailed procedural information and addressed the impact of social, behavioral, and emotional issues on academic outcomes and learning challenges (Briesch et al., 2018). Briesch et al.'s (2018) meta-analysis highlighted the extent to which at-risk students' academic outcomes may be influenced by the state in which they are screened and the accompanying universal screening procedures if any, exist. Several states differentiate between how students should be screened in the areas of conduct, learning, emotion, and social interaction more precisely than others (Briesch et al., 2018). Some states' guidelines emphasize detecting and resolving problems to enhance academic performance, while others outline a more nuanced approach to finding the fundamental cause of academic difficulties (Briesch et al., 2018). Educators working in public schools in any state must follow the state-mandated universal screening requirements for RTI. As

a result, the extent to which educators working in a given state can accurately undertake universal screening is constrained by the criteria and resources available in that jurisdiction.

Progress monitoring is a second vital component of RTI (Wanzek et al., 2018).

Curriculum-based assessments and other research-based interventions are employed as part of the RTI model's progress monitoring. Progress monitoring is also used to assess the efficacy of treatments and other RTI-related procedures (Hall-Mills, 2018). Progress monitoring is necessary to guarantee that an educational intervention is appropriate and has good consequences for the student, regardless of how well-trained educators are in detecting learning issues or the rationale for implementing a specific educational intervention. Progress monitoring, like universal screening, can differ significantly amongst states, schools, and educators (Hall-Mills, 2018; Hintze et al., 2018). Curriculum-based measurement (CBM) of intervention performance is emphasized in some schools. In addition to academic metrics, others adopt a more comprehensive approach to evaluating intervention implications at the emotional, social, and behavioral levels (Hintze et al., 2018).

In response to ever-changing academic standards and expectations, progress monitoring and the standards used to evaluate intervention efficacy frequently alter (Jimerson et al., 2016). The most recent and visible example of such a transition is adopting common core state standards (CCSS) in 2009 (Jimerson et al., 2016). The implementation of the CCSS demonstrated an attempt to standardize expectations for what students should know at each grade level before moving on to the next. As a result,

significant differences in academic standards and expectations across the state have negatively influenced student achievement (Jimerson et al., 2016). However, the adoption of the CCSS was not without its difficulties and obstacles, particularly for educators. To meet new standards and expectations for what students at a specific grade level should learn, many educators had to adjust their class materials, assessments, and other aspects of their teaching procedures (Jimerson et al., 2016). As a result, many educators have had to adjust how they monitor students receiving RTI interventions. While there is a dearth of evidence to show the overall effectiveness of progress monitoring across all institutions of learning that employ RTI (see Jimerson et al., 2016), academics such as Hintze et al. (2018) have attempted to assess the accuracy of data used to evaluate CBM progress monitoring. Hintze et al. conducted a thorough examination of CBM data, revealing the complicated and multifaceted issues that plague the progress monitoring process. The findings of Hintze et al. show that pupils' intervention reactions are frequently misclassified regardless of teacher preparation and school resource availability. Researchers discovered that out of 20,000 data sets representing progress monitoring for public school pupils' reading growth over 15 weeks, the number of students observed or assessed incorrectly was unacceptable. In addition, although many responses were recorded incorrectly due to recording errors, many students were still classified as "unresponsive" to intervention in many cases where the designated evaluation guidelines were followed, and responses were recorded correctly (Hintze et al., 2018).

RTI outlines multitiered ways to identify and address learning or behavioral difficulties among students (National Center for Response to Intervention, 2012). When used effectively, several researchers have emphasized the value of RTI in improving educational experiences and outcomes (Anderson, 2017; Keller-Margulis, 2012; Preston et al., 2016). Individual RTI practices and components were used even before RTI became a standard approach once the IDEA was reauthorized. Data-driven program development, behavioral consultancy, educational psychology, learning disorders, and parenting disciplines have traditionally been related to RTI (Preston et al., 2016). Each RTI tier represents a distinct degree of instruction, with Tier 1 focusing on primary prevention and Tier 2 focusing on more intense interventions. State, school, and educator procedures for progress monitoring and universal screening differ significantly (Hall-Mills, 2018; Hintze et al., 2018). Nonetheless, because of RTI, many students with SLDs or who exhibit challenging behaviors can be taught in general education classrooms (Jahnukainen & Itkonen, 2016; Otaiba & Petscher, 2020).

Response to Intervention: Tiered System

RTI is a multi-tiered technique for determining a student's educational needs (Morse, 2019). The RTI approach typically has three tiers dependent on the amount of support that each student needs. Furthermore, the RTI model entails providing students at each Tier with evidence-based practices.

Tier I of RTI offers all students evidence-based activities, and universal screening is utilized to identify students at risk of academic challenges (Whitten et al., 2020). Tier I intervention includes intensive, research-based teaching practices, research-based core

curricula, and varied instructional strategies to help students learn. Tier I demands teachers be knowledgeable about evidence-based methods and differentiate education to meet the needs of students (Begeny et al., 2018). When executed correctly, Tier 1 education is usually sufficient for 80 percent of students. Tier II interventions are advanced to students who have not made acceptable progress in Tier I interventions.

Tier II interventions are required for about 15% of public school students. Tier II interventions are focused on specific skills that have not been learned. Tier II interventions are frequently given to small groups of students who have been recognized as needing extra help, and progress must be monitored at least once a week. For example, Begeny et al.'s (2018) study discovered that offering RTI instruction in a small group setting with no more than six students allows for corrective feedback, responding, and teacher attention.

Tier III is usually the last tier in the RTI process. Approximately 5% of students require Tier III interventions after the first two tiers have been executed effectively (Turse & Albrecht, 2015). Students who do not react to Tier I or Tier II interventions require Tier III interventions, which are the most intensive. Tier III often provides more instructional time, and the time span for receiving interventions may be greater than in Tier 2. (Whitten et al., 2020). At Tier III, progress monitoring is also more common. Progress monitoring is usually done on a weekly basis to keep track of pupils' progress (Turse & Albrecht, 2015). Tier III interventions are designed to help students develop foundational skills. Tier III interventions at this level, according to Begeny et al. (2018), should be implemented in small groups of three or four students because it is a more

feasible strategy for educators due to time and resources constraints. Teachers can teach and reteach abilities that students have not previously acquired when they provide teaching in small groups (Begeny et al., 2018). If a student has failed to make progress after completing all three tiers of the RTI process, a special education referral is usually necessary (Whitten et al., 2020).

The RTI process provides data acquired throughout the implementation of all three tiers. If progress is not made, data can be utilized to plan interventions and determine the next steps. Data acquired during RTI implementation also aids in the elimination of reporting inaccuracies and the reduction of causes such as a lack of instruction for students' academic deficiencies in targeted areas. If students are referred for special education, the information acquired through RTI might help with the evaluation process (Werts et al., 2014). Educators play a critical role in RTI since they interact with students the most and perform interventions daily. Several psychologists, school administrators, and school social workers collaborate closely with educators to manage Tier II and Tier III interventions (Avant & Swerdlik, 2016).

In conclusion, RTI models are multi-tiered systems that may provide students with interventions (Whitten et al., 2020). All students receive the same instruction at Tier I; universal screening is performed to determine which students need help (Whitten et al., 2020). Tier II interventions usually entail more individualized and personalized education (Whitten et al., 2020). Tier III is the most generally linked with RTI, and it involves more intensive and tailored interventions if Tiers I and II fail to achieve positive student

outcomes. Students who do not make acceptable progress after completing all three tiers may be referred to special education (Whitten et al., 2020).

Response to Intervention in Special Education Contexts

This section explains how RTI is utilized in special education settings and how RTI used in general education settings might result in students being referred to special education. The special education referral process's controversies and obstacles are also discussed. The section comes to a close with a summary.

In the United States, special education refers to teaching and learning strategies for students who have been identified with disabilities or learning challenges and are not enrolled in traditional public or private schools (Hallahan et al., 2012). To be eligible for special education, a student must have a disability that 1) falls into one of the 13 categories of special education and 2) has a negative impact on their academic performance, according to the IDEA. Autism, Blindness, Deafness, Emotional Disturbance, Hearing Impairment, Intellectual Disability, Multiple Disabilities, Orthopedic Impairment, Other Health Impairment, Specific Learning Disability, Speech or Language Impairment, Traumatic Brain Injury, and Visual Impairment are some of the special education categories (Kurth et al., 2014).

Children with disabilities have not always had access to special education programs in public schools (Conner, 2014). According to Noonan et al. (2014), an unprecedented number of students in the public school system were not obtaining an appropriate education. The Education for All Handicapped Children Act was passed by the United States Congress in 1975. The EHA mandated that public schools provide

disabled students with equal access in the least restrictive setting possible (Björn et al., 2016). IDEA led to federal and state laws that expanded educational rights for students with disabilities, as well as legislation for individuals with disabilities based on federal court decisions. Other federal laws that guaranteed the educational rights of students with disabilities include Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act (Amendments of 1973) and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, which led to the establishment of and improved access to designated special education programs and classrooms (Noonan et al., 2014).

Special education programs and services for students with disabilities ensure that students who have been identified as having learning difficulties receive instructional interventions that are based on best practices and address the student's specific learning needs (Connor, 2014). According to Cavendish and Espinosa (2013), the primary goal of special education is to meet each student's individual learning needs. As a result, universal screening is necessary to ensure that children receive an individualized education that is tailored to their specific learning needs.

Teachers provide individualized interventions to students identified as at-risk based on the results of screenings. According to Cavendish and Espinosa (2013), student progress is measured to see if the student is making acceptable progress or if a special education referral is necessary after receiving consistent and comprehensive treatments. When properly implemented, special education referrals are only issued when an educator has determined that a student's progress would not improve in a general education setting or that general education resources are insufficient to satisfy a student's needs (Chaparro et al., 2020).

For various reasons, the process of referring students to special education has been historically erroneous (Woodson & Harris, 2018). The fact that many students are misdiagnosed with learning disabilities, behavioral problems, and other diagnoses every year is perhaps the most disturbing concern. These diagnoses inform their experiences with schooling and educational practices (Williams et al., 2017). External variables such as a student's home environment, rather than a learning disability or behavioral condition, may be responsible for behaviors and dispositions that negatively impact academic achievements, such as low attention span or disruptive behavior. Additionally, educators' prejudices and beliefs can influence how they assess students' conduct and progress (Squires, 2016). Cavendish and Espinosa (2013) and Cartledge et al. (2016), for example, found that the rate of special education for minority students is highly disproportionate. Researchers conclude that special education should only be considered when instructors adopt relevant evidence-based treatments to avoid excessive and needless referrals. As a result, the student's academic development continues to be insufficient.

When comparing a student's expected learning rate to their actual learning quality, it is critical to see if they respond well to interventions or referrals (Fuchs, Fuchs, & Compton, 2012). Progress monitoring is also crucial for determining the effectiveness of instruction and making appropriate adjustments to instructional practices to meet the needs of each student (Chard, 2013). When used correctly, RTI can help ensure that special education referrals are not excessive or indiscriminate (Kirby, 2017; Vardy, 2016). RTI may also lessen the need for extensive interventions when used at the earliest indicators of a learning problem or behavioral disorder. According to Heinemann et al.

(2017), when RTI is properly implemented throughout Tier 1 and Tier 2, the need for significant Tier 3 interventions is reduced, and improper referrals to special education are avoided. RTI is beneficial in reducing special education referrals by 12 percent when Tier 1 is done effectively and by 8% when Tier 2 and Tier 3 are implemented effectively, according to their findings (Heinemann et al., 2017).

To conclude this section, special education refers to the delivery of techniques to students who have been diagnosed with learning problems or disabilities (Hallahan et al., 2020). According to the IDEA, a student must have a condition that 1) falls into one of the 13 types of special education and 2) has a negative impact on their academic performance. Due to significant changes in special education rules, many primary schools now conduct annual screenings to identify at-risk students (Connor, 2014). However, the process of assigning students to special education and interventions has been faulty in the past for a variety of reasons, including misidentification of SLDs and educators' biases clouding their assessments of students (Woodson & Harris, 2018). RTI ensures that special education referrals are not made in an indiscriminate or excessive manner (Kirby, 2017; Vardy, 2016).

Teachers' Role in Response to Intervention

This section explains the roles and responsibilities of educators in relation to the RTI process. The necessity of continuing professional development and receiving RTI feedback from educators is highlighted, as well as educators' effect on the trajectory and success of interventions. Educators can have a big impact on RTI outcomes (Otaiba & Petscher, 2020). The teacher's responsibility in the RTI process is to identify students

who require interventions, provide research-based materials that are compatible with their educational needs, and select the most effective interventions. Teachers must then collaborate with other educators to create and implement student interventions. RTI is one of many techniques that teachers must use in their classroom education to benefit themselves and their students (KellerMargulis, 2012).

The RTI method is a strategy for assisting students who need intervention or specialized instruction. RTI has been emphasized by researchers such as Frank et al. (2018) for regulating student behavior, promoting positive classroom outcomes, and creating supportive teacher-student interactions. Outside of the RTI model's formalized components, such as progress monitoring and universal screening, Frank et al. (2018) focused on the impact of teachers' daily interactions with students and how teachers' words and behaviors can enhance or weaken teacher-student relationships. Furthermore, individual teacher attributes and talents, such as taking responsibility for mistakes, continual critical reflection, and cultural awareness, can substantially impact RTI outcomes and general classroom conduct (Frank et al., 2018).

For educators to effectively apply the RTI process, they must receive ongoing and effective professional development (Otaiba et al., 2019). Due to recent research and educational initiatives, educational best practices and RTI guidelines are constantly changing and improving. As a result, educators should have frequent opportunities to improve their professional knowledge of RTI best practices, such as formal professional development and training, to successfully apply their expertise in their classrooms. For example, teachers were substantially more educated about Tier 1 interventions and the

leadership structure of school systems than how to use student data to make practical judgments, according to Otaiba et al. (2019). This shows that to increase the effectiveness of their RTI judgments, teachers' knowledge, strengths, and areas for progress should be evaluated as part of ongoing professional development initiatives.

Furthermore, data gathered from the interviews revealed a gap between teachers' grasp of RTI and their capacity to put what they learned into practice in their daily interactions with kids (Otaiba et al., 2019). As a result, professional development should include current, evidence-based methods and realistic expectations for teachers' roles and responsibilities in the RTI process. RTI models and frameworks make it easier for educators to successfully perform their jobs as teachers when appropriately applied based on state-level rules (Whitten et al., 2020). While most educators possess the professional expertise required to teach at their assigned grade level, educational hurdles and other circumstances can limit their capacity to fulfill the needs of all students and promote academic growth. Whitten et al. (2020) provided a quick overview of how RTI frameworks assist both educators and kids. The RTI method, according to Whitten et al. (2020), is a school-wide approach that assists educators in meeting the needs of all students. The multi-tiered structure is a deliberate framework for delivering high-quality, adaptable, individualized instruction to students depending on their academic readiness, needs, interests, and learning preferences. It is founded on the demonstrated effectiveness of productive goal-setting and continuing progress tracking as part of a multi-faceted evaluation system. As a result, teachers can use RTI to combine their talents and resources to fulfill their students' needs.

Periodic reviews of teachers' perceptions and perspectives on existing RTI models can be utilized to improve RTI processes, in addition to reviewing teachers' performance or competence to execute RTI (Anderson, 2017; Hurlburt & Tunks, 2016; Whitten et al., 2020). Understanding RTI advantages and weaknesses from the viewpoints of those directly responsible for implementing screening, interventions, and progress monitoring is a direct way of evaluating teachers' perceptions (Arrimada et al., 2018; Bartholomew & De Jong, 2017).

Anderson (2017) conducted another study to understand better "how teachers charged with administering the RTI process understood its objective, their role, and their preparation for this task" (p. 5). While the present RTI system is rational and helpful, educators in general education and special education at five different primary schools requested extra training to improve RTI processes and develop more effective intervention methods. Furthermore, personal variables such as education level and years of experience had no bearing on teachers' judgments. Implementing school mentorship programs, increasing parental involvement, using data more effectively to improve teacher training, and giving in-service training based on evidence-based methods were among the survey's recommendations (Anderson, 2017). The findings of Anderson's (2017) quantitative analysis demonstrate the value of analyzing teachers' perceptions of RTI and demonstrate how ideas gained from teacher surveys may help RTI models improve.

In summary, educators have a major impact on RTI outcomes for various reasons (Otaiba & Petscher, 2020). RTI is a system for managing student behavior, reinforcing

positive classroom outcomes, and developing supportive teacher-student interactions. As a result, effective ongoing professional development equips educators with the tools they need to properly carry out their critical RTI role (Otaiba et al., 2019). Teachers can use the response to intervention models to monitor students' progress and make important decisions regarding future instruction (Castro-Villarreal et al., 2016). Furthermore, analyzing teachers' opinions on RTI models regularly and acting on their input can help increase RTI effectiveness (Anderson, 2017; Hurlburt & Tunks, 2016; Whitten et al., 2020).

Case Study Research and RTI

A qualitative case study methodology was used in the current research project. Case studies allow researchers to develop an in-depth description of a central research phenomenon (Bouck & Cosby, 2019; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2017; Riley-Tillman et al., 2020); case studies allow researchers to develop an in-depth description of a central research phenomenon (Bouck & Cosby, 2019; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2017; Riley-Tillman et al., 2020). (Yin, 2017). Furthermore, case studies necessitate careful examination of the environment and circumstances influencing the research phenomenon (Yin, 2017). The implementation of RTI and its impact on appropriate student referrals for special education services is the major phenomenon in this research project.

Several RTI case studies have recently been done at the school, district, and state levels (Bouck et al., 2019; Duffy, 2018; Grable, 2019; Roberson, 2017). Duffy (2018), for example, recently conducted a case study of a single Minnesota school district to see how school leaders "leveraged policies, procedures, and implementation techniques" to

implement an RTI model and multi-tiered system of assistance (MTSS). The ultimate goal was to rectify a disparity in student achievement across the district based on I.Q. The necessity of precise implementation guidelines, system-wide alignment/coordination, procedural specificity, principal guidance, and thorough professional development for educators were highlighted in Duffy's (2018) study.

Bouck et al. (2019) conducted another case study to assess the performance of a two-tier RTI strategy deployed in a school mathematics class. Tier I required participation in a general education mathematics class, while tier II required participation in a mathematics lab. A pretest and posttest were used to track progress, and no significant changes in score improvement were found; both groups made improvements, but the tier 2 intervention did not reduce the score gap between tier I and tier II students. As a result, the findings of Bouck et al.'s (2019) case study show how an RTI framework with a firm structure or evidence-based components can nonetheless result in unfavorable intervention effects.

In a comparable study, Grable (2019) looked at recent RTI implementation in two academically recognized elementary schools in Indiana. One school was in a rural setting, while the other was in an urban setting. Staff interviews and classroom observations indicated key variables and themes that contributed to successful implementation. Specifically, several universal screening and progress monitoring assessments were given regularly. Furthermore, early intervention was emphasized, major efforts were made to manage student data, and cooperation with a local institution strengthened educators' instructional assistance. Grable's (2019) case study of two diverse Indiana elementary

schools shows how the same, or comparable, RTI models may be beneficial in very different educational situations when intervention decisions are data-driven, and RTI efficacy is regularly monitored.

Epler (2016) conducted a comparable case study of two schools to assess RTI implementation from instructors' perspectives. Instead of comparing RTI implementation and results from two schools serving the same grade levels, the researcher compared RTI implementation and results from two schools in the same district. While both schools employed an RTI model with four tiers to improve academic outcomes, the distinctions between tiers and RTI components and the techniques educators incorporated vary between the two schools. Within the context of each participating school, Epler (2016) defined each RTI tier following tier 1, general education with no interventions.

According to Epler (2016), a thorough analysis of intervention results revealed that RTI was used effectively at both schools and benefited both children and educators. Overall, the case study demonstrated the necessity of combining the most effective evidence-based practices and RTI models with available funding, student needs, and personnel availability. In addition, the use of quantitative student data and qualitative insights from educators and school counselors helped create a complete and holistic comparison of each school or case.

The majority of the case studies cited were undertaken in a single school, single school district, or a two-school comparison. Chaparro et al. (2020) demonstrated how and why Oregon's Effective Behavioral and Instructional Support (EBIS) system, which was established in 2002, exhibits successful RTI implementation in a more thorough

statewide case study. "(1) district-wide goals; (2) district leadership and commitment, (3) utilization of data-based teaming, (4) professional development and coaching; and (5) district-wide assessment, curriculum, and instructional methods," according to the Oregon EBIS system (p. 270). The framework of teams responsible for executing interventions and support is an essential part of the Oregon EBIS system. The district-level team comprises administrators in charge of resource allocation, literacy specialists, and positive behavioral interventions and support (PBIS) professionals. A systems coach helps officials from the district and school teams communicate more effectively. A resource allocation administrator, PBIS specialists, and literacy experts, as well as tiered groups for each grade and department level, make up the school-level team. The Oregon EBIS has been used to improve student outcomes for nearly two decades, including "statistically significant gains in oral reading fluency (ORF) in first and third grades and marginally significant decreases in the percentage of students in the intensive reading category in second and fourth grades" (p. 5). Since the system's start, scores on measures used to assess system effectiveness in leadership, action planning, coordination, professional development, assessment, visibility, and funding have risen dramatically, from 53% to 78% on average (Chaparro et al., 2020).

Previous case studies that explain the success and failure of various systems and RTI models reveal common elements and variances. The aim is to maximize existing resources and develop the most thorough plan possible (Chaparro et al., 2020; Duffy, 2018). A four-tiered structure may be most appropriate in some circumstances, depending on student needs. However, given the resources available to drive RTI implementation, a

two-tiered approach may be necessary. Numerous RTI systems have failed or required considerable reorganization, raising concerns about their long-term viability. Despite its initial effectiveness, the system could not be sustained in the long run. System success is also linked to coordination at the school and district levels (McIntosh & Goodman, 2016). Multi-tiered systems with defined standards and designated liaisons for school and district leaders have a better level of system efficacy than systems established in single schools or at specific grade levels (Bouck et al., 2019). Finally, the most successful RTI models and methodologies are founded on evidence-based practices and include contextually relevant design components (McIntosh & Goodman, 2016).

To conclude this section, the current research project will employ a qualitative case study approach to create a comprehensive account of the research phenomenon of interest (Yin, 2017). When studying current case studies that illustrate reasons for the success and failure of different RTI approaches, many commonalities and variations can be found. Using available resources to build the most comprehensive system possible, considering sustainability, cooperation at the school and district levels, and contextually appropriate evidence-based practices and design components are all themes associated with successful RTI implementation (Chaparro et al., 2020; Duffy, 2018).

Implications

This qualitative case study addressed a local problem by providing specific insight into the perceptions of elementary teachers regarding the impact of RTI in the referral of students to special education by adhering to a specific set of guidelines (Yin, 2017). The teachers and children at XYZ Elementary School benefited from this

qualitative case study by better comprehending the RTI process and improving the efficiency of applying RTI in the general education classroom. As a result, RTI has been shown to reduce the number of students referred to special education (Catts et al., 2015). Further information from this case study was used to generalize research findings to other schools in the district and surrounding school districts by addressing teachers' opinions of RTI and contributing to XYZ Elementary School's awareness and needs.

Summary

Schools must use Response to Assistance to meet IDEA standards by providing early intervention for students who have not been identified as having learning disabilities. If RTI is to be successful, teachers must follow the program's instructions to meet students' academic needs. To examine teachers' perceptions of RTI's impact on the number of students referred to special education, data must be gathered. This part described the qualitative case study's purpose, significance, important terminology, research questions, and the local problem that influenced the study. A literature review offered documentation for the research's conceptual framework and information to support the study's problem's importance at the local and national levels.

The qualitative case study's methodology, research design, and approach were all discussed in Section 2. The criteria for selecting study participants, processes for gaining access, and methods for establishing a researcher-participant relationship were all covered in Section 2. In addition, the researcher followed measures to ensure the study's participants' ethical protection. Finally, data collection methods were discussed in section 2 and how data is tracked, data analysis, and study constraints.

Section 2: The Methodology

Introduction

This section also explains why a qualitative research design approach was used for this study. I explain how I chose the participants for this study by using purposeful sampling and participation criteria. I describe how a relationship between the participants and myself was developed. I discuss how participants were granted access to the project study site and the safeguards used to ensure that no one was hurt during the research. In addition, I detail the data collection techniques and how I evaluated the data from each instrument to find themes about elementary teachers' perceived challenges and fears about implementing the RTI program at their school.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the elementary teacher's perceptions regarding the implementation of RTI and the influence of the model on appropriate referrals of students for special education services. This qualitative study aimed to learn more about how teachers perceive RTI and its effect on referrals to special education. By gathering data, constructing themes of information, and forming a broad description of practices based on a series of questions answered through individual interviews, I employed Vygotsky's (1978) SCT. According to Creswell (2019), the qualitative study's inquiry tactics have a significant impact on the processes used.

The interview questions were open-ended to allow me to improvise follow-up questions based on the participants' responses and give time for in-depth answers (see Kallio et al., 2016) to consider the effects for teaching and learning. Thematic analysis was used to examine the data. A process of detecting, analyzing, and reporting patterns

(themes) within data is known as thematic analysis (Castleberry et al., 2018). Castleberry and Nolen (2018) stated that thematic analysis of open-ended responses from transcribed interviews might be used to dig deeper into the context of learning while still providing for flexibility in data analysis.

To address the problem of the research study and examine teachers' perceptions regarding the RTI Initiative, the primary question that guided this study was, "How does implementing the RTI process support appropriate referrals to special education?"

Additional research questions this study addressed included the following:

RQ1. What are teachers' perceptions of RTI in meeting the needs of at-risk students in kindergarten through fifth grade?

RQ2. How do teachers describe the influence of Response to Intervention in their instructional practices for at-risk students in the general education classroom?

RQ3. What do teachers perceive as the factors contributing to or distracting from the implementation of RTI in their school?

Research Design and Approach

I chose a qualitative case study design to examine the participants' perceptions and thoroughly describe the data (see Creswell & Creswell, 2017). In a bounded system, a qualitative case study approach is used to investigate a particular case (Kratt, 2019). Case studies differ from other qualitative methodologies in that they entail in-depth examinations and descriptions of a single unit or system that is constrained by place and time (Anderson, 2017). Qualitative research can also be used to learn more about other people's actions, views, worries, motives, goals, culture, or way of life (Creswell, 2018).

A qualitative study can be used to make educational decisions, create communication strategies, and perform research. Among the various formal approaches employed are in-depth interviews and ethnography. Unstructured material, such as company reports, customer feedback forms, or media clips can also be analyzed as part of qualitative research. As a result, manually collecting and evaluating this unstructured data can be time-consuming and difficult. The study's research questions served as the foundation for the qualitative approach, which explained, examined, and characterized occurrences or happenings (see Wilde et al., 2019).

This qualitative case study examined the elementary teacher's perceptions regarding the implementation of RTI and the model's influence on appropriate referrals of students for special education services. XYZ Elementary School was the site of the case study. I conducted one-on-one interviews with teachers to learn more about their perspectives on RTI. As part of my research strategy, I considered my goal with the research, my role as the researcher, how data will be collected, how data will be analyzed, and how the research findings will be presented.

Within the qualitative research design, there are numerous approaches to research (Creswell, 2019). Qualitative research can be conducted in a variety of ways. Ethnography, phenomenology, narrative, and grounded theory are among the methods used. According to Chen and Teherani (2016), the approach chosen is determined by the investigation's emphasis and research questions. As a result, the researcher must be aware of the key characteristics of each method and how they relate to the study's research questions.

The beliefs, values, and attitudes that shape a group's behavior, language, and relationships are grouped in ethnographic research (Hancock & Algozzine, 2017; Kusumaningrum, 2018). Ethnography is a qualitative study that understands and examines people's culture over a long period of time, according to Fetterman (2019); however, due to time constraints, I did not apply the ethnography approach. A phenomenological study allows the researcher to experience a phenomenon through the eyes of the study's participants (Creswell, 2019). A phenomenological methodology requires the researcher's study of the participants over a long period of time. Ethnographic and phenomenological methodologies were not viable for this project study due to time constraints.

A research technique that employs or creates arguments from data acquired and examined using comparative analysis is known as grounded theory (Chun Tie et al., 2019). The goal of grounded theory is to construct a theory based on data. According to Creswell (2019), a researcher uses ground theory to conceptualize the study topic based on the participants' perspectives. The grounded theory methodology was not appropriate for this research because my goal was not to develop a theory. The narrative analysis was another design consideration. According to Creswell, narrative inquiry entails acquiring data via collecting tales, recounting individual experiences, and analyzing the significance of those experiences. The researcher collects autobiographies, biographies, life narratives, and oral descriptions of past events as data for narrative analysis (Creswell, 2019). The narrative analysis did not apply to this study because I did not want to collect data for an autobiography or life narrative.

Justification of Research Design

The case study method was chosen because it allows for in-depth exploration and investigation of an everyday occurrence in its natural setting (see Yin, 2017). The researcher uses a case study approach to select a limited number of participants and analyze a behavior pattern to better understand the phenomenon (Ridder, 2017) and investigate the occurrence, and data is triangulated from multiple sources. As a result, I concluded that a qualitative case study approach was the best way to learn about elementary teachers' perceptions. Quantitative and mixed research methodologies were also considered for this investigation. Quantitative research examines variables and their relationships to analyze statistical data (Creswell, 2019). These variables are often assessed by achievement/aptitude tests or surveys, with quantitative data analyzed through statistical processes.

This project study examined the quantitative research design. Nonetheless, I elected not to use this method because the study's findings were not analyzed or summarized using textual data. Textual data could not be collected because of the quantitative research methodology. Nonetheless, numerical data is irrelevant to this study because no experimental or correlational research was conducted. A mixed research approach was also examined as a study design. This strategy entails the collecting of both qualitative and quantitative data. According to Creswell and Clark (2019), a mixed-method research design allows the researcher to address a study problem in various ways. However, because narrative data acquired through interviews was not utilized to gather data, a mixed-method research methodology was not suited for the study.

Participants

The participants for this study were chosen through purposeful sampling. Participants are chosen for purposeful sampling based on their ability to provide meaningful information on the topic under investigation (Babbie, 2017). Purposeful sampling was used to produce an in-depth investigation of the study's principal emphasis (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Vasileiou et al., 2018). According to Creswell (2019), a qualitative sampling approach is based on specialized knowledge of the subject or issue, and a sort of purposeful sampling involves the willingness to participate in the study. Through one-on-one interviews, the focus on teacher perceptions was critical in answering the guiding study question. Guetterman (2020) stated that qualitative sampling often employs a nonprobability-based technique, such as purposeful sampling, in which participants are chosen specifically for their capacity to answer the study questions. The general education teachers in grades K-5 were the study's target sample. The project research took place at a school with 400 kids in prekindergarten through fifth grade. Over 20% of the 400 students have been classified as special education students. In a self-contained classroom, 8% of students receive services, 10% receive instructions in a resource classroom, and 2% receive speech-language therapy in an itinerant setting. The elementary school is in a public school district in the United States' southeastern region. There are 52 schools in the district: 28 elementary schools, nine middle schools, seven high schools, and eight special and charter schools (. African Americans, Asian Americans, Indian Americans, European Americans, and Hispanics attend the district's 52 ethnically diverse schools. In the research study school district, there are roughly

23,000 kids enrolled. Seventy-five percent of the students are African Americans, 18 percent are Caucasians, 4% are Hispanics, 2% are Asian Americans, and 1% are American Indians.

For my final study, I recruited eight to 12 general education participants. I stipulated that the chosen participants must meet specific requirements. First, participants were required to actively participate in the RTI process. Second, participants were required to have either previously established or be currently implementing the RTI process. The participants also had at least 2 years of RTI experience and were familiar with implementing tiered interventions. The sample size reflected the number of individuals who volunteered and met the study's requirements.

My rationale for recruiting eight to 12 teachers was to present a diverse range of teacher perspectives. According to Creswell (2019), a researcher uses a small sample of individuals to conduct more in-depth research and understanding. As a result, evaluating more than eight subjects was unnecessary, and a bigger group would not have provided me with as much in-depth information as the smaller group. The sample size was kept small to gain a more in-depth insight using this method of investigation (see Vasileiou, 2018). According to Creswell, a qualitative sampling method is based on a specific understanding of the subject or issue. A sort of purposeful sampling is the ability and willingness to engage in the study.

Gaining Access to Participants

I gained access to participants by receiving consent from Walden University's Institutional Review Board to conduct the study (approval no. 09-11-19-0445568),

allowing me to collect data. After that, I wrote and emailed a letter to the principal of XYZ Elementary School requesting permission to conduct research (Appendix B). Upon obtaining permission to conduct research from the school's administrator, the school's administrator emailed a participation invitation letter stating the study's purpose and criteria inviting teachers to participate (Appendix C). The participation invitation letter was then forwarded to the school's teachers by the school's administrator. After 5 days, I checked my Walden email for responses from potential participants. At the time, I had received 10 responses; however, two teachers decided not to engage in the study for various reasons unrelated to the study. The remaining eight people verified their willingness to participate in the study by answering the email I provided with informed consent from potential participants by replying, "Yes, I consent." The eight teachers who agreed to participate were then contacted to set up an interview date and time.

Researcher-Participant Relationship

Qualitative researchers are extensively involved in data collecting and deal with ethical issues that arise in the researcher-participant relationship (Merriam, 2016). As a result, in qualitative research, it is critical to create a researcher-participant relationship role (Bell et al., 2016). Unfortunately, I could not meet with teachers face-to-face due to COVID-19 restrictions, but I did call each participant to create a connection. The study's goal, the data collection techniques, my and participant's roles, and their significance in the research were discussed during this chat with potential volunteers. I also stated that I wanted to use the findings of this study to encourage and assist teachers in better implementing RTI in their classrooms. I attempted to create trust and understanding with

the participants by sharing information about myself and my excitement for this project. As a result of this effort, I saw that participants were more inclined to share their thoughts about RTI. Yin (2017) emphasized the importance of establishing a trustworthy relationship between the participant and the researcher to get accurate and complete information for the study.

Ethical Issues and Confidentiality Agreement

According to Apuke (2017), during the study process, the researcher has an ethical obligation to protect participants and the profession. As the researcher, I had no ethical concerns or conflicts of interest that would have impeded the study's progress. Therefore, the participants were kept anonymous and were not recognized by name. In each interview, the participants' confidentiality was important on their concerns and perceptions of the study's topic. The participants' identities or schools were not disclosed in the study to safeguard their rights, including confidentiality.

Furthermore, I informed each participant that they would be identifiable by alphanumeric coding. The study's purpose was also discussed, and I reminded each participant that participation in the study was entirely voluntary. Finally, before the interview, I informed the participants about the study's procedures, objectives, risks, and benefits. After the interview, all participants were informed that they would receive an electronic copy of the interview through email. Participants were also told that all interview transcripts and data would be kept secure for 5 years before being destroyed. According to Walden University's protocol, all data collected for the study will be stored for 5 years.

Data Collection

The study's research questions about teachers' perceptions of the implementation of RTI and the influence of the model on appropriate referrals for students to special education services at the research site were answered mostly through interviews. Interviewing is frequently used as a key strategy to acquire research data in the educational profession (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). I developed an interview instrument (see Appendix D) by using interview guides to assist me in selecting questions to ask efficiently about elementary teachers' perceptions of RTI implementation and the model's influence on appropriate student referrals for special education. One-on-one semistructured interviews were used to gain teachers' perceptions of the RTI process. Interviews were performed over the phone at a convenient time for both the participant and myself. Each interview lasted 60 minutes, and all of them were conducted over the phone due to COVID-19. The interviews were set to enable enough time between them to allow for more time if necessary. The interviews were semistructured, with participants responding to a series of open-ended questions that were not leading and did not need simply yes or no responses (See Appendix D).

Sufficiency of Data Collection

Individual interviews were sufficient for gathering data about teachers' perceptions of RTI implementation and the model's influence on appropriate student referrals for special education services. According to Harrison et al. (2017), interviews are the most important sources of information in a qualitative study. Individual interviews allowed me to thoroughly explore the elementary teachers' perceptions of RTI, using

interviews to justify collecting data for the study. The interview questions were a series of carefully crafted questions designed to elicit perspectives from individuals with similar backgrounds or experiences on a certain topic.

System for Tracking Data

During the interviews, I asked participants a series of guided questions about their perceptions on RTI implementation and the model's influence on appropriate referrals of students to special education. For accuracy, I transcribed interviews. While participants responded to open-ended interview questions, I made notes on an interview protocol form. The transcripts and analysis were shared with the participants to double-check that I had accurately interpreted the responses. During the interview, participants elaborate and explain their comments (Creswell, 2019). I took notes during the interviews and labeled them with alphanumeric identifiers. After all, interviews were completed, I transcribed the participant's responses. The data from the interviews were gathered and examined to look for patterns and themes.

Role of the Researcher

According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), the researcher's role in qualitative research is to try to gain access to the participants' thoughts. My role in this study is that of a student-researcher examining elementary teachers' perceptions regarding the implementation of RTI and the influence of the model on appropriate student referrals for special education services. As a researcher, I had numerous responsibilities during the study. I informed potential participants about the study, obtained their agreement, and developed interview questions. I also gathered data, analyzed it, and presented the study's

outcomes. Following the study, I secured all of the task-related documents. In the school district where XYZ Elementary School is located, I had no previous professional interaction with any of the participants prior to the study. That is why, before each interview, I presented information about myself and my function in the school context to acquire the participants' trust. To create a welcoming atmosphere, I focused on establishing a connection with the study participants who were being interviewed. I used broad introductory talk unrelated to this topic to avoid influencing participants' responses by expressing personal thoughts regarding the research subject. In addition, I avoided biases during data collection by not asking any leading questions about the project study topic before or throughout the interview procedure. During the data analysis stage of the project research, it became important that I minimize any biases. During the interview process, I avoided using facial expressions, tone, or body language to avoid displaying any bias. During the interviews, I also used neutral body language and facial expressions to avoid indicating favor or disapproval of any participant's comments. I also maintained a neutral tone throughout the interview, answering each question without highlighting any keywords or concepts.

Data Analysis

Data analysis of teachers' perceptions about the impact of RTI on the referral of students to special education was conducted. Themes were generated by analyzing the data gathered from the interviews by coding, categorizing, and labeling them. Analyzing the data allowed me to understand better the roles of teachers and how they view RTI in their classrooms. An inductive reasoning approach was used to answer the study's

research questions, assemble and evaluate data for analysis. Looking for patterns and assisting in the development of generalizations are examples of an inductive approach (Zalaghi & Khazaei, 2016).

In contrast to the more deductive, hypothesis-centered quantitative method, qualitative data analysis is primarily inductive, allowing meaning to emerge from the data (Richards & Hemphill, 2018). Themes were developed after a detailed study, which included classifying, categorizing, and labeling the data. The inductive technique focuses on observation and drawing inferences from it (Zalaghi and Khazaei, 2016). The inductive method is also employed in the search for patterns and the development of generalizations. The data was then thoroughly evaluated and classified in order to conduct a thematic analysis of the findings.

The data was divided into themes, and important phrases were color-coded by emphasizing related research topics. According to Creswell (2018), coding is a technique for organizing and grouping data with similar qualities. As a result, coding improved the study's accuracy. Throughout the data collection procedure, the qualitative study did data analysis. The organizing of data for subsequent analysis is known as data display (Miles & Huberman, 1984). Trends and themes were uncovered using open coding to collect data. Qualitative data analysis, according to Castleberry and Nolen (2018), entails compiling, disassembling, reassembling, interpreting, and concluding. Finding meaningful responses to my study questions was the first stage in gathering data, and assembling entailed transcribing the interview data to examine it simply. Coding is

defined as the process of converting raw data into useable data by recognizing themes, concepts, or ideas that are related in some way (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018).

Simultaneously, applying and reapplying codes to qualitative data enables data grouping and regrouping to promote meaning and explanation (Creswell, 2019). Coding entailed discovering data similarities and contrasts. Coding is a method of retrieving and categorizing similar data so that the researcher can look at all of the information connected with that code (Richards & Hemphill, 2018). The codes were grouped and then placed in context to generate themes. The themes that developed were then grouped, and significant data relevant to the study was presented.

Accuracy, Credibility, and Findings

To ensure reliable analysis techniques, several strategies were applied during the study. According to Creswell (2019), “the researchers' ability to assess the correctness of findings ensure readers of accuracy was strengthened by the employment of multiple methods. Each data set collected was rechecked once the data was analyzed. Individual interviews were re-evaluated for missed patterns and coding pattern misidentification (Creswell, 2018). I re-evaluated codes and notes to ensure that patterns were correctly identified and to address any questions or contradictions in the data collected from the participants' interviews. The triangulation approach is then utilized to ensure the validity of the study (Creswell, 2013). The goal of triangulation is to use various metrics to validate the same theme or occurrence. This method is more dependable than relying on a single source for results (Yin, 2009). The researcher can use triangulation to investigate information from numerous data sources and analyze it to build a coherent justification of

themes” (Creswell, p. 191). To triangulate, the researcher will use data from interviews. “Case study findings are more likely to be reliable and credible if they are based on different sources of information,” according to Yin (2009). Rechecks will be used to corroborate patterns that have emerged. The implementation of a peer review technique will aid in ensuring the data's veracity. After that, a member check will take place (Creswell, 2018). The participants will have the chance to look over any themes that emerge from the data to see if they believe the themes and findings are accurate (Creswell, 2018).

During the data collection and data analysis, I made steps to build credibility and validate that the conclusions of this study are consistent with the study's goal. First, I utilized various tactics to verify that suitable analysis procedures were followed. According to Creswell (2018), the researchers' ability to assess the correctness of findings to guarantee readers of precision was strengthened by employing diverse methods. Each data set was rechecked after reviewing the data received next. Second, missed patterns and misidentification in coding methods were reevaluated in teacher interviews (Creswell, 2018). I re-evaluated codes and notes to ensure that patterns were correctly identified and to address any questions or contradictions in the data collected from the participants' interviews. Third, the study's validity was confirmed using the triangulation approach (Creswell, 2019). The goal of triangulation is to use various metrics to validate the same theme or occurrence. This method is more dependable than relying on a single source for results (Yin, 2009). The use of triangulation enabled for the assessment of evidence from diverse data sources to build a coherent justification of themes” (Creswell

(2019), p. 191). Data from audio-recorded teacher interviews were used. “Case study findings are more likely to be credible and accurate if they are based on numerous different sources of information,” according to Yin (2009). Rechecks were used to confirm patterns that had emerged, and the use of a peer review process aided in ensuring the data's validity. Finally, there was a member check (Creswell, 2018). Within a week, I emailed participants a preliminary summary of my results to examine them and provide feedback on how I interpreted their responses during the interviews. The participants were allowed to look at any potential themes that emerged from the data to see if they thought the themes and conclusions were accurate (Creswell, 2018).

Discrepant Cases

It was essential to address any discrepant cases that may occur during the study with the 8 participants. I identified discrepancies that may emerge during data collection by finding inconsistent data with themes established during data analysis. I discussed any identified articles and perceptions that may contradict the participants' subjects to deal with discrepant cases. I also checked for discrepancies by asking the participants to validate or retract the interview transcripts to clarify the information. According to Yin (2017), identifying inconsistent data strengthens the study.

Limitations

The purpose of this qualitative case study is to examine the perceptions of elementary teachers regarding the impact of RTI on the referral of students to special education. The study only looked at students in kindergarten through fifth grade at a

local elementary school. The following factors could be considered potential study limitations. The study's participants were first chosen from a single suburban school district in South Carolina. As a result, the study findings could not be applied to other school districts in the state or country. Second, the information gained may only be useful to the school district where the study was conducted. Third, the findings were not applicable to other school districts that had received RTI training from various RTI consultants and facilitators. Finally, the study's findings may not apply to other RTI models with many tiers or schools with a wide range of student demographics.

Data Analysis Results

Themes are established in qualitative data analysis to summarize the nature of the event. During the qualitative data analysis phase, thoughts must be clarified to better understand the situation (Houghton, Murphy, Shaw, & Casey, 2015). Qualitative research varies from quantitative research in that qualitative data analysis is primarily inductive, allowing meaning to emerge from the data rather than the more deductive, hypothesis-centered quantitative method, according to Richards and Hemphill (2018). I first did a rigorous study to produce themes by classifying, categorizing, and labeling the data. Following that, an analysis procedure used inductive reasoning to assemble and evaluate data to answer the study's research questions. According to Zalaghi and Khazaei (2016), the inductive technique stresses observation and drawing inferences from observations. They also mentioned that the inductive method entails looking for patterns and making generalizations.

Data Analysis Process

The study's data was evaluated and categorized so that a thematic analysis of the findings could be performed. Coding entailed discovering data similarities and contrasts. The codes were used to find and classify data that were comparable across the dataset connected with the codes (Richards & Hemphill, 2018). The codes were then placed in context with one another to form themes. Themes reflect key aspects of the data collected and represent recurring patterns in the data (Roberts, Dowell, & Nie, 2019). Thematic analysis is defined by Roberts et al. (2019) as a pattern identification method used in the content analysis that categorizes themes for examination. Compiling, deconstructing, and reassembling the themes were then used to interpret them. Conclusions, according to Castleberry and Nolen (2018), are compiled from responses to the study's research questions and goals. A full discussion of the coding processes and how the themes were developed and understood aided in the development of the study's conclusion.

I assigned a number to each participant before collecting data to maintain anonymity; the participant's number was used during data analysis. The interviews were then transcribed, and the transcriptions were compared to the audio recordings to ensure that the data was accurate. After verifying the accuracy of the data, I prepared a new document with the interview questions and responses from the participants. The responses of the participants to each question were coded. Throughout the interview questions, the participants' responses were scrutinized for comparable terms and phrases. Additionally, related words and phrases were classified for each group by color-coding the text.

Color coding aids in the identification of themes related to the study topic, conceptual framework, and research questions. I utilized the software's "find" option to look for similar terms and responses. An inductive, open-coding approach was used to code and categorize data for analysis (Bree & Gallagher, 2016). Open-coding was first used to systematically assess and categorize research data. The inductive method ensured that the study was guided by the facts rather than any biases. Then, codes that recognized comparable data were organized into major themes. The codes consisted of words, phrases, and sentences that described the participants' answers. Finally, thematic analysis of the coded keywords was conducted using interview replies' data and grouped into 30 codes of similar words, phrases, and thoughts. The use of color-coding made it easier to spot emergent themes.

The interviews, which comprised of ten open-ended questions, were the primary source of data gathering (Appendix E). Ten interview questions were posed to the participants. The interviews were transcribed, and the responses were organized for further investigation (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018). Transcribing is a method of obtaining a written transcript of a participant's comments for examination in qualitative research. Each teacher's response was reexamined to acquire a more in-depth understanding of their issues and perceptions with implementing the RTI program. Participants' responses were transcribed verbatim and also reexamined to validate the correctness of the data. I generated a document with all of the interview questions and responses from the teachers. For each interview question, I first examined the teachers' responses, looking for comparable terms and sentences. The text was then color-coded with different colors for

each group to identify identical or similar words and phrases. This document assists me in recognizing similar terms and phrases in the participants' responses. I was able to detect themes pertinent to the study questions as a result of the content in different colors. According to Vaismoradi, Jones, Turunen, and Snelgrove (2016), themes allow researchers to address the study's research question. This method made it possible to describe and analyze data for meaning (Roberts et al., 2019). After that, I went through the entire paper looking for duplicates or keywords in the interview responses.

Similarly, in each response for each item, comparable words and phrases were color-coded and repeatedly read to identify keywords and phrases. Finally, the words were color-coded and copied into a new document. The primary goal of this inductive technique is to let research findings arise from a variety of dominating or important topics without being constrained by established methodologies (Lui, 2016). According to Lui, inductive analysis codes data do not fit into a prior coding framework or the researcher's analytical presumptions.

Discussion of Findings

This study's purpose is to assess elementary teachers' impressions of RTI and its impact on appropriate student referrals to special education services. This study's conclusions came from interviews with 8 elementary school teachers in a southeast suburban district. The 8 teachers taught grades K-5. Each interview aimed to understand better teachers' perceptions regarding the implementation of RTI and the influence of the model on appropriate student referrals for special education services. Throughout the investigation, data was analyzed. To maintain confidentiality, I coded the teacher's data

alpha-numerically. Each interview's data was arranged according to the research questions and the primary components through data gathering and analysis that matched the three study topics. Themes emerged from interview responses after data analysis. Member checking clarified any participant answers. A copy of their interview responses was emailed to them for review. Each teacher said the questions were correct. The final themes for each research question were created.

The first theme addressed Research Question 1, the second theme addressed Research Question 2, and the third and fourth themes addressed Research Question 3.

RQ 1. What are teachers' perceptions of RTI in meeting the needs of at-risk students in kindergarten through fifth grade?

Theme 1: Lack of Knowledge on Differentiation of Instruction

Based on the findings, the teachers thought the RTI program was unsuccessful and not being implemented properly. RTI implementation is highly dependent on a teacher's knowledge and skills regarding the RTI process. Teachers who are familiar with providing the RTI model's tiered components can ensure that students receive the proper interventions and determine the effectiveness of the classroom instruction provided. The fidelity of application was mentioned by all 8 teachers, who stated that their school was not consistently implementing the RTI tiered intervention with accuracy throughout the building. Teacher 1 believed that the lack of precision in providing the tiered interventions was due to insufficient RTI framework implementation training. During all 8 interviews, teachers mentioned the concept of differentiation of instruction. Teachers 2 and 3 stated that they would like to learn how to differentiate instruction and engage

students in the classroom using technology. The majority of educators believed their self-efficacy to deliver the RTI model's tiered interventions was inadequate. They also stated that they had limited knowledge about the differentiation between Tier 2 and Tier 3.

Teacher 3 stated that she needed clarification "I do not know enough about Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions and how to differentiate instruction when implementing the two tiers.

Teacher 5 stated that she utilizes STAR Reading and STAR Math, online curriculums that the district has purchased to implement Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions. Teachers 2, 4, and 5 said that they are unclear makes the online curriculums a Tier 3 intervention 2 if it is a Tier 2 intervention? Teacher 2 stated that she needed clarity between the two tiers and what interventions to give each student." Teacher 5 expressed that she needed help finding and implementing research-based strategies to improve all students' Tier 1 instruction. She believed that improving Tier 1 instruction was vital to keep students from needing more intervention. Teachers appeared perplexed regarding the RTI process, despite having regularly scheduled meetings for Tier 2 and Tier 3 students. Teachers 4 and 6 stated that they implemented differentiated instruction on a grade level for all tiers, adjusting the level and the intensity of work depending on each students' needs.

RQ 2. How do teachers describe the influence of Response to Intervention in their instructional practices for at-risk students in the general education classroom?

Theme 2: Unclear RTI Guidelines

Teachers felt the RTI did not influence their instructional practices for at-risk students because they were unclear of the RTI guidelines. Because they were unfamiliar with the RTI criteria, teachers believed the RTI had no impact on their teaching practices

for at-risk kids. In addition, teachers reported they were unsure about applying RTI because the school did not correctly provide clear guidelines to support their RTI instructional practices. According to Kalahari (2019), implementing RTI is challenging for general education teachers, and clear guidelines and expectations are critical if RTI is effective. When RTI was first introduced, the guidelines were unclear, according to the participants, and did not appear to be consistent across grade levels or even within the district. The school district conducted RTI meetings and training sessions for RTI Chairpersons from each district's schools monthly. However, according to the participants, teachers were not usually given the training or new material when RTI Chairpersons returned from monthly RTI meetings.

RQ 3. What do teachers perceive as the factors contributing to or distracting from the implementation of RTI in their school?

Based on the findings, Teachers stated that they have inadequate training on how to implement the RTI process and that extensive PD is needed (Theme 3) to meet the needs of their students and that this is a significant issue that is distracting them from consistently implementing the RTI model. Teachers also stated that the lack of resources played a role in implementing RTI in their schools (Theme 4).

Theme 3: Professional Development

The third theme is directly related to the third research question. All participants agreed that PD was required to understand all aspects of RTI better, including but not limited to intervention selection, implementing interventions, data collecting, progress monitoring, and data analysis for the appropriate rate of acquisition. T1, T2, T3, T4, T5,

T6, T7, and T8 all agreed that continual PD is necessary, but they also emphasized the importance of coaching and trying different approaches to understand the RTI process better. When asked what additional needs would help teachers maintain RTI integrity, all responded that professional development was at the top of the list. Throughout the data analysis of each interview, participants expressed a desire for PD to understand RTI better and apply it as intended. As a result, continual PD, based on interview data, is important to the effectiveness of RTI.

The participants agreed that additional PD concerning RTI was needed. Teachers expressed a want for further professional development on the different components of the RTI model, such as research-based tiered interventions and assessment measures, among others. Teacher 6 spoke on the importance of strengthening Tier 1 instruction. "I want to concentrate on Tier 1 education because I believe our teachers need to be more knowledgeable about effective strategies," she explained. Teacher 5 believed that professional development was necessary in order to improve student assessment and decision-making. "That would require a significant amount of PD, and the majority of us are uncertain about that." In order to fully comprehend the components of RTI, the other teachers agreed that more training was required. Teacher 2 stated, "I believe that if instructors understood it better, they would use it more," Teachers also stated that professional development was critical to their expertise and understanding of differentiated instruction. However, the previous professional development did not address the specific needs of each teacher in terms of classroom implementation or provide ongoing training and support for the RTI processes and procedures, despite the

fact that it provided an overview of the RTI program, including its purpose, goals, and components. Additional professional development is required to cover strategies for providing individualized reading instruction, progress monitoring, and documentation. Teacher professional development (PD) opportunities such as hands-on workshops and classroom mentorships, according to Bjorn et al. (2016), are beneficial to teachers because they allow them to receive specific directions on implementation procedures and intervention strategies that can be used in classrooms. Teacher 3 commented, "I believe that more teacher PD would be beneficial in order to assist students who are struggling in core content courses" She considered that the several teachers did not have a consistent understanding of how to implement the research-based interventions in the various curricula areas and that this played a major role in them implementing RTI.

Theme 4: Resources

Teachers 4 and 6 both stated that they notice a shortage of many resources such as interventions, materials, and personnel. They also stated that finding time to work with students individually while teaching Tier 1 and Tier 2 is difficult. Teacher 4 stated that having the resources to implement the interventions will make her feel more prepared for the students during the intervention block. "We have an accommodating administrative support team," Teacher 4 stated, "but they can only do so much." She also said that she would feel competent when providing interventions if she had adequate training and resources. During her interview, Teacher 6 stated that she is aware of the RTI's five-year framework implementation but that given the current conditions with COVID-19, things may take longer and look somewhat differently. Time, materials, and staffing are all

important obstacles for efficiently implementing RTI, according to teachers 4, 6, and 8. Teacher 8 indicated that she handles all of her students' interventions on her own. She also stated that having three to four students in Tier 3 is quite frustrating since time becomes an issue. Therefore, having staff to assist with interventions would be quite beneficial.” Teacher 6 expressed similar concerns about not having someone to assist with providing interventions but added that the Reading Interventionist assists with interventions but cannot come on a set day or time due to her busy schedule.

When asked what resources were available to help with RTI implementation, the responses were limited, unclear, and inconsistent. Teacher 1 stated that staffing is one of her barriers; nevertheless, she educates her grade-level team members to perform the interventions as grade-level chair. She also mentioned how fortunate she is to have a full-time teacher's assistant in her classroom who assists her in providing small-group interventions. Teacher 2 indicated that adding resources such as knowledgeable staff for RTI would improve the process, but that the additional staff would need to be thoroughly trained to assist with RTI for the fidelity aspect of the process.” Teacher 2 added that she enjoys watching struggling students succeed. Nonetheless, resources are definitely needed in order to implement what is expected of each teacher.

Discrepant Cases

Negative cases must be searched as a researcher. In qualitative research, discrepant case analysis is an analytic approach for establishing validity (Hanson, 2017). Discrepant data offers a different perspective on a new area or theme. Discrepant case analysis entails looking for and debating data that contradicts the study's results patterns

or themes. I looked at the entire data set when examining the coded data to see if it accurately reflected all of the participants' views and beliefs. Other reasons and probable misrepresentations had to be considered (Ravitch & Carl, 2015). During the data collection and analysis, I found no discrepant cases. Every participant contributed vital information to the study's purpose of answering the research questions. This step was critical to the study's validity.

Accuracy of Data Analysis

All data was gathered and examined to ensure my findings' accuracy by having members double-check the transcribed interview data. Each participant received a copy of the transcription to double-check its accuracy. According to the participants, no adjustments were needed, and the analysis and results were both accurate. Additionally, reliability was ensured by using member checking during each interview and after transcription. The procedure of returning participant responses for validation and analyzing the study results' reliability is known as member checking (Birt et al., 2016). Member checking was used during data analysis to eliminate researcher bias. Member-checks are appropriate for validating study findings, according to Merriam and Tisdell (2016).

Summary

The outcomes of this qualitative project research gave useful information about elementary teachers' perceptions of RTI's effectiveness in referring students to special education at the study site. Teachers frequently face numerous problems when implementing a new procedure. Obstacles to effectively implementing a new practice

include a lack of PD, knowledge, resources, and unclear RTI protocols. For teachers to implement RTI with fidelity, they must have the expertise and ongoing training. Teachers must also be given the resources they require, such as interventions, time, materials, and professional development (Goodman, 2017). Teachers require professional development, continual mentoring, a greater understanding of the processes and principles, and resources to implement RTI, according to the findings.

Project Deliverable

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine elementary teachers' perceptions regarding the effectiveness of RTI in the referral of students to special education. I interviewed teachers who were in charge of administering the RTI program. Researchers have suggested that while introducing interventions like RTI, teachers' opinions and concerns about the process should be addressed (Barrio & Combes, 2015). The lack of fidelity in implementing the RTI framework prompted this study, leading to an increase in special education referrals. Information on how schools implemented RTI and what teachers saw as effective RTI implementation was needed to understand the problem better and suggest viable solutions.

The project study's findings highlighted a need for PD training opportunities on the RTI model's components. The teacher's self-efficacy to implement the RTI model could be improved by the PD. Furthermore, PD would provide novice and veteran teachers with the support they need to properly deploy RTI strategies and support student academic achievement. In Section 3, I explained and justified the PD that arose as a result of the study's findings. In addition, I completed a review of the literature, created a

project evaluation strategy, and presented project implications. In Section 3, I also looked at the data gathered and how the study will affect social change on a local level.

Section 3: The Project

Introduction

According to research, altering instructional techniques is not a simple undertaking and requires time for teachers to reflect on the outcomes of their practices (Martin et al., 2019). Teachers' professional development collects what they know to create improvements in their practices that can ultimately result in student achievement and gradually transform teachers' views and instructional methods. To comprehend how educators alter instructional practices that result in increased student accomplishment, instructors must first develop professionally and reform their instructional beliefs and practices. Understanding teachers' perceptions and concerns about educational practices enable them to address their students' different needs, provides insight into implementation decisions, and serves as a model for training (Cavendish et al., 2019).

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine elementary teachers' perceptions of RTI implementation and the model's effect on proper referrals for special education services. Once the data was analyzed, I built continuous professional development training around the data analysis themes. I will conduct PD training at the research school on an ongoing basis. The professional development seminars will assist teachers in recognizing the significance of the study results to properly implement tiered interventions. According to a recent study, schools have discovered that professional development helps teachers meet the requirements of their students. According to my examination of the literature, teachers require help to boost their comfort and confidence in fulfilling the needs of their students, particularly those getting tiered interventions.

Through participation in professional development events, teachers at the school will have a new opportunity to consider the impact of the five themes and concepts on their intervention-based instruction. I will offer the PD throughout the school year, providing teachers with ongoing chances to expand their knowledge and understanding of RTI practices applicable to their classroom instruction.

Rationale

The findings of the qualitative case study presented in Section 2 provided the information necessary to create the PD training sessions. The findings of the study allowed insight into what is required to support teachers in properly executing the RTI process in the classroom. The study's outcomes also assisted in identifying gaps in practice as they pertain to the RTI process. Additionally, the information gathered aided in the development of additional resources to support the implementation of RTI and clarify any misconceptions or expectations about the RTI process.

Review of the Literature

In this section, I conducted a literature review on the material pertinent to my project. I discuss the framework that guided the development of the project, which included professional development perceptions, data analysis, and individualized instruction. Additionally, I covered current research on RTI interventions, professional learning communities, and progress monitoring in the literature review, including an extensive examination of recent peer-reviewed publications that include papers on RTI. I conducted literature research and accessed peer-reviewed articles and publications through the electronic databases and academic texts of Walden University Library.

Professional development, data analysis, differentiation, and teaching methodologies were all terms I searched. Education Research Complete, ERIC, ProQuest Central, Sage, Google Scholar, and Academic Search Premier were the EBSCO host databases searched for publications relevant to this project during this literature study. I focused my search for literature published in the last five years relevant to the project by using a Boolean search. To ensure that the literature supported the project, I reviewed it and included it in this study.

Universal Screening

Schools use data from universal screening to identify at-risk pupils who may require more assistance (Pierce & Jackson, 2017). RTI includes universal screening as a key component. Universal screening, for example, could assist schools in reducing the over-representation of children of color in schools where African American students are twice as likely to be identified (Elliott et al., 2018). The first step in detecting which students are in danger of academic failure is to use a reliable screening instrument. Two or three times a year, schools typically administer universal screening tools. Teachers can catch students who were not previously recognized in previous screenings and follow previously identified students by administering universal screeners two to three times a year (Pierce & Jackson, 2017). Furthermore, universal exams frequently include benchmarks for reading core skills. According to Gillis (2017), benchmark scores assist instructors in determining if students are on track to achieve grade-level literacy abilities.

Progress Monitoring

Universal screening, tiered interventions, progress monitoring, and data-based decision making are the four basic components of the RTI approach (Johnson & Hutchins, 2019). Many schools implementing RTI do not yet have all the components in place and properly implemented (Johnson & Hutchins, 2019). Educators must have progress monitoring abilities to successfully implement a three-tiered RTI approach based on data-driven decision making (Pentimonti et al., 2017). Schools in Tier 2 must use progress tracking to determine whether pupils are making academic progress. Regular monitoring of student development is an important part of the RTI program since it determines whether more intensive methods are needed based on the student's academic achievement or growth. When making judgments concerning student learning, keeping track of student progress is a valuable method. It is used to assess the effectiveness of an intervention or instructional strategy during the RTI process.

To assess student learning, educators need reliable and valid tests. Educators must collect, graph, and adjust teaching practices based on academic skill data (Lopuch, 2018). Tindal et al. (2017) advocated for employing software to organize and visualize student data to create interventions based on skill inadequacies. Teachers can use progress monitoring to get information about a student's performance level and rate of academic advancement. The key aims of progress monitoring data are to inform education, target student learning, and support decision making (Mercado, 2016). During the RTI process, many teachers felt their expertise in progress tracking, and data-based decision making was lacking. Mercado (2016) looked at how the display of RTI progress monitoring data

affected data-driven decision making when referring students for special education services.

Curriculum-based measuring is a recommended measure for RTI progress monitoring of topic understanding. Curriculum-based measurement refers to standardized techniques that can help students improve their literacy and reading skills, as well as their spelling, written expression, and early math computation and application skills (Hintze et al., 2018). Curriculum-based measuring is a valid and accurate method of assessing a student's response to intervention. During the universal screening component of RTI, curriculum-based measurement is frequently used to identify students at risk of academic failure and monitor responsiveness to instruction during the progress monitoring phase.

Progress monitoring, according to Pentimonti et al. (2017) and Fuchs and Fuchs (2016), should be evidence based and ongoing. According to current research, student-level data improves when teachers use progress monitoring to make instructional decisions (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2016). For example, when a student is identified as struggling in reading or mathematics, the teacher will adjust the curriculum and gather data over time to determine if the student improves. A constant lack of growth among students, on the other part, implies the need for more rigorous educational practices. Data collecting techniques should be on a timetable based on student needs, according to Lopuch (2018), and students at higher risk of failure should be checked more regularly.

Differentiated Instruction

Differentiated instruction is a teaching strategy that customizes lessons to the needs of individual students (Coubergs et al., 2017). Differentiated instruction considers

students' strengths and weaknesses to offer them the most effective learning opportunities possible (Coubergs et al., 2017). Teachers must adapt their lessons to the learning styles of their students (Malacapay, 2019). Differentiated instruction not only adapts learning to the learning styles of students but it also keeps them engaged. By implementing learning strategies into their classroom instruction to improve student engagement and minimize boredom, the teacher plays a critical role in reducing boredom and disengagement. According to research, boredom substantially impacts student involvement in classroom education (Mazer, 2017). Further research shows that different teaching methods can influence students' behavior in the classroom and that disengaged students are more likely to participate in off-task behavior (Bolkan & Griffin, 2017).

Professional Development

Professional development (PD) is systematic learning that changes teachers' classroom methods and student academic progress (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Continuous and sustained opportunities, alignment with students' learning goals, implementing practices that support student learning, focusing on teachers' learning needs, collaborative learning, and using student data to inform instructional practices and provide feedback and reflection are all characteristics associated with effective PD. Furthermore, PD allows teachers to learn RTI tactics to improve their teaching and learning practices and meet the requirements of their students. Castillo et al. (2016) investigated the impact of direct, intense RTI skills training and job-embedded coaching on teachers' reported RTI program implementation skills. According to the findings, receiving on-the-job mentoring and peer collaboration improved perceived RTI

implementation abilities in academic content. Collaboration is required for PD specifically targeted to assist instructors in changing their instructional approaches to implement RTI (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Collaboration among instructors to model, observe and apply logic to attain particular outcomes should focus on PD that leads to greater student achievement. Brown (2018) found that instructors are satisfied with applying new techniques when they get continual PD. According to the author's results from his study, teachers who participate in PD are more likely to reflect on their current educational practices and attempt to improve their future ones. Teachers who took part in PD explored ways to effectively use RTI practices in their classrooms to instruct kids, prevent failures, and fulfill the requirements of a diverse group of pupils. Teachers evaluate their activities by working together and applying RTI techniques and fidelity processes effectively (Ciampa & Gallagher, 2016). According to research, over 70% of teachers who engaged in PD were more willing to modify their instructional practices to apply RTI at a better standard for teaching and learning development (Gabbin, 2020). Teachers are motivated to use effective RTI methods, according to Gabbin (2020), when they can participate in PD and learn new concepts with a purpose and apply existing experiences with newly learned skills to motivate instructors to implement and support the RTI process, continual PD should be provided. Teachers can use PD to engage in discourse, reflect, observe, and construct a professional learning community. Professional learning communities enable PD to occur, resulting in changes in teachers' views and practices in terms of implementing the RTI process with greater fidelity (Darlington-Hammond, 2017). Brown (2018) revealed that when teachers receive continual

professional development, they are satisfied with the implementation of new techniques. According to the author's results, teachers who participate in professional development may reflect on their current educational techniques and make a concerted effort to improve their future educational techniques.

Project Description

The results of the data analysis generated from the participant interviews were used to determine the content of the PD training sessions. This PD will be executed during regular professional development training sessions for K-5 teachers responsible for applying the RTI framework. PD training will take place over the course of 3 days. The PD program will equip teachers with ways for implementing the RTI process consistently. The PD program aims to develop a method for delivering successful interventions through differentiation of instruction, clear expectations for progress monitoring, and assistance in closing achievement gaps among students. In addition to researcher-made slideshow presentations (Appendix A), the PD program includes a series of RTI online training modules developed by the IRIS Center embedded within the presentations. The IRIS Center at Vanderbilt University is designed for professional learning and provides engaging hands-on RTI resources that bridge the gap between research and practice for all educators working to implement the RTI model (IRIS Center, 2019). Professional development training will be ongoing, and teachers will be organized into teams to cooperate on adopting new practices when they have completed the training (Krutka, & Carpenter, 2016). Teachers will next use the tactics they have learned with their students and provide feedback to their colleagues on a specific

skill they have implemented and its impact on student progress (Trust et al., 2016).

Teachers' feedback will be shared after the PDs, and teachers will have the opportunity to adjust lesson plans based on research of instructional strategies used with students.

Teachers usually apply the information given in collaborative PD training sessions into regular instructing practices to focus on the knowledge, according to Trust et al. (2016).

As a result, the lesson study for the project could be successful if each teacher processes the concepts and themes offered and uses fidelity tactics.

Existing Supports and Needed Resources

Implementing the PD project would need the support of the school's administration. As an incentive and in accordance with the district's professional learning credits, PD hours may well be awarded to each participant, if permitted. Teacher buy-in will be critical for promoting future professional development and sustaining the changes. Without buy-in for RTI, developing and sustaining systems change is difficult (Thomas et al., 2020). To participate in the training, both participants and the researcher will require internet access and laptop computers. Additionally, a site equipped with a Smartboard or projector screen to present the Powerpoint, PD training handouts, and exit slips are needed for the project.

Potential Barriers

The lack of teacher participation could be a potential barrier to this project's success. Teachers must be available for all of the PD days that are scheduled. Despite the rich information, teachers who have previously attended RTI training and found it ineffective may be hesitant to attend a three-day session. Teachers expressed their

frustration with implementing the RTI process and differentiating instruction to meet the needs of all of their children, claiming that earlier training had not addressed any of their issues. Another potential stumbling block could be the minimum 3-day attendance schedule. Because many schools have limited face-to-face meetings and gatherings and may have deferred PDs to the following school year due to school closures, scheduling throughout the school year and COVID-19 constraints may be a potential hurdle. The participation of the school administration and teachers will be critical to the project's success. For the initiative to be successful, it would have to be completely executed, including the 3-day professional development, teacher training tailored to the needs of the teachers, and further training throughout the year.

Potential Solutions to Barriers

Collaboration with the school's administrator to develop a time when teachers can attend PD training simultaneously could be a viable solution to the study's barriers. Previous PDs, according to the instructors in this experiment, failed to address their concerns, resulting in resistance to applying content offered in the classroom and difficulties convincing teachers that the tactics presented would effectively address students' needs. Teachers frequently felt ill-equipped to differentiate instruction to meet all students' academic demands. The professional development program will improve teachers' understanding of the RTI process and fidelity in executing the RTI model's tiers to meet students' needs. Teachers' needs must be addressed in order for PDs to be effective. It is recognized that teachers can only remain effective if they continue to participate in professional development throughout their careers (Van der Klink, Kools,

Avissar, White, & Sakata, 2017). Teachers believed they lacked knowledge of the procedures involved in the RTI process. Teachers were particularly concerned about tracking students' development and how to apply the RTI procedures properly. Given the uncertainty of whether COVID-19 constraints and social distancing guidelines will allow the PD training for this study to be offered face- to -face, another approach to a potential obstacle would be to conduct the PD training utilizing a virtual platform. Teachers' professional development can be delivered virtually via technology while still addressing their needs (Bates et al., 2016). A face-to-face option should be possible now that several COVID -19 restrictions have been lifted. However, one method to handle this potential barrier is to arrange for the PD to be presented utilizing more than one method.

Proposal for Implementation and Timeline

At the research site, the training sessions are planned to be implemented during the 2021-2022 school year. PLC groups would receive the training, which could begin as early as January. I will submit the findings to the school's administrator and all PD participants during a faculty meeting before January to provide a rationale for the project's presentation. Once accepted, I would work with the school's administrator and teachers to schedule the PD. A copy of the PowerPoint presentation will be distributed to teachers (Appendix A Part 2). I will also meet with the media specialist to request the technology that will be used to provide the training. The project is expected to be administered from January 2022 to April 2022. Each training session will last approximately 5-7 hours. After each training session, an assessment form and a question and answer session will address any issues or concerns.

Roles and Responsibilities of Researcher and Others

It is my responsibility as the researcher to effectively apply the PD and provide help to teachers as needed. It is also my obligation to convey training dates and locations to the administration and teachers. Throughout the PD program, it is the teachers' job to remain actively involved and receptive. Teachers want PD sessions that actively involve them in putting the skills, ideas, and procedures they have learned into practice. Matherson and Windle (2017) (Matherson & Windle, 2017). Teachers must commit to following the RTI process to the letter and participate in the RTI PLCs and coaching offered to increase their self-efficacy. School administrators and leaders are encouraged to attend and support the professional development courses.

Project Evaluation Plan

This project's evaluation is formative. Participants will be given an exit slip with five open-ended questions to respond to at the end of each training session to provide formative feedback. This formative evaluation will give teachers feedback on their understanding of the PD materials and help them plan for future training. Understanding the effectiveness of a PD, initiating positive change, and informing and guiding future practices are all important reasons to assess PDs (Merchie, Tuytens, Devos, & Vanderlinde, 2018). Furthermore, the study's evaluation should assess the impact of PD activities on teaching and student learning.

Teachers' attitudes and beliefs, knowledge, abilities, classroom practices, and student learning results should all be considered when evaluating a PD's efficacy (McChesney & Aldridge, 2018). Teachers' knowledge and abilities in applying the RTI

process would be improved through the PD. Participants can use the exit slips to report any practices or issues that need to be addressed in future trainings. Informal assessments will be undertaken throughout the training sessions in addition to the formal assessment. Informal assessments will allow me to observe the level of participation of the participants by assessing knowledge acquisition and understanding through collaborative activities.

Project Implications

Local Community

This research has the potential to impact positive social change for teachers and students on a local level. There is a social change impact because this initiative may better understand RTI and chances for RTI professional development and resources. RTI professional development teaches teachers how to apply RTI with more fidelity, meet the different needs of their students, and identify RTI implementation gaps. Collaboration, differentiated instruction, data analysis, applying research-based interventions, and effective progress monitoring are all emphasized in PD training and PLCs. This project study has the potential to reduce the number of students referred to special education programs, in addition to the potential for social change. As a result, increasing the percentage of students who score proficient on state assessments improves teachers' ability to use the RTI process and procedures in their classrooms.

Larger Context

This project study offers significant potential for implementation in the district's schools and other districts in the larger context. The project study has implications for

change in other districts that have seen an increase in special education referrals but lack information and comprehension of the RTI process. Given the widespread implementation of the RTI model, many school districts could benefit from this study to improve teachers' understanding of utilizing the RTI process effectively. Teacher professional development that is high-quality and consistent has a favorable impact on teaching methods and student academic achievement (Capraro et al., 2016). The project was created in response to the issue raised by the research study. The three-day PD trainings are universal and can be used in schools with similar challenges.

Conclusion

In Section 3, I gave an overview of the project. The PD sessions' objectives are to improve teachers' understanding of the RTI process, provide opportunities for teachers to participate in research-based strategies that can be used in the classroom to support self-efficacy, and provide clarity and expectations regarding RTI's implementation procedures. Because it satisfies the instructors' learning needs, the three PD trainings are a suitable and logical response to the findings of this case study. Following that, I conducted a literature analysis and developed a project evaluation strategy. I listed the resources the project required and potential barriers and proposed solutions to the issues. I also included a timeframe for completing the project and the roles and duties of the various stakeholders. In Section 3, the possibilities for local and far-reaching social change were also discussed.

Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

Project Strengths and Limitations

Project Strengths

The main goal of continuous PD sessions was to give teachers a systematic and well-defined technique for implementing the RTI process with fidelity, effective progress monitoring, and best practices for meeting students' needs using the RTI model. Teachers at the study school provided me with study data for my research. These teachers were responsible for implementing differentiated instruction and modifying it to meet the needs of their students. All the teachers who were interviewed either presently work with RTI intervention plans or have worked with RTI intervention plans in the past. Even while some teachers had greater confidence in using the RTI framework than others, everyone contributed to the conclusions of this project study. During the interviews, all eight participants agreed that the themes that emerged from the data impacted their self-efficacy and competence in consistently providing RTI interventions. Furthermore, data gathered from individual interviews helped in the development of ongoing PD training.

Project Limitations

There are two limitations to the project. The first limitation was that it is reliant on teachers' participation and reflection on the components of the PD. Practice, self-reflection, support, and continual feedback are vital components of PDs, which help teachers gain more significant confidence in their teaching. Teachers must completely participate in ongoing PD sessions because if they do not find the sessions useful, they will not examine their classroom teaching strategies to see if they are effective.

According to Hubbard (2018), a teacher's aversion to using technology could be due to personal views. The study's weakness is that it is reliant on teachers' participation and reflection on the PD's components. Practice, self-reflection, support, and continual feedback are vital components of PDs, which help teachers gain more significant confidence in their teaching. Teachers must completely participate in ongoing professional development sessions because if they do not find the sessions useful, they will not examine their classroom teaching strategies to see if they are effective. As a result, professional development sessions will have a minor impact on student achievement. To mitigate the impact of low engagement, teachers are encouraged to use students' work examples as evidence, meaningful reflection, and teacher cooperation. Another flaw is the lack of consideration for teachers' potential resistance to changing their teaching methods. Teachers mentioned several issues with the present RTI process and the need for extra training to apply RTI effectively. Teachers will be required to communicate and build a plan of action to improve their recent RTI framework implementation with more fidelity during PD training. The study's limitations could include difficulties incorporating ongoing RTI-focused PDs into the training schedule because schools may already have designated PD training in other planned areas. A second limitation could be incorporating excellent practices into present RTI methods. Teachers' teaching methods will improve because of the PD sessions and their self-efficacy in applying the RTI process.

Recommendations for Alternative Approaches

Based on the literature review and study findings, a 3-day PD on the RTI framework was prepared to train teachers. PD training is the most common way for educators to gain new knowledge and strategies for teaching (Beach, 2017). However, according to Thomas et al. (2020), teachers stated, PD on the RTI process, roles, and duties was insufficient and that they would prefer more detailed PD. Furthermore, in addition to training and scheduling, teachers said they did not have enough time to collaborate with other teachers on RTI (Thomas et al., 2020). As a result, the 3-day continuous PD training sessions are the logical solution to the project study school's identified challenges and concerns.

Scholarship, Project Development and Evaluation, and Leadership and Change Scholarship

My time at Walden University has allowed me to develop a more nuanced view of what it means to be a scholar-practitioner. My doctorate journey has been rigorous and challenging. However, it has improved my writing and research skills. As a doctoral student and scholar-practitioner at Walden University, I desired to close the gap between my learning as a student and within my profession. Additionally, I desired to share my knowledge and thoughts with colleagues in my profession as an educator to improve and strengthen instructional practices.

My research abilities have significantly improved, and this has inspired me to strive to improve student learning. First, I feel that my research study demonstrates the critical nature of the RTI framework and the role of teachers in implementing RTI.

Second, the PD project allowed for my growth as a scholar-practitioner. I learned about several research methodologies and the most effective method for answering my research topics. I was able to put what I had learned in class about creating, conducting, evaluating, and problem solving to use. Third, I followed ethical guidelines throughout my research to guarantee that no participants were harmed during the project study. My doctoral chair was always encouraging and supportive when I had questions or concerns. My second chair, the university research reviewer, and the IRB committee all assured me that I followed university policies and procedures and produced work of the highest quality.

Project Development

As a doctoral candidate in Walden's Doctor of Education in Teacher Leadership program, I desired to conduct research on a problem that continues to have an impact on my colleagues' teaching practices. I wanted a study that would impact instructional methods and improve the social conditions of the project study school and other schools in the district. This project was designed in response to teachers' identified demands about RTI fidelity. My desire to assist teachers and challenging students fueled my desire to create a project that I could apply within the project study school and eventually expand to other schools. The prospect of this initiative potentially improving student achievement and reducing referrals to special education helped me understand the importance of high-quality research. My study can help teachers understand why RTI is critical for making judgments regarding students' progress. Kilgo and Pascarella (2016)

asserted that participation in research experiences can help students connect classroom learning to real-world problems.

Following the completion of the research for the project study, I considered how to develop a project that would address the participants' needs and concerns around the implementation of RTI. The PD project began with the data collecting, coding, and analysis of the interview findings. Teachers believed that earlier training did not adequately address their own learning needs or those of their students. The project was developed in response to the findings of the project study. I created the professional development to address teachers' concerns about the RTI program's goal of reducing the number of pupils referred to special education. Additionally, I intended to provide teachers with solutions for meeting their students' various academic needs. Continuous support was offered to instructors in the form of training sessions that clarified RTI methods, provided chances for collaborative work with peers, and assisted in improving fidelity.

Peer-reviewed literature was researched to explain the issues and challenges that teachers across the country were encountering when implementing RTI. This research assisted me in helping classroom teachers in efficiently addressing barriers in the full implementation of the RTI approach. Additionally, this data will enable me to assist teachers through meaningful and professional development training that addresses the following goals: increasing teachers' understanding of the RTI process, providing teachers with opportunities to engage in research-based strategies, and clarifying RTI

implementation procedures. Finally, as a formative assessment technique, an exit slip with five open-ended questions was created.

Leadership and Change

As a social change activist and a leader, Walden University has given me the tools and training I need. Change is unavoidable, and teachers are more likely to make changes if they believe their administrators and other stakeholders will support them. My ambitions are to inspire people to strive for change and rise to the position of a leader who impacts change. Supporting teachers, listening to their concerns, and cooperating with teachers to improve student achievement are all effective ways to effect change in the classroom. By participating in this project study, I will have the opportunity to assist a local elementary school in understanding how to implement the RTI model properly.

Reflection on Importance of the Work

Reflecting on my work, I see that this qualitative project study was critical in presenting the participants' perceptions of and concerns about the RTI interventions, procedures, and processes at their school, which were otherwise difficult to obtain. After hearing the teachers' concerns, I set out to find the most appropriate professional development training and materials for the teachers implementing RTI. PD training sessions allow teachers and administrators the opportunity to collaborate and discuss best practices. As a result, teachers will gain knowledge and skills in RTI, and their self-efficacy in applying RTI will increase. Furthermore, their instructional practices are likely to improve, resulting in close achievement gaps and increased academic success across the board.

Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research

Teachers and students alike stand to benefit from the project study's potential to affect positive social change. A potential social change that could result from this study is the implementation of RTI professional development that could improve teachers' knowledge and skills in delivering RTI strategies with fidelity. Teacher professional development is essential for teachers to be effective in offering educational approaches that promote student success. Teacher professional development is critical for improving teacher effectiveness because it allows teachers to gain new information and skills that will help them implement instructional approaches more successfully. Additionally, teachers must get professional development training relevant to research-based methodologies and evidence-based best practices that may be utilized in the classroom. According to Castillo et al. (2018), evidence-based practices offered in professional development can equip teachers with the knowledge and skills necessary to implement RTI effectively. The participants in this study expressed concern about effectively monitoring student progress and differentiating instruction for various students accurately.

Because the content of past RTI training was inconsistent and there was no continuity in implementing procedures and the RTI process, according to the findings of this project research, previous RTI training did not fulfill the learning needs of teachers and did not meet their expectations. Teachers at the research site will benefit from this professional development initiative because it will provide the knowledge and tools to improve their RTI model skills. In addition, the strategies and knowledge gained during

this PD could be applied in the classroom to improve student accomplishment and levels of engagement. As a result, this study can boost teachers' self-efficacy in implementing RTI while simultaneously reducing the number of students referred for special education. Furthermore, the results of this study may have an impact on professional development opportunities for teachers in the current district and neighboring school districts. The subjects covered in the professional development sessions are universal and could be delivered in secondary contexts. As a result, working together with all school settings in the district to deliver meaningful RTI professional development for all teachers would be beneficial.

Following the implementation of the PD, it will be beneficial to do additional research into teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of the PD. Further research will be required to determine how teachers implemented the RTI methods and increased their sense of self-efficacy following the PD training. Quantitative analysis will be required in the future to measure student development and assess how effective PD was in closing achievement gaps and assisting in directing future RTI decisions. As a result of its contribution to future RTI decisions, this project study will positively impact teachers' practices at the project study school and the surrounding community. This PD could be used with schools that demonstrate the exact needs, with modifications and further research.

Conclusion

In this project study, I used a qualitative approach to examine the problem by interviewing 8 elementary teachers about their perceptions of implementing the RTI

model at one elementary school to determine what resources, supports, and professional training were needed to implement the RTI model effectively. As a result, professional development was developed to provide teachers with training on using RTI strategies as well as the support they required. An analysis of the study's results revealed a need for additional professional development in the areas of differentiation of instruction and progress monitoring. As a result, the objectives for the professional development project were defined in order to meet the training needs of the teachers. To improve the implementation of the RTI model and increase students' academic achievement, the project's objectives are to reduce the number of special education referrals while simultaneously improving the implementation of the RTI model. Potential learning opportunities to assist schools struggling to implement the RTI model effectively were also highlighted as a result of the project research. When it came to understanding the impact of the RTI program on student success and social change, self-reflection proved to be beneficial.

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Appendix A: The Project

The slideshow presentation (Appendix A) for all three training sessions of Response to Intervention: Closing Achievement Gaps for At-Risk Learners can be viewed by holding the Ctrl +Click to follow the link:

[Response to Intervention.pptx](#)



Agenda Day 1

8:00-8:30	Welcome and PD Learning Objectives
8:30-9:00	Think-Pair-Share Activity
9:00-10:00	RTI Overview/Purpose/Benefits
10:00-10:30	Break
10:30-11:30	IRIS Center Module: RTI (An Overview)
11:30-11:45	Reflections
11:45-12:45	Lunch on Your Own
12:45-1:45	Differentiating Instruction Overview and Strategies
1:45-2:00	Review Video: Differentiating instruction in Grades K-5
2:00-3:00	IRIS Center Module: Differentiated Instruction (Maximizing the Learning of All Students)
3:00-3:15	Breakout Session
3:15-3:30	Review/Closure/: Exit Slip

Agenda Day 2

8:00-8:30	Welcome and PD Learning Objectives
8:30-9:00	Quick Write Activity
9:00-10:00	Small-Group Activity
10:00-10:30	Break
10:30-11:30	Progress Monitoring <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overview • Benefits
11:30-11:45	Reflections
11:45-12:45	Lunch on Your Own
12:45-1:45	Data-Based Decision-Making: Overview and Purpose
1:45-2:00	IRIS Center Module: Data-Based Decision Making
2:00-3:00	IRIS Center Module: Progress Monitoring
3:00-3:15	Breakout Session
3:15-3:30	Review/Closure:Exit Slip

Agenda Day 3

8:30-9:00	Small Group Activity
9:00-10:00	Administrative Support and Guidance
10:00-10:30	Break
10:30-11:30	Turn and Talk
11:30-11:45	Reflections
11:45-12:45	Lunch on Your Own
12:45-1:45	RTI Implementation/Guidelines
1:45-2:00	Collaboration and PLCs
2:00-3:00	IRIS Center Module: Considerations for School Leaders
3:00-3:15	RTI Review
3:15-3:30	Review/Closure: Exit Slip

EXIT SLIP

- What did you learn today?

- What could have been done better today?

- Do you still have any questions or concerns that need to be addressed in the future? If so, please explain.

Appendix B: Permission to Conduct Research

Dear Principal,

My name is Heather Abney, and I am a doctoral student at Walden University. As a part of my doctoral research, I would like to conduct interviews with at least 8-12 certified teachers who have been a part of the Response to Intervention process for at least two years. The purpose of my study is to examine the elementary teacher's perceptions regarding the implementation of RTI and the influence of the model on appropriate referrals for students for special education services. Therefore, I am requesting permission to provide your teachers with an opportunity to participate in a significant study.

I am aware of the high demands and expectations placed upon teachers and can assure you that the time required to complete the individual interviews will take a minimum of 45-60 minutes. Therefore, to collect the data efficiently and with minimal interruption, I would like to conduct the interviews after school hours at a time and location convenient for each participant.

My research includes procedural safeguards and confidentiality as required by Walden University's Institutional Review Board. Interview data will remain confidential, with the participants receiving a pseudonym to represent them in the study. All collected data will be stored securely in a locked file cabinet in my home office for five years as required by Walden University. The researcher will destroy all data after five years. Please indicate your permission for your teachers to participate in this important research by signing below. I appreciate your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Heather Abney

Doctoral Candidate

Walden University

_____ Permission is granted to interview the teachers

_____ Permission is not granted to interview the teachers

(Principal or Designee Signature)

(Date)

Appendix C: Participation Invitation Letter

Dear Teachers,

My name is Heather Abney. I am a doctoral student at Walden University's Teacher Leadership Program. I am kindly requesting your participation in a doctoral research study that I am conducting titled: A Case Study of Elementary Teachers' Perceptions of Response to Intervention in Special Education Referrals. The purpose of this study is to examine the elementary teacher's perceptions regarding the implementation of RTI and the influence of the model on appropriate student referrals for special education services.

Criteria for participating in this study are a certified elementary school teacher with at least two years of experience implementing the RTI process.

The study involves 8-12 elementary school teachers completing a 45-60 minute individual interview. Participation is entirely voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study at any time. The study is entirely confidential. Therefore, I will be the only one knowledgeable of your identity.

If you would like to participate in the study, please reply to this invitation email electronically, signing the attached informed consent form. Once informed consent is received, you will be contacted to schedule an interview at the location and time of your convenience.

Your participation in the research will be of great importance to assist in social change in ensuring that research addresses the implementation of RTI and whether it effectively supports the design of interventions and supports more appropriate referrals to special education.

Thank you for your time and participation.

Sincerely,

Heather Abney

Doctoral Student

Walden University

Appendix D: Teacher Interview Questions

1. What is your experience with RTI at XYZ Elementary School?
2. What do you see as the benefits of RTI?
3. Discuss the challenges you have encountered with RTI?
4. What effect has RTI had on the referral of students to special education for specific learning disabilities?
5. What are your thoughts on the effectiveness and appropriateness of the RTI Tier structure?
6. What changes have you noticed in special education placement since the implementation of RTI?
7. After implementing RTI, how likely is it that students will be referred to special education?
8. What do you see as the main goal of RTI?
9. How has RTI affected the referral process for special education services at your school?
10. What is your overall evaluation of how the RTI program is working at the school?