

2022

A Qualitative Study on the Fidelity Implementation of Response to Intervention for K–2 Students in Reading

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Sandra L. Joyner

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Walden University

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Abstract

A Qualitative Study on the Fidelity Implementation of Response to Intervention for K–2
Students in Reading

by

Sandra L. Joyner

MA, Walden University, 2011

BS, Voorhees College, 2009

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

Walden University

March 2022

Abstract

The problem that prompted this qualitative case study was a continuous below proficiency level performance of the kindergarten through second grade students in a U.S. Southern state in reading, despite response to intervention (RTI) being implemented since 2011. The purpose of the study was to explore K–2 teachers' perceptions regarding the fidelity implementation of RTI procedures in K–2 grades. The theoretical framework for this study was based on constructivist learning theory. The research questions were intended to examine K–2 teachers' perceptions on how interventions were implemented through RTI to benefit, challenge, and address the needs of Grades K–2 struggling readers. Data were collected from nine K–2 teachers via semi structured interviews and lesson plan reviews. Data analysis via open coding and thematic analysis led to six themes as part of the study results. These include limited knowledge of RTI procedures, inconsistent knowledge of RTI components, need more time to implement RTI interventions, inconsistent knowledge on the RTI Tiers, limited number of interventions strategies, and need more intervention materials. The project that emerged from these findings was a professional development training for the K–2 teachers. This project has the potential for positive social change because K–2 teachers can use it to improve their instructional strategies to improve the academic performance of students at the research site.

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Dedication

I dedicate this Project Study to my son, Robert Jerome Boseman, who said he has never known me not to continue to learn; thank you for your patience, encouragement, and love. To my sister, Beverly Franklin, for the many cards, prayers, and words of encouragement and my spiritual leaders, Elder and Missionary Holsey, and the Trinity Temple COGIC family. Thank you for your support, prayers, and love that has given me the strength to complete this Doctoral Study. I will be forever grateful. To all my students, never give up on yourself or your ability to succeed in your learning process.

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I want to acknowledge my son Robert J. Boseman for his love and encouragement. A special thanks to my bonus daughters, Deshawna Tubman, Wynona Blackwell, and Sandra Brown. You all always knew my visits required me to bring my laptop and for you to provide a quiet spot to continue my work. Also, I acknowledge my special friends Jacqueline Sweat and Antonio Hooper for encouraging me and not allowing me to quit in those times I wanted to give up.

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Table of Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| Section 1: The Problem..... | 1 |
| Introduction | 1 |
| The Local Problem | 3 |
| Purpose of the Study | 5 |
| Rationale | 5 |
| Evidence of the Problem at the Local Level | 5 |
| Evidence of the Problem from the Professional Literature | 6 |
| Definition of Terms | 8 |
| Significance of the Study | 11 |
| Research Questions..... | 12 |
| Review of the Literature | 13 |
| Background | 14 |
| Constructivist Learning Theory | 14 |
| Conceptual Framework..... | 18 |
| RTI Tiered Instruction..... | 20 |
| Struggling Readers..... | 22 |
| Implementing RTI in Schools..... | 24 |
| Response to Intervention (RTI) and Early Literacy Skills for Struggling Readers | 28 |
| Different Tiers of the Response to Intervention (RTI) model..... | 30 |

| | |
|--|----|
| Response to Intervention and the Constructivist Learning Theory | 31 |
| Professional Development..... | 33 |
| Teaching Response to Intervention (RTI) with Fidelity | 35 |
| Implications | 36 |
| Summary | 38 |
| Section 2: Methodology..... | 40 |
| Introduction | 40 |
| Qualitative Research Design and Approach..... | 41 |
| Participants | 44 |
| Informed Consent..... | 49 |
| Confidentiality | 49 |
| Participants Rights | 50 |
| Data Collection | 51 |
| Justification for Data Collection Methods..... | 54 |
| Description of Data Collection Instruments | 54 |
| Interview Protocol..... | 55 |
| Lesson Plans Review | 56 |
| Justification for the Sufficiency of Data Collection Instruments | 56 |
| Data Gathering..... | 56 |
| Systems for Keeping Track of Data..... | 58 |
| Procedures for Gaining Access to Participants..... | 59 |
| Role of the Researcher | 60 |

| | |
|---|-----|
| Data Analysis | 62 |
| Evidence of Quality | 65 |
| Limitations | 68 |
| Summary | 68 |
| Discussion of Findings..... | 69 |
| Research Question 1..... | 71 |
| Research Question 2..... | 77 |
| Research Question 3..... | 84 |
| Discrepant Cases..... | 86 |
| Data Validation..... | 86 |
| Project Description | 87 |
| Conclusion..... | 88 |
| Section 3: The Project..... | 91 |
| Introduction | 91 |
| Project Description and Goals..... | 93 |
| Rationale | 94 |
| Review of the Literature | 96 |
| Strategy Used for Searching the Literature..... | 97 |
| Professional Development..... | 97 |
| Research Based Intervention Strategies..... | 100 |
| Small Group Instruction..... | 100 |
| One-on-One Instruction..... | 102 |

| | |
|---|-----|
| Differentiated Instruction | 104 |
| Assessment Measures to Monitor Student Progress | 105 |
| Progress Monitoring..... | 106 |
| Databased Decision Making on Students Progress..... | 109 |
| Procedures and Expectations for Teachers | 111 |
| The Project Description | 112 |
| Resources and Supports Needed for the Project..... | 113 |
| Project Implementation and Timeline..... | 115 |
| Project Evaluation Plan..... | 116 |
| Project Implication..... | 117 |
| Project Social Change..... | 118 |
| Conclusions | 119 |
| Section 4: Reflections and Conclusion | 121 |
| Introduction | 121 |
| Project Strengths..... | 121 |
| Project Limitations..... | 124 |
| Recommendations for Alternative Approaches..... | 125 |
| Scholarship..... | 128 |
| Project Development..... | 129 |
| Project Evaluation..... | 130 |
| Leadership and Change..... | 131 |
| Analysis of Self as a Scholar | 132 |

| | |
|--|-----|
| Analysis of Self as a Practitioner..... | 133 |
| Analysis of Self as a Project Developer..... | 134 |
| Reflection on the Importance of the Work..... | 135 |
| Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research | 136 |
| Conclusions | 137 |
| References..... | 139 |
| Appendix A Part 1: The Project | 154 |
| Appendix B: Recruitment Letter | 167 |
| Appendix C: Interview Protocol | 168 |
| Appendix D: Lesson Plans Review | 169 |
| Appendix E: Confidentiality Agreement for Peer Reviewer | 170 |

Section 1: The Problem

Introduction

According to the department of education in the Southern state that was the focus of this study, Response to intervention (RTI) is becoming a frequent support system. RTI offers benefits for struggling readers in their classroom environment, which includes students receiving special education services (Job, 2016). The kindergarten through second grade students at a suburban county elementary school are continuously below proficiency level in reading comprehension. According to the college and career readiness performance index (CCRPI) report even though RTI interventions were implemented students continue to struggle with reading (Georgia Department of Education, 2015). The Georgia Department of Education Accountability (2018) defined CCRPI as a comprehensive school improvement, accountability, and communication platform for all educational stakeholders that promote college and career readiness for all Georgia public school students. Georgia uses CCRPI as a tool for annually measuring how well its schools, districts, and the state itself are helping students achieve their goals.

The Georgia Department of Education, 2016, confirmed the Governor's Office of Student Achievement (GOSA) defines a "low-performing school" as a school that has a college and career ready performance index (CCRPI) score at or below the 25th percentile in its grade cluster which is 65.9% or less for Elementary Schools (Georgia Department of Education, 2016). This score was compiled through the sum of achievement on statewide academic assessments progress, achievement gap, and

challenge points. The elementary school in this study's CCRPI scores were 58.5 in 2016 to 2017 down from 63.3 in 2015 to 2016 (County School, 2017).

Response to Intervention (RTI) integrates assessment, instruction, and databased decision-making to address the learning needs of students in both regular and special education classrooms (Shapiro, 2018). The problem at this suburban county elementary school was that kindergarten to second grade students were continuously below proficiency level performance in reading even though RTI interventions were implemented (County School, 2015). Observation of instructional strategies and interviews with kindergarten to second grade level teachers and RTI team members were used to determine if RTI is implemented according to the RTI framework reference.

Reading instruction must continue through elementary school with targeted intervention for students who struggle with reading proficiency (Martin, 2016). In the review of literature, authors discussed the reading problems of elementary school students identified through the RTI process. The review of literature also included an overview of RTI, its models, tiers, and approaches. The effectiveness of a reading program to improve students' reading for comprehension is necessary for them to perform on grade level or above grade level. Section 1 includes the local problem, a rationale for this study, evidence of the problem at the local level, evidence of the problem from the professional literature, definitions of terms, significance of the study, and research questions that I used to guide this study.

The Local Problem

The problem at a suburban county elementary school was the continuous below proficiency level performance of the kindergarten through second grade students in reading performance even though RTI has been implemented since 2011. The Georgia Department of Education (2015) stated the continuous reading struggles with kindergarten to second grade students in mastering grade-level reading skills, is the ineffective implementation of RTI strategies by teachers. The Georgia Department of Education (GADOE) (2017) stated according to the school improvement accountability and communication platform, this county elementary school is among the failing schools within the school district in which it is situated based on the College and Career Readiness Performance Index.

According to the Georgia Department of Education this school's 2014 to 2015 College and Career Readiness Performance (CCRPI) test scores were 52.5% down from 57.5% for 2013 to 2014 and 61.1% in 2012 to 2013. CCRPI scores represented the percentage of students with achievement scores at *meets* or *exceeds* standards on the Criterion-Referenced Competency Tests (CRCT). In order not to be considered a low performance school, this score should be at or below the 25th percentile in its grade cluster, which is 65.9%. The score of 65.9% on the CCRPI is better than 70% of schools in the state (Georgia Department of Education Accountability, 2015).

Given this suburban county elementary school's 2015 to 2016 i-Ready progress monitoring and diagnostic assessment scores (assessments that measure reading comprehension), 61% of this county elementary school students performed two grade

levels below grade level and 15% of the students performed greater than two grade levels below grade level. These early elementary students were non-responsive in Tier 1 (core instruction) and Tier 2 (group interventions) of the RTI process. There is a need to increase the academic achievement of these students.

RTI included a combination of high quality, culturally and linguistically responsive instruction, assessment, and evidence-based intervention (National Center of Response to Intervention, 2015). Balu et al. (2015) stated that the academic area frequently focused on in the implementation of RTI models is early literacy skills. The principal of the suburban, local county elementary school expressed concern with the RTI process being implemented and evaluated effectively for struggling early readers. The principal also stated she believed that, if implemented with fidelity, struggling readers should be on or close to grade level reading by second grade (School Principal, personal communication, May 11, 2015). Further, the teachers were left to implement RTI using their own interpretation of how to effectively utilize RTI and use the program resources to support successful implementation of the RTI model (Balu et al., 2015; Foust, 2018; Trickett et al., 2020). Georgia Department of Education Accountability, (2018) confirmed that The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 and the Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) of 2004 emphasized that schools focus extensively on assisting every child's learning process through early intervention before the child is behind to the point that a referral to special education services was warranted.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore Kindergarten to second grade teachers' perceptions regarding the fidelity implementation of RTI procedures in Grades K-2. I obtained important information regarding support the teachers provided in each tier of the RTI model. I used interviews and lesson plan reviews of the kindergarten to second grade elementary teachers to develop an in-depth understanding of the fidelity implementation of the RTI model that enhanced student learning and impacts reading achievement. School leaders, teachers and stakeholders can use the results of this study to make improvements in their RTI efforts and provide more resources that teachers can use to increase the academic achievement of the students in K-2 at the elementary school level.

Rationale

Evidence of the Problem at the Local Level

This school's 2014 to 2015 CCRPI test score was 52.5% which was down from 57.5% for 2013 to 2014 and 61.1% in 2012 to 2013. (County School System, 2015). According to County School System (County School System, 2015) I-Ready is a data-driven comprehensive integrated online program used by county public school for reading and K-2 mathematics. This program simplifies the challenge of differentiating instruction using an all-in-one program that combines individualized instruction, growth monitoring and assessments. This elementary school's i-Ready progress monitoring data indicates that many early elementary students continue to struggle with reading skills (County School System, 2015). These students already reached Tier 2 (interventions) of the RTI process and were progressively behind in attaining these skills within a year.

Some groups of children, including those with special needs, experienced a cumulative rather than a compensatory cycle of achievement growth. Hughes and Dexter (2016) found there is emerging evidence that a tiered early intervention approach can improve the academic performance of at-risk students.

Evidence of the Problem from the Professional Literature

According to Gersten et al. (2017), RTI is a major focus of government initiatives to improve reading performance in Grades K–2. Funding is provided through programs like Reading First to support strategies that increase reading performance of elementary students (Desimone & Pak, 2017). The US Department of Education (2015) noted that No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) (2002) initiated Reading First as a state grant program during the Bush Administration. The Reading First grant aided state educational and local educational agencies in initiating reading programs for students in kindergarten through third grade that are based on research-based reading strategies. In addition, Hughes and Dexter (2016) noted that targets for teachers, based on a set of strategies and expected outcomes have been set within the RTI framework. The educational strategy is that all teachers should be able to utilize the potential of RTI to increase pupils' levels of proficiency. The integration of the use of RTI across the curriculum is a school-wide issue. It involves a systematic and cohesive strategy that drives the methods of interventions and supports for students in need. Their study revealed that in North Carolina, 5000 students were considered not on grade level in school. Long et al. (2016) confirmed barriers recognized from collective responses in a study are a burdensome

process. The process of using RTI school wide throughout the curriculum entails attitudes, knowledge and gaps, parental issues, and collaboration issues.

It is important for children to practice reading weekly. Tankersley (2016) stated that the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) found children who are read to three or more times per week are more likely to perform at a higher level and children who are read when they enter school. In addition, Tankersley (2016) found that White children were read to more often than Black or Latino children. In addition, the socioeconomic levels of families were factored into a child's ability to read in the early school years. Family members in low socioeconomic situations read to 74% of children living in poverty before entering kindergarten, in contrast to 87% of more affluent children.

There is a need for students to be able to read at the end of first grade. Tankersley (2016) reported that by the end of first grade students proficient at reading have seen an average of 18,681 words of running text, whereas those who are struggling have only seen 9,975 in reading. The proficient readers have covered more time with decoding, automaticity, fluency, and vocabulary growth. The struggling readers have fallen behind and are not able to catch up, consequently labeled as struggling or at-risk readers. Tankersley (2016) explained that some readers that seem proficient in early grades start to fall behind in fourth grade because there is a shift in the learning process from learning to read to reading for information. According to Tankersley (2016) early readers that have not accessed appropriate time with decoding, automaticity, fluency, and vocabulary are unable to achieve, proficient growth consequently labeled as struggling or at-risk

readers. According to Mesmer, & Hiebert (2015) this gap is apparent throughout testing of basic reading comprehension skills in Grades K–3 and testing for reading comprehension in fourth grade through high school.

A child’s experiences and background in life have a lot to do with their ability to read. Brooke (2017) stated that a child's background and experiences are likely to directly influence their pre-reading phonological skills that help develop fluent readers. This function relates to having access to resources. Differences in socioeconomic backgrounds may play a role if a child does not have access to various resources. Parents at higher socioeconomic level might have the resources to increase environmental exposures or seek out alternate educational strategies. However, struggling readers require interventions to target their reading problems (Brooke, 2017). Struggling readers need tailored instruction to increase their performance in reading at the public-school level. This study is to determine if the implementation of RTI at county elementary school in kindergarten second grade level is being implemented with fidelity.

Definition of Terms

Assessment: Measurement of student growth; assessment tool choice is dependent on the purpose and use of measurement results (Shapiro, 2018).

At-risk students: Students that exhibit poor learning performance outcomes in which intervention occurs to accelerate knowledge, skill, or ability development (Hughes & Dexter, 2016).

College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI): Georgia's comprehensive school improvement, accountability, and communication platform for all educational stakeholders (Georgia Department of Education, 2018)

Databased Instruction: An instructional approach that relies on student performance data to assess the effectiveness of the instruction and to make changes in instruction based on that data (RTI Action Network, 2017)

Differentiation: Differentiation is a broad term referring to the need of educators to tailor the curriculum, teaching environments, and practices to create appropriately different learning experiences for students based on varying interest, readiness levels, and learning profiles and to react responsively (Georgia Department of Education, 2018).

Fidelity: Fidelity refers to the provision or delivery of instruction in the way it was designed or prescribed (Otaiba et al., 2015)

Interventions: Targeted instruction that implements strategies and techniques based on student needs (Georgia Department of Education, 2015).

Low-performing school: According to the Georgia Department of Education is a school that has a College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI) score at or below the 25th percentile in its grade cluster, which is 65.9 or less for Elementary Schools (Georgia Department of Education, 2018).

Progress monitoring: Approaches designed to monitors students' academic performance and evaluate the effectiveness of instruction (Georgia Department of Education, 2015).

Reading comprehension: Reading comprehension is the process of understanding written language (Hurlbut & Tunks 2016).

Reading intervention: A reading intervention is one or more techniques, strategies, programs, and supports intended to prevent or remediate reading difficulties (Patrikakou et al., 2016).

Response to intervention (RTI): RTI is a method of academic intervention that is designed to provide early, effective assistance to struggling students. Placement into the program is based on progress monitoring results from assessments (Pullen & Kennedy, 2018).

The Governor's Office of Student Achievement (GOSA): Formerly the Office of Education Accountability, strives to increase student achievement and school completion across Georgia through meaningful, transparent, and objective analysis and communication of statewide data (The Governor's Office of Student Achievement. 2015).

Tiered service-delivery model: A multi-tiered model of service delivery in which instruction is differentiated to meet learner needs at various tier levels (Patrikakou et al., 2016)

Tier 1: The first level of a multi-tiered model, which is the core curriculum within the general classroom instruction with grade-level expectations for all students (Patrikakou et al., 2016)

Tier 2: The second level of a multi-tiered model of instruction, which involves the identification of students not making adequate progress within Tier I (classroom

instruction) followed by prescribed intervention with ongoing progress monitoring of the intervention's effectiveness (Patrikakou et al., 2016)

Tier 3: The third level of intervention is the most intensive layer of general education support following unresponsiveness to Tier 2 (intervention). Progression to Tier 3 indicates a shift from general education due to a suspected disability and a provision for special education services (Patrikakou et al., 2016).

Significance of the Study

I used the results from the interviews with participating K–2 teachers interviews and my review of lesson plans to determine the fidelity of implementation of RTI within grades K–2, the participating elementary school. RTI, when implemented with fidelity, is designed to increase reading proficiency of kindergarten to second grade students that are struggling in reading. Studying this problem may help teachers at the research site implement RTI strategies effectively and consistently to help students build upon their reading skills to become proficient readers. Coonce (2015) revealed that, with RTI, schools use data to identify students at risk for poor learning outcomes, monitor student progress, and provide evidence-based interventions. Teachers and administrators may adjust the intensity and nature of those interventions depending on a student's responsiveness and identify students with disabilities.

The intensity of the interventions depends on the needs of the students. Wanzek et al. (2018) suggested that focusing on a small set of reading-related skills is essential to Tier 3 in kindergarten through second grade because having too many instructional objectives for struggling readers makes it more difficult to learn the skills well enough for

proficient reading. Setting instructional goals helps pinpoint data that identified learning disabilities (LD) which has proven to shift away from discrepancies in cognitive abilities that have traditionally been a primary basis for learning disabilities identification. Fuchs and Fuchs (2017) also acknowledged diagnostic assessments help determine why a reading problem is occurring and which reading skills or performance deficits need to be addressed to improve reading performance. Service delivery models that provide early interventions align with the results of diagnostic testing results. Implementing RTI with struggling readers with fidelity and purposeful instruction benefit the students, teachers, and parents. Developing reading skills in the early learning stages promotes positive social progress by potentially improving college and career preparedness and propelling students to become productive citizens and lifelong learners.

Research Questions

It is important for teachers to implement RTI with fidelity to increase reading achievement of students. Gardenhour (2016) concluded that implementing the four essential RTI components with fidelity is an effective strategy to improve schools and increase student reading. Gardenhour (2016) stated the four components provide a research-based framework for delivering high quality instruction and interventions customized to individual student needs. In my research, I emphasized the importance of implementing RTI instruction strategies effectively and continuously to help struggling readers master the skills necessary to become proficient readers. The problem at a suburban county elementary school was the continuous below proficiency level performance of the kindergarten through second grade students in reading performance

even though RTI has been implemented since 2011. This below level performance has been a problem seemingly because of the gap in practice concerning the discrepancy of performance between high- and low-achieving students. Castillo (2017) concluded principals in different districts have reported in multiple instances that implementation of RTI is scattered, incomplete, and superficial due to funding problems, staff resistance to change, and weak and inadequate professional development. For this study, I used qualitative inquiry to determine the in-depth understanding what a phenomenon was be occurring (Creswell, 2017).

I used the following questions to guide this study:

Research Question 1 (RQ1): What are the perspectives of K–2 teachers concerning RTI fidelity implementation procedures in K–2 Reading?

Research Question 2 (RQ2): What are the perspectives concerning how K–2 students move through the three RTI tiers in Reading?

Research Question 3 (RQ3): What are the perspectives of K–2 teachers concerning accessing program resources to support the fidelity implementation of RTI in K–2 Reading?

Review of the Literature

I conducted several searches in different educational research databases from Walden University Library and other libraries in the United States, including ERIC, SAGE, EBSCO publications, and ProQuest publications. The search included primary sources, full text, peer reviewed articles from the last 5 years. Articles on RTI and reading in the past several years or longer have documented the evolution of RTI and

reading intervention strategies commonly used to date, but I have referred and cited current literature on the topic. Several articles from various sources included information regarding concepts that impacted reading skills for students in the RTI intervention phases such as grade level, age, implementation of RTI, and concerns of intervention strategies use for students in early grades. All literature sources and websites for this study were documented and referenced in this literature section. I also included internet websites from local, state, and national data. The public data websites confirmed that reading problems and issues were not just a local issue but were also a concern on a state and national level.

Background

Constructivist Learning Theory

According to Vygotsky (as cited in Shokouhi & Shakouri, 2015) children who might have reached similar levels of conceptual development are different in their readiness to achieve higher levels of understanding, through structured help, understanding student-learning preferences help teachers, receive, and process information accurately. Macy (2016) believed that if teachers understand their students' abilities, they will meet their specific learning needs more appropriately and bridge their learning gaps by using Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Modeling procedures, ideas, expectations, and solutions are a means of differentiated instruction. The national board for professional teaching standards (NBPTS; 2016) stated that accomplished teachers understand how students develop and learn as they incorporate a variety of learning and development theories into their practice and remain attuned to their students'

needs by communicating to expose gaps and weaknesses students have which allow teachers to adjust their instruction accordingly.

It is important to understand the ZPD completely and correctly and it must be regarded within the framework of the whole system of Vygotsky's theoretical constructions (Eun, 2017). According to Eun (2017), ZPD is a concept developed by Vygotsky that signified the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through teacher-led problem-solving guidance, or in peer partnership with peers at an advanced cognitive level. Leslie (2015) stated that ZPD is an observable and measurable theory that incorporates grouping, collaboration, and learner centeredness. This framework supports the constructivist learning theory.

Theorists who made contributions to the constructivist learning theory were Piaget, Dewey, Vygotsky, and Bruner, who considered the learner's individual needs. According to Somerville (2015), the constructivist theory suggested that humans construct knowledge and meaning from their experiences. This is viewed as a philosophy that investigates the nature, methods, and limits of human knowledge not as a pedagogy.

The RTI process is an effective way to monitor students' progress in the classroom. Utley and Obiakor (2015) described RTI as an assessment and intervention process intended for methodically monitor student progress and make decisions based on the need for instructional modifications or progressively developing services using progress monitoring data. RTI is an integrated method of providing instructional strategies using a multi-tiered method for all students experiencing difficulties in areas of

academic, behavior, health, speech, social, and emotional development (Utley and Obiakor, 2015). This process applies a problem-solving framework to recognize and focus on academic and behavioral difficulties for all students using research-based instruction (Utley & Obiakor, 2015).

In this study, I combined the RTI conceptual framework model with the constructivist learning theory approach for this research to explore the perspectives of elementary teachers in one elementary school regarding the fidelity implementation of RTI procedures in Grades K–2. Also, a decision was made to move students between the two tiers, and what program resources are needed to carry out the assessments for these students. Students were actively involved in small group instruction, differentiated instruction, knowledge acquisition and tiered interventions as part of the RTI process. The attributes involved in the RTI process contribute to data collection and analyzing these data by discovering themes, categories, and codes to answer the research questions.

Educators use ZPD as a foundational basis for teaching and learning and as part of the constructivist classroom to vary teaching practices, which facilitates students' learning. Macy (2016) revealed social constructivism is a sociological theory of knowledge that focuses on how individuals come to construct and apply knowledge in socially mediated contexts. Vygotsky's learning theory implies that cognitive growth takes place at the student's ZPD (Macy, 2016). The ZPD is defined as the area about what students can achieve without assistance and the achievements of students getting the help of someone who performs at a higher cognitive level. RTI's Tier 2 intervention is identified as intense instruction focused on students' individual learning needs (Macy,

2016). Constructivism is based on three assumptions about learning (Marcy, 2016): First, an individual's interaction with the environment; next, holding two conflicting thoughts while is the stimulus for learning. Finally, social environment plays a critical role in the development of knowledge. One model of the theoretical view of constructivism in the classroom is small group instruction implementing RTI, with a concentration on teaching reading skills and strategies (Park & Datnow, 2017). The constructivist learning approach includes differentiated instruction with small groups based on the ratio of students to teacher. Park and Datnow (2017) stated that differentiated instruction means adjusting the curriculum and instruction to maximize learning where the students are active participants in the learning process rather than passive learners.

Applying RTI within the classroom helps students maximize their learning potentials by demonstrating their understanding of actively constructing their learning based on instructional methods that include strategies of differentiation (Armstrong, 2016). According to Seyyedrezaie, and Barani (2017), constructivism assumes individuals construct meaning from their experiences and interactions and, therefore, construct the realities in which they participate. This can improve the academic learning needs of students in the classroom.

According to Prescott et al. (2018), there is a need for developing a school-wide practice of teaching reading that is not aligned with limited group pullout testing and remedial instructions benefit all students involved. Georgia Department of Education (2015) stated that a school-wide RTI approach should begin with classroom teachers implementing process monitoring tools such as i-ready. Wanzek et al. (2018) voiced

concerns about the screening process used in RTI to identify students that seem to be at risk for learning disabilities. Some concerns of special education teachers with the RTI process are gaps in knowledge, faculty attitude, and lack of resources (Long et al., 2016). However, there are also benefits that include improved instruction because of assessments data, collection, and analysis, and differentiated instruction (Long et al., 2016).

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study was based on the instructional model response to intervention (RTI) based on the constructivist learning theory (Vygotsky, 1967) guided this case study. I explored the perspectives of elementary teachers in one elementary school regarding the fidelity implementation of RTI procedures in K–2 grades on their decision made to move students between the two tiers, and what program resources are needed to carry out the assessments for these students. The RTI implementation is an important procedure for teachers, and it can benefit students in their academic achievement.

The RTI model framework was reported as a high-quality general education program that includes universal screening procedures to identify students at risk for academic failure in the general education classroom (Lachar, 2018). Teachers can use interventions to implement evidence-based treatment protocol alone with progress monitoring for specified length of time. If the general intervention does not work for some students, more intensive and tailored interventions are used for them in the classroom (Lachar, 2018). RTI is not a model to be imposed on schools, but a framework

was used to support students before the difficulties they encounter with language and literacy become more serious (Lachar, 2018).

The RTI model framework has been implemented throughout the United States as a way for school districts to identify students with learning disabilities, but also to provide high-quality instruction to all students in the classroom (Swanson et al., 2012). A successful RTI process begins with a teacher providing high quality core instruction in the classroom (Greenwood et al., 2015). Swanson et al. (2012) stated that when the No Child Left Behind Act was implemented, the federal government provided funding to states to target students who was falling behind in their class work. Many of these students were not identified as having a learning disability and their academic standing in the classroom was below average according to the local and state standards in their performance. The school districts and the local school were mandated to implement a RTI mode that was designed to identify students were having academic problems in the classroom (Preston et al., 2016). Seeking to achieve greater effectiveness in educating children in the United States, the RTI approach has been implemented throughout school districts in the United States as a prevention model of multitiered instruction with a minimum of three tiers (Preston et al., 2016).

The origins of RTI have historical roots in multiple fields, including behavioral consultation, data-based program modification, and learning disabilities (Preston et al., 2016). Since 2017, interest has been growing among researchers and policy makers in early identification of and intervention for children considered at risk for poor academic achievement (Milburn et al., 2017). Three advantages of a RTI approach include (a)

students do not wait to fail to be eligible for support, (b) students avoids problems associated with process-deficit and discrepancy models, and (c) RTI is instructionally grounded, enhancing the ecological validity of the diagnostic process (McEneaney et al., 2006, p. 3). The shift moves practice away from the traditional model of waiting for students to qualify for special education before serving them to one of intervening immediately to prevent developmental delays and challenges from becoming disabilities (Milburn et al., 2017).

RTI Tiered Instruction

According to Daddario (2019), highly structured and explicit instruction is the foundation of effective early reading instruction and highly structured and explicit instruction contributes to positive outcomes for students from diverse backgrounds. RTI provides that highly structured and explicit instruction that many students require. RTI frameworks frequently use a tiered structure to identify and support students experiencing reading difficulties in the classroom (Weiss & Friesen, 2014). A multitiered approach can improve the academic outcomes for students at risk for academic failure (Daddario 2019).

In RTI, Tier 1, the teacher gives “daily instruction based on current curricular requirements with the assumption that every student is learning at the expected level” (Sterrett et al., 2020, p. 1). In RTI Tier 2, allows teachers to help students that have been identified as needing additional or modified instruction to assist them with reaching any literacy learning target they might have and who provides the additional supports in the classroom (Sterrett et al., 2020). Interventions with increasing intensity are used to

provide an appropriate instruction that matching a child's demonstrated response to research-based activities in their classroom (Sterrett et al., 2020). Given recent concerns that RTI may simply reduce the extent of children's' difficulties but not the number of students who will eventually require special education supports, it is important to examine not only the identification of children making inadequate progress in instruction but also their responsiveness to Tier 2 intervention (Milburn et al., 2017).

Although regular education classroom teachers have a charge of instructing all students in grade level curriculum modifications, the instructional model have taken place with the implementation of RTI. There has been more focus on the role of the classroom teacher in preventing reading failure in the regular classroom via Tier I or Tier II interventions (Gersten et al., 2017). If a student does not make academic progress during a specific time, they move to Tier III, which is being referred for special education services. The approach stems from concepts in prevention science that offer means of differentiating treatment with potentially broad value by providing adaptive interventions for all individuals (Gersten, et al. 2017). RTI assumes that literacy teachers differentiate as a matter of course, within both the context of the general classroom and within the context of more specialized and targeted instruction/intervention (Watts-Taffe et al., 2012). Although the evidence for structured and explicit reading instruction is clear and convincing, one decision that teachers need to make when considering the needs of children at risk for reading problems is how much additional instruction is needed (Daddario, 2019). After additional instruction, the component of regular process monitoring is implanted also. Teachers evaluate the success of students' academic

interventions through progress monitoring three times a year (Preston et al., 2016).

As part of the RTI process, teachers help students who are struggling with their academic skills by teaching proven research-based interventions to help students make progress with their academic skills (Brann et al., 2020). Researchers noted several research-based interventions that deal with reading skills. There are also research-based methods of improving writing and mathematics skills. These research-based interventions strategies are proven strategies used to meet the needs of all students in the classroom to advance their academic achievement (Turse & Albrecht, 2015).

Struggling Readers

Early elementary students with reading deficits face significant challenges because they lack necessary early literacy skills when they begin school. Poor readers did not develop literacy skills during preschool and kindergarten and, therefore, have a chance of failing reading (Martin & Myers, 2019; Varghese et al., 2019). According to the Department of Accountability, Research, and Evaluation (2015) struggling readers in Grades K–2, defined state provided cut off scores on reading assessments. Veenman et al. (2018) perceived reading difficulties leading to problem behaviors, students avoiding difficult tasks, reading deficits due to not academically engaging with academic content, and maintaining transactional relationships.

Reading deficits and problem behaviors are closely related (Veenman et al., 2018). Veenman et al. (2018) provided noted several suggestions to guide teachers and principals to help with struggling readers. These include identifying appropriate assessment and intervention resources for the struggling readers, determining

professional development needs to improve capacity for intervention delivery that will help all teachers with RTI delivery, resources should be used in the most effective way, structuring the time to deliver interventions, and engage students who are not receiving intervention and optimizing the physical space available to deliver interventions. On the other hand, the Center for Public Education (2015) stated elementary students that continue to experience problems in reading require intensive interventions and states are working to improve third grade reading through assessments to pinpoint problems, interventions for struggling readers, and possible retention of third graders who do not meet grade-level markers. In addition, Bohanon et al. (2017) argued the primary goal of RTI is to improve academic and behavioral outcomes in their focus on universal teaching of all students, provision of a continuum of supports provided to students who do not respond, and reliance on action planning guided by a representative team.

Response to Intervention screening and progress monitoring assessment, evidence-based intervention, and school-wide coordination of multi-tier instruction is part of a well-designed approach to differentiating reading (Bohanon et al., 2017). Hughes and Dexter (2018) stated that the screening process used in RTI should identify students that appear to be at risk for learning disabilities. In addition, Hurlbut and Tunks, (2016) reported that teachers use an assessment tool to measure struggling students' individual skills. After each assessment, the individual score is plotted on a graph to determine improvement at the expected rate or if he needs additional support. However, there is advantages and disadvantage of the delivery process. The recent focus on RTI provides an opportunity to combine academic and behavior systems effectively and efficiently into

an integrated school-wide system of supports for students (Bohanon, Goodman, & McIntosh, 2017). The screening process, for students in primary grades kindergarten second grade performed at least once a year, identifies at risk students for reading failure. Based on the screening scores at risk students identified are given intensive reading interventions.

According to Georgia Department of Education (2015), two basic decisions, from the RTI approach are instructional planning and eligibility for special education services. The instructional planning process implements a multi-tiered strategy approach to identify students struggling and who are eligible for special education services. The multi-tiered strategy approach targets students struggling in reading within the general education setting in the early grades before considering special education. Using responsiveness to evidence-based interventions to make referrals and address problem areas.

Implementing RTI in Schools

Response to intervention (RTI) is an increasingly popular practice associated with the improving the performance of at-risk students on measures of literacy and a potentially reducing the number of students identified for special education (RTI Action Network, 2017). Based on RTI Action Network (2017), the RTI reading program needs examining for consistency in its practices to modify instruction based on student performance data about the intensity and duration of interventions based on individual student response to instruction. RTI requires that general education teachers use research-based instruction with all students, subsequently evaluating the effectiveness of

the intervention before moving to the third tier (Vaughn, Zumeta, Wanzek et al., 2014). Tier 3 of RTI indicates possible special education referral. RTI is layered with the intent to lessen the achievement gap for struggling learners through school-wide evidence-based practices and evidence-based interventions (RTI Action Network, 2017). As a result, of necessary changes involved with RTI, it is imperative to have teacher support and buy-in for effective implementation of instruction.

RTI Action Network (2017) acknowledged that students move through the tiers, receiving whatever level of intervention meets their needs until they are meeting grade-level benchmarks. After students meet their grade level goal, they stop receiving services under the RTI program. Hirschler (2016) believed RTI is a fantastic learning structure that teachers can use to help students learn to their capacity by teaching and reteaching the interventions to increase students' knowledge through five components of RTI. All teachers need to use the RTI process. Also, Manning (2016) stated a focus on individualized instruction and intervention, within the regular education classroom, is an attempt to keep struggling students from falling behind. This specific additional instruction and intervention, known as Response to Intervention (RTI) in most states is not only a push towards the improvement of education for all students, is how decisions regarding a student's special education eligibility are based upon.

There is a need for school districts across the United States to make sure children receive the support they need in reading achievement. Samuels (2015) acknowledged many states press to ensure that children in the earliest grades get the literacy support they need to meet crucial 3rd grade milestones, because if the child is not reading

proficiently by 3rd grade they are considered in academic crisis. Morin (2014) believed parents would support RTI if they were aware of all actions that can occur with this process. National Center for Learning Disabilities (2015) provided helpful information for parents to understand the RTI process. These include: (a) at any time, during the school year, the parent can talk to the teacher and find out which interventions are available to help your child. (b) The child will continue to receive their core instruction in the general education classroom. (c) The increasing levels of support mean that if the first intervention method does not work, there are other options before special education and progress monitoring, means that if your child gets a referral for special education services, there is already documentation about which type of instruction has not been helpful for the child.

RTI programs are beneficial if the education professionals are putting forth significant effort in using the most appropriate type of interventions for that specific student (Samuels, 2015). RTI teams have specific duties to help struggling readers and that is defining the student's problem, planning an intervention, implementing the intervention, and regularly evaluating the student's progress. Various interventions should be attempted if the student is still struggling in reading. Educational Research Newsletter and Webinars (2016) listed five recommendations to schools and school districts on using RTI for primary grade students struggling with learning how to read. The recommendations are as follows: (a) A screening is done to detect potential reading that led to possible developmental reading disabilities. (b) Provide differentiated reading instruction (RTI) for all students based on assessments of students' current reading levels

(Tier 1). (c) Provide intensive, systematic instruction in small groups to students who score below the benchmark three and five times a week for 20–40 minutes (Tier 2). (d) Tier 3 intervention plans follow data showing students are still struggling in Tier 2. (e) Provide intensive instruction daily for students exhibiting minimal progress after time spent in Tier 2 small group instruction (Tier 3) (Webinars, 2016).

The recommendations were meant to identify students with continuous reading difficulties, implement interventions to improve the students' reading ability and pinpoint those that are eligible for special services. With the proper implementation of the response to intervention framework, students stand to gain significant progress to move forward. The Response to intervention (RTI) is a multi-tier approach to the early identification and support of students with learning and behavior needs. The RTI process begins with instruction and universal screening of all children in the general education classroom. Center on Response to Intervention (2015) stated data analysis and decision making occurs at all levels of RTI implementation and the screening and progress monitoring data supports decision making concerning instruction, movement among tiered levels, and disability identification.

RTI has the potential for keeping a class together by promoting instruction in the least restrictive environment. Kindergarten to second grade students struggling with reading, receive interventions at increasing levels of intensity to accelerate their rate of learning (Balu et al., 2017). RTI services taught in small groups, individually by teachers, special educators, and specialists are ways of addressing the problem. Little et al. (2017) stated that the RTI system is all about creating a vehicle of progress for all

students by monitoring and assessing both the learning rate and level of performance of individual students. Educational decisions, and how to best implement them, are based on individual student response to instruction. RTI is used when making decisions in both general education and special education, this process links the two together and creates a bond where support is the objective. There is a need for more research into how schools can proficiently offer a multiplicity of research-based instructional strategies; to assist struggling readers to become successful in developing their reading skills (Little et al., 2017).

Response to Intervention (RTI) and Early Literacy Skills for Struggling Readers

The primary years are a major part of developing the early literacy skills for students. Offering different approaches for struggling readers provides a chance to target areas of deficiency (Gardenhour, 2016). Also, Gardenhour (2016) affirmed RTI incorporates multitier interventions systems, where students have access to evidence-based classroom reading instruction, and supplemental interventions when needed. Gardenhour (2016) also believed non-proficient reading skills not corrected in the primary grades, will continue to get progressively worse in subsequent years. According to Fuchs and Fuchs (2017) the implementation of RTI can be problematic, due to ineffective teaching. Training teachers is necessary to implement the RTI strategies with fidelity. In addition, many factors contribute to students struggling with reading in the early primary years. Difficulties observed in the primary grades with mastering basic reading skills are associated with limited engagement in text reading. This causes a pervasive reading deficit characterized by low fluency, poor vocabulary, and limited

world knowledge, all contributing to impaired reading comprehension (Gardenhour, 2016).

RTI process can be useful to teachers in the classroom to advance the achievement of students Fuchs and Lynn (2017) verified that RTI is useful for several instructional purposes. A study performed in 13 states revealed most of the schools studied used RTI for reading instruction in first through third grades. Research firms Monitor Deloitte. RAND Corporation (MDRC), Scientific Research Institute (SRI) International, the University of Washington, and the Instructional Research Group focused the research on 140 schools. Fuchs & Lynn's study revealed four key elements used in each school situation. Fuchs and Lynn (2017) elements were, a) three tiers of increasingly intense reading instruction being used; b) screening of all students for progress at least twice a year; c) regular usage of data to place students in Tiers 2 or 3; and d) more-frequent progress monitoring for students in Tier 2 and above to gauge whether the interventions are working.

It is important for teachers to provide individualized instruction for some students to increase their academic achievement. Shapiro (2018) stated that the focus of individualized instruction and interventions within the regular education classroom has been unique to having students learn in a regular classroom environment. Students with reading difficulties benefit from instruction that is purposeful and targeted at important objectives. Moving from logical sequential order to challenging skills is usually the method of learning for students. Re-teaching skills not mastered in a different manner is required. The Iris Center (2016) listed the benefits of RTI administered to struggling

readers as: (a) explicit instruction in which skills are clearly modeled and key concepts are directly taught (b) extended opportunities for guided and independent practice with both corrective and positive feedback and making connections with text and (c) instructional formats that promote active involvement and responding. According to The Iris Center (2016) students who are easily confused, are more likely to be successful when they receive instruction with these characteristics.

Different Tiers of the Response to Intervention (RTI) model

According to Kuo (2014), RTI involves three tiers to ensure that each student receives an appropriate education: (a) Tier 1 represents the class-wide level in an RTI framework based on high quality instruction. (b) Tier 2 (interventions) is a supplement to Tier 1 for students who do not respond to Tier 1 and need extra support and remediation. (c) Tier 3 (intense intervention and instruction) is a supplement for both 1 and 2 because it is designed to increase the intensity of explicit instruction (Kuo, 2014, p.10).

County Elementary i-ready progress monitoring data indicated that many early elementary students continue to struggle with reading skills (District School System, 2015). These students have already reached Tier 2 of the response to intervention (RTI) process. RTI Tier 2, require that students not making satisfactory progress in the core curriculum are provided with progressively intensive instructions that are fitted to their individual needs. RTI includes a combination of high quality, culturally and linguistically responsive instruction; assessment; and evidence-based intervention (Martin, 2014).

Struggling readers, in the kindergarten to second grade classrooms at an elementary are small groups and tend to continue this pattern throughout the school year

without having improved and still having issues with reading skills. Tankersley (2016) acknowledged differentiated instruction, has been proven to facilitate significant gains in reading ability for this group of struggling readers. Struggling readers, requires instruction facilitated by trained instructors, which utilize techniques identified through research methods to improve fluency, accuracy, and comprehension.

Response to Intervention and the Constructivist Learning Theory

The theoretical underpinnings of Vygotsky's (1978) Social Constructivism, according to Manning (2016) were used to evaluate the problem with students' reading performance considering that RTI is a problem-solving model which relies on collaboration and reflective communication. The collaborative nature of learning is emphasized in the constructivist paradigm. This means RTI requires constant communication amongst educators working closely with the students in kindergarten to second grade. Educators meet to discuss, analyze, and carefully plan the interventions needed to help the students move forward while maintaining fidelity throughout the RTI tier framework process.

Social constructivism theory of learning placed focus on social relations and the importance of readiness for learning by relying on dynamic assessments to establish a students' level of readiness to determine a students' learning potential (Manning, 2016; Vygotsky, 1978). Also, Manning (2016) also acknowledged the constructivist learning is significant in the development of RTI because Vygotsky (1978) believed that instruction should occur through functional scaffolding. This concept supports a major structural component of RTI, specifically known as the concept of multi-tiered instruction.

The zone of proximal development (ZPD), developed by Vygotsky, (1978) described the gap between the students' actual development level and the potential development level by initiating problem solving techniques (Manning, 2016). In addition, Manning (2016) believed the ZPD is synonymous to the tiers of RTI and scaffolding in those varied tiers of instruction promote the highest possible level of achievement through varied support. Just as knowledgeable skilled teachers are important to the effective implementation of RTI, providing instruction using the ZPD model requires actively involved teachers who use social negotiation to build knowledge as a collaborative group. The ZPD represents a students' capacity to learn with the support of a skilled teacher. Rector (2016) believed the zone of proximal development is one of Vygotsky's main explanatory models showing the relationship between development, cognition, and social experiences.

The zone of proximal development (ZPD) is in reference to material a learner has mastered, and material that is a potential possibility to learn. A student's previous knowledge associates a teacher working within the ZPD and using scaffolding to help the student develop the ability to do certain tasks independently. Scaffolding accesses modeling, thinking aloud, asking questions, prompts, and clues, to introduce and teach a concept. Rector (2016) believed the combination of learning materials aligned with a student's ZPD, and the use of scaffolding to support student learning opens the door for real learning to occur because the material provides a challenge but builds upon the learner's current knowledge base.

The constructivist approach to learning, with multiple strategies, helped teach reading in the lessons, involving small group instruction and individual instruction (Schcolnik, 2016). Students benefitted from the constructivist learning approach, which is for differentiated instruction taking place in small groups, with a small number of students. As stated by Schcolnik et al. (2016), Zone of proximal development is part of the constructivist theory and supports active participation in the learning process involving students learning from each other. Students comprehended and applied new concepts in daily activities with the teacher as the facilitator. Teachers working with RTI interventions realized RTI instruction helped target specific deficiencies and required close monitoring of struggling students' progress based on the instruction. Eun, (2017) acknowledged combining the zone of proximal development as part of the constructivist learning theory with RTI for this research, helped determine the effectiveness of RTI. The implementation of RTI, taught with fidelity will be successful, and help students that are not mastering the skills taught and are consistently falling behind in reading. Students are actively involved in small group instruction, differentiated instruction, knowledge acquisition and tiered interventions as part of the RTI process. The attributes involved in the RTI process contribute to data collection and analyzing these data by discovering themes, categories, and codes that reveal answers to the research questions.

Professional Development

Professional development is an important element for teachers to increase their instruction knowledge. March et al. (2016) indicated that teachers require ongoing professional development (PD) required to teach RTI implementation with fidelity. Most

school districts extend both initial and ongoing professional development to all school site personnel and hire expert facilitators and qualified coaches to address RTI implementation to help improve reading. The RTI process required teachers to effectively screen, assess, teach, and document student progress, initial staff training to build teachers' understanding of RTI is essential. Castillo et al. (2016), implied that there is a need for ongoing professional development when implementing RTI and demonstrate the benefits of intentional and ongoing training on teacher outcomes especially in comparison to single after-school trainings.

It is important that school districts provide adequate professional development for teachers. According to Castillo et al. (2016), professional development for RTI implementation helped educators apply theoretical concepts, to hands-on applications within the classroom, and experts in the field are required to train educators. Castillo et al. (2016), proved workshops increase teachers' knowledge, as opposed to the one-time trainings, which do not provide the depth of understanding, or the implementation of practice needed to collect, analyze, and use student data to guide instruction. In addition, change agents are the classroom teachers that ignite student learning in the classroom and create the foundation for school-wide success or failure of the RTI process (Little et al., 2017). Deficits may be the result of inadequate teaching from lack of training. Schools must ensure that teachers are knowledgeable in implementing RTI so that it increases student reading. Schwehr (2014), ongoing professional development in RTI led to greater improvement in self-efficacy of using RTI principles and strategies than a single

afterschool training session after controlling for teachers' experience and teachers' education levels.

Teaching Response to Intervention (RTI) with Fidelity

The RTI Action Network (2016) suggested that fidelity with RTI is the intensity of how the program performs. The time and interest put into implementing RTI depends on the teacher. Teachers can learn and collaborate. Otaiba (2015) stated that there are five elements of fidelity, and they are student engagement, program specificity, and quality of delivery, exposure/duration, and adherence. During this process, students were involved in the intervention activity designed to increase their proficiency in reading. Students received interventions according to their deficiencies in reading. The interventions were useful in addressing the problems. The instructor was the key in the delivery because she/he was knowledgeable and trained to carry this out. The students spent quality time exposed to this activity. The teacher implemented the plan on a consistent basis for the duration of correcting the problem (Otaiba, 2015).

Some researchers reported that there is a need for a multi-tier system of supports that uses students' response to intervention to determine progress and to inform instructional decisions requires that the instruction and interventions are delivered be implemented with high degrees of fidelity to achieve meaningful student outcomes (Ruffin, 2016). According to Ruffin, this is a critical process to get positive results in reading. Jackson and Alvarez (2017) believed that RTI can succeed because, properly understood, it is fundamentally practical when schools select the right tools designed to

implement RTI there will be a tremendous difference in reaping the benefits of a sustainable RTI program, while avoiding potential pitfalls.

Many teachers need understanding on the RTI concept and progress monitoring tools. Otaiba (2015) declared teachers would not be able to implement RTI with fidelity unless they are knowledgeable and understand how to monitor their progress. Otaiba (2015) also believed that teachers understanding must exceed basic knowledge and understanding of how important progress monitoring is to have sustainability. Teachers need professional development training to learn strategies, a template with guidelines on monitoring progress. In addition, Otaiba (2015) conducted a qualitative study with special education teachers on the teachers' perceptions of RTI, the intensity used to implement RTI and if evidence based instructional practices guided the process. The data analysis from study aligned with the interviews, observations, and criteria for state assessment scores in which he discovered over a five-year span of time the teachers spent 42% of time on comprehension activities and 54% with reading. The perceptions measured concurred with the interaction and engaged time with students and the activity (Otaiba, 2015).

Implications

This research was intended to gain an understanding of underlying reasons, opinions, and motivations of teachers implementing RTI with fidelity to kindergarten to 2nd grade students to improve their reading. Documenting and analyzing teacher perspectives and challenges on RTI implementation helps future teachers with interventions for reading. This qualitative study explored the problems of RTI

implementation to provide effective instructional interventions for reading literacy. The findings of my study may help me develop a project for teachers at the local school that can influence student achievement by means of implementing RTI with fidelity. These finding may also assist in future recommendations for the RTI process that help improve and align program implementation in the classrooms.

RTI utilizes a problem-solving framework to identify and address academic and behavioral difficulties for all students using scientific, research-based instruction. The county school system developed a response to intervention/ student support team (RTI/SST) manual. The intent of the county school system RTI/SST manual is to clarify the principles and components of the RTI process and offers guidelines related to making decision within system. It also suggests approaches for data collection in the RTI process to identify specific learning disabilities as well as other disabilities. The County School System RTI/SST manual answer frequent questions and identify other resources that the school may use.

Training may help teachers to implement RTI interventions with fidelity in their classroom. Professional Training could help teachers to better implement RTI to students that struggle with reading. Standard practice interventions are suggested to answer the questions about what students need in the classroom when performing below proficiency. These interventions may be developed at the school level based on student's needs and students with similar struggles may be grouped together to work on skill deficits. This approach has evidence-based support within the area of reading, particularly at the elementary level (Department of Psychological Services, 2015). Results of the study by

Murphy (2015) showed that the teacher is the most important factor in student achievement. It is essential that teachers utilize research-based strategies, engage in thoughtful assessment leading to instruction, and have knowledge of assessments to develop strategic lesson plans and intense professional development training of practicing research based best processes to reach the students. This qualitative study may provide information to the administrators in that the results help them to make decisions in the best interest of the teachers, as well as all students.

The purpose of the study was to explore K–2 teachers’ perceptions regarding the fidelity implementation of RTI procedures in K–2 grades. Further, this study obtained important information regarding support the teachers provide in each tier of the RTI model. Interviews and lesson plans review of the K–2 elementary teachers provided in-depth understanding of the fidelity implementation of the RTI model that enhance student learning and impact reading achievement. In addition, the constructivism and implementation framework support the importance of implementing interventions with the quality, frequency, and alignment that the developer designed in the intervention. Researchers noted that if RTI implementation quality is linked to student outcomes, schools may benefit from analyzing their implementation using the scale for reading (RTIS-R) or a similar measure at least annually to execute planning for RTI implementation and to monitor progress (Jackson & Alvarez, 2017; Ruffin, 2016).

Summary

The problem at a suburban county elementary school was the continuous below proficiency level performance of the kindergarten through 2nd grade students in reading

performance even though RTI has been implemented since 2011 (Study School, 2015). Despite increases in reading and English language arts scores on the state standardized testing this school was still on the State low performing school list. The overview of County Elementary 2015 i-Ready process monitoring, and assessment scores have determined that many K- 2nd grade students are not responding to strategies used in Tiers 1 and 2 of the RTI process. This qualitative study examined how response to intervention (RTI), was implemented, at County Elementary with K–2nd grade students to determine if it was with fidelity. The rationale behind this study was to explore if RTI is being implemented with fidelity given its constructivist base. The implications were aligned with the anticipated findings from this study in saying the RTI process requires knowledgeable teachers, personalization of lessons to meet student’s needs, resource support in executing the RTI process with fidelity. Section two includes the methodology that discusses procedures of finding the answers and analyzing the data collected.

Section 2: Methodology

Introduction

The problem at a suburban county elementary school was the continuous below proficiency level performance of the kindergarten through second grade students in reading performance even though RTI has been implemented since 2011 (Study School, 2015). The Governor's Office of Student Achievement (2017) generated a report of reading proficiency with the targeted school for 2013 to 2017 revealing only 38.8% of its third grade students are reading at or above the grade level target, 33.4% at the district level and 51.7% at the state level as of 2017. The procedures and format of RTI strategies implemented to improve Kindergarten to second grade students' proficiency levels in reading. This chapter contains an overview of the research design and approach that were used in this study stating why the approach is appropriate to address the problem. The purpose of the study was to explore Kindergarten to second grade teachers' perceptions regarding the fidelity implementation of RTI procedures in K–2 grades.

Section 2 provides a description of the research design and the research findings selected for this study. This section includes a description of the participants for this study, the selection process, the number of participants, the procedures for gathering access to the participants, the methods for establishing a working relationship with the participants, and the measures for the protection of the participants. This section also includes a description of the data collection process, the role of the researcher, and the limitations of this study.

Qualitative Research Design and Approach

This study was conducted to explore teachers' perspectives of the fidelity implementation of RTI in kindergarten to second grade. A qualitative case study was used to explore the perceptions of elementary teachers in one school regarding the fidelity implementation of RTI procedures in kindergarten to second grade on decisions made to move students between the two tiers, and what programs resources were assessed. The overarching research questions guiding this study were as follows:

RQ1: What are the perspectives of elementary teachers concerning RTI fidelity implementation procedures in K–2 Reading?

RQ2: What are the perspectives of elementary teachers concerning how K–2 students move through the three RTI tiers in Reading?

RQ3: What are the perspectives of elementary teachers concerning accessing programs resources to support the fidelity implementation of RTI in K–2 Reading?

Qualitative research is a process where the researcher studies the participants in naturalistic inquiry and seek in-depth understanding of social phenomena within their natural setting. Qualitative research focuses on the *why* and the *what* of social phenomena and relies on the direct experiences of human beings (Creswell, 2017). Case studies are also used to research individuals or groups of participants experiences in a particular setting (Yin, 2009). Other types of qualitative research design were considered such as phenomenological, grounded theory, and ethnography.

Phenomenological studies explore the lived experiences of participants in their natural settings. Phenomenological research design allows the participants to provide a

detail description of their personal experiences of a particular phenomenon (Creswell, 2017). The researcher was interactive with the participants to gain an in-depth understanding of their experiences and allowed participants to provide the researcher feedback and this shaped the direction of the study. The goal of a phenomenological study is to allow the participants to have a voice with other participants with the same or similar experiences and viewpoints (Creswell, 2017). Although this research study used interviews to seek the elementary teachers' perceptions and views regarding the fidelity implementation of RTI procedures, the focus was not on their individual perceptions but emerging patterns and themes that identified the fidelity implementation of RTI procedures. Therefore, a phenomenological study was not the best approach for this research study.

Grounded theory is a research design that present a theory to collect data and build or confirm a theory based on the data collected (Creswell, 2017). In the grounded theory, the researcher builds or confirm a theory from the ground up and verifies the theory based on the research findings. The goal of the researcher with grounded theory is to theorize or explain how the theory process occurred over time by providing a conceptual framework with a topic being studied by the researcher (Creswell, 2017). The data in grounded theory are organized into different patterns and themes to create a model based on the theory. The theory is then generalized to a larger population of people. The research may collect several rounds of data to develop or prove the theory (Creswell, 2017). This research study was based on social constructivism theory of learning, which places a focus on social relations and the importance of readiness for learning by relying

on dynamic assessments to establish a students' level of readiness to determine a students' learning potential. For this reason, grounded theory research design is not an appropriate research design for this study.

Ethnography designs focus on understanding and analyzing elements in a culture. Researchers in education noted that ethnography studies had an influence in anthropological and sociological practices as they relate to the cultural aspects of participants (Creswell, 2017). One of the goals of ethnography designs is to understand the behavior of a group or how behaviors relate to a larger setting such as in society or at an institution. Researchers conduct ethnography studies over a long period of time. This information provides the researcher with a detail account of how a group functions daily in terms of their thoughts, beliefs, patterns, and rituals (Creswell, 2017). An important aspect of an ethnography study is that the researcher becomes involved in the culture as a participant and observer to obtain information about the culture and gain certain perspectives from a participant point of view (Creswell, 2017). The purpose of the study was to explore Kindergarten to second grade teachers' perceptions regarding the fidelity implementation of RTI procedures in kindergarten to second grade. Therefore, an ethnographic study was not the most appropriate research design for this study.

A case study research design provides an in-depth explanation of the elements being studied. The goal of a case study design is to provide a detailed understanding of units or cases by providing rich descriptions of the phenomenon being studied (Yin, 2009). In a case study, the researcher explores problems or questions to obtain meaning or identify the process and determine what works or improve practices through a variety

of data collection tools such as observations, interviews, and document reviews (Creswell, 2017). The researcher uses several sources of data collection to triangulate or cross check different types of data collected to provide validity and reliability to the research study (Creswell, 2017). Case study research also differs from other qualitative research designs and approaches such as grounded theory, ethnographic, and phenomenological studies because of the limitations with time and participants, which can create a bounded system. A case study design and approach were appropriate for this study because it provided the opportunity for the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of the participants through interviews and through lesson plans reviews.

Using the social constructivism theory of learning perspective, the goal of this research study was to explore the continuous below proficiency level performance of the kindergarten through second grade students in reading performance even though RTI has been implemented since 2011 (Study School, 2015). Also, the participants interviews provided an understanding of the teachers' views and perceptions of the fidelity implementation of practices as well as teachers' perspectives of research-based strategies that can impact students moving through the RTI tiers.

Participants

According to the administration at the local school site (2018), a large population of students were in Tier 2 and 3 in the RTI process. Participants in this study were kindergarten to second grade teachers that were implementing RTI in Tiers 1 and 3 with students in their classroom. These teachers had experience working with an RTI program with students in their classroom. The intent of this study was to explore the problems of

RTI implementation to provide effective instructional interventions for kindergarten to second grade struggling readers. There was a need to interpret the instructional strategies, investigate what supports and barriers teachers described when planning instruction for students that are at tiers two and three of the RTI process. Gutterman (2015) stated that qualitative sampling is not a single planning decision, but it is an iterative series of decisions throughout the process of research, where the researcher adjusted and considers the implications of sampling on interpretation.

Following the procedures to conduct research within the district, I requested permission to conduct the study. Once approval was granted for this research from the district's Department of Student Services, I had direct access to the participants because I also taught in the same district. At county elementary school, all teachers were informed of the study. Prior to contacting the teachers, I contacted the district and principal for permission to perform the study. I emailed the participating teachers, instructional coaches, and Early Intervention Program (EIP) teachers a letter, providing them with information about the study. I collected the letters and purposively select kindergarten through second grade teacher participants. The participants supported the RTI progress reporting for all students and collaborate on ideas to create a viable learning environment for all involved. The purposeful sample of 10 to 15 participants allowed probing for detailed information that represents teachers' experiences and ability to implement RTI with fidelity (Creswell, 2017). The justification for selecting these nine participants was to collect detailed information from educators involved in the implementation of RTI

with early struggling readers. The researcher selected the nine participants for this study due to saturation.

This project study used purposeful sampling methods. Gutterman (2015) reported that some researchers have addressed the challenges of determining sample size and explained that purposeful sampling involves selecting information-rich cases. The nine participants were chosen according to the grade level taught Kindergarten to second grade and their experience implementing RTI. The purpose of interviewing these RTI team members were to determine if RTI is implemented according to the RTI framework reference. To establish participant eligibility, a demographic questionnaire was emailed to all intended participants. All participants completed the informed consent form before completing the questionnaire.

I assured the principal and administrators the study would not interfere with instructional time and would not be a detriment to student learning. Meetings with the teachers took place after school at a designated location, based upon the agreed convenient time of all parties. Gaining access to the participants required meeting with them for two hours one-on-one after school, to describe the research study and elicit feedback from teachers. Sutton and Austin (2015) stated the researcher attempts to access the thoughts and feelings of study participants, which involves asking people to talk about personal information. Thus, it is a primary responsibility of the researcher to safeguard participants and their data.

Many qualitative studies used purposeful sampling methods to select the participants. Koenig (2016) concluded that subject selection in qualitative research is

purposeful; participants are selected that best inform the research questions and enhance understanding. Therefore, to understand the RTI process, teachers were purposefully selected based on the study's selection criteria. A selection from EIP teachers, the instructional coach, and Kindergarten to second grade classroom teachers were used to maximize what could be learned about the research study. Koenig (2016) believed refining your sample is done by eliminating from the research or results any participants whom you suspect do not meet the requirements. The participants were selected for the interviews because they had fulfilled a role in RTI at the research site and have implemented RTI at least one year in the classroom; teachers not meeting these criteria was eliminated from the study.

The nine participants for the study knew the significance of their role as well as their intended contribution to the study. Participants were made aware that their participation was on a volunteer basis by a letter sent through electronic mail (Appendix A). Each participant knew that their participation was on a voluntary basis, and that they had the right to withdraw voluntarily from the study at any time without any consequences because they signed the informed consent form. Sutton and Austin (2015) stated mechanisms for such safeguarding must be articulated clearly to participants and must be approved by a relevant research ethics review board before the research begins. The participants who took part in this study were asked to sign a consent form to be a part of the research. Each participant agreed to a time and place to conduct an interview. If participants could not meet for a face-to-face interview, an alternative time was designated for a phone interview, video conference or other means to collect information.

The semistructured interview consisted of in-depth open-ended questions and lasted 45 to 60 minutes per participant, depending on the flow of the conversation with each of the participants. All interviews were recorded for later review. The recorded interviews were transcribed and reviewed accordingly. Once the transcription was done, the recordings were stored in a locked container and will be kept for 5 years, pending publication of the study, then disposed by destroying the document.

A researcher should identify requirements for ethics review for the research supported (Roth & Von Unger, 2018). According to Ponelis (2015), qualitative studies explore the perceptions of research participants and are encouraged to utilize new and diverse strategies to ensure that all potentially eligible participants are invited to participate. MacPhail et al. (2016) suggested there is shared meaning as part of the coding process for the interviews as a system to organize my data. Data often used for interpreting what respondents mean in their answers to questions. Working relationships detail being able to talk and listen to one another, have concern for participant's interpretation of how the study influences them and provide them with the right to privacy, protection from harm and the right to withdraw if they desire.

The key principles of ethical research were to address and protect the rights of participants involved in qualitative research (Roth & Von Unger, 2018). It was my responsibility as the researcher, to abide by ethical research methods throughout the study, particularly in the collecting of data and in the presenting the results (Sutton & Austin 2015). Under the policies of Walden University, I completed the National Institute of Health (NIH) training. By taking this course, I ensured that the research methods used

in this study were ethical and provide cautionary protection to the participants. To provide fair and ethical treatment of the human participants, I received permission from Walden University IRB to proceed with this research as well as permission to conduct the study from the participating school district.

Informed Consent

The participant's involvement with the research was preceded by informed consent (Appendix B) that was required after the participant had expressed interest in participating in the study. The participants were asked to review the consent form and sign it within 24 to 48 hours after receiving and reviewing the form. If clarification was needed the researcher was available through email correspondence. This implied a responsibility to explain fully and meaningfully what the research is about and how it will be disseminated. A central ethical principle in research is that research participants have a full knowledge of the risks and benefits of their participation and freely choose to be participants (Davis, 2018). The participants also knew the nature of the study, their potential role, the identity of the researcher, the financing body, the objective of the research, and how the results will be published and used (Creswell, 2017.). Thus, in addition to providing participants with knowledge of any risks and benefits of their participation, the informed consent also provided background information on the study. The consent form was signed before the participants completed the questionnaire.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality requires not disclosing information unless permitted to do so, and only in ways agreed. Confidentiality means that the participant's identity is revealed to

the researcher, but not to the public. Twining et al. (2017) believed the researcher must minimize the possibility of intrusion with autonomy of study participants and where highly sensitive issues are concerned during the collection of data. The researcher protects the rights of all participants by keeping any identifying information out of published reports unless consent to publish names is given. We must attempt, always, to guarantee promises of confidentiality made to research participants. Creswell (2017) stated the best way to ensure that the people you have interviewed or observed, would not be embarrassed by the research is to remove identifying information, such as names and addresses, as soon as the data are reviewed. Participants were assigned a number for identification to ensure their confidentiality by using letters and numbers to represent the participants names.

Participants Rights

The study procedures and format of RTI strategies were implemented to improve Kindergarten to 2nd grade students' proficiency levels in reading at County Elementary School. After the participants expressed interest in participating in the study the researcher selected nine participants for the study, representing K–2nd grade level teachers that have implemented RTI at least one year. The selected participants reviewed and signed the consent form. Each participant knew that their participation was on a voluntary basis, and that they had the right to withdraw from the study without consequences. Twining et al. (2017) believed considering the nature of qualitative studies, the interaction between researchers and participants can be an ethical challenge, as they are personally involved in different stages of the study. The researcher should

establish ethical guidelines, which is essential. The guidelines included confidentiality, informed consent, and researchers' potential impact on the participants. The researcher must always work towards minimizing the possibility of intrusion of autonomy of study participants. Creswell (2017) reported that to minimize the risk of harm the researcher should make sure to obtain informed consent from participants, protecting the confidentiality of participants. Also, the researcher should allow the participants the right to withdraw from the research study at any time.

Data Collection

The data collection process began when permission to conduct the study from Walden University's Institutional Review Board was granted. Data collection included in-depth interviews and lesson plans for review with participants. Interviews and questionnaires are unique to qualitative research. Roulston (2018) revealed qualitative interviews are a type of framework in which the practices and standards are recorded, achieved, challenged, and reinforced. The interviews were conducted one-on-one with each of the participants after school hours.

The in-depth interviews helped explore the perceptions of kindergarten - second grade teachers, EIP teachers, and instructional coaches concerning RTI processes and implementation with fidelity to improve a student's reading abilities. According to Roulston, (2018) the qualitative researcher must select and engage participants in a deep and meaningful questioning process, affluent with quotation, description, and narration, as researchers attempt to capture conversations, experiences, perspectives, voices, and meanings. Qualitative research excavates the why and how of consumer behavior,

allowing for more expressive responses and the chance to probe participants for more details.

All interviewees had the exact same context of questioning where each respondent received the same interview stimulus as any other for aggregation (Koskei & Simiyu, 2015). Koskei and Simiyu (2015) also, stated “The interviewer’s intervention might influence the respondent and the nature of interviewers’ ability in respondent’s replies that does not reflect ‘true’ variation” (p.1). Thus, I used the same interview script (Appendix C) for each in-depth interview to ensure all participants receive the same initial prompting. The strengths of semistructured interviews were that the researcher can prompt and probe deeper into the given situation. Avoiding pitfalls would require sticking to what the data show without any manipulation of the results. I took enough time to prepare the questions for the interview so there would be no doubt concerning reliability, validity, or accuracy of the data later. Therefore, it was essential that I be acquainted with the data recording equipment. I also considered the venue because it affected the data collection. The interviews should be conducted at a time and place of the participants’ convenience, in a comfortable setting, potentially free from interruptions (Creswell, 2017). The researcher should never provide choices to the respondents in the interview sessions but should make sure interview questions are clear and concise by using an interview guide. The interviews should be conducted in a place that avoids others listening. I am responsible for taking all precautions against any threats that may affect negativity or threaten data accuracy and reliability. This was accomplished by careful review of the research literature to develop questions that are supported by the

literature, Koskei and Simiyu (2015) stated a researcher, therefore, must be neutral and objective-minded in carrying out his study.

Addressing credibility is part of the process when using triangulation and member checks. Devault (2017) stated triangulation is accomplished by asking the same research questions of different study participants and by collecting data from different sources and by using different methods to answer those research questions. To member check the interview data, I asked the study participants to review both the data collected during their interview and my interpretation of that data. Member checking is a two-step process that includes the review of transcriptions; as well as the review of draft findings for accuracy of the researcher's interpretation of the data used from the findings and for viability of the findings in the observation setting. Devault (2017) stated participants are appreciative of the member checking process and knowing that they will have a chance to verify their statements tends to cause study participants to willingly fill in any gaps from earlier interviews. Triangulation and member checking was used to address credibility.

The steps for data collection through interviews, conducting the interviews and analyzing the data were as follows: (a) set up the interviews with each participant, (b) sought the informed consent, (c) stated purpose of interview and why the participant were chosen, (d) explained confidentiality, (e) conducted interviews, (f) verified and summarized key data and (g) analyzed data. The research questions were, aligned with the conceptual framework, the questions relied on learned knowledge from interacting with the RTI process, the students, and other teachers that had implemented. These were the steps used in the interview process.

Justification for Data Collection Methods

The method of inquiry used in a qualitative study must reflect the study's purpose, which pinpoints the central question (Saracho, 2017). Exploring how elementary classroom teachers' implement RTI with fidelity in the classroom to improve reading is essential to this study. Conducting interviews will give participants, who have a shared knowledge of their school's RTI process, the opportunity to discuss their knowledge in an informal, relaxed setting. Qualitative research reveals the why and how of consumer behavior, allowing for more significant responses and the opportunity to prompt participants for additional details. This was accomplished by making sure that the participants were relaxed during the interview process.

Description of Data Collection Instruments

In-depth interviews allow participants to elaborate on their experiences and perceptions independently from their colleagues. This prohibited bias/influence of sharing information or being influenced by someone else's remarks. Roulston, (2018) confirms that semistructured, in-depth interviews are widely used with individuals or groups, one for 30 to 60-minute durations that involves a presentation of questions that the researcher needs to explore based on experiences and knowledge. Listening to the individual interviews provided understanding of how RTI is implemented with fidelity and if it aligns with national procedures and protocols. I requested permission from each participant to record their interview. Digital audio recorders recorded each interview and be used for transcribing. The collected data was held in the strictest confidence. Storage

of confidential participant information was kept in a secure folder on my password protected computer. Data will be destroyed five years after the study is completed.

Interview Protocol

The researcher developed the interview questions for this study (Appendix C). The interview questions allowed the elementary teachers in grades K–2 to provide information on their perceptions and experiences related to the fidelity implementation of RTI to allow the students to move through the tiers and the resources need to implement RTI effectively in their classrooms. The interview questions came from research studies conducted in the areas of RTI and the implementation of providing RTI services to students in elementary schools.

The interview protocol was divided in two parts, part one asked the participants background information such as the length of time teaching and the length of time implementing RTI at their school. Part two will ask the participants general information on the fidelity implementation of RTI and their perceptions of resources needed to properly implement RTI in their classrooms. Each of the participants will have a separate time and place to complete the interview via Zoom or telephone phone. The researcher interviewed each teacher one-on-one in hope to gain the experiences and perceptions of the teachers about their views and perspectives of the fidelity implementation of practices as well as teachers' perspectives of research-based strategies that can impact students moving through the RTI tiers.

Lesson Plans Review

The lesson plan review was the final part of the data collection process (Appendix E). The lesson plan review supported the data gathering for RQ 1-3. The lesson plan review process involved the analysis of the teacher's lessons reflecting the fidelity implementation of RTI in their classroom and whether they are following the procedures in providing students research-based interventions in their classrooms. The review of the lesson plans took place outside of school hours as required by the school district and to protect the confidentiality of the teachers who participated in the research study. The teachers provided their lesson plans from three previous weeks for review by the researcher. The lesson plans were emailed to the researcher for review.

Justification for the Sufficiency of Data Collection Instruments

Determining the effects of implementing RTI with fidelity as learned through professional development and experience of the teacher, was difficult. The teacher's lesson plans should have indicated the students' understanding of materials taught in the classroom and their ability to apply the knowledge planned for the lesson. The perspectives of the participants (teachers, instructional coach and EIP teachers) provided pertinent and sufficient information to answer the research questions.

Data Gathering

To ensure cogency when conducting a qualitative inquiry, researchers must use established systematic procedures when collecting and analyzing data (Saracho,2017)). The case study was conducted within a four-week window to gain an understanding of participants' ability to implement RTI with fidelity. Data collection began by soliciting a

sample group of all teachers on levels K to 2nd, EIP teachers and Instructional Coach participants at the study site. Once participants were selected, communication with all participants went through e-mail to arrange mutually convenient interview times and dates. To gain insight from multiple teachers' perspectives and get an overarching picture of County Elementary school's RTI process, I conducted in-depth interviews via Zoom. This procedure guided by an interview protocol gave me an understanding of the RTI process at County Elementary. This also helped me to become acquainted with individual participant's unique perspectives of implementing RTI with fidelity.

A qualitative data collection method, in-depth interviews, offered the opportunity to capture rich, descriptive data about people's behaviors, attitudes, and perceptions (Castillo-Montoya, 2015). This method of collecting data enabled the unfolding of complex processes that can be used as a standalone research method or as part of a multi method design, depending on the needs of the research. The data was used to analyze relationships and categories concerning the interviews. Participants interviewed were asked eight questions pertaining to RTI implementation (see Appendix D). Prior to conducting interviews, an explanation was given concerning the consent forms for all participants and research questions. I explained that the participants' confidentiality was protected and that they were given pseudonyms within this study. Interviews were recorded with a digital recorder to ensure proper recording procedures according to IRB-approved interview protocols. Individual interviews lasted 45-60 minutes.

After the participants completed the interviews, I sent the audio files to an approved professional transcription service that signed a confidentiality agreement and if

they turned around the transcripts in a timely manner. After the interviews were transcribed, the use of my field notes was helpful in making the necessary edits in the transcriptions to ensure cohesion and understanding. I used the concepts in the conceptual framework to code the data. Reading and coding the interview transcriptions allowed me to revise and look for similar phrases and meanings. I conducted member checking of the interview data with each participant to assure the best possible accuracy and credibility of findings. I asked participants to review draft findings for accuracy of the researcher's interpretation of their data including the findings.

Using modified, in-depth interview guides, I met with individual interviewees via Zoom for 15 minutes to review the informed consent forms, study risks, and benefits of knowing they were free to discontinue participation at any time if they experience psychological stress due to their confidentiality. I also explained that all information would be kept confidential, and participants were guaranteed confidentiality. Before the start of each interview, I discussed with the participants the expectations and purpose of the study as using interview protocol. Participants were reminded that their responses would be held in strict confidentiality. Each participant was reminded that their participation in the interview was voluntary and would be recorded. Participants were assured that; they could decline to answer questions or cease participation at any time.

Systems for Keeping Track of Data

The researcher kept track of data by recording information pertinent to the study in a research field notes. The following steps helped with data organization: According to Walden University Library (2018) the following should be considered in keeping track of

data. This include following a clear file naming system. There were nine participants, and each log was numbered specific to the participant beginning with the number one. The next step was to develop a data tracking system. This was accomplished using a consent form, audio file for the interview, field notes from observations, Microsoft file named according to participant for transcriber. Finally, I established documented transcription/translation procedures and a professional transcriber to transcribe the data. In addition, I established quality control procedures by monitoring the quality of transcription by comparing the transcribed interviews against the actual tape (either all or random sample). Finally, I established a realistic time for the data collection and data analysis process. A timeline was developed with consideration for locating participants, downloading, and preparing file, transcribing, translating, coding, conduct and making corrections.

Protecting participants' confidentiality was done by securely storing study data. I labeled and saved all audio files to a folder on my personal password-protected laptop as well as to a flash drive was locked up to ensure it was stored safely. Encrypted professional transcriptions from interviews were stored on a flash drive at my home. Paper copies were labeled and stored in a locked filing cabinet and the documents will be shredded after five years.

Procedures for Gaining Access to Participants

In conducting research, it is important to think about how to gain access to participants. Cunliffe and Alcadipani (2016) listed the following steps that are taken to gain access, maintain access and manage researcher/participant relationships. The school

system made informal contact with building principals, teachers, and parents to assess the likelihood that they agreed to participate in the study. The researcher must talk to many people by developing a rapport with them and being able to learn from them. When the researcher is doing field research, they are in contact with people at conferences, seminars, public hearings, or community meetings. Initial contacts with research participants or gatekeepers set the tone for the rest of the study. I was clear about the objectives, time, and resources for the study. I maintained access in establishing relationships of trust with research participants can be difficult. In addition, the transactional relationship is a contractual one of give-and-take, trade-offs, and compromise, involving a bargain over outcomes that benefit both the researcher and the gatekeeper (Cunliffe & Alcadipani, 2016). It is important to be honest, patient, be yourself, and know who you are talking to, do not pretend you are one of them to protect the data.

Role of the Researcher

As the researcher of this qualitative study, I performed many different responsibilities. Among those responsibilities were as an inquirer, interviewer, data collector, coder, and analyst. I am a Special Education teacher at the County Elementary School. I am qualified in all special education content areas. I have worked at this location for the past five years. I adapt well to general education lessons and teach all major subjects. I also communicate with parents and Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) team members to discuss each student's progress and set new goals. The participants in the study were colleagues, which included general education teachers, the

EIP teacher, the Instructional Coach and Administrator. As a Special Education teacher, I am not involved in the initial RTI process. The special education department is not involved until Tier three of the process. Therefore, there were no conflicts of interest or ethical issues arising.

Inquiry involves avoiding bias to ensure the study's credibility. As the researcher, I introduced myself as a fellow teacher and doctoral student. I refrained from answering questions the participants were asked during the interviews, concerning the RTI process. I used open-ended questions and probes in an interview protocol to elicit perceptions, responses, and opinions from participants and not lead them, and I kept a field note of personal reflections during data collection and data analysis. By following these qualitative data collection procedures, I attempted to minimize subjectivity. The context of questioning should be the same for all participants (Creswell, 2017). Careful preparation of the questions for interviews by a thorough review of the research literature helped defray doubts concerning reliability, validity, or accuracy of the data later. Clear and concise questions do not require input from the researcher. I am responsible for taking all precautions against any threats that may affect negativity or threaten data accuracy and reliability. Koskei and Simiyu (2015) stated that it is the responsibility of the researcher to be neutral and objective-minded in conducting the study. This was done by setting aside my own opinions and views of the participants responses to the interview questions.

Data Analysis

Case study research is an investigation and analysis of a single or collective case via collecting data that draws from informational sources such as documents and interviews (Da Silva et al., 2020). Documents can be work samples, RTI reports, and the school's RTI policy statements. The qualitative research case study utilized interviews and lesson plans review as the sources of data collection. The interview questions were aligned to the problem statement, purpose statement, and research questions of the study (Appendix D). The interviews provided perspective and insight and are often used to collect data within qualitative research. Maher et al. (2018) stated that the in-depth interviews are intense conversations in which the researcher probes deeply to uncover clues, resolve problems, or to secure vivid explanations of personal experiences of the subject. The interviews promoted communication, exchange of information and necessary feedback on research questions pertinent to the case study. The lesson plans will support data and information collected from interviews.

Triangulation is an important element to conduct in qualitative research. Da Silva et al. (2020) announced methods of triangulation can be used to produce innovation in conceptual understandings and lead to multi-perspective meta-interpretations to support and justify emerging themes derived during the study. Triangulation of data means using more than one method to collect data on the same topic. This is a way of assuring the validity of research, with a variety of methods to collect data on the same topic, which involves different types of samples as well as methods of data collection. To provide

triangulation of data, the interviews and the lesson plans review were conducted to help develop emerging themes from the participants.

I reviewed all recordings from the interviews and the lesson plans review and made notes of similarities and differences of the participant's responses in each interview to develop a summary of each participant. Once the similarities were identified, I used open coding, which identifies similar words throughout all the interviews and observations. Once I read through the collected data several times, I began to create tentative labels for segments of data that summarize what will be happening based on the meaning that will emerge from the data. Then I used a priori coding based on RTI components and open coding to identify common words or phrases. Axial coding is done to identify the relationships among data for a priori and open codes. The analysis was conducted by the researcher who listened to each interview and recorded the audiotapes for review. The interviews were reviewed and transcribed over a period of one week. Each dialogue was recorded verbatim from the voice of the educator and the researcher. Once the interviews were transcribed the researcher gathered an understanding from the responses and the transcriptions were coded.

Thematic analysis put word parts together to make a whole word was the framework of reference that was used to locate various expressions or words, in transcriptions that are linked together to construct meaning (Crossman, 2017). Nine teachers were interviewed, and their lesson plans reviewed to explore their perceptions of RTI implementation with fidelity. Interviews and lesson plans were coded for similarities, common patterns, repeated words or group of words and interrelationships to

develop themes. Data was gathered from interviews and lesson plan reviews were grouped accordingly. The coding analyses began with a priori coding followed by open coding, and axial coding of the data. Priori coding is a process of coding qualitative data when the researcher develops the codes ahead of time that are based on the theoretical framework, to construct the interview questions or pre-existing knowledge of the study (Crossman, 2017)

Table 1 provided the priori codes used for the coding of the data for data analysis. A priori coding helped the researcher to provide direction and structure to building the code process (Creswell, 2017). I developed a priori codes in line with RQ 1, 2, and 3, and the RTI framework. The following were the preestablished or priori codes for the lesson plan review:

Table 1

Pirori Codes

| | |
|---|--|
| Assess students reading below grade level | Whole group instruction for all students |
| Research-based intervention | Small group instruction |
| Individualized instruction | Research-based strategies |
| Students are engaged in the classroom assignments | Student practice is encouraged |

These codes were cross checked with key components of the RTI framework. I examined all lesson plan data with the protocol that included the a priori codes. These lesson plans illustrated strategies for individualized instruction and whole group instruction for students in their classrooms. A check mark was given to the code that is

found in the lesson plans. The a priori codes that were present in the lesson plans were noted for each of the participants on an Excel spread sheet. I used open coding to further analyze the data. All codes highlighted during the open code process with the participants will be placed into an Excel spreadsheet. Each participant code and corresponding statement on the plan were added to the spread sheet showing the overall codes found using the a priori and the open coding data process. Next, I provided a complete list of the codes using three columns on a Microsoft Word document. The labels on the Word document are the components from the RTI framework using the a priori codes and the codes established using the open coding and the texts from the collected data from the participants.

The next step in the data analysis process was axial coding. Axial coding is putting together the revised codes, categories, and subcategories from the interview data (Creswell, 2017). The coding process should concur with groups of similarities, common patterns, repeated words or groups of words and interrelationships among themes. The information gathered from the a priori and the opening coding was used to create themes and subthemes of each research question in the study.

Evidence of Quality

To determine the validity of the research, I decided if the qualitative methods used to explore the fidelity of implementation of RTI procedures in K–2 grades on decision made to move students between the two tiers, and what program resources are needed to carry out the assessments for these students. The research results were free of bias and should reflect truth and honesty. Crossman (2017) states there are many methods of

conducting qualitative research, and most researchers should incorporate at least two methods into the research process. Within this study, I employed peer review/debriefing. According to McMahon & Winch. (n.d.) peer debriefing requires the researcher to work collectively with one or more of their colleagues who have impartial views of the study. The confidential peer used to support this study has over 15 years as a qualitative researcher and has served as a dissertation chair and committee member for several persons conducting qualitative research. The role of the peer reviewer was to review all the data and confirm that the researcher has used the data to logically develop codes, themes, and answers the research questions. The peer reviewer signed a confidentiality agreement before reviewing the data (Appendix F).

Qualitative research is about the why and how of the experiences in the natural setting (Teherani et al., 2015). Research protocols can be challenging because the researcher may empathize with the participants concerning distressing situations, important information disclosed and the reality of what is being asked. Rapport is developed through collaboration during the study. Participant's confidentiality will be maintained throughout the study in reference to disclosed information, personal data, correspondences, messages, and emails that will be handled according to ethical approval requirements (Teherani, 2015).

Personal information will not be publicly disclosed due to confidentiality rights of all participants involved in the research. Confidentiality was maintained during the entire research study process. Also, the interviews, the audio recordings, researcher's notes, and

field notes were placed in a fireproof, locked container in my home. The identity of participants was not revealed within the study.

Data results that were provided from the participants were the results of the data analysis. The data was evaluated for common themes, patterns, and phrases contributing to the credibility of the participants. Lesson plans review helped corroborate data collected with the interviews to establish credibility for this research study. Dependability in research requires maintaining a stable setting in which the research is conducted. Changes can disrupt the method in which the research is conducted and must be reported. Trustworthiness was achieved in conversations with the participants and in making them feel comfortable during their interviews. Recording interviews gave the researcher a chance to review the data for clarity and accuracy. Member checking was conducted with the participants to allow them to review the accuracy of the researchers' interpretation of their own data included in the findings from this project study.

To narrow the themes collected and analyzed from of the data sources, the themes were represented visually with the use of Microsoft Excel. The themes were reexamined for accuracy and the overall importance to this research project (Creswell, 2017). I made every effort to ensure that the readers understood the details that were associated with each developed theme and why they are important to the overall research. I also reviewed the themes and consider how they fit in the overall dataset in relations to the purpose of the study, the framework, and the research questions. The evidence from the data collected was used to support the themes. The themes were finalized after the raw data were examined and reexamined and made clear and succinct (Creswell, 2017).

Limitations

In qualitative research the data collection can present limitations since the data are based on chronicle responses from conversations between participants and the researcher. These conversations could unintentionally influence the interviewee to give certain responses (Creswell, 2017). Case studies have become in many cases a synonym for freeform research where all is acceptable. The absence of systematic procedures for case study research is something that some researchers acknowledged as a concern due to an absence of guidelines for methodology (Yazan (2015). This study will be limited to one elementary school in a southern state. This study was limited to a small sample size of nine elementary teachers; therefore, the study will have limited transferability to other settings. I provided the reader with a clear description of the context of the study to assist in application of results to similar contexts.

Summary

The purpose of the study was to explore K–2 teachers’ perceptions regarding the fidelity implementation of RTI procedures in K–2 grades. Section two provided a description of the research design and the research findings selected for this study. This section included a description of the participants for this study, the selection process, the number of participants, the procedures for gathering access to the participants, the methods for establishing a working relationship with the participants, and the measures for the protection of the participants. This section also included a description of the data collection process, the role of the researcher, and the limitations of this study. The procedures and format of RTI strategies implemented was to improve Kindergarten to 2nd

grade students' proficiency levels in reading. The methodology contained an overview of the research design and approach that was used in this study stating why the approach is appropriate to address the problem. move students between the two tiers, and what programs resources are assessed.

Discussion of Findings

The problem at a suburban county elementary school was the continuous below proficiency level performance of the kindergarten through 2nd grade students in reading performance even though RTI has been implemented since 2011 (Study School, 2015). The Governor's Office of Student Achievement (2017) generated a report of reading proficiency with the targeted School for 2013-2017 revealing only 38.8% of its 3rd grade students are reading at or above the grade level target, 33.4% at the district level and 51.7% at the state level as of 2017. The procedures and format of RTI strategies implemented to improve Kindergarten to 2nd grade students' proficiency levels in reading. The purpose of the study was to explore K-2 teachers' perceptions regarding the fidelity implementation of RTI procedures in K-2 grades. The findings from this study emerged from interviews and lessons plan reviews. The data from the interviews and the lesson plans were used to triangulate the data and provided an understanding of the teacher's perceptions regarding the fidelity implementation of RTI procedures in K-2 grades on decisions made to move students between the two tiers, and what program resources are assessed. The lesson plans reviewed was to explore teachers' abilities to provide appropriate instructions in the three tiers of the RTI model to meet the diverse needs of the learners in their classrooms. The data was coded, and 40 codes were

identified as important to this study. The codes were then reduced to six categories and provide clarity to the study research problem. The researcher used three research questions to explore the continuous below proficiency level performance of the kindergarten through 2nd grade students in reading performance even though RTI has been implemented since 2011 (Study School, 2015). The six themes that emerged from the data were: (a) limited knowledge of RTI procedures, (b) inconsistent knowledge of RTI components, (c) need more time to implement RTI interventions, (d) inconsistent knowledge on the RTI tiers, (e) adequate knowledge of interventions strategies, and (f) need more intervention materials.

The six themes were interrelated with each other through the study and had an influence on each other. This lack of knowledge and the inconsistent implementation procedures in the RTI process, resulted in the teachers not conducting the RTI model with consistency throughout the grades. The teachers noted that more training on RTI procedures alone with more information on the types of interventions, more knowledge on what should occur in the different RTI tiers and procedures were needed which could lead to implementing the RTI mode in a way which could benefit the students being instructed using the RTI model. In addition, professional development, and training on the proper procedures of implementing RTI consistently at their school which lead to them having limited and inconsistent knowledge and skill with implementing RTI with Fidelity at their school. This section was arranged by the research questions and the key themes that emerged from the data analysis and the findings. The first three themes

addressed Research Question 1, two themes addressed Research Question 2, and the last theme addressed Research Questions 3.

Research Question 1

RQ1: What are the perspectives of elementary teachers concerning RTI fidelity implementation procedures in K–2 Reading? Based on the findings from the teachers, the teachers perceived the RTI procedures as providing students with research-based interventions to students in their classroom who are struggling to read or to perform math (Theme 1). The teachers reported that the RTI components were providing services to students who are struggling in their class small group instruction using assessment and evaluating student using the i-Ready data. The teachers also stated that implementing RTI in their classroom is to use whole class instruction, small group instruction, one-on-one instruction, flashcards, pull-out program, and the i-Ready lessons to meet the needs of diverse learners in their classroom.

Theme 1: Limited Knowledge of RTI Procedures

The teachers were asked to explain the RTI process at their local schools. All the teachers in the interviews were able to adequate responses on the purpose of RTI and how RTI is a multi-tiered process where students go through different tiers with interventions provided by the teacher and their role in the implementation of RTI in the classroom. T1 explained, “It work on a tier system and student go through different tiers to determine their strength and weakness through assessment.” T2 noted, “RTI procedures help bridge the gap in their achievement and provide interventions to them.” T3 explained, RTI is a way to provide different interventions to struggling students.” T4

described their knowledge of RTI procedures, RTI is important in allowing the student to go through tiers such as Tier 1, Tier 2, and Tier 3. Whereas, T5 explained, “It is important to implement RTI in the classroom to promote growth and development of students who are struggling and falling behind in their academic learning.” T6 describe their knowledge of RTI procedures, “It is important to implement RTI in the classroom, but I do not fully understand the process.” Also, T7 stated, “RTI procedures is reviewing the results from the i-Ready assessment and help students to make progress in the classroom.” Also, teachers monitor the progress of students. Whereas, T8 explained, RTI procedures is a model where you help struggling through assessing their strength and weaknesses and providing different interventions in the classroom.” T9 explained, RTI help struggling students to make progress in the classroom and teachers are able to monitor the students’ academic progress in the different tiers.”

The participants responses revealed that a common understanding among them were that RTI procedures were to help students who are struggling in the classroom by providing different interventions. Most of the teachers struggle with reading knowledge of the RTI framework model. RTI procedures are designed to provide early identification and support for students with learning needs. The RTI process begins with providing all students in the classroom high quality instruction and universal screening to assess students’ strengths and weaknesses. The lack of knowledge was present in at least 85% of the teachers’ responses. The teachers reported that RTI is used for students who are struggling in the classroom but most of the fail to reported that assessment and evaluation of students are done at the beginning of the RTI procedures to see what students need

more interventions and instructional needs. T6 reported that RTI was important for students, but they did not know much about the procedures. Also, T8 reported that they understood the RTI procedures but had trouble explaining it to other teachers.

Theme 2: Inconsistent Knowledge of RTI Components.

The knowledge and skills of a teacher is important in implementing RTI with fidelity in the classroom. Teachers who are knowledgeable concerning the concepts they are teaching can provide appropriate information and intervention to students and be effective in their classroom instruction to students (Siegel, 2020). The teachers were asked to explain the RTI components. Most of the teachers were not able to adequately explain the key components of the RTI process. Most of the teachers could not explain the RTI components. Several of the teachers mixed up the RTI process with the components of RTI. T1 explained, “The key components of RTI are regular classroom learning in whole group instruction, and pull-out, and small group instruction.” T2 reported, “RTI components are important, they help the students who are struggling.” T3 explain, “the RTI components are using small groups to help struggling students.” Whereas T4 described the RTI components this way, “A teacher uses three tiers, personalized instruction, use small groups, use i-Ready lessons, and teacher toolbox for students.” T5 reported, “The key components of the RTI framework are progress monitoring, differentiation instruction, and growth monitoring.” T6 explained the RTI components this way, “The components of the RTI components are progress monitoring, growth monitoring, bring students up to grade level, and re-teaching certain skills.” T7 explained, “The components of the RTI model are universal screening, students have to

pass through the different tiers like Tier 1, Tier 2, and Tier 3.” Whereas, T8 reported, “The components of the RTI model are collecting data, modeling instruction, and providing interventions to struggling students.” Also, T9 explained the key components of the RTI model this way, “it is whole group instruction, one-on-one-instruction, assessment of the student progress, and monitoring their progress.”

The participants in this study provided inconsistent knowledge of the components of RTI. The components of the RTI process are universal screening and assessment for all students in the classroom. Also, the RTI process has three tiers, Tier 1, class-wide interventions, Tier 2 put word parts together to make a whole word, targeted interventions, and tier three, intensive, individualized interventions (Siegel, 2020). The vast majority of teachers’ responses (89%) were inconsistent when explaining the key components of RTI. Some of the teachers were able to explain the RTI process and how different students complete the tiers. Also, some of the teachers could not explain how all students receive universal screening to determine their strengths and weaknesses for their academic progress in the classroom. For example, T7 reported that the components of the RTI model are universal screening, students must pass through the different tiers like tier 1, tier 2, and tier 3.” Whereas, T8 reported, that the components of the RTI model are collecting data, modeling instruction, and providing interventions to struggling students. There is a need for all teachers at the local research site to be able to have knowledge of the components of the RTI process to provide students in their classroom proper instruction to help them to achieve academically. All the participants reported that they need more time implementing the RTI interventions at their local school.

Theme 3: Need More Time to Implement RTI Interventions.

It is important for teachers to implement RTI process with fidelity. The RTI Action Network (2016) suggested that fidelity with RTI is the intensity of how the program performs. The time and interest put into implementing RTI depends on the teacher and teachers could have the opportunity to learn and collaborate with each other. Otaiba (2015) stated that there are five elements of fidelity: student engagement, program specificity, quality of delivery, exposure/duration, and adherence. During this process, students were involved in the intervention activity designed to increase their proficiency in reading. The participants were asked to relate some of the challenges of to the implementation of the RTI framework model in their classroom. All the participants in this study were able to provide several examples of challenges they experience in implementing RTI in their classroom such as RTI is time consuming, they need more training, need more materials on the interventions and best practices in using RTI in their classroom. Also, the participants noted that they need more time to effectively implement RTI within the allotted time due to other materials they must cover in one period. T1 explained, "I have very little time to work with students who need my help. Also, I do not have time to serve all students because of the number of students who need help with their reading." T2 reported, "There is a lot of paperwork and not enough time to provide help with the interventions for all students. Also, I have too many small groups in my classroom who need help." T3 explained, I do not have enough time to work effective with each small group in the classroom. Also, there is limited time to implement RTI effectively in the classroom to benefit all student." Whereas T4 described their

experiences this way, “My time is limited with providing intervention to all students who need it during one class period. This causes some students to fall behind due to the lack of help they need.” T5 reported, “There is very little time to make it to all students who need intensive help each day during my class time. I feel bad for some students not receiving the needed help.” T6 explained, I do not have enough time to provide the needed interventions. Also, I need more time to implement RTI all five school days.” Whereas, T7 reported, I do not have enough time to implement the intervention strategies to all students who need help in my classroom.: T8 explained, I feel we need longer class periods to properly implement the intensive intervention that some students need in the classroom to make adequate progress.” Whereas, T9 reported, “A challenge for me would be the time to implement RTI in my classroom and the amount of paperwork we have to complete on each student.”

The participants responses reveal that there is a need for the local school to make changes in their schedule to allow teachers more time to provide research-based interventions through RTI implementation for students who are struggling with reading skills in teaching classrooms. Veenman et al (2018) believed reading deficits and problem behaviors are closely related. The authors noted several suggestions to guide teachers and principals to help with struggling readers. These include identifying appropriate assessment and intervention resources for the struggling readers, determining professional development needs to improve capacity for intervention delivery that will help all teachers with RTI delivery, using resources in the most effective way, structuring the time to deliver interventions and engage students who are not receiving intervention,

and optimizing the physical space available to deliver interventions. Also, teachers use interventions to implement evidence-based treatment protocol with progress monitoring for specified length of time. If the general intervention does not work for some students more intensive and tailored interventions are used for some students in the classroom (Lachar, 2018). RTI is not a model to be imposed on schools, but a framework to help identify and support students before the difficulties they encounter with language and literacy become more serious (Lachar, 2018).

Through a review of the lesson plans, I found that the teachers provided the students with high quality instruction with implementing RTI by providing whole group instruction. The teachers also provide differentiated instruction to students in the classroom. The lesson plans were broken down according to abilities of the students in the classroom. All the teachers (9 out of 9) lesson plans provided whole group lessons, guided practices for the students, and independent practice for some students in their classroom. Also, for students who need tier 2 intervention, the lesson plans noted that for intervention groups, 80% of small group time was spent on reading phonics and 20% of the intervention groups were spent on reading comprehension.

Research Question 2

RQ2: What are the perspectives of elementary teachers concerning how K–2 students move through the three RTI tiers in Reading? The results of the data indicated that the teachers provided inconsistent knowledge on what procedures (Theme 4) because of providing vague responses to the interview questions concerning the three tiers in the RTI process. Also, the participants were asked to explain and provide some examples of

interventions strategies used in their classroom to help students who needed RTI intervention. The participants were inconsistent in their answers on effective interventions and how they should be used in providing research-based intervention to students in their classroom.

RTI involves three tiers to ensure that each student receives an appropriate education (Kuo, 2014). These include Tier 1 which represents the class-wide level in an RTI framework based on high quality instruction. Tier 2 (interventions) is a supplement to Tier 1 for students who do not respond to Tier 1 and need extra support and remediation. Tier 3 (intense intervention and instruction) is a supplement for both 1 and 2 because it is designed to increase the intensity of explicit instruction. The participants were asked to explain what happens in each of the three tiers in implementing RTI in their classroom. Most of the teachers provide their interpretations of the different RTI tiers that are used in the RTI model, but their descriptions were inconsistent.

Theme 4: Inconsistent Knowledge on the RTI Tiers.

RTI Action Network (2017) acknowledged that students will move through the tiers, receiving whatever level of intervention meets their needs until they are meeting grade-level benchmarks. After students meet their grade level goal, they stop receiving services under the RTI program. Hirschler (2016) believed RTI is a fantastic learning structure that teachers can use to help students learn to their capacity by teaching and reteaching the interventions to increase students' knowledge through five components of RTI. Also, Manning (2016) stated a focus on individualized instruction and intervention, within the regular education classroom, is an attempt to keep struggling students from

falling behind. Most of the teachers were able to provide a general knowledge of what the three tiers mean and how the students move through the tiers but some of the teacher's knowledge were inconsistent with the tiers as outlined in the RTI Model. Only two teachers were able to provide a general knowledge of what occurs in Tier 1 which is universal screening of all students in the classroom to determine their strengths and weaknesses. T1 explained, "In Tier 1, I provide instruction for the entire classroom, in Tier 2, it depends on who need certain types of interventions and for Tier 3, I target my intervention for the diverse needs of the students in tier 3." T2 reported, "The tiers are a way for you to provide different types of interventions for the students who are struggling in the classroom. I provide different types of interventions to help bridge the gap in their learning." T3 stated, "In tier 1 you provide whole class instruction to all students in your classroom. In tier 2, the teacher provides different types of interventions such as small group instruction and one-on-one instruction to certain students. In tier 3, the teacher provides targeted intervention strategies to students who need that type of instruction and intervention." Whereas, T4 reported, "In tier 2 the teacher provides small group instruction and in tier 3, the teacher can provide guided reading to struggling readers. These interventions are design for students who are struggling to comprehend the teaching concepts." Also, T5 explained, "Tier 1 is design for the teacher to teach the entire class certain lessons. Tier 2 is where you provide certain interventions to some of the students in the classroom. I use i-Ready lessons as an intervention strategy." T6 explained, "In Tier 1 you provide instruction for the whole class. In tier 2, you reteach and provide progress monitoring, and in Tier 3 you meet with the administrator to make a

decision of the strength and weaknesses of the students in that tier.” Whereas, T7 stated, “In Tier 2 the teacher provides instruction to the whole class. In Tier 2, the teacher provides intervention strategies for a target number of students through small group instruction or one-on-one instruction.” T8 explained, “In tier 1 the teacher provides assessment and instruction to the entire class of students. In Tier 2, the teacher provides research-based interventions to certain students. In Tier 3, the teacher provides intensive interventions to certain student for an amount of time to see if they respond to the intervention. Also, the teacher meets with the counselor and the school administrator to discuss the students’ needs and appropriate placements.” Whereas, T9 explained, “The tiers are design for certain instruction for teachers to apply in the RTI model. Tier 1, the teacher instructs the entire class to determine if they are on grade level and target students who need further help with their lessons. Tier 2 is design for students who need more interventions to retain the lessons in the classroom. In tier 3 you provide one on one or small group instruction to certain students.”

The participants responses in this study revealed that there inconsistent in the knowledge that the teachers had about the RTI tiers that students go through for teachers to determine their level of knowledge and understanding of the classroom lessons on reading skills. Fuchs & Lynn’s (2017) study revealed four key elements used in each school situation. The RTI elements identified by Fuchs and Lynn were, a) three tiers of increasingly intense reading instruction being used; b) screening of all students for progress at least twice a year; c) regular usage of data to place students in Tiers 2 or 3; and d) more-frequent progress monitoring for students in Tier 2 and above to gauge

whether the interventions are working. T8 explained, “In tier 1 the teacher provides assessment and instruction to the entire class of students. In tier 2, the teacher provides research-based interventions to certain students. In tier 3, the teacher provides intensive interventions to certain student for an amount of time to see if they respond to the intervention. Also, the teacher meets with the counselor and the school administrator to discuss the students’ needs and appropriate placements.” The local school should provide more professional development and training so that the teachers at their school could develop the necessary skills to understand RTI and the different tiers that teachers need to understand so that they can provide effective research-based intervention to students in their classroom.

A review of the lesson plans indicated that all the teacher’s lesson plans provided directions on the implementation of RTI for the different tiers. In tier 1, all the teachers provided the students with high quality whole class instruction along with different assessments to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the students. These assessments were designed in the lesson plans to identify students who did not comprehend the reading concepts. The teachers provided different interventions as needed to these students. The lesson plans identified the tier 3 intervention such as small group instruction on reading fluency and reading comprehension. Also, the lesson plans noted that in tier 3, the teachers provided more intensive interventions for the students such as one-on-one instruction.

Theme 5: Limited Number of Interventions Strategies.

The intensity of the interventions depends on the needs of the students. Wanzek et al. (2018) suggested that focusing on a small set of reading-related skills is essential to tier 3 in kindergarten through grade 2 because having too many instructional objectives for struggling readers makes it more difficult to learn the skills well enough for proficient reading. Struggling readers require focused interventions to target their reading problems. Struggling readers need tailored instruction to increase their performance in reading at the public-school level. This study is to determine if the implementation of RTI at county elementary school in kindergarten 2nd grade level is being implemented with fidelity. The participants in this study struggle to provide the different types of interventions available or could be used for students in the RTI implementation in their classrooms. T1 explained, I use flashcards, computer games, and i-Ready lessons as intervention strategies with the students in my classroom.” T2 reported, “The intervention I use the most in my classroom are i-Ready lessons, and flashcard as intervention tools with the students who are struggling to master the lessons.” T3 explain, “The interventions I use with my students’ are one-on-one instruction and flashcards. Whereas, T4 reported, “The intervention strategies I use with my students are small group instruction, flashcards and i-Ready lessons.” T5 explained, “I use reading comprehension strategies and i-Ready lessons with many of my students in the classroom. Whereas, T6 reported, I use aspire-up and classroom assignment for most of my students.” T7 explained, “I use small group instruction, one-on-one instruction, and whole group instruction as some intervention strategies in my classroom.” Also, T8 reported, “I use i-Ready lessons and lots of

different types of interventions strategies such as small group instruction.” Whereas, T9 explained, “I use whole group instruction, small group instruction, one-on-one intervention strategies, i-Ready lessons for student. The types of interventions strategies depend on the level of the student and what the students’ needs are at a point in time for instruction.”

The participants responses in this study revealed that the teachers had limited knowledge and understanding of the different types of interventions strategies they can use to help students who are struggling in their academic skills in their classroom. Also, teachers’ intervention strategies regarding the fidelity implementation of RTI procedures in K–2 grade on decisions made to move students between the two tiers, and what program resources are assessed are important to successful implementation of the RTI process. All the participants noted that they use several types of intervention strategies in their classroom. For example, T6 reported, I use aspire-up and classroom assignments for most of my students.” T7 explained, “I use small group instruction, one-on-one instruction, and whole group instruction as some intervention strategies in my classroom.” Also, T8 reported, “I use i-Ready lessons and lots of different types of interventions strategies such as small group instruction.” Whereas, T9 explained, I use whole group instruction, small group instruction, one-on-one intervention strategies, i-Ready lessons for student. Based on the participants responses, the school should provide more training for teachers so they can design more research-based interventions other than flashcard and small group instruction to instruct students with diverse needs.

A review of the lesson plans from the teachers noted that all of them used different interventions for their students based on the level and intensive needs of the students in their classroom. T1, “I use flashcards, computer games, and i-Ready lessons as intervention strategies with the students in my classroom. T2 used i-Ready lessons, and flashcard as intervention tools with the students who were struggling to master the lessons.” T3 explained, “The interventions I use with my student’s ae one-on-one instruction and flashcards. These data served as an indication of the need for more professional development and training for teachers on different intervention strategies that can be used in their classroom to increase the learning needs of students who are struggling to read and comprehend the materials.

Research Question 3

RQ3: What are the perspectives of elementary teachers concerning accessing programs resources to support the fidelity implementation of RTI in K–2 Reading? The findings from this study indicated that all the teachers noted that they need more resources to fully implement RTI with fidelity in their classroom to increase student achievement. The teachers identified resources such as professional development, support, and research-based intervention materials.

Theme 6: Need More Intervention Materials.

Teachers having the proper resources to implement RTI with fidelity is important if school districts and teachers want students to fully benefit from the RTI process. Also, Wanzek et al. (2018) voiced concerns about the screening process used in RTI to identify students that seem to be at risk for learning disabilities. Some concerns of Special

Education teachers with the RTI process are gaps in knowledge, faculty attitude, and lack of resources. However, there are also benefits that include improved instruction because of assessments data, collection, and analysis, and differentiated instruction (Long et al., 2016). T1 explained, "I do not have enough resources to fully implement RTI with all of the tiers especially when I need to provide intensive instruction to struggling students." T2 stated, I need more materials on intensive interventions to work with small groups in my classroom. Also, the school district needs to provide more training through professional development so teachers can understand fully how to implement RTI with fidelity." Whereas, T3 reported, "We need more resources other than flashcards, i-Ready lessons, and Google programs for the classroom." Also, T4 explained, "We need more intervention materials for students who are struggling in reading and more internet materials for students to complete." T5 reported, "I would suggest that the school provide more professional development and training on how to use intervention materials in working with students' who are struggling to read in my classroom." T6 describe the need for resources this way, "We need more training on how to use the strategies in the i-Ready lesson materials for students in tier 2 who need intensive intervention strategies." Whereas, T7 reported, "We need more reading strategies materials for those students who are struggling to read simple materials. Also, I would like more professional development on how to use the intervention strategies in the i-Ready lesson plan." In addition, T8 explained, "I would like to see more professional development and training on the use of intervention strategies for the classroom with students who are struggling to read in my classroom." Whereas, T9 reported, "I feel that we need more materials on reading

comprehension for students. We also need more professional development and training on how to use the intervention strategies for students who are struggling in the classroom.”

Discrepant Cases

As a qualitative researcher, one must take a close look at the negative cases in their research study (Ravitch & Carl, 2015). Discrepant data provides an alternative explanation on the emerging themes or categories. The discrepant case analysis is an important part of qualitative research (Hanson, 2017). Discrepant case analysis includes reviewing and searching for data that might provide a contradiction to the themes or patterns observed by the research in the findings in a research study. I coded and data and analyzed it to determine whether the data accurately reflect the perspectives and perceptions of the participants for this study. It was important to conduct this process and look for alternative and misrepresentations of the data (Ravitch & Carl, 2015). During the data collection and analysis, I did not find any discrepant cases. Also, all the participants for this study provided their unique and valuable data which led to answering the three research questions.

Data Validation

In a qualitative research study, an important part was to memorize research bias and enhance the quality of the data collection process; therefore, it was important to conduct triangulation of the data from the participants. This included using multiple sources of data collection with a qualitative study. Fusch and Fusch (2018) reported that triangulation in a qualitative research study can add more credibility to the study and the

data being collected by the researcher. All the data in this research study were verified for accuracy through conducting member checking of the transcribed interview data. The interview was sent back to each participant to check the data for accuracy. The participants took one week to return the data back to the researcher. Also, I conducted debriefing sessions with each of the participants. I provide each of the participant with my name and contact information in order to ask any additional questions about the research study. In addition, Merriam and Tisdall (2016) suggested that member checking is an important step in qualitative to validate the research findings in a study. The participants indicated no changes were required to the transcribed interview data.

Project Description

The teachers in this research study were struggling to explain the RTI process in general, but several of them were able to adequately respond about the purpose of the RTI process. Also, the teachers were able to respond to how RTI is a multi-tiered process where students go through different tiers with interventions provided by the teacher and their role in the implementation of RTI in the classroom. All the participants in this study were able to provide several examples of challenges they experience in implementing RTI in their classroom such as RTI is time consuming, they need more training, need more materials on the interventions and best practices in using RTI in their classroom. An analysis of the interview and lesson plan review led to the emergence of the themes: (a) limited knowledge of RTI procedures, (b) inconsistent knowledge of RTI components, (c) need more time to implement RTI interventions, (d) inconsistent knowledge on the RTI tiers, (e) adequate knowledge of interventions strategies, and (f) need more

intervention materials. Based on the analysis of the findings, more professional development and training at the local school for teachers on the best practices for implementing RTI with fidelity should be offered at the local school. The project should be delivered three times during the school academic year for three evening or on the teachers' professional development working days. In the recommendations for evidence-based practices, I will provide research-based instructional strategies for teachers and resources that the teachers can use to implement the RTI framework model with fidelity at their local school

Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore K–2 teachers' perceptions regarding the fidelity implementation of RTI procedures in K–2 grades. To better understand the problem and purpose of this project study, I conducted interviews with the participants and reviewed the lesson plans of the teachers who were implementing RTI at their local school. Manning (2016) stated a focus on individualized instruction and intervention, within the regular education classroom, is an attempt to keep struggling students from falling behind. In this qualitative study, the interviews and the lesson plans review were appropriate data collection instruments for a qualitative research design to solve the local problem and to answer the research questions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In Section 2, I provided a justification for the qualitative research design and how the participants were selected for this study. Also, I provided a review of the instruments used to collect the data and provided how the data were analyzed.

The findings provided valuable information related to the RTI conceptual framework model with the constructivist learning theory approach for this research to explore the perspectives of elementary teachers in one elementary school regarding the fidelity implementation of RTI procedures in K–2 grades on decisions made to move students between the two tiers, and what program resources are needed to carry out the assessments for these students. Students were actively involved in small group instruction, differentiated instruction, knowledge acquisition and tiered interventions as part of the RTI process. The attributes involved in the RTI process contribute to data collection and analyzing these data by discovering themes, categories and codes that revealed answers to the research questions. The results from the interviews from the participating school principal, instructional coach, teachers, and other members of the RTI team, and classroom instruction observation analysis were used to determine the fidelity of implementation of RTI within the participating elementary school. RTI when implemented with fidelity is designed to increase reading proficiency of kindergarten to second grade students that are struggling in reading. Studying this problem could help teachers at the research site implement RTI strategies effectively and consistently to help students build upon their reading skills to become proficient readers. Coonce (2015) revealed that, with RTI, schools use data to identify students at risk for poor learning outcomes, monitor student progress, and provide evidence-based interventions. The results of the data assist with adjusting the intensity and nature of those interventions depending on the teacher's responsiveness. In Section 3, I established, describe the result of this study that explored the perceptions of elementary teachers in one school regarding

the fidelity implementation of RTI procedures in K–2 grades on decision made to move students between the two tiers, and what programs resources are assessed.

Section 3: The Project

Introduction

Research has shown that RTI has become a frequent support system implemented in a southern state (Georgia Department of Education, 2018). RTI offers benefits for struggling readers in their classroom environment, which includes students receiving special education services (Job, 2016). The kindergarten through 2nd grade students at a suburban county elementary school were continuously below proficiency level in reading comprehension. According to the college and career readiness performance index (CCRPI) report, even though RTI interventions were implemented, students continue to struggle with reading (Georgia Department of Education, 2015). The Georgia Department of Education Accountability (2018) defined CCRPI as a comprehensive school improvement, accountability, and communication platform for all educational stakeholders that will promote college and career readiness for all Georgia public school students. Georgia's uses CCRPI as a tool for annually measuring how well its schools, districts, and the state itself are helping students achieve their goals. Understanding the perceptions and concerns of teachers the fidelity implementation of RTI for K–2 students in reading provides insight into the implementation decision making and offers examples for training teachers on the proper way to implementing RTI in their classroom to increase students learning (Cavendish et al., 2019).

The purpose of the study was to explore K–2 teachers' perceptions regarding the fidelity implementation of RTI procedures in kindergarten to second grade. Further, this study obtained important information regarding support the teachers provide in each tier

of the RTI model. Interviews and lesson plans review of the kindergarten to second grade elementary teachers provided in-depth understanding of the fidelity implementation of the RTI model that enhanced student learning and impact reading achievement. This study should provide school leaders, teachers and stakeholders with valuable information needed to make improvements in their RTI efforts and provide more resources that teachers can use to increase the academic achievement of the students in K–2 at the elementary school level. Based on the findings from this case study, I developed some professional development training to address the needs of teachers in helping students to achieve positive outcomes at the research site. The development of the project was based on the themes emerged from the data analysis process: (a) limited knowledge of RTI procedures, (b) inconsistent knowledge of RTI components, (c) need more time to implement RTI interventions, (d) inconsistent knowledge on the RTI tiers, (e) adequate knowledge of interventions strategies, and (f) need more intervention materials. The project was developed to provide research-based strategies on the process and methods of properly implementing RTI to address the teachers concerns about the fidelity implementation of RTI for students in K–2 settings. The strategies presented in the PD sessions can assist the kindergarten to second grade teachers. The information and strategies present in the PD sessions can assist Kindergarten to second grade teachers in research-based intervention strategies in the RTI intervention model, helping teachers to become more knowledgeable on monitoring the progress of students, and providing teachers with information to make data-based instructional decisions about students' progress in their classroom.

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

Project Description and Goals

The findings from the data analysis of the interviews and the lesson plan reviews in Section 2 showed that there was a need for more professional development and training on the fidelity implementation of the RTI process for teachers in kindergarten to second grade. The project was created because of the findings from this project study due to several teachers lack the necessary knowledge and training to properly implement RTI in their individual grades. I developed the training sessions to focus on the topics of research-based intervention strategies in the RTI model, progress monitoring for students in the RTI process, and databased decision making for students in the classroom. The professional development (PD) training addressed the concerns of the kindergarten to second grade teachers in this project who expressed in their interviews that there is a need for teachers to implement RTI with fidelity when delivering the model in their classrooms. The PD will be provided for teachers at the local school for three days during their regular teacher meeting session, which will take place January, February, and March of 2021. The PD training can also be grouped according to teacher grade level and presented during grade level team meetings at the local school for teachers. This is important to implement at grade levels to learn about specific interventions and strategies that can be implemented for certain students.

The aim of the PD training sessions will be to improve the K–2 teachers’ understanding of the fidelity implementation of RTI for K–2 students in reading. Also, the PD sessions are to increase the teachers’ self-efficacy skills to develop some confidence with implementing the RTI model with high fidelity to meet the diverse needs of all students in the RTI process. The goals of the PD sessions are designed to allow teachers to develop the necessary research-based strategies and skills and to make sure they have clarity on the RTI procedures. The kindergarten to second grade teachers needs to have a clear understanding of how the RTI model work and the procedures needed to properly implement the RTI model with fidelity to meet the academic needs of all students in the classroom.

Rationale

Based on the analysis of the findings, there should be more PD and training for teachers at the local school on the best practices for implementing RTI with fidelity. The project should be delivered several times during the school academic year for several evening or on the teachers’ professional development working days. In the recommendations for evidence-based practices, I will provide research-based instructional strategies for teachers and resources that the teachers can use to implement the RTI framework model with fidelity at their local school.

This school’s 2014 to 2015 college and career readiness performance test score was 52.5% which was down from 57.5% for 2013 to 2014 and 61.1% in 2012 to 2013. (County School System, 2015). According to County School System (County School System, 2015) i-Ready is a data-driven, comprehensive, integrated online program used

by county public school for reading and mathematics. This program simplifies the challenge of differentiating instruction using an all-in-one program that combines individualized instruction, growth monitoring and assessments. This elementary school's i-ready progress monitoring data indicates that many early elementary students continue to struggle with reading skills (County School System, 2015). These students have already reached Tier 2 (interventions) of the RTI process and were progressively behind in attaining these skills within a year. Some groups of children, including those with special needs, experience a cumulative rather than a compensatory cycle of achievement growth. Hughes and Dexter (2016) found there is emerging evidence that a tiered early intervention approach can improve the academic performance of at-risk students.

Researchers noted that PD is important for teachers and is a critical part of teachers being able to improve their teaching and delivery strategies for teaching and students' achievement in the classroom (Ayodele & Samantha, 2018; Hughes & Dexter, 2016). Also, researchers reported that PD allows teachers to share different ideas and knowledge on different strategies to implement in their classroom to advance the diverse needs of the students they teach. According to Gersten et al. (2017), RTI is a major focus of government initiatives to improve reading performance. Funding is provided through programs like Reading First to support strategies that increase reading performance of elementary students (Desimone & Pak, 2017). The U.S. Department of Education (2015) noted that No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) (2002) initiated Reading First as a state grant program during the Bush Administration. The Reading First grant aided state educational and local educational agencies in initiating reading programs for students in

kindergarten through third grade that are based on research-based reading strategies. In addition, Hughes and Dexter (2016) noted that targets for teachers, based on a set of strategies and expected outcomes, have been set within the RTI framework. The educational strategy is that all teachers should be able to use the potential of RTI to increase pupils' levels of proficiency.

The integration of RTI across the curriculum is a school-wide issue. It involves a systematic and cohesive strategy that drives the methods of interventions and supports for students in need. The study revealed that in North Carolina, 5000 students were considered not on grade level in school. Long et al. (2016) confirmed barriers recognized from collective responses in a study are a burdensome process. The process of using RTI throughout the curriculum school wide entails attitudes, knowledge and gaps, parental issues, and collaboration issues. By providing PD for K–2 teachers at the research site could help develop a partnership with each other in designing best practices and resources they can use and share with each other to examine students' needs to data decision making and based their classroom instruction on the individual needs of students in their classroom.

Review of the Literature

The purpose of the study was to explore Kindergarten to second grade teachers' perceptions regarding the fidelity implementation of RTI procedures in kindergarten to second grade. Further, this study obtained important information regarding support the teachers provide in each tier of the RTI model. The literature review focused on research-based intervention strategies in the RTI intervention model, helping teachers to become

more knowledgeable on monitoring the progress of students, and providing teachers with information to make data-based instructional decisions about students' progress in their classroom through PD.

Strategy Used for Searching the Literature

The topics discussed in the literature review emerged from the themes that emerged from the study in Section 2. The literature review highlighted the need for more PD and training on research-based intervention strategies to properly implement RTI with fidelity, increasing teachers' knowledge on the RTI process in general, strategies and procedures on progress monitoring of student's progress, and making databased instructional decisions about students' progress in their classroom. I conducted a search for relevant research information for this literature review within the last 5 years and focused on peer-reviewed and full text sources. The databases consisted of several searches in different educational research databases from Walden University Library and other libraries in the United States that included ERIC, SAGE, EBSCO publications, and ProQuest publications. Key search terms included: *progress monitoring*, *professional development*, *response to intervention strategies*, *databased decision making*, *teacher self-efficacy*, *implementation of RTI with fidelity*, and *progress monitoring*. The review of literature search resulted in the themes PD, research-based intervention strategies, assessment measures, and

Professional Development

Teachers require ongoing professional development (PD) to teach RTI implementation with fidelity (March et al., 2016). Most school districts extend both

initial and ongoing professional development to all school site personnel and hire expert facilitators and qualified coaches to address RTI implementation to improve reading. The RTI process required teachers to effectively screen, assess, teach, and document student progress. Initial staff training to build teachers' understanding of RTI is essential. Castillo et al. (2016) implied that there is a need for ongoing professional development when implementing RTI and demonstrating the benefits of intentional and ongoing training on teacher outcomes especially in comparison to single after-school trainings.

According to Castillo et al. (2016), professional development for RTI implementation helped educators apply theoretical concepts, to hands-on applications within the classroom, and experts in the field are required to train educators. In addition, Castillo et al. (2016) proved workshops increase teachers' knowledge, as opposed to the one-time trainings, which do not provide the depth of understanding, or the implementation of practice needed to collect, analyze, and use student data to guide instruction. In addition, change agents are the classroom teachers that ignite student learning in the classroom and create the foundation for school-wide success or failure of the RTI process (Little et al., 2017). Deficits may be the result of inadequate teaching from lack of training. Schools must ensure that teachers are knowledgeable in implementing RTI so that it increases student reading. Schwehr (2014) reported that ongoing professional development in RTI led to greater improvement in self-efficacy of using RTI principles and strategies than a single afterschool training session after controlling for teachers' experience and teachers' education levels.

Researchers suggested that school districts should provide teachers with long term support using PD when implementing the RTI model in their school (Castillo et al., 2016; Greenwood & Kelly, 2017). The PD that the teachers receive should reflect the problem-solving approach and sharing ideas through collaboration with other teachers (Hilton et al., 2016). A study by Greenwood and Kelly (2017), noted that many teachers expressed the need for coaching and PD to effectively implement the RTI model in their classroom. Also, Hilton et al. (2016) noted that many teachers have a change in their attitudes when certain knowledge is presented to them about the benefits of teaching and learning. These types of efforts can be done using PD to have a positive effect on students learning and outcomes. The results of the study found that there was a statistically significant difference with teachers who receive ongoing PD with the focus on helping students to make progress in their classrooms.

Teacher's readiness to implement RTI can play an important role in the quality of instruction students received in the classroom and student performance and learning needs in the classroom (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Also, Gallo (2017) reported have expressed the need for proper PD and training and resources required to implement school districts initiatives in the school district. The findings from this study indicated that the teachers who received proper PD and training were more confident in implementing new initiatives in the school district. Also, researchers such as Brown (2018) reported that teachers who received ongoing PD were more satisfied with implementing new programs in the school district.

Research Based Intervention Strategies

Research based intervention strategies provide direct and explicit intervention directed at increasing the academic skill set of students in the classroom. This is done by providing (a) additional instruction, (b) changing teaching methods, or (c) providing a specific behavior modification program for some students in the classroom (Hailemariam et al., 2019). Effective interventions increase the intensity of instruction by (a) increasing the teachers' instruction time in the classroom, (b) decreasing the number of students assigned to a group, (c) improving the quality of instruction to students, (d) focusing on essential learning needs of students and providing explicit and systematic instruction to students (Hailemariam et al., 2019). Research based intervention strategies are delivered to student through small group instruction, one-on-one instruction, and differentiation instruction.

Small Group Instruction

Researchers noted that small group instruction gives teachers the opportunity to provide certain students who need extra help with their learning and achievement (Small, 2020). Also, small group instruction gives teachers the opportunity to differentiate their instruction to these students in their classroom to help them increase their academic achievement. In addition, gives teachers the opportunity to assess and evaluate the learning needs of students and design their lessons around these students to help them to be successful in the classroom (Beal & Small, 2020). Small group instruction is used in the RTI model in tier two and three where teachers provide small group instruction to

certain students who need more learning strategies to increase their academic achievement (Little et al., 2017).

RTI services taught in small groups, individually by teachers, special educators, and specialists are ways of addressing the problem. Little et al. (2017) stated that the RTI system is all about creating a vehicle of progress for all students by monitoring and assessing both the learning rate and level of performance of individual students. Educational decisions, and how to best implement them, are based on individual student response to instruction. RTI is used when making decisions in both general education and special education, this process links the two together and creates a bond where support is the objective. There is a need for more research into how schools can proficiently offer a multiplicity of research-based instructional strategies to assist struggling readers to become successful in developing their reading skills (Little et al., 2017).

Constructivist approach to learning, with multiple strategies, can help teach reading in the lessons involving small group instruction and individual instruction (Schcolnik et al., 2016). Students benefitted from the constructivist learning approach, which is for differentiated instruction taking place in small groups, with a small number of students. As stated by Schcolnik et al. (2016), Zone of proximal development is part of the constructivist theory and supports active participation in the learning process involving students learning from each other. Students comprehended and applied new concepts in daily activities with the teacher as the facilitator. Teachers working with RTI interventions realized RTI instruction helped target specific deficiencies and required

close monitoring of struggling students' progress based on the instruction (Schcolnik et al., 2016).

RTI programs are beneficial if the education professionals are putting forth significant effort in using the most appropriate type of interventions for that specific student (Samuels, 2015). RTI teams have specific duties to help struggling readers and that is defining the student's problem, planning an intervention, implementing the intervention, and evaluating the student's progress regularly. Various interventions should be attempted if the student is still struggling in reading. Educational Research Newsletter and Webinars (2016) listed five recommendations to schools and school districts on using RTI for primary grade students struggling with learning how to read. The recommendations are as follows: (a) A screening is done to detect potential reading that led to possible developmental reading disabilities. (b) Provide differentiated reading instruction (RTI) for all students based on assessments of students' current reading levels (Tier 1). (c) Provide intensive, systematic instruction in small groups to students who score below the benchmark three and five times a week for 20–40 minutes (Tier 2). (d) Tier 3 intervention plans follow data showing students are still struggling in Tier 2. (e) Provide intensive instruction daily for students exhibiting minimal progress after time spent in Tier 2 small group instruction (Tier 3) (Webinars, 2016).

One-on-One Instruction

Researchers noted that one-on one instruction is when a teacher use this technique to teach a student and ensure that student interact individually with the teacher on certain concepts in the classroom. Also, one-on-one instruction ensures that the student learn

concepts and materials at their own pace and in their own way. Many students sit in a classroom surrounded by other students and receive little to no attention from their teacher when they need help with the assignments (Bladel, 2018). Therefore, with one-on-one instruction the student can learn their materials faster and are able to master more materials in the classroom (Hikida et al., 2018). Researchers noted that some benefits of one-on-one instruction are: (a) high quality interaction when student feel low in the classroom, (b) low stress environment frees students from the fear of failure, (c) the teacher can gauge the student progress and mastery of class assignment, (d) teacher can personalize assignments and conversations with the student, and (e) teachers adapt to the student's communication and learning styles (Hikida et al., 2018).

In the RTI process, students who do not respond to classroom instruction and interventions in tier 1 and tier 2 receive more intensive and one-on one instruction in tier 3. The intensity of the interventions depends on the needs of the students (Wanzek et al., 2018). Wanzek et al. (2018) suggested that focusing on a small set of reading-related skills is essential to tier 3 in kindergarten through grade 2 because having too many instructional objectives for struggling readers makes it more difficult to learn the skills well enough for proficient reading. This is usually done with one-on-one instruction. Setting instructional goals help pinpoint data that identifies learning disabilities (LD) which have proven to shift away from discrepancies in cognitive abilities that have traditionally been a primary basis for learning disabilities identification. Fuchs and Fuchs, (2017) also acknowledged diagnostic assessments can help determine why a reading problem is occurring and which reading skills or performance deficits need to be

addressed to improve reading performance. Service delivery models that provide early interventions align with the results of diagnostic testing results. Implementing RTI, to struggling readers with fidelity with purposeful instruction will benefit the students, teachers, and parents. Developing reading skills in the early learning stages promotes positive social progress by potentially improving college and career preparedness and propelling students to become productive citizens and lifelong learners.

Differentiated Instruction

Teachers in the RTI process are expected to provide different types of instruction to different students who are falling below grade level in their classrooms. Due to the different levels of learning needs of students in the classroom. All educators should be prepared to provide services that meet the needs of learners by accommodating student they teach by using differentiated instruction (Gaitas & Alves-Martins, 2017; Malacapay, 2019; Suprayogi et al. (2017). Differentiated instruction (DI) is a teaching method that consider the different learning abilities of students by recognizing their strengths and helping students with their weaknesses (Gaitas & Alves-Martins, 2017; Suprayogi et al., 2017). Suprayogi et al. (2017) defined differentiated instruction as a teaching method where a teacher is flexible in their approach to helping students learn different concepts in the classroom. Also, DI also builds on the learner learning styles and the teachers develops strategies to aid the person to increase their learning needs (Malacapay, 2019). Researchers noted that DI is an approach where teachers can provide different activities in the classroom to reduce student's classroom disengagement where some students become bored due to not being able to complete their assignments given the teacher

(Gaitas & Alves-Martins, 2017). Gaitas and Alves-Martins (2017) conducted a study using 277 classroom teachers on their perception on the difficulties of implementing DI in their elementary classroom. The results of the study showed that the teachers noted that they need more professional development and training on strategies materials and instruction with implementing DI in their classrooms to effectively teach students in their classrooms.

Researchers noted that DI can be a great strategy to help students increase their academic achievement in the classroom, but many teachers have limited knowledge and skills on how to effectively use DI in their classroom to meet the diverse needs of students (Al Otaiba et al., 2016). Many teachers perceive DI to modify the curriculum and their teaching methods in the classroom. Differentiated instruction can be used to promote active learning of students (Ismajli & Imami-Morina, 2018). Researchers reported that DI can be used to address student deficiencies in both dept of learning and speed to which they learn. Active learning can promote faster growth than passive learning. In addition, researchers noted that with active learning, students achieve greater knowledge and retention than students using passive learning (Valiandes & Neophytou, 2018).

Assessment Measures to Monitor Student Progress

Assessment in the RTI progress begins when the classroom teacher assesses the academic skills of students in his/her classroom (Anderson, 2017). This assessment process helps the school and the teachers to identify which students in the school and the classroom need research-based interventions to address their individual learning needs.

The assessment team and the classroom teacher can then design specific strategies that the students need to improve their academic achievement. The assessment process can be part of the class-wide instruction where all students are screen on their academic strengths and weaknesses (Thomas et al., 2020).

A goal of the RTI model is to eliminate the wait to fail approach with students because all students can receive specific help promptly with the general education teacher in their classroom. As soon as the assessment data is reviewed indicating an academic problem area, the classroom teacher can respond to a group of students or certain individual students to address their diverse needs (Alahmari, 2019). Also, the assessment process has two parts, the universal screening and progress monitoring. Individual screening is when the RTI team and the classroom teacher screen all students in the school and the classroom to identify their strengths and weaknesses. Progress monitoring is when teachers collect data on students regularly and plot the data on graphs. The RTI team and the classroom teachers review the trend line to determine if the intervention is working or if the teacher needs to provide different instructional strategies for the students or an individual student in their classroom (Anderson, 2017).

Progress Monitoring

Progress monitoring (PM) is used to document the progress of students received RTI services due to problems with their academic achievement in the classroom. Progress monitoring framework consist of four components which include screening, multi-level or multi-tier prevention system, progress monitoring, and data-based decision making (Johnson & Hutchins, 2019; Lopuch, 2018). Researchers noted that many school districts

in the United States who are using RTI model in their schools are not fully implementing the model with fidelity (Johnson & Hutchins, 2019). Many classroom teachers need professional development and training on using progress monitoring to track students' progress in their classrooms. PM on the student's data is a way that can be useful for teachers in making data-based decisions about the progress the students are making in retaining the required materials. Also, PM is useful in the RTI process to determine the short- and long-term goals and objectives for students and to evaluate students' outcomes (Johnson & Hutchins, 2019; Lopuch, 2018).

The RTI model there need to be valid and reliable assessment measures to assess student learning and achievement (Lopuch, 2018). These include collecting data and using graphs and charts to plot the instructional progress and changes on students' academic skills. Also, Tindal et al. (2017) suggested that school districts should invest in software technology to assist teachers in graphing and organizing data to design different interventions for students' skills deficits in the classroom.

Researchers noted that a technology tool that many school districts use to track the progress of students in the RTI process is curriculum-based measurement (CBM). CBM is a set of standardized measurements that can be used to guide student performance in academic subjects such as reading, literacy, early math computation, math application, spelling, and written expressions (Hintze et al., 2018). CBM is a reliable and valid way to measure students' progress and to determine if they are responding to the interventions presented to them by the teacher (Dakroub et al., 2020). Also, CBM is a valid and reliable indicator for students' performance on state-wide tests and the

elementary school level. In addition, CBM is a valid and reliable tool that teachers can use at the beginning of the RTI process during universal screening for students to identify if certain students are at risk of academic failure during the progress monitoring phase of tracking students' progress in the RTI process (Dakroub et al., 2020).

Response to Intervention screening and progress monitoring assessment, evidence-based intervention, and school-wide coordination of multi-tier instruction is part of a well-designed approach to differentiating reading (Bohanon et al., 2017). Hughes and Dexter (2018) stated that the screening process used in RTI should identify students that appear to be at risk for learning disabilities. In addition, Hurlbut and Tunks (2016) reported that teachers use an assessment tool to measure struggling students' individual skills. After each assessment, the individual score is plotted on a graph to determine improvement at the expected rate or if he needs additional support. However, there is advantages and disadvantage of the delivery process. The recent focus on RTI provides an opportunity to combine academic and behavior systems effectively and efficiently into an integrated school-wide system of supports for students (Bohanon, Goodman, & McIntosh, 2017). The screening process, for students in primary grades kindergarten second grade performed at least once a year, identifies at risk students for reading failure. Based on the screening scores at risk students identified will be given intensive reading interventions.

Progress monitoring can provide teachers and the RTI team valuable information about students' level of academic achievement whether they are making progress to improvement in the classroom. The RTI team and the teachers can use the PM data to

inform instruction, target the learning needs of certain students, and making certain decision about a student progress in class (Bixler, 2020). Researchers noted that the teachers need to know how to use the information receive on the progress of students from the PM to make informed decision concerning the students' needs in their classroom (Dakroub et al., 2020).

Databased Decision Making on Students Progress

Researchers have noted that in school districts across the United States, there is a growing push for teachers to use data to guide them in making certain decisions concerning students' progress in their classrooms (van Geel et al., 2016). Also, when teachers use data to make educational decision concerning students, this could improve the way teachers deliver their instructional services to students they teach in their classrooms (van Geel et al., 2016). Filderman et al. (2018) reported that teachers who use data to track the progress students are making in their classrooms can provide more structure lessons and this in turn can increase the academic achievement of students they teach. Also, teachers who use data in their instruction can adapt best practices in their teaching and evaluate effectively whether their instructional methods need to be changed to research certain students they each in their classroom (van Geel et al., 2016).

Data based decisions can be used for young students in K–2 grades who struggle to read with fluency in the RTI process. Researchers noted that the primary years are a major part of developing the early literacy skills for students. Offering different approaches for struggling readers provides a chance to target areas of deficiency (Gardenhour, 2016). Also, Gardenhour (2016) affirmed RTI incorporates multitier

interventions systems, where students have access to evidence-based classroom reading instruction, and supplemental interventions when needed. The data collected from the strategies used will prompt decisions related to intervention are concerning deficiencies per student. Gardenhour (2016) also believed non-proficient reading skills not corrected in the primary grades, will continue to get progressively worse in subsequent years.

According to Fuchs and Fuchs (2017) the implementation of RTI can be problematic, due to ineffective teaching. Training teachers is necessary to implement the RTI strategies with fidelity. In addition, many factors contribute to students struggling with reading in the early primary years. Difficulties observed in the primary grades with mastering basic reading skills are associated with limited engagement in text reading. This causes a pervasive reading deficit characterized by low fluency, poor vocabulary, and limited world knowledge, all contributing to impaired reading comprehension (Gardenhour, 2016).

RTI is a useful tool to help students who are having problems in school. Fuchs and Lynn (2017) verified that RTI is useful for several instructional purposes. A study performed in 13 states revealed most of the schools studied used RTI for reading instruction in first through third grades. Research firms Monitor Deloitte. RAND Corporation (MDRC), Scientific Research Institute (SRI) International, the University of Washington, and the Instructional Research Group focused the research on 140 schools. Fuchs & Lynn's study revealed four key elements used in each school situation. Fuchs and Lynn (2017) elements were, a) three tiers of increasingly intense reading instruction being used; b) screening of all students for progress at least twice a year; c) regular usage

of data to place students in Tiers 2 or 3; and d) more-frequent progress monitoring for students in Tier 2 and above to gauge whether the interventions are working. Therefore, teachers need training to become data literate to analyze and respond to the various needs of the students in the classroom.

Procedures and Expectations for Teachers

Many educational initiatives in school districts across the country fail within three years of implementation because teachers and other stakeholders do not plan well and get the buy-in from all stakeholders involved in the initiative and the changes that must occur with the new initiative (Askell-Williams & Koh, 2020). Also, there must be clarity among all parties involved in the change. The leader of the change effort must provide adequate information to develop understanding and provide reasons why the change must take place for others to follow the change (Lewis, 2018). Lewis (2018) reported that persons in charge of the change could hinder the change efforts if they lack providing clarity and clear expectations for all involved in the change. Also, the leader of the change effort must communicate with those effectively so that they can provide feedback on the positive and negative aspect of the change taking place.

All teachers at the local research site must understand why the local school district is implementing the RTI model at their local school. They also must learn the purpose of RTI and how this program can benefit the entire student population at the school. These elements are important to understand if the administration at the school would like to get the buy-in from all the stakeholders and teachers (Askell-Williams & Koh, 2020). The findings from this study noted that many of the teachers have limited

knowledge concerning the RTI process. Providing teachers with PM is a way for the school administration and the RTI team to help teachers understand the importance of using RTI as a strategy to aid students learning and achievement in their classrooms. The teachers are expected to participate in the PM sessions so that they can understand the RTI process implementing at their local school with fidelity. The teachers can provide feedback on the PM sessions what that the presenter can make improvements to the PM sessions to benefit all the teachers at the local school.

The Project Description

The findings from the data analysis of the interviews and the lesson plans review in Section 2 showed the need for more PM training sessions of the fidelity implementation of RTI at the local school. Data analysis in part 2 of this project study suggested that was a gap in some teachers understanding regarding the fidelity implementation of RTI procedures in K–2 grades on decisions made to move students between the two tiers, and what program resources are needed to carry out the assessments for these students. Based on the analysis of the findings, there should be more professional development and training at the local school for teachers on the best practices for implementing RTI with fidelity at the local school. The project should be delivered several times during the school academic year for several evening or on the teachers' professional development working days. In the recommendations for evidence-based practices, I will provide research-based instructional strategies for teachers and resources that the teachers can use to implement the RTI framework model with fidelity

at their local school. The project crated because of the findings from this project study is to provide K–2 teachers PD training on the fidelity implementation of RTI.

The PD will focus on understanding the RTI model process for the local school, research-based strategies such as one-to-one instruction, small group instruction, differentiation instruction, progress monitoring, and data-based decision making for students. The PD will take place during the local school faculty meeting in January, February, and March 2021 and will be split into different sections and presented at the grade level meetings of the K–2 teachers. The PD information will be presented using slideshow presentation (see Appendix B) and using RTI online training created by the United States Department of Education Office of Special Education Programs at Vanderbilt University. The programs at Vanderbilt University provides RTI resources that help teachers and the RTI team leaders to provide research-based practices in the implementation of the RTI model (IRIS, 2019). The online training materials will be completed by the teachers during their grade level meeting so they can discuss how the training materials can be applied to certain grade level at the local school. The teachers can receive a certificate of completion of the online modules and receive PM hours by taking the pre and posttest. I believe that the PD training will benefits the K–2 teachers in helping them to better understand how to implement the RTI model at the local school with fidelity.

Resources and Supports Needed for the Project

The two resources needed to effectively implement the RTI mode at the research site is administrative support and teacher but-in of the RTI model. The RTI model will

need positive and strong leadership from the administration at the school district and the local school level if the programs are to be successful at the local school. Researchers noted that strong leadership is important if a program initiative is going to work successful at a school district (Anderson, 2017; March et al., 2019). The school principal has a strong influence on whether the RTI model works at the school and how teachers react and implement the RTI programs at the local school level (McIntosh et al., 2016). Also, March et al. (2019) reported that the two main forces that must take place to enhance change in the school district is administrative support from the school district level and the support received from the local school building principal which can enhance teacher buy-in of the RTI programs. It can also enhance whether the teachers have a positive or negative attitude and belief concerning the implementation of the RTI program.

Some other resources needed for the project include a room to hold the meeting and computer and projector equipment to present the presentation, internet connection, a computer laptop for the teachers to complete the online modules, and project evaluation assessments. The PD will need to be in a room large enough so that the teachers can share their experiences learned from the presentation with other teacher at the presentation. Also, as a facilitator of the PD training, I will make sure that the room is ready for the PD training and all equipment is working properly for the PD training sessions.

There are no financial resources needed for the PD training because all the equipment and the location of the PD training sessions will take place at the local schools where the teachers already work. I received support from the administration and the RTI

team leader who feel that the teachers need more PD and training. I have already discussed the findings from the project study and they both support the project being implemented and the timeline at the school during the months of January, February, and March 2021 faculty meetings. Also, I will provide additional training to the teachers at their grade level meeting during the months of January, February, and March 2021. In addition, the school technology coordinator will provide support and make sure I have enough computer laptops for the online modules that the teachers will complete.

Project Implementation and Timeline

The project expected implementation date for the PD and training session is set for 2020-2021 school year. Also, the project is ready to be implemented pending approval from the doctoral study committee. The project study findings will first be presented to the local administration and the RTI team to provide an overview and rationale for the project being presented to the K–2 teachers to further their knowledge and skill on the fidelity implementation of the school RTI model to increase students learning and achievement in their classroom. Upon approval to present the training with the K–2 teachers, I will meet with the RTI team to present the timeline and schedule for the PD training sessions and to provide them with the training materials so they can review it before the PD training take place with the teachers. In addition, I will also meet with the technology person to obtain all the necessary equipment necessary for the PD training sessions which will take place for the months of January, February, and March 2021. The PD training session will take place for three faculty meetings with will last for two hours each time and with the grade level teachers for five times for a total of five

hours. The total time allotted for the training sessions will be 15 hours. The PD training session will end with the K–2 teachers completing an evaluation form where they will have the opportunity to address any concerns or issues with the PD training sessions.

Project Evaluation Plan

It is important to have an evaluation plan for the PD project to determine the strengths and weaknesses of the plan and to determine the quality for positive social change for the intended audiences. The evaluation process is done to inform and guide reform efforts by the researcher and other stakeholders (Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2017). Drago-Severson and Blum-DeStefano (2017) reported that evaluations are done with PD as a way to measure the program activities to determine the knowledge level of the teachers in terms of their beliefs and attitudes towards the PD activities being presented to them. This PD is intended to improve the K–2 teacher knowledge and skills on the fidelity implementation of the RTI at their local school.

The evaluation for this project is done through formative evaluation. Formative evaluation aims to test the current knowledge of participants and allow them to adjust their knowledge to meet the participants' needs in a learning session (Buelin et al., 2019). The goal of the PD sessions is to improve the K-12 teachers' understanding regarding the fidelity implementation of RTI procedures in K–2 grades on decisions made to move students between the two tiers, and what program resources are assessed. The project research will provide six open-ended questions at the end of each session to give the K–2 teachers the opportunity to provide formative feedback on the sessions and to make suggestions for future training sessions. In addition to the formative assessment at the end

of the sessions, I will conduct informal assessment during the sessions to make sure that all participants are actively engaged in the PD and participating in the session activities to acquire a greater understanding of the RTI procedures and strategies for interventions to be used in their classroom with students.

Project Implication

This research is intended to gain an understanding of underlying reasons, opinions, and motivations of teachers implementing RTI with fidelity to kindergarten to 2nd grade students to improve their reading. The findings of my study may help me develop a project for teachers at the local school that can influence student achievement by means of implementing RTI with fidelity. These finding may also assist in future recommendations for the RTI process that will help improve and align program implementation in the classrooms.

Professional development training may help teachers to implement RTI interventions with fidelity in their classroom. Also, PD training could help teachers to better implement RTI to students that struggle with reading. Standard practice interventions are suggested to answer the questions about what students need in the classroom when performing below proficiency. These interventions may be developed at the school level based on student's needs and students with similar struggles may be grouped together to work on skill deficits. This approach has evidence-based support within the area of reading, particularly at the elementary level (Department of Psychological Services, 2015). Results of the study by Murphy (2015) showed that the teacher is the most important factor in student achievement. It is essential that teachers

utilize research-based strategies, engage in thoughtful assessment leading to instruction, and have knowledge of assessments to develop strategic lesson plans and intense professional development training of practicing research based best processes to reach the students. This qualitative study may influence the administrators in that the results will help them to make decisions in the best interest of the teachers, as well as all students.

Project Social Change

This project has potential for positive social change because it can help influence K-12 teachers to improve their instructional strategies so that it can improve the academic performance of students at the research site, the local community at large and can be used by other school districts in the state to improve best practices for students receiving RTI interventions. Researchers reported if teachers receive the proper training and development on the RTI process, they can develop the necessary skill set to properly implement the RTI model in their classrooms. The findings provided valuable information related to the RTI conceptual framework model with the constructivist learning theory approach for this research to explore the perspectives of elementary teachers in one elementary school regarding the fidelity implementation of RTI procedures in K-2 grades on decision made to move students between the two tiers, and what program resources are needed to carry out the assessments for these students. Students are actively involved in small group instruction, differentiated instruction, knowledge acquisition and tiered interventions as part of the RTI process. The attributes involved in the RTI process contribute to data collection and analyzing these data by discovering themes, categories and codes that revealed answers to the research questions.

The results from the interviews from the participating school principal, instructional coach, teachers, and other members of the RTI team, and classroom instruction observation analysis will be used to determine the fidelity of implementation of RTI within the participating elementary school. RTI when implemented with fidelity is designed to increase reading proficiency of kindergarten to second grade students that are struggling in reading. Studying this problem could help teachers at the research site implement RTI strategies effectively and consistently to help students build upon their reading skills to become proficient readers. Coonce (2015) revealed that, with RTI, schools use data to identify students at risk for poor learning outcomes, monitor student progress, and provide evidence-based interventions. The results of the data assist with adjusting the intensity and nature of those interventions depending on a student's responsiveness and identify students with disabilities

Conclusions

In Section 3, I presented a description of the research project that emerged from the research in this project study. The goal and objective of the PD with the K–2 teachers are to improve perspectives of elementary teachers in one elementary school regarding the fidelity implementation of RTI procedures. Also, another goal is to provide the K–2 teachers the opportunity to learn about different research-based intervention strategies to use in their classroom to support self-efficacy in the implementation of RTI procedures in their classrooms. Professional development training is appropriate for this project study because it addresses the learning needs of the K–2 teachers in this project study. Also, I provided a review of literature that supported the conclusions of this project study. In

addition. I provided a description of the needed resources to implement the project study. Also, I provided an implementation timeline for the project study and the responsibilities of the persons responsible for the project implementation. Finally, I provided a description of both local and national social change for this project in Section 3.

In Section 4, I described the project's strengths and limitations, presented alternative solutions for the local problem, and provided several perspectives of the doctoral project study process. In addition, I provided a reflection and provided a discussion of the importance of the project study to the education community at large. Also, I discussed the learning growth I received as a scholar practitioner and a project developer through this project study process.

Section 4: Reflections and Conclusion

Introduction

In Section 4 of this project study, I present the reflections about the findings from this study. Included in this section is the project's strengths, limitations, and recommendations for alternative solutions to the local problem. I also discuss scholarship, project development, leadership and change, and the importance of the work. In addition, I concluded the section with the implications, applications, and direction for future research.

Project Strengths

The findings from this project study can provide K–2 teachers with important PD on the fidelity implementation of the RTI model that could have a positive effect on teaching practices and enhance the academic achievement of students in the classroom. The RTI Action Network (2016) suggested that fidelity with RTI is the intensity of how the program performs. The time and interest put into implementing RTI depends on the teachers having the opportunity to learn and collaborate with each other. Otaiba (2015) stated that there are five elements of fidelity: student engagement, program specificity, and quality of delivery, exposure/duration, and adherence. During this process, students were involved in the intervention activity designed to increase their proficiency in reading.

March et al. (2016) indicated that teachers require ongoing PD required to teach RTI implementation with fidelity. Most school districts extend both initial and ongoing professional development to all school site personnel and hire expert facilitators and

qualified coaches to address RTI implementation to help improve reading. The RTI process required teachers to effectively screen, assess, teach, and document student progress, initial staff training to build teachers' understanding of RTI is essential.

Castillo et al. (2016) implied that there is a need for ongoing PD when implementing RTI and demonstrate the benefits of intentional and ongoing training on teacher outcomes especially in comparison to single after-school trainings. The teachers at the research site were struggling implementing RTI model with fidelity. As a result of the lack of properly implementing RTI in their classrooms, more students met the criteria for intensive intervention services and special education services than may have been necessary. Researchers noted that if RTI implementation quality is linked to student outcomes, schools may benefit from analyzing their implementation using the scale for reading (RTIS-R) or a similar measure at least annually to execute planning for RTI implementation and to monitor progress (Jackson & Alvarez, 2017; Ruffin, 2016).

The PD activities developed for this project study had several strengths that could benefit the teachers at the research site. The first strength of this PD project it can inform teachers through active learning. The PD for the teachers could use two approaches for the teachers to gain information on RTI model, a series of PD presentations to teachers and online modules on the fidelity implementation of the RTI program. The PD would provide K–2 teachers at the research site an overview of the RTI process and information on RTI and strategies on the proper use and the fidelity implementation of the RTI process to increase academic achievement for students in their classroom. Also, the teachers would receive and review procedures and guidelines for progress monitoring

procedures for students in their classroom in the RTI implementation process. The PD sessions are conducted several times each month throughout the years with the kindergarten to second grade teachers. Also, the Kindergarten to second grade teachers will be provided the opportunity to collaborate and evaluate research-based practices on the RTI process to enhance their skills on instructing students.

The second strength of the project study was that the K–2 teachers were able to express their perceptions and viewpoints on the fidelity implementation of the RTI process through interviews and lesson plans review. During the interviews with the teachers, they expressed the need for more information and training on the fidelity implementation of the RTI program and information on procedures in kindergarten to second grade in making decisions to move students between the two tiers, and what programs resources are assessed. Also, this need was evident in reviewing the lesson plans from the teachers who were using different techniques in their classroom such as one-to-one instruction, small group instruction, and differentiation instruction. The K–2 teachers expressed the need for more research-based strategies to support the implementation of RTI in their classroom. All the teachers were concerned that the research site school was not following the process and the procedures consistently among all the teachers on the fidelity implementation of RTI and providing interventions to students. This PD can provide teachers with more information on research-based strategies and interventions to properly implement RTI to improve students' academic achievement.

The third strength of the project study is the online training modules developed by the IRIS Center that the kindergarten to second grade teachers can receive self-directed training on RTI procedures. The RTI online training modules were created by the United States Department of Education Office of special Education Programs at Vanderbilt University. The programs at Vanderbilt University provides RTI resources that help teachers and the RTI team leaders to provide research-based practices in the implementation of the RTI model (IRIS, 2019). The online training materials can be completed by the teachers during their grade level meeting or at other times so they can discuss how the training materials can be applied to certain grade level at the local school. The teachers can receive a certificate of completion of the online modules and receive PM hours by taking the pre and posttest. I believe that the PD training will benefits the K–2 teachers in helping them to better understand how to implement the RTI model at the local school with fidelity. Also, the K–2 teachers can receive professional development credit upon completing these training modules.

Project Limitations

In qualitative research, the data collection can present limitations since the data are based on responses from conversations between participants and the researcher. These conversations could unintentionally influence the interviewee to give certain responses (Creswell, 2017). Case studies have become in many cases a synonym for freeform research where all is acceptable (Yazan, 2015). The absence of systematic procedures for case study research is something that some researchers acknowledged as a concern due to an absence of guidelines for methodology (Yazan, 2015). This study was limited to one

elementary school in a Southern state. Also, this study was limited to a small sample size of nine elementary teachers; therefore, the study will have limited transferability to other settings. I provided the reader with a clear description of the context of the study to assist in application of results to similar contexts.

Recommendations for Alternative Approaches

The problem that guided this study is that Kindergarten to second grade students is continuously below proficiency level performance in reading even though interventions are implemented through RTI. Despite increases in reading and English language arts scores on the state standardized testing, this school is still on the state low performing school list. The overview of County Elementary 2015 i-ready process monitoring, and assessment scores have determined that many Kindergarten to second grade students are not responding to strategies used in tiers 1 and 2 of the RTI process. This qualitative study examined how response to intervention (RTI), has been implemented, at County Elementary with Kindergarten to second grade students, and determined if it is with fidelity. The rationale behind this study was to explore if RTI is being implemented with fidelity given its constructivist base. The implications are aligned with the anticipated findings from this study in saying the RTI process requires knowledgeable teachers, personalization of lessons to meet student's needs, resource support in executing the RTI process with fidelity.

The findings provided valuable information related to the RTI conceptual framework model with the constructivist learning theory approach for this research to explore the perspectives of elementary teachers in one elementary school regarding the

fidelity implementation of RTI procedures in kindergarten to second grade. Students are actively involved in small group instruction, differentiated instruction, knowledge acquisition, and tiered interventions as part of the RTI process. The attributes involved in the RTI process contribute to data collection and analyzing these data by discovering themes, categories and codes that revealed answers to the research questions. The results from the interviews from the participating school principal, instructional coach, teachers, and other members of the RTI team, and classroom instruction observation analysis will be used to determine the fidelity of implementation of RTI within the participating elementary school. RTI, when implemented with fidelity, is designed to increase reading proficiency of kindergarten to second grade students that are struggling in reading. Studying this problem could help teachers at the research site implement RTI strategies effectively and consistently to help students build upon their reading skills to become proficient readers.

The PD sessions with the K–2 teachers would provide them with information on strategies, resources, and design different support systems with implementing fidelity of the RTI process. The alternative approaches to provide PD to the K–2 teachers include allowing the teachers to take the IRIS Center training modules in their planning periods throughout the school year so they can be up to date on research-based interventions strategies. Beach (2017) reported that the use of web-based learning is a good source to provide information to teachers which provide them access and opportunities to increase their instructional knowledge and to increase their professional knowledge on different subjects. Also, all K–2 teachers will be provided a resources manual on different

research-based intervention d strategies they can refer to for each of the tier areas with the RTI model. They will also be provided examples of strategies with using progress monitoring.

Another alternative approach to providing PD training for the kindergarten to second grade teachers would be during their grade level meeting and during the school all day institute that is held throughout the year. The teachers meet for their grade level meeting 2 days a week for 1 hour after school hours. One hour of this time can be devoted to participating in a live training session with PD on the fidelity implementation of the RTI process. The teachers would also be allowed time to collaborate and share information on research-based strategies they are currently using in their classroom This PD would be delivered 1 day a week for 3 months which would be 12 hours in length devoted to PD on the fidelity implementation of the RRI process to increase academic achievement for students in their classroom.

A fourth alternative would be to allow teachers to meet once a month by grade level to discuss different strategies they are currently using such as research-based interventions, and strategies on progress monitoring with students. Also, the department chair for each grade level would attend al of the PD training session in the summer and conduct small group training sessions with certain teachers to make sure they are implementing the RTI model with fidelity. In addition, the principal of the research site school could assign certain online learning modules as enrichment to individual teachers who may need additional training and support on the RTI and progress monitoring process.

Scholarship

Researchers such as Lam (2017) reported that scholarship is when a person develop knowledge and skills through studying subject matter in detail through university learning. I have learning much in scholarship while progressing through the program from completing the course work, completing the prospectus, and completing the project study. Throughout my studies here at Walden University, I gained much training as a scholarship practitioner. The first thing I learned here at Walden University is that the doctoral experience was very complex, challenging, and a life changing process but one can achieve success if you persist to the end. I had to learning such elements as research and writing, how to synthesize academic research articles and write down my isas in a systematic way to achieve my goals in life. Also, I followed the advice of my advisors and project chair when helping me to complete certain tasks on the project study such as using the Walden library databases to search for current articles and sources to support my research.

Secondly, developing the project study on the fidelity implementation of the RTI model provided me the opportunity to grow as a scholar researcher and practitioner. My research and writing skills improved over time through my doctoral journey through the program. Also, I learned and applied different research methods in course assignments until I decided to use the qualitative method for my project study. I learned how to solve issues and problems related to data collection and the data analysis process. I learned to importance of ethical practices throughout the research process to ensure that the researcher protect the rights of human subjects who were participants in the project study

through the data collection process. In addition, I learned over time in the doctoral programs to have frequent communication with the chair and the committee in make the necessary correction to the project study to bring it to completion.

Project Development

Researchers such as Renzulli et al. (2021) noted the importance of applying learning that make a connection with students and help them to apply what they learn to real world situations. As a special education teacher and candidate at Walden University doctorate in education in curriculum instruction and assessment, I wanted to research a topic that was a need in my school district. Also, I wanted to research a topic that would influence teachers' instructional practice that could advance best practices by creating new knowledge and change instructional practices to income the academic achievement of students in the school district. As a special education teacher who is on the receiving end of student placed in special education classrooms, I was aware of the need for research on the fidelity implementation of the RTI model. The K–2 teachers at the research site were struggling with the fidelity implementation of RTI model which affected student learning and achievement.

After completing the literature search for the project study, I began to consider how the project study can meet the needs of teachers at the research site. The RTI project progressed to the data collect, coding and the data analysis stag. I wanted to get the perceptions of teachers and how they felt about the RTI process and whether they understood the fidelity implementation of the RTI process for teachers in their classroom. I conducted interviews and lesson plan reviews with several teachers at the research site.

The participants believed that teachers were not on the same page when it came to implementing RTI model in their classrooms. Also, the teachers felt that they need more training on research-based intervention strategies to use in the classroom with implementing RTI. The findings from the project study with the teachers led to the development of PD for the K–2 teachers to provide them with more information and trainings on research-based intervention on the fidelity implementation of the RTI model at the research site. Therefore, I wanted to provide the teachers with guidance in the form of training sessions several times a year that could enhance the RTI program fidelity to ensure consistency in the implementation of the program and provide clarity on RTI procedures and provide the teachers an opportunity to collaborate with each other on the implementation of RTI in their classroom.

Project Evaluation

The evaluation for this project is done through formative evaluation. Formative evaluation aims to test the current knowledge of participants and allow them to adjust their knowledge to meet the participants needs in a learning session (Buelin et al., 2019). The goal of the PD sessions was to improve the K-12 teachers understanding regarding the fidelity implementation of RTI procedures in K–2 grades on decision made to move students between the two tiers, and what programs resources are assessed. The project research provided six open ended questions at the end of each session to give the K–2 teachers the opportunity to provide formative feedback on the sessions and to make suggestions for future training sessions. In addition to the formative assessment at the end of the sessions, I will conduct informal assessment during the sessions to make sure that

all participants are actively engaged in the PD and participating in the session activities to acquire a greater understanding of the RTI procedures and strategies for interventions to be used in their classroom with students.

Leadership and Change

This project has potential for positive social change because it can help influence K-12 teachers to improve their instructional strategies so that it can improve the academic performance of students at the research site, the local community at large and can be used by other school districts in the state to improve best practices for students receiving RTI interventions. Researchers reported if teachers receive the proper training and development on the RTI process, they can develop the necessary skill set to properly implement the RTI model in their classrooms. The findings provided valuable information related to the RTI conceptual framework model with the constructivist learning theory approach for this research to explore the perspectives of elementary teachers in one elementary school regarding the fidelity implementation of RTI procedures in K-2 grades on decision made to move students between the two tiers, and what program resources are needed to carry out the assessments for these students. Students are actively involved in small group instruction, differentiated instruction, knowledge acquisition and tiered interventions as part of the RTI process. The attributes involved in the RTI process contribute to data collection and analyzing these data by discovering themes, categories and codes that revealed answers to the research questions.

The results from the interviews from the participating school principal, instructional coach, teachers, and other members of the RTI team, and classroom

instruction observation analysis will be used to determine the fidelity of implementation of RTI within the participating elementary school. RTI when implemented with fidelity is designed to increase reading proficiency of kindergarten to second grade students that are struggling in reading. Studying this problem could help teachers at the research site implement RTI strategies effectively and consistently to help students build upon their reading skills to become proficient readers. Coonce (2015) revealed that, with RTI, schools use data to identify students at risk for poor learning outcomes, monitor student progress, and provide evidence-based interventions. The results of the data assist with adjusting the intensity and nature of those interventions depending on a student's responsiveness and identify students with disabilities

Analysis of Self as a Scholar

As I look back at my doctoral at Walden University, I can say that I have grown in the areas of research and writing and learned how to conduct research in a systematic way on the doctoral level. Also, throughout my journey in the doctoral program, I have developed my critical thinking skills so that I can synthesize articles and sources to complete my project study document. In addition, I can collect, analyze, and interpret research data in a way to draw certain conclusions from the research. Also, in the data collection process, I had to learn how to interview the participants in a way that made them feel comfortable and to share their perceptions and experiences about the RTI process at the research site. As a result, I had to learn how to conduct qualitative interviewing skills such as probing questions, showing empathy to the participants, allowing the participants to express themselves, and providing feedback to the

participants in the interview process. Also, I had to learn to review code and analyze the lesson plan review from the K–2 teachers on the different RTI intervention strategies they were using with students in their classroom. Through this process I have matured as a scholar and researcher which is a role that can allow me to make positive social change in future work in general and at the research site.

Analysis of Self as a Practitioner

As a student in the doctoral program, I have learned how to apply what I have learn by conducting the project study to be a practitioner in help others in the education field to be better teachers for students. Currently, I am a special education with 10 years of experience working in the school district where I conducted my project study. I have learned many things from Walden University about the teaching profession through my doctoral journey and try hard to apply what I have learning to advance best practices and academic expectation for myself and for the students I teach at the research site. I also try to self-reflect on education things concerning my students and on teaching practices for the classroom. As a practitioner, I have attended many PD on several topic and have implemented several school districts initiatives for the classroom in the past years working in this school district. Also, I have learned different instructional strategies through PD and have grown over the years by applying what I have learned to increase the academic achievement of the students I teach in the classroom. As a scholar practitioner, I have learned from other teachers as we discuss and collaborate in different types of learning experiences with the goal of applying what we learn to become better teachers for the student population we teach daily. In addition, I continue to participate in

school district and local schools' PD to increase y knowledge and understanding of various education topic These training have allowed me to gain increase knowledge to create PD on RTI model for teachers at the research site.

Analysis of Self as a Project Developer

Conducting research on a topic and applying to a project was something different and challenging for because I did not know the differences between a project study and a traditional dissertation. I learned at Walden University that a project study examines a local problem and design a project to implement with a group of people that can transform social change. As an educator and students working on my doctorate, I had worked on several class and school related projects such designing research-based interventions and accommodation strategies for teachers who work with students with disabilities in their classroom before this experience. This project was a little different because I had to go through a project of researching the topic, design the project, recruit participants for the project study, collect the data from the participants, analyze the data interpreter draw certain conclusions for the research write the final report, and design the PD project to implement it to teachers in a way so they could use what they learned and apply it in their classrooms. I developed the PD from the project study to provide that teachers with assistance in implementing the RTI model with fidelity so that all teachers can implement the RTI model the same way in their classroom to promote academic achievement.

Reflection on the Importance of the Work

This research was intended to gain an understanding of underlying reasons, opinions, and motivations of teachers implementing RTI with fidelity to kindergarten to 2nd grade students to improve their reading. Documenting and analyzing teacher perspectives and challenges on RTI implementation will help future teachers with interventions for reading. This qualitative study explored the problems of RTI implementation to provide effective instructional interventions for reading literacy. The findings of my study may help me develop a project for teachers at the local school that can influence student achievement by means of implementing RTI with fidelity. These finding may also assist in future recommendations for the RTI process that will help improve and align program implementation in the classrooms.

RTI utilizes a problem-solving framework to identify and address academic and behavioral difficulties for all students using scientific, research-based instruction. The county school system developed a response to intervention/ student support team (RTI/SST) manual. The intent of the county school system RTI/SST manual is to clarify the principles and components of the RTI process and offers guidelines related to making decision within system. It also suggests approaches for data collection in the RTI process to identify specific learning disabilities as well as other disabilities. The County School System RTI/SST manual answer frequent questions and identify other resources that the school may use.

The PD training may help teachers to implement RTI interventions with fidelity in their classroom. Professional Training could help teachers to better implement RTI to

students that struggle with reading. Standard practice interventions are suggested to answer the questions about what students need in the classroom when performing below proficiency. These interventions may be developed at the school level based on student's needs and students with similar struggles may be grouped together to work on skill deficits

Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research

The purpose of the study was to explore K–2 teachers' perceptions regarding the fidelity implementation of RTI procedures in K–2 grades. Further, this study obtained important information regarding support the teachers provide in each tier of the RTI model. Interviews and lesson plans review of the K–2 elementary teachers provided in-depth understanding of the fidelity implementation of the RTI model that will enhance student learning and impact reading achievement. In addition, the constructivism and implementation framework support the importance of implementing interventions with the quality, frequency, and alignment that the developer designed in the intervention. Researchers noted that if RTI implementation quality is linked to student outcomes, schools may benefit from analyzing their implementation using the scale for reading (RTIS-R) or a similar measure at least annually to execute planning for RTI implementation and to monitor progress (Jackson & Alvarez, 2017; Ruffin, 2016).

This project study has potential to advance knowledge about RTI which can create positive social change for K–2 teachers in their classroom to increase the academic achievement of the students they teach. The positive social change can come from the teachers participating in the RTI professional develop their skill to improve the

implementation of the RTI model at the class level. As the K–2 teachers improve their instruction strategies, students learning, and achievement can also improve.

Directions for future research could come from providing teachers PD not only at the research site but other teachers throughout the current school district. Also, PD could be implemented to elementary schools in other school districts in the surrounding areas of the fidelity implementation of the RTI model in their school district. I plan on coordinating with administrators in all schools in the district to share the findings from this study and offer them the opportunity to schedule more PD on the fidelity implementation of RTI model at the elementary level at their school. Also, the findings could be used to guide future RTI decisions among teachers concerning improve the implementation of RTI among all teachers to reduce the increase of students being placed in special education. With further modifications and research, this project study could be used in different settings with comparable PD needs on the fidelity implementation of the RTI model.

Conclusions

The purpose of the study was to explore K–2 teachers' perceptions regarding the fidelity implementation of RTI procedures in K–2 grades. To better understand the problem and purpose of this project study, I conducted interview and lesson plans review of the teachers who were implementing RTI at their local school. The goals for this project study were to create a project to meet the diverse needs of the K–2 teachers. The overarching goals of this project study was to improve the fidelity implementation of RTI framework model to increase students' academic achievement. Also, the project study

provided future learning opportunities for teachers and can assist the school districts who are struggling with the fidelity implementation of RTI model. Also, I was able to provide a self-reflection on the project study to be able to understand the importance of the RTI model on students' academic achievement and positive social change.

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Appendix A Part 1: The Project

Response to Intervention (RTI) Workshop

The findings from the data analysis of the interviews and the lesson plans review in Section 2 showed the need for more PM training sessions of the fidelity implementation of RTI at the local school. Data analysis in this project study suggested that was a gap in some teachers understanding regarding the fidelity implementation of RTI procedures in K–2 grades on decisions made to move students between the two tiers, and what program resources are needed to carry out the assessments for these students. Based on the analysis of the findings, there should be more professional development and training at the local school for teachers on the best practices for implementing RTI with fidelity at the local school. The project should be delivered several times during the school academic year for several evening or on the teachers' professional development working days. In the recommendations for evidence-based practices, I will provide research-based instructional strategies for teachers and resources that the teachers can use to implement the RTI framework model with fidelity at their local school. The project created because of the findings from this project study is to provide K–2 teachers PD training on the fidelity implementation of RTI.

The PD will focus on understanding the RTI model process for the local school, research-based strategies such as one-to-one instruction, small group instruction, differentiation instruction, progress monitoring, and data-based decision making for students. The PD will take place during the local school faculty meeting in January, February, and March 2021 and will be split into different sections and presented at the

grade level meetings of the K–2 teachers. The PD information will be presented using slideshow presentation (see Appendix B) and using RTI online training created by the United States Department of Education Office of Special Education Programs at Vanderbilt University. The programs at Vanderbilt University provides RTI resources that help teachers and the RTI team leaders to provide research-based practices in the implementation of the RTI model (IRIS, 2019). The online training materials will be completed by the teachers during their grade level meeting so they can discuss how the training materials can be applied to certain grade level at the local school. The teachers can receive a certificate of completion of the online modules and receive PM hours by taking the pre and posttest. I believe that the PD training will benefits the K–2 teachers in helping them to better understand how to implement the RTI model at the local school with fidelity.

Resources and Supports Needed for the Project

The two resources needed to effectively implement the RTI mode at the research site is administrative support and teacher but-in of the RTI model. The RTI model will need positive and strong leadership from the administration at the school district and the local school level if the programs are to be successful at the local school. Researchers noted that strong leadership is important if a program initiative is going to work successful at a school district (Anderson, 2017; March et al., 2019). The school principal has a strong influence on whether the RTI model works at the school and how teachers react and implement the RTI programs at the local school level (McIntosh et al., 2016). Also, March et al. (2019) reported that the two main forces that must take place to

enhance change in the school district is administrative support from the school district level and the support received from the local school building principal which can enhance teacher buy-in of the RTI programs. It can also enhance whether the teachers have a positive or negative attitude and belief concerning the implementation of the RTI program.

Some other resources needed for the project include a room to hold the meeting and computer and projector equipment to present the presentation, internet connection, a computer laptop for the teachers to complete the online modules, and project evaluation assessments. The PD will need to be in a room large enough so that the teachers can share their experiences learned from the presentation with other teacher at the presentation. Also, as a facilitator of the PD training, I will make sure that the room is ready for the PD training and all equipment is working properly for the PD training sessions.

There are no financial resources needed for the PD training because all the equipment and the location of the PD training sessions will take place at the local schools where the teachers already work. I received support from the administration and the RTI team leader who feel that the teachers need more PD and training. I have already discussed the findings from the project study and they both support the project being implemented and the timeline at the school during the months of January, February, and March 2021 faculty meetings. Also, I will provide additional training to the teachers at their grade level meeting during the months of January, February, and March 2021. In addition, the school technology coordinator will provide support and make sure I have enough computer laptops for the online modules that the teachers will complete.

Project Implementation and Timeline

The project expected implementation date for the PD and training session is set for 2020-2021 school year. Also, the project is ready to be implemented pending approval from the doctoral study committee. The project study findings will first be presented to the local administration and the RTI team to provide an overview and rationale for the project being presented to the K–2 teachers to further their knowledge and skill on the fidelity implementation of the school RTI model to increase students learning and achievement in their classroom. Upon approval to present the training with the K–2 teachers, I will meet with the RTI team to present the timeline and schedule for the PD training sessions and to provide them with the training materials so they can review it before the PD training take place with the teachers. In addition, I will also meet with the technology person to obtain all the necessary equipment necessary for the PD training sessions which will take place for the months of January, February, and March 2021. The PD training session will take place for three faculty meetings with will last for two hours each time and with the grade level teachers for five times for a total of five hours. The total time allotted for the training sessions will be 15 hours. The PD training session will end with the K–2 teachers completing an evaluation form where they will have the opportunity to address any concerns or issues with the PD training sessions.

Project Evaluation Plan

It is important to have an evaluation plan for the PD project to determine the strengths and weaknesses of the plan and to determine the quality for positive social change for the intended audiences. The evaluation process is done to inform and guide

reform efforts by the researcher and other stakeholders (Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2017). Drago-Severson and Blum-DeStefano (2017) reported that evaluations are done with PD as a way to measure the program activities to determine the knowledge level of the teachers in terms of their beliefs and attitudes towards the PD activities being presented to them. This PD is intended to improve the K–2 teacher knowledge and skills on the fidelity implementation of the RTI at their local school.

The evaluation for this project was done through formative evaluation. Formative evaluation aims to test the current knowledge of participants and allow them to adjust their knowledge to meet the participants' needs in a learning session (Buelin et al., 2019). The goal of the PD sessions is to improve the K-12 teachers' understanding regarding the fidelity implementation of RTI procedures in K–2 grades on decisions made to move students between the two tiers, and what program resources are assessed. The project research will provide six open-ended questions at the end of each session to give the K–2 teachers the opportunity to provide formative feedback on the sessions and to make suggestions for future training sessions. In addition to the formative assessment at the end of the sessions, I will conduct informal assessment during the sessions to make sure that all participants are actively engaged in the PD and participating in the session activities to acquire a greater understanding of the RTI procedures and strategies for interventions to be used in their classroom with students.

Project Implication

This research is intended to gain an understanding of underlying reasons, opinions, and motivations of teachers implementing RTI with fidelity to kindergarten to

2nd grade students to improve their reading. The findings of my study may help me develop a project for teachers at the local school that can influence student achievement by means of implementing RTI with fidelity. These findings may also assist in future recommendations for the RTI process that will help improve and align program implementation in the classrooms.

Professional development training may help teachers to implement RTI interventions with fidelity in their classroom. Also, PD training could help teachers to better implement RTI to students that struggle with reading. Standard practice interventions are suggested to answer the questions about what students need in the classroom when performing below proficiency. These interventions may be developed at the school level based on student's needs and students with similar struggles may be grouped together to work on skill deficits. This approach has evidence-based support within the area of reading, particularly at the elementary level (Department of Psychological Services, 2015). Results of the study by Murphy (2015) showed that the teacher is the most important factor in student achievement. It is essential that teachers utilize research-based strategies, engage in thoughtful assessment leading to instruction, and have knowledge of assessments to develop strategic lesson plans and intense professional development training of practicing research based best processes to reach the students. This qualitative study may influence the administrators in that the results will help them to make decisions in the best interest of the teachers, as well as all students.

Project Social Change

This project has potential for positive social change because it can help influence K-12 teachers to improve their instructional strategies so that it can improve the academic performance of students at the research site, the local community at large and can be used by other school districts in the state to improve best practices for students receiving RTI interventions. Researchers reported if teachers receive the proper training and development on the RTI process, they can develop the necessary skill set to properly implement the RTI model in their classrooms. The findings provided valuable information related to the RTI conceptual framework model with the constructivist learning theory approach for this research to explore the perspectives of elementary teachers in one elementary school regarding the fidelity implementation of RTI procedures in K–2 grades on decision made to move students between the two tiers, and what program resources are needed to carry out the assessments for these students. Students are actively involved in small group instruction, differentiated instruction, knowledge acquisition and tiered interventions as part of the RTI process. The attributes involved in the RTI process contribute to data collection and analyzing these data by discovering themes, categories and codes that revealed answers to the research questions.

The results from the interviews from the participating school principal, instructional coach, teachers, and other members of the RTI team, and classroom instruction observation analysis will be used to determine the fidelity of implementation of RTI within the participating elementary school. RTI when implemented with fidelity is designed to increase reading proficiency of kindergarten to second grade students that are

struggling in reading. Studying this problem could help teachers at the research site implement RTI strategies effectively and consistently to help students build upon their reading skills to become proficient readers. Coonce (2015) revealed that, with RTI, schools use data to identify students at risk for poor learning outcomes, monitor student progress, and provide evidence-based interventions. The results of the data assist with adjusting the intensity and nature of those interventions depending on a student's responsiveness and identify students with disabilities.

Part 2

Training materials for the Professional Development Workshop

The PD training sessions which will take place for the months of January, February, and March 2021. The PD training session will take place for three faculty meetings with will last for two hours each time and with the grade level teachers for five times for a total of five hours. The total time allotted for the training sessions will be 15 hours. The PD training session will end with the K–2 teachers completing an evaluation form where they will have the opportunity to address any concerns or issues with the PD training sessions.

The training materials needed for the PD will be a PowerPoint slide presentation for all three training sessions. The title of the slide presentation is Strengthening RTI for At-Risk Learners which is located at the following link:

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/5peaca4flkdwngp/The%20PD%20%20Project%209-15-20.ppts?d=0>

Also, the mini sessions with grade level teachers on implementing RTI in different subjects will be taken from the IRIS Center on RTI from Vanderbilt University.

The following are the training materials needed for the project PD presentation:

- Laptop computers for participants
- Wireless Internet access
- Power cords for laptops and charging capabilities
- Presenter's laptop computer with Microsoft PowerPoint 2010 or higher capabilities

- PowerPoint slide presentation for all sessions
- Access to the IRIS Center website
- Access to the school district’s shared RTI Google drive for the participants to retrieve documentation and forms
- Pens and post-it notes pads
- A copy of the session evaluation for each teacher to complete
- Printed agenda for each of the three session for participants
- Printed handouts of PowerPoint presentation for all sessions for the participants

Agenda

The PD will take place during the monthly faculty meetings for January, February, and March 2021. Also,

Professional Development Session 1 Agenda (2-Hours and a Half)

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| 3:00-3:15 | Welcome, Outline the training and PD learning objectives |
| 3:15-4:00 | RTI/Purpose/ Benefits PowerPoint |
| 4:05-4:30 | Discussion on RTI with Teachers |
| 4:30-5:00 | Differentiating Instruction overview and strategies |
| 5:00-5:15 | Discussion with teachers and provide example of DI strategies |
| 5:15-5:30 | Review/Closure/Reflection: Evaluation |

Professional Development Session 2 Agenda (2-Hours and a half)

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| 3:00-3:15 | Welcome, Outline the training and PD learning objectives |
| 3:15-4:00 | Progress Monitoring Overview Benefits |

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|-----------|--|
| 4:05-4:30 | Small Group Activity on Progress Monitoring |
| 4:30-5:00 | Discussion with teachers and provide example on progress monitoring with RTI |
| 5:00-5:15 | IRIS Center Module: Data-Based Decision Making |
| 5:15-5:30 | Review/Closure/Reflection: Evaluation |

Professional Development Session 3 Agenda (2 Hours and a half)

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| 3:00-3:15 | Welcome, Outline the training and PD learning objectives |
| 3:15-4:00 | RTI Sustainability, Implementation/time guidelines |
| 4:00-4:30 | Group activity on implementation of RTI |
| 4:30-5:00 | IRIS Center Module: Considerations for School Leaders |
| 5:00-5:15 | Collaboration strategies |
| 5:15-5:30 | Review/Closure/Reflection: Evaluation |

Professional Development Mini Session Grade Level Sessions with IRIS Center Modules

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|--|--|
| Session 1: RTI Assessment | 30 minutes presentation and Discussion |
| Session 2: RTI Reading | 30 minutes presentation and Discussion |
| Session 3: RTI Mathematics | 30 minutes presentation and Discussion |
| Session 4: RTI Language Arts | 30 minutes presentation and Discussion |
| Session 5: RTI data analysis teaming process | 30 minutes presentation and Discussion |
| | Review/ Closure/Reflection: Evaluation |

Evaluation Plan

The evaluation of the professional development (PD) training sessions will focus on the effectiveness of the PD to increase the teachers' knowledge and skills to implement RTI in their classrooms with fidelity. The evaluation of this project will be formative and summative. Informal evaluations can be completed by the participants' level of knowledge and engagement during the collaborative and reflective responses from the participants during the PD training sessions. The formative evaluation for this

PD project will be completed when the teachers provide feedback after completing each PD session. An exit evaluation will consist of three open-ended questions administered to the teachers after the training sessions will serve as formative evaluation feedback from the participants in order to improve future training sessions. The data from these pre and post evaluation tools can be used by the school's RTI facilitator to monitor the teacher's knowledge and understanding of RTI and to identify areas where improvements are needed. At the end of the PD workshops, the participants will complete a summative evaluation of the project in the form of a questionnaire. The questionnaire will be used to capture the teachers' perceptions and experience of the influence that the PD session had on instructional practices. The findings from both the exit evaluation from each session and the questionnaire will be used to enhance the project for future training sessions on providing teachers with information and trainings on the implementation of RTI at the local school

Part 3

Professional Development Questionnaire

The purpose of this evaluation is to acquire participant feedback about your participation in the RTI professional development training sessions to inform future RTI workshops.

INSTRUCTIONS: Please complete the following open-ended questions concerning your thoughts on the materials presented in this workshop session:

1. What did you learn in today's workshop sessions?

2. What could have been done better today?

3. What are your thoughts on the training goals and objectives?

4. Were you well informed about the goals and objectives of this training session? If so, how?

Do you still have any questions or concerns that need to be addressed in the future?

Appendix B: Recruitment Letter

Dear K- 2nd Grade Teachers:

I am a doctoral student at the Walden University. I am conducting research as one of the requirements to earn a doctorate degree in Education. The purpose of this qualitative case study is to examine if the response to intervention (RTI) in reading in whole group, small groups and individual practice was implemented with fidelity and consistency in kindergarten through 2nd grade students at a suburban county elementary school. You are invited to participate in this study because you are a Kindergarten to second grade teacher that implement RTI to struggling reading.

Participation in this research includes a face-to-face interview on your experiences in implementing with the RTI and classroom observation of instructional practices. The face-to-face interview will last from 45 to 60 minutes. Each member checking session will take about 20 minutes in length. You will be asked to provide two lesson plans for review. Participation in the study will be strictly voluntary.

The individual interviews will take place via TEAMS online platform.

Your participation is extremely important in exploring the perceptions of elementary teachers regarding the fidelity implementation of RTI procedures in K – 2nd grade. If you have additional questions, please contact me any time after 6:00 pm during weekdays. You may contact me at XXX or by email: XXX.

Best regards,

Sandra L. Joyner. Ed. S

Appendix C: Interview Protocol

Part 1: Background Questions

1. Tell me a little about your background.
2. How long have you been teaching at the elementary level?
3. How long have you been teaching at County Elementary School?
4. How familiar are you with implementing RTI?

Part II: Response to Intervention (RTI) Definitions and Experiences

1. What do you know about the Response to Intervention (RTI) Model?
2. How do you perceive the importance of implementing RTI?
3. What are the three key components of RTI?
4. What are the key elements of Response to Intervention RTI?
5. What factors determine placement in RTI tiers?
6. What happens in Tier 1 of RTI?
7. What is a Tier 2 intervention?
8. What is the difference between Tier 2 and Tier 3?
9. What is the example of intervention?
10. How does RTI work in the classroom?
11. What are some examples of RTI interventions?
12. What is the primary goal of a response to intervention RTI plan?
13. What are the challenges of using an RTI model with fidelity?
14. What are the pros and cons of RTI?
15. How do you perceive the fidelity and effectiveness of implementing RTI?

Appendix D: Lesson Plans Review

| Elements of the RTI Framework | Evidence in the Lesson Plans | Not Evidence in the Lesson Plans |
|--|------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Does the teachers' implementation of RTI reading strategies to support students to increase their reading achievement evident in the lesson plans? | | |
| Does the teachers' lesson plan show understand of the goal and objectives of the curriculum to implementation of RTI Tiered model? | | |
| What are the teachers approaches to implementing the research-based reading to students in the classroom outlined in the lesson plans? | | |
| Do the lesson plans provide examples on the students' grade level of understanding throughout their lesson? If so, please provide some examples. | | |
| Is there anything in the lesson plans requirements that demonstrate students' outcome goals for students who are having academic problems? | | |
| Is there anything else observed in the classroom that are relevant to the study? | | |

Appendix E: Confidentiality Agreement for Peer Reviewer

Peer Reviewer Confidentiality Agreement

Confidentiality Agreement

I, _____, have agreed to be the peer reviewer for the study entitled: A Qualitative Study on the Fidelity Implementation of Response to Intervention for K–2 Students in Reading.

In assuming this role, I agree to:

1. Keep all the research information shared with me confidential by not discussing or sharing the research information in any form or format (e.g., transcripts) with anyone other than Sandra L. Joyner.]
2. Keep all research information in any form or format (e.g., hard copy, digital) secure while it is in my possession.
3. Return all research information in any form or format (e.g., hard copy, digital) to Sandra L. Joyner when I have completed the research tasks.
4. After consulting with Sandra L. Joyner erase or destroy all research information in any form or format regarding this research project that is not returnable to Sandra L. Joyner (e.g., information stored on computer hard drive).

(Researcher - print name)

(signature)

(date)

(Peer Reviewer- print name)

(signature)

(date)