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## Teachers' Experience with the Implementation of Response to Intervention

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# Walden University

College of Education and Human Sciences

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Laura Lynette Gamboa

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,  
and that any and all revisions required by  
the review committee have been made.

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Walden University  
2024

Abstract

Teachers' Experience with the Implementation of Response to Intervention

by

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MA, University of Texas at Brownsville, 2010

BS, University of Texas at Brownsville, 2008

Project Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Special Education

Walden University

February 2024

## Abstract

Response to Intervention (RtI) implementation has been an issue at a local school district in the United States for several years. Teachers have reported lack of resources and training on the RtI process and minimal support from administration, which have impeded their understanding of the intervention. As a result, students who are receiving RtI are not being provided with adequate instruction. The purpose of this study was to examine teachers' experiences and the barriers that hinder RtI delivery. The conceptual frameworks that grounded this study consisted of Malcolm Knowles's theory of andragogy, the concepts of self-direction, and adult education in learning. Using purposive sampling, 10 teachers from a local kindergarten through Grade 5 campus who deliver RtI were selected to participate in the study. They participated in semi-structured interviews about their RtI experiences. Data analysis consisted of open coding and thematic analysis. The findings revealed themes that may contribute to ineffective RtI implementation such as limited knowledge on RtI and interventions, inadequate professional development, minimal time for implementation, extensive paperwork, minimal resources, and insufficient support from administration. This qualitative study may influence positive social change by identifying RtI coaching and adequate professional development as potential strategies for increasing teachers' knowledge on RtI procedures and implementation. Improvements in teachers' implementation and delivery of interventions could increase academic performance, achievement, and overall success in the classroom which may potentially lead to higher test scores and improved campus ratings.

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## Dedication

First of all, I would like to dedicate this project to my Father God, for without his strength, I would not have made it through the program. I would also like to thank my family for all their support, motivation, and words of encouragement when I felt like giving up.

My beautiful daughters Miranda and Carla, you are both my inspiration, and my motivation to be the best. Thank you both for always understanding and being patient all those times you heard, "I can't because I have schoolwork". You are what I live for, and I dedicate this to you both! My lovely parents, Momma and Daddy-O, thank you for giving me life, for loving and guiding me, and shaping me into the woman that I am today. My beautiful and strong sister Norma, thank you for being such an amazing role model and inspiring me all my life. My awesome brother Bobby, thank you for always encouraging me to keep going and always telling me that I got this! Gus Jr., Isabella, and Adam, my gorgeous grandchildren, you three are my greatest blessings and you are my entire heart and soul. Thank you for motivating me to be the best and smartest grandma ever! THANK YOU ALL FOR EVERYTHING! I AM FOREVER GRATEFUL.

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I love each of you with all my heart and soul and this project is dedicated to you!

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## Section 1: The Problem

The provision of proper support for students with learning disabilities and other academic challenges has been a longstanding concern of U.S. educators and policy makers. To address these issues, when they reauthorized the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA), U.S. lawmakers introduced instructional strategies and models to help educators classify students who are struggling academically and have specific learning disabilities.

to help classify students who are struggling academically and have specific learning disabilities. Although the model known as response to intervention (RtI) was not specifically mentioned in the reauthorization, it was presented within the act as a tool to assist educators in identifying students with specific learning disabilities (“Response to Intervention,” n.d.). Arias-Gundin and Llamazares (2021) explained that the overall purpose of RtI is to guarantee that all students, in spite of their abilities, are provided with the highest quality instruction and interventions prior to referral for special education services. Arias-Gundin and Llamazares (2021) also stated that RtI is a resource that can improve learning outcomes by preventing and detecting learning deficiencies at an early stage in an inclusive setting. Bester and Conway (2021) also noted that the implementation of RtI would lead to fewer referrals to special education, fewer students identified with a disability, and less overrepresentation of certain subgroups in special education. However, Gomez-Najarro (2020) also noted that referrals for students who continue to struggle can be made if they are unresponsive to RtI instructional delivery.

Effective implementation of RtI is an issue for many U.S. educators, including at the local site.

### **The Local Problem**

Although, RtI was derived from IDEA (2004, Poon-McBrayer, 2018), the implementation, delivery, and maintenance of the process is the responsibility of general education teachers. This is true for a South Texas school district where general and special education teachers are primarily responsible for RtI's implementation and sustainability; they often struggle with successfully implementing it. Al Otaiba et al., (2019) stated that teachers do not feel confident implementing RtI because they often perceive it as a confusing, difficult, and inconsistent model which can, in turn, lead to ineffective implementation. Several general and special education teachers at a local elementary campus in South Texas also reported that many students, both within the general and special education populations, struggled to successfully complete their coursework and academic tasks despite the implementation of RtI according to general and special education teachers at the school. Al Otaiba et al., (2019) noted that due to teachers' lack of understanding of the RtI model, they are unable to execute the process adequately and at times, avoid implementing it in their classrooms as much as possible. As a result of not adequately operating RtI in the classroom, students can be deprived of the supports they need to achieve academic success.

Information from an accountability ratings report provided by the campus principal demonstrated that this local school was the lowest performing elementary

school within the district in the 2014–2015 school year according to a special education teacher. Similarly, in the 2015–2016 school year, although state standards were met, the school was ranked second lowest in the district in academic performance and accountability ratings. In addition, as of 2016, students at this local campus perform significantly lower than average for Texas in all subjects in the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR). The campus improvement plan for the 2015–2016 school years noted several areas that required attention including the improvement of RtI implementation for students in need, RtI initiation and follow up, and ongoing professional development for RtI. General and special education teachers at the local setting have also reported that due to their shortage in RtI training, they lack the necessary skills required to effectively implement, deliver, and maintain RtI interventions as stated by general and special education teachers. Johnson and Hutchins (2019) reported similar barriers noted by teachers, including gaps in their knowledge due to their lack of training in the areas of RtI interventions, progress monitoring methods, and use of RtI assessment instruments.

Finally, some major themes that correspond with teacher reports are a lack of understanding of the RtI process and insufficient professional development and/or training (Gomez-Najarro, 2020). Oslund (2021) also added that a lack of, or insufficient professional development that focuses on RtI can become a barrier when implementing the model. As a result, general and special education teachers indicated that they were often reluctant to put the model into practice, as they lacked the necessary training and

skills needed to effectively deliver RtI. Safari et al. (2020) noted that educators experienced challenges with RtI implementation due to their being unclear about their job roles and duties, how to administer interventions, and how to incorporate decision making based on student data. Some of the issues noted in the research are teacher frustration due to limited resources, lack of professional development and training, and limited knowledge and understanding of student data and the RtI model (Alahmari, 2019). Many of the issues described in prior research concerning RtI implementation are consistent with the problems experienced by teachers at the local campus on a regular basis.

### **Rationale**

Examining general and special education teachers' perspectives on their experiences with RtI and its implementation was the focal point of this study. I pursued this study because many teachers at the site reported significant barriers that lead to ineffective implementation. Research suggests that issues regarding RtI such as a lack in teacher training, knowledge, motivation, fidelity, support, and resources remain unresolved and require attention (Vollmer et al., 2019). RtI has also been linked to concerns such as teacher time becoming increasingly limited due to a rise in teacher responsibilities; the result is reduced time to effectively implement the model (Stafford, 2019). When implemented adequately and effectively, RtI has been linked to early prevention of academic deficiencies among special education students and minority groups (Grapin et al, 2019).



According to Dunn (2018), RtI has the potential to increase academic performance, reduce special education referrals, decrease inappropriate behaviors, and reduce disproportionality. Although this is the intent, many general and special education teachers at the study site indicated that they do not feel confident in implementing the model with efficacy due to their lack of skills, understanding, knowledge, and perception of RtI. To determine barriers of effective implementation of RtI, I conducted an in-depth basic qualitative study to explore the perspectives of select general and special education teachers within a kindergarten through Grade 5 (K–5) campus in a South Texas school district.

### **Evidence of the Problem at the Local Level**

As a special education lifeskills teacher who communicates closely and frequently with various grade level general and special education teachers at the study site, I am familiar with the lack of effective RtI implementation and delivery, adequate RtI training, and RtI resources, and supports. Due to these discrepancies, many teachers at this site who had students who were struggling in their classroom indicated to me that they were not fully implementing RtI, or at times, avoid the implementation altogether. Although training was provided, it was brief and provided during teachers planning periods, which were roughly about 45 min. In these training courses, teachers were most often provided with handouts or Power Points and the information was read verbatim by the presenter from the materials the teachers were given, teachers noted. During these training, teachers were required to complete modules during their extra time and were also given a

list of websites that offered different types of research-based interventions and support, a teacher stated.

Several teachers at this local campus stated that they did not feel these training were effective or beneficial and did not assist in increasing their knowledge to adequately identify student deficiencies. As a result, general and special education teachers were unable to implement adequate interventions that corresponded with student limitations; thus, students continued to struggle academically according to one general education teacher. In addition, general and special education teachers throughout the campus reported that they had never been provided with meaningful training such as full-day sessions throughout the school year, direct coaching, or RtI modeling in their classrooms.

General and special education teachers at this site requested different forms of support such as training with experts in the field, or individuals with a successful track of RtI implementation, two teachers shared. Training with these practitioners could allow teachers the opportunity to gain accurate information and knowledge about proper implementation of RtI and how struggling students should respond to the interventions, two teachers stated. Castillo et al., (2018), emphasized the significance of embedding these elements, via continuing professional development activities, on-going training, and job-embedded supports for teachers. Alahmari (2019) emphasized that adequate RtI can be implemented and maintained when practitioners are provided with accurate and sufficient information and training, and when teachers feel they are fully competent to deliver the model. Oslund (2021) agreed that rigorous training efforts and research is

necessary to provide teachers with the resources they need to help them implement RtI and its corresponding interventions with accuracy. Olsund also noted that direct support by trained RtI professionals can also assist in identification of students who require RtI, intervention accuracy, improved instructional practices and progress monitoring, and understanding of data interpretation. Castillo et al., (2018) stressed that these elements; along with collaborative reflection amongst teachers and RtI experts, are critical to the effective implementation of RtI.

Two teachers shared that there was also ample evidence of other significant deficits within the RtI process, such as the amount of paperwork and progress monitoring documentation teachers are required to complete. In the RtI process, continuous progress monitoring of student performance is regularly completed in the second and third tiers of implementation (Albattal, 2018). Progress monitoring can be a difficult process if teachers are not adequately trained in RtI and in collecting data and analysis procedures (Bruhn et al., 2018). Bruhn et al. (2018) also noted that progress monitoring is a key step in RtI implementation as it is applied to determine student's academic growth and/or regression and for intervention adjustments based on student responsiveness. Reister and Blanchard (2020) emphasized that progress monitoring is necessary to make well-informed intervention decisions and should be repeated regularly to assess student improvement.

General and special education teachers who implemented RtI in this local campus stated that progress monitoring was completed every 4 to 8 weeks. Many teachers,

however, were unable to make sound decisions about the students' progress or intervention success due to minimal training they received on progress monitoring. Progress monitoring is critical as it provides data showing how students perform compared to their peers (Lopuch, 2018). It also consistently measures student's responses throughout the process (Alahmari, 2019).

Educators delivering RtI are not only faced with not knowing how to properly implement RtI, but they also struggle with another substantial part of the process, which is the extensive paperwork that is required (Thomas et al., 2020). Many general education teachers within the district had not been adequately trained on how to properly fill out RtI paperwork. Therefore, many teachers only did what they could based on the minimal information they had been given through grade level meetings or after school training. The paperwork was then given to the campus diagnostician to be reviewed. As a result, the paperwork was returned to the teacher for corrections and revisions; however, errors often reoccurred because they did not have proper training noted one teacher. These deficits were critical because the core issues remained unresolved and the RtI process was often delayed due to continuous errors according to special and general education teachers.

An additional area of concern that may be related to ineffective implementation of RtI was the extended amount of time students were on RtI. Several teachers reported that some students had been receiving interventions for more than an entire school year and demonstrated minimal progress. Van et al., (2020) suggested that intervention duration

should be 6 to 20 weeks with one to three, 30-min sessions per day depending on the tier level and specific needs of the student. Although the number of weeks and/or months that RtI interventions were required varied depending on the student's needs; many educators at the site felt that if a student's progress was minimal or less than expected, interventions should be modified or changed. However, a teacher at the site reported that this did not occur and most often continued with the same interventions for an extended period, with minimal to no modifications. These deficits in RtI led me to further study and explore the perceived barriers of RtI implementation throughout the district.

### **Evidence of the Problem From Professional the Literature**

RtI was initiated under the reauthorized IDEA (2004) to assist students who are struggling in their coursework. With this reauthorization, the discrepancy model to identify students with specific learning disabilities was eliminated and replaced with an approach that identifies students with disabilities based on how they respond to research-based interventions (Hanauer & Yel, 2018). Hanauer and Yel (2018) also noted that RtI funding was provided specifically for general education students who had not yet been identified for special education services but were identified as struggling students who required additional academic or behavioral assistance. Although pre-screening, intervening, and monitoring supports, such as RtI, were intended to provide additional assistance for struggling students; current research has revealed many barriers in RtI implementation (Thomas et al., 2020). Some concerns regarding RtI have been noted such as, lack of professional development and training, teachers' uncertainties, and

misunderstandings about the RtI process, and lack of resources that lead to ineffective implementation (Nagro et al., 2019). Gomez-Najarro (2020) also found that teachers were unsatisfied by the lack of professional development, direct support and coaching, and educational resources they were receiving from their school leaders.

Bouton et al., (2018) stressed the importance of direct RtI tutor/expert assistance as it can provide classroom teachers with the help they need to effectively implement interventions, interpret the data, and translate the information into effective practices. General and special education teachers who are provided with this form of expert RtI training are more likely to have a positive attitude towards RtI (Castillo et al., 2018); however, this is difficult to attain throughout this local district as this type of support is very limited. Several general and special education teachers at the study site reported that their experiences in selecting and delivering interventions were limited; therefore, they felt that direct support within the classroom setting would benefit them greatly.

Recent research studies of the RtI model have affirmed that supports such as coaching and in-classroom training can contribute to effective implementation of RtI and result in improved academic achievement. Some of the key components to an effective coaching model include, content expertise, communication between educator and coach, adequate knowledge of, and skills in RtI, data based decision-making skills, leadership, and team facilitation (March et al., 2020). March et al. (2020) also noted that a coach or consultant can assist teachers in data analyzation to target student needs, integrate data to create measurable and realistic goals, create an effective plan of action, assess progress

towards students' goals, and distinguish imminent needs. He also emphasized that the coaching model is beneficial in improving teachers RtI knowledge and instructional practices while also enhancing students' academic performance. Vollmer et al. (2019) also stressed that via job-embedded training, technical support, and evaluation support from RtI experts is crucial in facilitating the RtI process and ensuring implementation fidelity and ongoing maintenance.

### **Definition of Terms**

According to Creswell (2018), researchers define terms so that the audience can understand the terminology that is used throughout the study. Defining terms can help in clarifying words that are common in the RtI process and that are relevant to this study.

The following terms and definitions are used in this study:

*Fidelity*-The degree to which the instruction is being practiced and maintained according to set standards and how it is linked to positive outcomes (Pas et al., 2022).

*Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA)*- A federal law that requires teachers to provide accommodations for students with significant and diverse academic and behavioral deficits in a general educational setting (Lim, 2020).

*Job embedded*-Learning that is supported through daily practices and is designed to improve teacher performance and practices (Croft et al., 2010).

*Progress monitoring*-The use of various forms of measurement to monitor student progress over a period of time; the resulting data can be used for decision-making (Alano et al., 2018).

*Research-Based Interventions*-Educational practices and instructional strategies or interventions that are supported by scientific studies and are designed to help students who are struggling in an area of need (Ansyari et al., 2020).

*Response to Intervention*-A multi-tiered model that is designed for early identification and support of students who demonstrate significant learning and behavioral deficits (Aspiranti, et al., 2019).

*State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR)*-A state-mandated assessment in Texas that was introduced in 2011-2012 and is directly connected to a subgroup of state standards and core curriculum (Everman, 2020).

### **Significance of the Study**

The study may help the leaders of a local elementary school in identifying significant barriers that impede general and special education teachers' adequate delivery and implementation of RtI. Kelley et al., (2018) stressed that RtI plays a significant role in the decision-making process regarding students who are struggling academically. Fan et al. (2018) also noted that data collected during the RtI process serves as a preventative measure that can help educators in determining whether a student who is experiencing difficulties can remain in a general education setting or be referred for special education services. Dawkins (2020) emphasized that it is critical for teachers to have the ability to



effectively implement RtI; in particular, due to the ongoing and increasing demands teachers face with struggling students. Fan et al. also noted that teachers can accomplish this with the provision of resources that specifically gauge what they require to target struggling students and to effectively implement RtI. However, without proper training and insufficient knowledge about RtI, teachers do not have the ability to follow through adequately; thus, leading to inconsistent results and misinformed decisions about struggling students (Albritton et al., 2018).

This study may help enable social change within this local campus, and eventually within the district, surrounding districts, and ultimately throughout the world. It can help in identifying ways to help general and special education teachers improve their knowledge and skills in RtI and help increase their fidelity of implementation at the school and district and national levels. According to Castillo et al., (2018) fidelity is crucial to the RtI process as it measures consistency in the planning, collection of data, and implementation of interventions. This study can also help in improving teachers' experiences with the RtI process and assist in creating positive teacher attitudes and beliefs about the process and can also influence an increase in teacher buy in and receptiveness. Lopuch (2018) suggested that teachers' perceptions were considered a key element to the effective implementation and maintenance of RtI. Castillo et al. (2018) also noted some of the critical components that contributed to positive attitudes and successful implementation including valuable training, motivation, knowledge, adequate resources, tools, & supports, value, and the willingness to participate in the process.

## Research Questions

The intent of this study was to examine and determine general and special education teachers perceived barriers that impede the adequate implementation of RtI in a local elementary school in South Texas. For educators to implement RtI adequately and effectively to students with academic deficiencies and/or behavioral concerns; the barriers they face should be determined and addressed (Zhang et al., 2019). A teacher stated that some of the ways that RtI concerns were addressed were through training and professional development sessions that were available throughout the school year during grade level meetings or after school faculty meetings. Fraser (2018) emphasized that teachers require preparation and should be provided with consistent and continuing support to successfully deliver RtI. However, the authors noted that RtI creates challenges that educators must cope with to implement and maintain the framework effectively (Thomas et al., 2020). Some of the challenges teachers faced were limited opportunities or time for professional development and implementation, RtI fidelity and reliability of intervention implementation, and specificity of roles and responsibilities, exchange of information on best practices between districts and state leaders, and collaboration between practitioners when planning (Henderson, 2018). Gomez-Najarro (2020) stressed that building competence for effective RtI implementation, leaders require collaboration and an examination of practices that enforce information sharing and innovation.

As a result of the challenges general education teachers faced, they were unable to reach their full potential in RtI implementation. Some teachers reported that they felt the RtI training and professional development that were available to them were inadequate, and without value as they continued to struggle in its implementation and maintenance. Castillo et al. (2018) noted a crucial question regarding RtI professional development and whether it can be suitably focused, intended, and delivered to accomplish the results necessary to develop teachers' aptitude and skills to effectively implement the model.

RtI is a problem solving and data driven model that is designed to improve the academic or behavioral performance of students who are struggling (Zhang et al., 2019). It is a preventative, early identification tool that provides increasing instructional support that is adapted to meet the unique learning needs of students (Troester et al., 2022). Henderson (2018) noted that effective RtI delivery requires several critical components such as multifaceted decision-making including collaboration between special and general education teachers to target students who are struggling, intensity of interventions, progress monitoring, and the type of evaluation to use prior to referring or placing the student in special education. In order for general and special education teachers to ensure the effectiveness of RtI, change must occur in how they obtain RtI information, the manner in which they are trained, and how barriers are addressed (Gomez-Najarro, 2020). The following research questions (RQ's) will be investigated in the study:

RQ1 What significant barriers do general education teachers experience that contribute to the inadequate implementation, delivery, and maintenance of the RtI process?

RQ2 What significant barriers do special education teachers experience that contribute to the inadequate implementation, delivery, and maintenance of the RtI process?

RQ3 What supports and resources do general and special education teachers believe should be provided to them for more effective and adequate implementation of RtI?

RQ4 What do general and special education perceive as some of the most beneficial outcomes of the RtI model when implemented and delivered adequately?

### **Review of the Literature**

The review of literature provides information that corresponds with how general and special education teachers perceive the RtI model and its implementation and sustainability. It also examines some of the perceived barriers and challenges teachers face with the model and how it impacts the delivery. The categories include (a) the history of RtI, (b) purpose of RtI, (c) RtI implementation, (d) how teachers are trained in RtI, and (e) teachers' perceptions and attitudes towards RtI.

## **Conceptual Framework**

This investigation of RtI implementation will be based on Malcolm Knowles's notion of andragogy, self-direction, and adult education in learning. Knowles and Bradford (1952) argued that helping adults learn rather than lecturing them, more effectively enhances adults' learning. General education teachers stated that RtI information, training/in-services and professional development is primarily delivered through speakers/presenters, Power Point presentations, handouts, and so forth. Learning is an internal process that involves a human's tendency toward development and learning from their mistakes (Valdez, 2018) while providing learners with the opportunity to practice self-direction. Charungkaittikul and Henschke (2018) agree that self-directiveness is necessary for learning and growth. Valdez (2018) also stated that learners should be provided with adequate and appropriate techniques and processes to ensure learning success.

Knowles emphasized training where the learner is understanding, developing, and embracing new concepts that enhance the learning process (Charungkaittikul & Henschke, 2018). van der Walt (2019) supported the idea that learner motivation and dominance should be present at the learner stage in order to embrace and apply new information. Therefore, directly helping teachers learn the correct process to deliver and sustain the RtI model would be more beneficial than simply providing them with verbal or presented information. In his seminal work, Knowles and Bradford (1952) stated that the interaction and involvement that people experience can lead to growth and maturity,

and eventual self-direction in learning. Valdez (2018) refers to adult learning as relying on a facilitator to guide the discussion of the subject matter being learned in such a way that the learner can employ it adequately with successful results. Valdez (2018) also noted that the facilitator should coordinate the way the subject matter is covered using a variety of methods that relate to teachers' daily practices.

A possible connection between Knowles theory and this project may be that teachers will go from dependency to self-directedness (Charungkaittikul & Henschke, 2018) with adequate and proper training. Komatsu et al., (2021) emphasized that trainers should capture the mind of the learner and keep them engaged by linking the information they are presenting to teachers' instructional practices. Pawlak (2021) noted that a person learns best when learning and working with experts in the field who immerse others in their own experiences. Maatta and Kongas also indicated that a constant upgrade in learning is necessary as changes occur continuously and processes continue to advance (2021). Charungkaittikul (2018) emphasized that this form of training will allow learners to become eager to learn and be interested, value, and apply what they are learning into their daily practices. As a result, students will learn more efficiently.

### **History of Response to Intervention**

Between 1960 and 1970, researchers gained a significant amount of knowledge regarding students who were experiencing academic difficulties and the term, "learning disability" (Berkeley et al., 2020). Berkeley et al. (2020) also noted that during this time, federal policies initiated the term, "specific learning disability" as a deficiency in one or

more psychological processes that interferes with the understanding of reading, writing, speaking, spelling, or in mathematical concepts. To support this, the National Association of Special Education Teachers referred to a learning disability as a serious discrepancy between a student's intellectual ability and his/her academic performance (n.d.).

Karanxha et al., (2022) noted that it was also around this time that significant improvements were being made that focused on the needs of students with special needs. These actions and provisions were evident when special education began to be recognized at the federal level in 1965 when the Elementary and Secondary Education Act was enacted, which in part focused on students with disabilities (Nagro, Shepard, et al., 2019).

In addition, the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 was also introduced which prohibited discrimination and secured the rights for individuals with disabilities (Murphy, 2021). Thereafter, Congress passed the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, which provided schools with additional federal funds that were geared towards providing a more comprehensive education for students with disabilities (Karanxha et al., 2022). With several modifications and reauthorizations, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 was revised and renamed the 1997 Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA). Thereafter, it was reauthorized again, as the 2004 IDEA (Rooney, 2019). Each of these acts focused on the rights of individuals with disabilities and helped in the developments to improve the education of students with deficiencies (Robinson & Norton, 2019).

Prior to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, and the 1997 and 2004 IDEA, tiered systems and/or similar models had already been a part of special education for decades and was the means that influenced different forms of interventions; however, were often ineffective (Berkeley et al., 2020). Prior to the reauthorization of IDEA, students who struggled academically were identified with learning disabilities based on the results of a discrepancy model that compared student's potential to their academic performance (Gischlar et al., 2019); however, according to the National Association of Special Education Teachers, was phased out as the only means to utilize to determine a student's learning disability (Alahmari, 2019). The end of IQ formulas also allowed school districts to use different methods as a way of identifying students who needed special services (Fraser, 2018). During this time there were other areas of concern that warranted prevention framework such as: inclusive education, a significant growth in special education population, and special education funding (Raben et al., 2019).

By the early 2000s, students identified with disabilities had increased a whopping 150% and as a result, triggered concerns for educators, researchers, policymakers, and practitioners who were involved in the field of education (Savitz et al., 2018). As these concerns grew, the current reauthorization of IDEA (2004) introduced RtI as an alternate method for states, districts, and schools to determine eligibility for students with disabilities and special education services (Fraser, 2018). Savitz et al., (2019) noted the motivation for the implementation of RtI came directly from concerns regarding possible



misidentification of students labeled with learning disabilities due to not receiving appropriate academic instruction. According to Tefera and Fischman, (2020), overrepresentation of minority students was well documented and included groups of African American and Latino students as they were considered the most likely candidates for special education services. As a result, the reauthorized law supported RtI by allotting education agencies up to 15% of federal funding to obtain and implement early intervening and prevention services to students who are struggling academically but who are not yet identified as students who are in need of special education services (Alsalamah, 2021).

In addition, with the reauthorization of the IDEA in 2004, tiered methods and interventions such as RTI began to gain additional traction for determining eligibility for special education services and helped in determining discrepancies between the students IQ and their academic performance (Willis, 2019). RtI was also perceived as beneficial by educational practitioners as it had a strong correlation to No Child Left Behind (NCLB, 2002) as both were based on the principle that practitioners shall ensure that all of students' academic and/or behavioral needs should be addressed through measures of prevention and early identification (Ruiz, 2020). NCLB focused on school reform and restructuring, accountability, testing, adequate yearly progress, and more importantly, student academic proficiency (Saatcioglu et al, 2021) which go together with the objective and purpose of RtI. Rooney (2019) emphasized that teachers should not only consider the elements of history regarding how students with disabilities have been

perceived and treated, but the efficacy of the special education program and teachers' delivery of instruction. Dawkins (2020) also noted that by considering these factors, it can help in maximizing the advantages of RtI and help bridge the gap between general and special education.

### **Purpose of Response to Intervention**

Observing how students respond to, or do not respond to instruction, has been a basic tool that educators have used for decades to determine if there is an academic discrepancy (Beaujean, 2018). Throughout the years there have been different forms of multi-tiered methods that have been used internationally to evaluate student progress (Raben et al., 2019). Curriculum based measures and assessments, and progress monitoring have also been used over the years to measure a learner's skill level and used as a source of ongoing evaluation to determine gaps between a student's intellectual ability and their academic progress (van den Bosch et al., 2019). RtI is a student-centered, prerequisite method that was constructed to identify student academic discrepancies and is used prior to referring students for special education services (Raben et al., 2019). The RtI was designed to be a comprehensive process and when first introduced, was to ensure that all students; regardless of their abilities, receive high-quality instruction and support in a general education setting, prior to being referred for special education and related services (Arrimada et al., 2020). Albattal (2018) noted that comprehensive RtI "is constructed on research-based core subjects, regular benchmark assessments for all students, clear criterion to identify students in need of additional instructional or

behavioral supports, and efficient methods for providing such supports” (p. 104). Raben et al. (2019) described RtI as a model that includes a high level of quality instruction and supports that foster to the diverse and specific needs of students, and progress monitoring on a frequent basis to assist in making decisions about changes in instructional delivery and student goals (Raben et al., 2019). RtI is a student-centered approach that provides instruction through problem solving and research-based practices that target academic and behavioral deficiencies among students who may or may not need special education (Hawes et al., 2020).

In addition, Siegel (2020) noted that as RtI emerged, it held promise to prevent the academic failure of students while also having the potential to improve the measures by which students with disabilities are identified. Furthermore, the RtI model used as a preventative measure, has been noted to not only provide additional instructional support for students who are struggling and to minimize mislabeling, but to also target and improve areas of flaws in core curriculum and in teachers’ daily practices (Arden et al., 2018).

The purpose of RtI was also intended to minimize the risk for long term negative learning outcomes by responding quickly and efficiently to documented learning or behavioral problems and ensuring appropriate identification of students with disabilities (Roberts, et al., 2021). Ruiz (2020) stated that one of the major goals of RtI is to provide adequate and effective instruction that tailors to all student’s specific needs. It has also been noted that RtI was thought to decrease the number of referrals to special education;

thus, minimizing labeling of students as disabled, and a means of targeting the overrepresentation of students of color in special education (Alahmari, 2019). Banks et al. (2019) also stated that RtI allows early intervening services that can assist students who are falling behind their peers and provide them with the support they need to progress academically. According to Bester and Conway (2021), RtI is a promising method and intervention process that has the capability to improve learning outcomes for students who are at risk of failure. Bester and Conway (2021) also noted that the purpose of RtI and its effectiveness can ultimately increase and improve the likelihood of student academic and behavioral success across demographic minority groups in a general education environment. According to Mandel and Pendola (2021), although, these measures have been in place to assist students who are experiencing academic difficulties, there has been a substantial increase in the number of students who receive special education and related services under IDEA. Mandel and Pendola (2021) also noted that the number of special education students, ages 6 to 21, has almost doubled over the span of the last three decades from 3.7 million to over 6 million.

### **Implementation of Response to Intervention**

The RtI process includes many considerations for effective implementation including, how to identify students during general screening, knowledge and identification of preventative supports and interventions, the degree and intensity of RtI intervention support, progress monitoring, and what measures are required and should be exhausted prior to referring students to special education or related services (Arden et al.,

2018). By adhering to these considerations, teachers will have an increased ability to provide high quality RtI instruction, implement necessary supports & interventions, monitor student progress, and make effective instructional decisions and adjustments based on the specific needs of the student (Al Otaiba et al., 2019).

There are also several features within the RtI model that are necessary for its implementation to be valuable and successful. According to Gomez-Najarro (2020) some of these components include universal screening of students, identification of students who are struggling academically, evidence-based interventions, monitoring student growth, and decision making based on student data and results. For this to occur, the RtI process requires that highly qualified, general education teachers screen, assess, and provide instruction to diverse students, including those who are struggling academically or that have disabilities (Banks et al., 2019). Banks et al. (2019) also stated that effective RtI allows for general education teachers to intervene early so that they can assist students who are falling behind their peers and provide them with the support they need to progress academically. According to Bester and Conway (2021), RtI is a promising method and intervention process that has the capability to improve learning outcomes for at risk students. This method includes preventative supports and interventions, adjusting instruction, support outside of the curriculum, progress monitoring, and individualized instructional strategies and approaches (Safari et al., 2020). Examining student progress or regression, making decisions about RtI instruction, and making necessary adjustments

are critical during the process as it is an essential part of student academic improvement (Hawes et al., 2020).

For RtI implementation to function properly, there are three tiers that must be included in the process depending on the severity of the students' academic discrepancies (Fan et al., 2018). Hall-Mills (2019) describes RtI as three levels of instruction.

According to Hall-Mills (2019), Tier 1 consists of whole class instruction in a general education setting where most of the students make steady academic growth with teacher support (Siegel, 2020). Tier 1, or schoolwide support, core curriculum, and instructional goals are provided to all students, and most will respond efficiently to this support (Schiller et al., 2020). According to Arias-Gundin and Llamazares (2021), this level is where possible students who are at risk and struggling academically are identified.

Identified students can then be provided with further Tier 2 supports if needed.

Tier 2 consists of small group instruction with more targeted and focused interventions. Tier 2 is designed for students who are identified as struggling academically and who may be at risk of academic failure (Schiller et al., 2020). At this tier level students are provided with additional and more specialized support in any area that they demonstrate deficiencies (Fraser, 2018).

Tier 3 is considered the most intense form of support with additional forms of instruction and support (Schiller et al., 2020). Tier 3 is delivered individually and more intensively for students who are not responding adequately to Tier 1 or Tier 2 instruction (Field et al., 2019). Tier 3 interventions are typically implemented for 40 min per day and

require monthly progress monitoring (Arias-Gundin & Llamazares, 2021). At times, Tier 3 intervention can include services such as inclusion or resource/content mastery RtI support (Siegel, 2020). Inclusion services can include students with disabilities who receive a considerable amount of RtI instruction within the general education setting around their general education peers (Francisco et al., 2020). Stiefel et al. (2018) noted that inclusion allows for collaboration of both general and special education teachers which allows for positive management of students, increased preparation, and collaborative decision making regarding RtI. Similarly, inclusion, resource, and content mastery center services provide additional instruction to lower performing students or students with disabilities who receive part or most of their academic instruction in the general education setting (Kirkpatrick et al., 2019). According to the Center for Autism Research and The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia (2020), students who are struggling academically receive initial, whole class instruction in the general education setting and are then pulled out of classroom and provided with further instruction with accommodations, including RtI, in a separate setting. Inclusion, resource, and content mastery center require highly qualified, special education teachers to deliver students who struggle academically; either general or special education students, with supports such as RtI, reteaching, study sessions, tutorials, and/or strategy instruction (Poon-McBrayer, 2018).

## **Response to Intervention Training for Teachers**

There are a variety of substantial skills that educators must possess for RtI implementation to be successful. Some of the significant areas that educators must be knowledgeable about that play a key role in RtI delivery are universal screening, forms of assessment including formal and informal, tier levels, identifying, designing, and delivering research-based interventions (Al Otaiba et al., 2019). Instructional methods, decision-making skills, data collection, use of technology, and progress monitoring, are also components that play a critical role in the effectiveness of RtI (Raben et al., 2019). Savitz et al., (2018) stated that although RtI is a fairly new model, these components have played an essential role in recommended daily instructional practices for several decades. Teachers who successfully obtain these specific sets of skills are more likely to implement RtI with efficiency and fidelity; thus, resulting in positive student academic outcomes.

School districts and individual schools are responsible for guaranteeing that appropriate training is in place and ongoing, to ensure that all practitioners who access RtI have the previous mentioned knowledge and skills required to effectively implement the model (Chaparro et al., 2020). Some of the critical components of RtI are identified in literature as educator skill capacity and skill development, ongoing learning, and increased knowledge and understanding, (Castillo et al, 2018). Obtaining adequate skills through in-depth training, prior to the delivery, implementation, and maintenance of RtI, are a significant part of the process (Alahmari, 2019). These skills obtained will ensure



that teachers who are delivering RtI, will provide students who are struggling with the best intervention possible to increase the likelihood of academic success in a general education setting (Chaparro et al., 2020). Gartland and Strosnider (2020) emphasized that skills and major components within the RtI framework including universal screening, progress monitoring, and research-based interventions, must be implemented with fidelity and are key to successful delivery. To implement these core principles with fidelity, teachers must be provided with in-depth, meaningful, and ongoing training and coaching to acquire and maintain these skills (Benedict et al., 2021). In addition, it was noted that the potential benefits of valuable training led to increased knowledge and improved instructional practices; thus, resulting in positive academic outcomes (March et al., 2020).

Training for RtI should include critical components for its implementation to be successful. Some of the significant components that should be considered during RtI training include supports for targeted interventions that support cultural responsiveness, integrity, classroom environment, behavioral strategies, progress monitoring, fidelity, and additional materials and resources (Maki, 2018). The National Center on Response to Intervention (n.d.) emphasized that RtI training and/or any type of learning opportunity should be based on data and must be engaging for teachers and correlate with state, district, and local needs. They also noted that a considerable number of trainings should be provided during the initial stages of the establishment of RtI. Castillo et al., (2018) stressed that with adequate training, teachers are more likely to overcome possible

challenges and obstacles that may be presented during the implementation of RtI. Implementing RtI with fidelity is critical, to ensure instruction is being implemented as intended and that students who are struggling are being provided with accurate and consistent instruction (Scott et al., 2019). Scott et al. (2019) emphasized that a teacher implementing RtI without fidelity can result in negative outcomes and results. They also stated that, because of not implementing RtI with fidelity, a student can be considered one who is not responding adequately or equal to their peers, due to the teachers' inadequate delivery of interventions (March et al., 2020). Thus, it is key for practitioners to receive consistent training on an on-going basis, for RtI implementation to be effective and successful.

One of the key common themes that has been addressed in RtI research is teachers insufficient understanding of RtI due to inadequate or lack of valuable resources and professional development opportunities (Vollmer et al., 2019). Professional development should be presented in a variety of ways and should be meaningful and rich in information (Martin et al., 2019), however, is often delivered in ways that are not valuable or meaningful to the teachers. Some of the major concerns, according to Nagro et al., (2019) were a lack in wide-ranging professional development and the inclusive need for ongoing research on the development and implementation of RtI content. The authors also emphasized that initial training should emphasize the justification, principles, and correct implementation of RtI so that practitioners delivering the model can fully understand the various components that it entails (Nagro et al., 2019).

Lack of teacher competence and knowledge about RtI implementation have also raised concerns and have been noted to be related to ineffective and inadequate delivery of the model (Kressler & Cavendish, 2020). According to the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP), RtI implementation is most effective when teachers' needs are recognized and addressed through adequate training opportunities; all guidelines, instructional practices, and processes are communicated and accessible to all practitioners, parents, and students; and the provision of adequate technology, resources, and support to ensure effective delivery (2018).

### **Teachers' Perceptions of and Attitudes Towards Response to Intervention**

Although RtI is a special education initiative, general education teachers play a fundamental role in the implementation and delivery of the model. Gomez-Najarro (2020) noted that many students with disabilities receive a part or all their instruction in general education setting where the teachers are not certified in special education methods. As such, Vollmer et al., (2019) stated that general education teachers are accountable for many features of RtI for both general and special education students including: delivery of core subjects with fidelity, making sure that all students receive standard benchmark evaluations, and the provision of differentiated instruction as needed. Scott et al., (2019) noted that schools that are implementing RTI with fidelity should receive the supports and resources that are necessary and foster to the individual needs of the students in the general education classroom who are struggling academically. Because general education teachers play such an integral role in the RtI process, it is essential that

their attitudes and perceptions be taken into high consideration for fidelity to occur (Jordan et al., 2019). When teachers' concerns and beliefs about RtI are considered, the likelihood of collaboration and problem solving with others who are included in the RtI process is much greater than when teachers' concerns go unnoticed (Reynolds, 2022).

Some of the attitude's teachers display regarding the RtI process include feelings of a lack of overall understanding, lack of training/professional development, need for support and guidance for implementation, confusion, inability to obtain adequate research-based interventions, and lack of support from administration (Alahmari, A, 2019; Henderson, D., 2018). It was noted by Pregot (2021) that some administrators do not consider the feelings or opinions of the teachers who are implementing RtI and therefore can lead to negative outcomes. Henderson (2018) also emphasized that identifying and addressing attitudes, perceptions, and concerns of educators implementing the RtI process is a significant part of successful implementation. Several who deliver RtI at this local campus have stated that they feel as if their concerns and feelings go unnoticed and are not properly addressed; thus, resulting in inadequate and unsuccessful implementation of the model.

Other significant attitudes that are directly related to RtI are teachers heightened pressures due to increased responsibilities and paperwork associated with the model (Cavendish, Morris et al., 2020). Morris et al. (2020) stated that stressors related to increased responsibilities directly impact instructional delivery and how teachers manage their classrooms. Teachers who face these challenges often display negative perceptions

about RtI and ultimately results in poor delivery; thus, negatively impacting student academic outcomes (Cavendish et al., 2020). Many times, these increased obligations and feelings of direct accountability relate to teachers' pressures as they face time restraints and deadlines. The burden of paperwork and progress monitoring have also negatively impacted teachers' practices (Castillo et al., 2018). Many general and special education teachers have reported that they experience a significant amount of stress and frustration as they feel they simply do not have the time to fulfill the additional tasks and requirements necessary to effectively implement and maintain RtI. Teachers also feel that despite their significant roles in RtI implementation, their concerns, perceptions, feelings, and lack of understanding of the model go unnoticed and feel neglected (Morris et al., 2020). Nagro et al. (2019) also emphasized that due to teachers' essential roles in RtI, it is imperative to examine their attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions, to address them properly with training, resources, and supports to effectively deliver and sustain RtI.

### **Implications**

RtI has been given a significant amount of attention as it is considered an early intervention model that is designed to improve student performance (Grapin et al., 2019). Although, RtI is designed to improve student academic performance, there are many factors that can interfere with its effective implementation including the perceptions and experiences teachers face when implementing and delivering the model (Thomas et al., 2022). Over the years, RtI has received attention relative to policies that do not guarantee that teachers deliver the model with fidelity (Castillo et al., 2018). Educators who deliver

RtI must possess a variety of skills to implement the model with efficiency and fidelity. However, many times teachers experience negative outcomes as they feel that their skills are not adequate due to a lack in understanding, knowledge, training, and support as stated by several teachers. Due to these factors, students who are struggling academically within a local district have not been able to benefit from RtI and its major purpose.

This project study has implications that can lead to increased and positive academic and social change. The goal of general and special education teachers is to develop students academically, behaviorally, and socially in preparation for college and in their careers. In this study, the projected findings will be supported by information collected from teacher experiences in conjunction with the perceptions they have acquired about the RtI model. Based on the findings and common themes of the information collected, collaborative ideas and suggestions can be initiated that can lead to improvements in RtI implementation, teacher performance, daily practices, and its maintenance. Ruiz (2020) emphasized that having a full understanding of the RtI process can result in fidelity of the implementation, effectiveness of intervention delivery, improved daily practices, and consistency. As a result of the findings of this study, teachers who are delivering RtI may be more knowledgeable and feel more confident in implementing the model. In addition, the information collected could also prove to be imperative and foundational for developing resolutions that are directly related to RtI negative perceptions and concerns.

The data collected could also lead to a more comprehensive understanding of RtI of the major components that encompass its effective implementation and its overall design and purpose. Camila Nilvius (2020) stated that more knowledge and understanding about RtI can lead to a more user-friendly model that can be accepted and adapted into general and special education teachers' daily work. It is also anticipated that this study could have the potential to implement new and innovative ways to train teachers who are delivering RtI and ensure their skills are adequate and sufficient to effectively deliver and maintain RtI. This could include a series of improved professional development opportunities, increased RtI specialist support, in-class coaching, and year-round training throughout the district that can provide in-depth information on effective implementation and delivery of the RtI model (March et al., 2020). As this is achieved, the information could lead to social improvements by assisting local leaders and administrators, surrounding districts, and teachers, by providing necessary supports that are required to facilitate effective RtI practices.

Based on the study results, I developed a project(see Appendix A) that includes RtI coaching from experts that go into the classroom and provide direct support to the teachers in real time while instruction is occurring. Ideally, RtI coaches could work collaboratively with general and special education teachers once a week in the classroom for three consecutive weeks. After 3 weeks of direct support, RtI coaches can develop a specific plan for general and special education teachers to follow with a set of interventions for the specific needs of the struggling students. In addition, RtI coaches

can provide support through ongoing assistance in the classroom as needed, and continuous professional development throughout the school year. RtI coaches can be assigned to cluster schools throughout the district and should remain consistent within their designated schools. This form of RtI support could potentially have the capability to build new and improved RtI practices, enhance teacher performance, additional professional development opportunities, reveal the need for RtI coaching, raise state assessment scores, minimize referrals to special education, and ultimately, improve student academic achievement.

### **Summary**

As the importance of effective implementation of RtI continues to be of concern to many educators (Kressler & Cavendish, 2020), it is imperative to examine the factors that can lead to its ineffectiveness. The purpose of this basic qualitative study is to thoroughly examine the experiences and perceptions that educators have regarding RtI practices. The findings of this study could influence substantial improvements to overall RtI implementation which could lead to greater results of closing the gap between current RtI practices and academic outcomes. It can also lead to novel and innovative forms of training/professional development systems that can enhance teacher performance, experiences, and perceptions linked to RtI. Implications for social change are possible as the results of the study can lead to constructive collaboration amongst practitioners, increased clarity and understanding of the model, improved decision-making skills, and



overall, an increase in academic performance. These outcomes could lead to enhanced relationships; hence, resulting in a more productive and enriched society.

## Section 2: The Methodology

### **Introduction**

In Section 1, I provided evidence of the inadequate implementation and delivery of RtI in a local elementary school district in South Texas. Due to RtI deficiencies, I decided to examine what resources, supports, and training teachers at the school need to effectively implement RtI methods. In this qualitative study, I examined teachers' experiences with the implementation of RtI. In this section, I provide justification as to why I chose a qualitative research design for this project. I also describe how I chose the participants for the study by using purposeful sampling based on specific criteria. Confidentiality and informed consent are also discussed in this section along with their importance. In addition, I describe the data collection process, the role of the researcher, and the process of data analysis. Last, I include the limitations and a summary of the study.

### **Qualitative Research Design and Approach**

In this basic qualitative study, I utilized an exploratory basic qualitative study to further examine the implementation of RtI at a K–5 elementary school. According to Mohajan (2018), qualitative data consists of several different components that allow a researcher to produce the most effective results such as exploration of meaning and insights, purposeful sampling, in-depth interviews, actual experiences, non-numerical data, and a natural setting. These aspects made a qualitative approach best for this study. Castleberry and Nolen (2018) noted that qualitative methods are increasingly being used

in the field of education as they provide well-informed and rich descriptions of information obtained from actual data and not just numbers. In addition, the authors stated that, “the descriptive nature of qualitative approaches allows the researcher to build a complex, holistic picture in a natural setting” (p. 2). This attribute allowed for more valuable outcomes, I believe, for this study. I was able to probe participants experiences, for instance, through in-depth, semi structured interview questions (see Appendices B and C for the interview questions and protocol, respectively).

By using qualitative methodology to gather data regarding teachers’ experiences in RtI, I was able to obtain a more detailed, rich, and thorough understanding of possible challenges that hinder teachers from implementing and maintaining effective RtI practices. According to Mohajan (2018), qualitative research is a measure that encourages social action as its focus is geared towards examining attitudes, emotions, human behaviors, and how people interpret and justify their experiences as a measure to identify the social reality of individuals. These characteristics of qualitative designs made this approach most suitable and appropriate for this project study.

### **Justification for Design**

The data obtained within this study provided valuable information regarding practices that teachers at the study site were utilizing, that could be impacting the effective implementation, delivery, and maintenance of RtI. With information obtained from in-depth interviews, the study revealed and targeted what specific supports teachers require to successfully implement RTI. Using a qualitative approach for this basic

qualitative study would be more effective and beneficial than conducting research utilizing quantitative methods, as it is considered exploratory (Mohajan, 2018). An exploratory case study as Mohajan (2018) noted, offers a comprehensive review that includes various perspectives of a specific case.

In addition, in their exploratory research Hallingberg et al., (2018) were able to explain cause and effect relationships of the phenomena they were studying. Casula et al., (2021) emphasized that exploratory research should be clear, honest, strong, and reliable as this will ensure validity. In addition, the authors noted that exploratory research is beneficial as it clarifies the RQs that drive the entire study and allows for an examination of possible causes of the issues in question. Castleberry and Nolen (2018) noted that whereas quantitative methods focus on numbers, frequency, and duration, qualitative research allows researchers to investigate beliefs, standards, and causes that explain why the problem may be occurring. In this case, I was able to examine variables that may be affecting the implementation and maintenance of RtI. Castleberry and Nolen also noted that qualitative studies in the field of education are beneficial because the focus allows for a better understanding of the experiences of those who work directly with the phenomenon. Qualitative methods also take into high consideration the viewpoints, and beliefs of the participants.

### **Participants**

This local elementary school was selected as the focus campus due to RtI implementation issues which may have contributed to low state testing scores. In

addition, I previously served as a teacher at this campus and had direct access to teachers who fit the profile of the study and could be valuable participants. To coincide with qualitative research methods, a small group of general and special education teachers who were employed at this site and implemented RtI were taken into consideration to participate in this study. Slettebo (2021) stated that the number of participants selected in the study depends on what the researcher is inquiring about, the purpose of the examination, what is at stake, the use of the study, and its credibility. I believed it was important to choose as many participants as needed to cover the elements and purpose of the study. When considering participants for the study, it was important for me to focus on what RtI information was needed and how it would contribute to the purpose and outcome of the study. The general and special education teachers had previous experiences with RtI procedures in their classrooms and their participation was considered beneficial to the study. According to Blaikie (2018), the number of participants selected should be considered during the planning stage and must be adequate for the purpose and goals of the study. Sandelowski (1995) stated in seminal research that thoughtful decision-making is necessary when determining how many participants should be involved in the study. Sandelowski emphasized that too few participants may not provide sufficient information and too many can provide redundant data which may become unmanageable. I considered a sample size of 10 to 12 possible participants for this study. I believed that this range was an adequate number of teachers to fulfill the purpose of the research. Qualitative sample sizes provide “information

power” which implies that the more information the sample possesses, the lower the number of participants that are needed for the study (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022).

### **Sampling**

Sampling is a critical part of research studies and is key when determining the accuracy of the study (Bhardwaj, 2019). This sampling process established who should be included and who was most valuable to the outcome of the study. Careful consideration was ensured when choosing participants for this qualitative study. As the researcher, I referenced a predetermined list of criteria that each participant should possess to fit the profile of the study. I identified possible participants who fit the profile and certain descriptors that corresponded with the topic in question. The selection of possible participants was based on their experiences with the phenomenon under investigation and those who were willing to share their personal experiences and information regarding their involvement with RtI.

For this study, purposeful sampling was the most adequate method for selection of participants to ensure the RQs were answered adequately. Luciani et al. (2019) emphasized that purposeful sampling intentionally chooses participants who can best speak of the research being examined. A group of 12 participants were considered for this qualitative research study including general education and special education teachers who service students who require RtI support. Purposeful sampling, according to Kalu (2019), has been widely used in qualitative research as it provides information-rich data for

limited resources, meaningful documentation, and identifies common themes and patterns.

Staller (2021) noted that purposeful sampling specifically chooses participants for their ability to answer questions that are related to the topic in question. Staller also emphasized that the participants should have a clear connection and justification that satisfies a specified purpose that is consistent with the RQ (2021). Based on the predetermined criteria, the individuals chosen had a clear connection to RtI; thus, related to the RQs. The individuals considered had the ability to provide pertinent information regarding the significant factors, perspectives, and experiences related to the phenomenon under examination (Creswell, 2019). Luciani et al., (2019) also noted that this form of sampling is used when a varied sample is essential or the opinion of specialists in a specific discipline is within the theme or topic of interest. As each of these teachers had pertinent information regarding RtI procedures, they were considered essential and valuable to the outcome of the study.

### **Recruitment of Participants**

To gain access to the possible participants, I obtained approval from the Institutional Review Board at Walden University (no. 04-07-22-0428855). I also obtained approval from the district where the local elementary school is located (no. 2022-09-22). After meeting with the principal from the focus school and explaining the project in detail, I was given approval to contact potential participants (see Appendix D). I assured the campus principal that the study would not interfere with teachers' instructional time

or student learning in any way as interviews would be conducted during after school hours. I also informed the principal that teachers' participation was on a voluntary basis and not forced or obligatory. After consent was obtained, an email was sent out to 12 possible participants that fit the description of the research. The email included the invitation to participate and the informed consent form. The consent/invitation form included the purpose of the study, procedures, sample questions, voluntary nature of the study, risks and benefits of participation, payments, privacy, disclosures, and contact information. Possible participants were asked to respond to the invitation within 7 days.

Of the 12 invitations that were emailed only 10 teachers responded to the email. After securing participants, they were asked to sign a teacher-staff consent form required by the district acknowledging their consent to participate in the project study. The group of participants consisted of 1 Kindergarten teacher, 2 first grade teachers, 3 second grade teachers, 2 third grade teachers, 1 fourth grade teacher, and 1 fifth grade teacher. Each of the teachers who were selected to participate in the study were actively involved in the RtI process and were responsible for the implementation and maintenance of RtI.

### **Researcher-Participant Working Relationship**

Once the participants agreed to the study, I formally introduced myself to all participants and provided them with my personal information including my personal phone number, email, and the hours they can reach me. Gelinis et al., (2021), emphasized that having communication with participants via emails or visits should be initiated before interviews are conducted. I also informed each of the teachers that they could ask



me any questions or inform me of any concerns they had regarding the study. I believed that allowing them to have open communication with me allowed them to feel more comfortable with their involvement in the study and could also help in building rapport. Knechel (2019) noted that this form of communication is essential to develop a positive relationship, build rapport, and to gain the trust of the subjects who are participating in the study. Mohajan (2018), emphasized that researchers should spend a significant amount of time in the natural setting with the individuals who are participating in the study for a relationship to be established. Gelinas et al., (2021) stressed that communication is a key component when conducting qualitative research as it builds trust and rapport. Although the participants were my colleagues, I did not know them on a personal level. Therefore, obtaining a level of trust and rapport with the participants was essential during this study.

### **Protection of Participants' Rights**

#### ***Confidentiality***

Ensuring ethical treatment of participants in case studies is critical to producing accurate results. It was essential to ensure confidentiality throughout the entire process of the study. Hennessy et al., (2022) emphasized that thorough ethical consideration must be applied when recruiting, collecting data, and when representing participants within the study. One of the components that is of the utmost importance is confidentiality and assuring the participants that their information will remain confidential throughout the study (Colosi et al., 2019). The participants selected were informed that all the

information they provided would remain confidential and their identity would not be revealed in any way.

Some helpful ways to ensure that participants information remains confidential include not using their real or identifiable names, no required signatures on consent forms, ensure privacy when conducting interviews, and ensure that collected data is in a secured area (Surmiak, 2018). In this study, no real names were revealed, no signatures were required, privacy was ensured throughout, and information collected was secured. Colosi et al. (2019) noted that researchers must ensure subjects that the data collected will be protected from unauthorized access and use. Turcotte-Tremblay and Mc Sween-Cadieux (2018) also stated that subjects who participate in a qualitative study share their personal experiences, emotions, behaviors, attitudes, and perceptions about the topic in question; thus, must be respected and protected from harm. If participants do not feel protected or safe, their relationship with the researcher could become compromised and may not openly share valuable information; ultimately, jeopardizing the outcome of the study (Palys et al., 2019). It is also vital to ensure the protection of the rights and welfare of the human subjects who will be participating in the study (Colosi et al., 2019). Emanuel et al., (n.d.) emphasized that protecting human subjects includes checking their well-being throughout the study and if any risks or harm are foreseen, participants should be removed immediately from the study. The authors also stated that participants should be informed of any new information or changes they may need to know about; in particular, if new risks could arise from the changes (Emanuel et al., n.d.).

### ***Informed Consent***

Another essential component of ethics is informed consent in which the researcher is fully responsible for informing the participants of the nature and objective of the study, their role in the study, data that will be collected, and how it will be utilized throughout the study (Zhong et al., 2019). O'Sullivan et al. (2021) noted that researchers must follow human protection requirements by seeking full consent and approval from participants when using any form of device, practice, or approach in the study. Teachers who agreed to participate in the study were provided with the invitation and informed consents form to ensure their ethical rights (Biros, 2018). The informed consent included the following points including the purpose, procedures, sample questions, nature, and risks of being in the study, payment, privacy, disclosure, and my contact information.

Biros (2018) also noted that informed consent is necessary to fully advise the participant of the processes, pros, and cons of their participation in the study, and any possible risks or side effects. Roulston and Preissle (2018) emphasized that researchers are accountable for protecting all participants from any possible harmful consequences that may affect them because of their involvement in the study. Brough and Martin (2020) also provided a list of strategies that researchers can utilize to protect information including storage methods to protect data, exclusion of identifier components, use of aliases, and document consent in written, signed, and at times, witnessed and oral forms. The informed consent form used for the study provided pertinent information about the

study and their participation, which allowed participants to be fully informed and reiterated that participation was voluntary.

### **Strategies for Minimizing Research Bias**

An additional and crucial part of conducting case studies is recognizing and understanding the possibility of research bias. It was critical to ensure that my own experiences and perceptions about RtI would not influence the research in any way. Rubin and Rubin (2021) noted that identifying and managing research bias is crucial during research as any form of bias can result in skewed or distorted results. One of the ways I maintained objectivity and reduced bias was to consistently monitor my thoughts and attitude throughout the study. Mackieson et al. (2019) also noted different types of bias that cause concerns in the form of a lack of objectivity, ethical issues, threat to a study's reliability, and possible hidden feelings a researcher may have. One of the ways to eliminate possible bias is for the researcher to be self-reflective and aware of their own perceptions, values, and beliefs about the topic of the study to minimize bias as much as possible (Poerwandari, 2021). Being aware of my own biases and setting standards was a strategy used throughout to maintain validity of the research. Mackieson et al., (2019) agree that researcher bias can be a threat to the validity and credibility of the study. Mackieson et al., (2019) also emphasized that researchers should remain neutral, impartial, and as objective as possible throughout the entire study to minimize bias. Mackieson et al., (2019) noted strategies that can help in minimizing bias including choosing the appropriate research design, incorporating ethics committees, gathering

feedback from peers, random selection of participants, having a well-designed research protocol, and following up with participants to review the findings. By following this plan, it was more likely that the project study would contain thorough and in-depth information that led to sound results with minimal bias.

### **Data Collection**

This qualitative examination of teachers' experiences with the implementation of RtI was answered by collecting data through in-depth interviews. Collecting data is one of the most common and significant forms of gathering information when conducting a qualitative basic qualitative study. Zahle (2018) emphasized that it is critical to determine the extent of data collections depth and scope when planning a qualitative examination. Regardless of the theoretical position the researcher is considering and whatever the method of data collection being used, the process will encompass the compilation of large amounts of information. As stated by Clark and Vealé (2018), data collection is most reliable when it is purposeful and systematically driven. Clark and Vealé (2018) also noted that data collection can be obtained from various sources including interviews, documentation, interpretive thinking & reflection, journal writings, coding, and sorting. The interviews conducted helped explore the perceptions of elementary special and general education teachers who implement RtI in their classrooms. Heath et al., (2018) stated that data collection approaches can be organized in a variety of ways, for example, through conversational unstructured, semi-structured, or highly structured interviews depending on the participant and what their preference is. The interviews conducted with

the participants were semi-structured in nature as this allowed for further elaboration and encouraged communication. According to Chhabra (2021), when conducting qualitative approaches, data is collected from individuals who experience similar events and can provide information without any misrepresentations.

### **Description of Data Collection Tools**

For this study, I utilized an interview protocol (see Appendix C) to facilitate the interview process. Yeong et al. (2018) emphasized that using reliable interview protocol can help in acquiring valuable qualitative data. Using an interview protocol ensured that the questions were in fact, related to the aim and RQs of the study, and covered all research objectives (Yeong et al., 2018). In addition, I utilized the interview protocol to create structure and guide the study. Yeong et al. (2018) emphasized that using reliable interview protocol can help in acquiring valuable qualitative data. The interview protocol was key as it ensured structure and allowed the researcher to address every participant the same way; hence, reducing the chance for bias during the interview process.

For this examination, I conducted semi-structured interviews with each participant to collect in-depth and meaningful information that was valuable when determining the outcomes. According to Thelwall and Nevill (2021), interviews are a part of the qualitative process that allow participants to engage in rich and meaningful dialogue that provides the researcher with information regarding their attitudes and perceptions of the topic of investigation. House (2018) also noted that interviews are said to tap into the participants experiences, knowledge, attitudes, as well their personal perceptions of the

research topic in question. Interview questions (Appendix B) were developed to examine teacher experiences of RtI implementation, delivery, and maintenance of RtI. Weller et al. (2018) stated open ended questions are designed to investigate a subject in depth, help in understanding processes, and to classify possible causes of observed associations. In addition, open ended question responses can range from short lists to lengthy narratives, which can result in valuable information the researcher can utilize for the study (Lee & Kim, 2021). The participants were interviewed after school in their classrooms and were asked to reflect on their experiences with the RtI process.

### **Data Tracking Methods**

Data tracking and maintenance is vital when conducting a basic qualitative study. When data is collected, researchers can keep track of information through records such as logs, field notes, handwritten notes, transcriptions, and journals (Barrett & Twycross, 2018). Seminal research conducted by Ortlipp (2008), stated that it is beneficial for researchers to utilize reflective journals as they enable them to make their experiences, feelings, thoughts, and opinions known. Sahin et al. (2019) also noted that journals are also useful when conducting research design as it helps in the process of analysis, collection of data, and is critical when determining themes and interpreting the process. In addition, field notes are beneficial when taken at the time of the interviewing process as the researcher identifies issues or concepts that are likely to assist in the understanding of the topic in question (Pacheco-Vega, 2019). Phillippi and Lauderdale (2018) emphasized that field notes assist in composing dense, rich descriptions of the research,

interview, focus group, and is beneficial when documenting important contextual information. When taking field notes I recorded my thoughts, ideas, questions, and concerns, while noting teacher actions, impressions, and other important information that assisted in the understanding of the phenomenon. Phillippi and Lauderdale (2018) also highlighted that field notes can increase the full depth of a research study and enhance the intensity and context of qualitative outcomes.

### **Role of the Researcher**

My role as the student-researcher was to examine and gather data on teachers' experiences with the implementation of RtI. In addition, I played the role of facilitator, investigator, interviewer, data collector, and analyst. My role as an educator includes teaching at the local district for 11 years as a special education lifeskills teacher who instructs students with moderate to profound disabilities. I held the position as a lifeskills teacher at the focus campus for 4 years and serviced special education students from grades 3rd through 5th. During my time as a lifeskills teacher at the focus campus I had additional leadership roles including lead teacher and head of the crisis team. After 4 years of teaching at the focus campus, I transitioned to a high school special education lifeskills teacher servicing students from 9<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> grade ranging from ages 14 through 22. In the high school setting, I play the role of lead teacher, Special Olympics head coach, and a crisis coordinator. In addition, I have worked alongside teachers for the past 11 years who have implemented RtI within the focus campus and the local district, ranging from 1<sup>st</sup> through 5<sup>th</sup> grade, and 9<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grade.



Prior to becoming a special education lifeskills teacher, I worked as a first-grade general education teacher for three years in a surrounding district. As a first-grade general education teacher, I had the opportunity to begin my experiences with RtI and continued for the next three years. In addition, I worked alongside other general education teachers who worked with RtI implementation and found that most shared similar experiences. During my time as a general education teacher, I learned that most of the teachers' experiences that I worked with were negative and very relatable to my personal experiences with the implementation of RtI.

After my transition from the previous district to my current district, I also found that many teachers shared very similar experiences and perceptions regarding the RtI process. Therefore, acting as the data collector and analyst; researcher bias could be present in this basic qualitative study. Because my experiences with RtI were negative from the beginning of my teaching career, I may have had a predetermined view of the topic. However, the probability for researcher bias can be controlled by acknowledging and detaching personal feelings and actively involving the participants in confirming and verifying the results (Wadams & Park, 2018). In addition, gathering feedback, sharing the results, and reviewing the findings of the study with the participants can minimize bias (Mackieson et al., 2019). As the researcher, having general education and RtI experience, teachers were very willing to share their experiences and thoughts with me and most often, were very honest about their feelings. My transition from general education teacher to special education teacher allowed teachers from both disciplines to feel a sense of

comfort and were impartial; thus, minimized the probability of compromised data. During my time holding these positions, I did not supervise any of the members that participated in the study; therefore, minimizing the likelihood of bias.

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis in research is key as it helps in preparing and interpreting data that could lead to developing insights of the topic in question. Aguas (2022) stated that the analysis process follows a preparative method of producing, gathering, and recording data that is collected. One of the major methods to collect valuable data is through interviews. This qualitative study utilized in-depth interview information as the main source of data collection and was analyzed using a multi-step process. According to Gelinas et al., (2021), most qualitative research data is collected through interviews and is one of the most significant forms used in research to develop an understanding of a phenomena.

The purpose of qualitative data analysis is to increase the understanding of the research topic or phenomenon in question (Jenkins et al., 2018) which is best examined through conversation. The data analysis process conducted entailed a comprehensive process of structuring, transcription of responses, evaluating, and translating data to determine significance. According to Mohajan (2018), data analysis is a comprehensive process that merges developing themes, recognition of main ideas, meaning units, and information attained from the literature. The interview questions (see Appendix B) used in the case study corresponded with the study's problem statement, the purpose of the

study, and with the RQs. The interviews presented valuable data that revealed teachers' insights regarding their RtI experiences; thus, providing a deeper understanding of the matter in question. The interviews were recorded and transcribed as the transcription process is an essential and critical part of the analytical process (O'Neil, 2019).

The process of qualitative data analysis involves a significant amount of exploration and data; thus, should be broken down into streamlined chunks (Lester et al., 2021). The interviews conducted consisted of intense conversations of teachers stating their feelings about the issues with RtI within their campus, personal experiences, and their version of resolutions. Theophilus (2018) noted that researchers should tap into the voices of the participants to gather information from them, interpret it, and report on it so that others can read and learn from their experiences. As the interviews were being conducted, notes were written in a reflective journal that helped in the transcription process. Henderson (2018) noted that transcribing is usually comprised of two stages including a rough transcription and an in-depth transcription. Rough transcriptions do not include a lot of detail, while in-depth transcribing consists of more elements, gestures, and pauses (Oluwafemi, et al., 2021). The information from the interviews was fully transcribed by re-listening to the audio recordings and noting participants expressions such as sighs and facial expressions, and writing short statements verbatim as they were given. This process of transcription allowed me to further examine the information collected and allowed for accuracy of the information. In addition, reflective thinking was also utilized as this provided further insight and reflection from the researcher. The

reflective thinking process also allowed for a better understanding of the relationships the participants shared and its connection with the research (Syamsuddin et al., 2020).

An important step included in this research study was open coding. Williams and Moser (2019) noted that utilizing open coding can demonstrate that facts are awaiting to be discovered. Coding was key in the research and data analysis process because provided structure, organization, and helped in making sense of the relative data by exposing patterns and themes. According to Creswell, coding is a method that can be used to group and organize data that is similar (2018). Inductive coding was used because there was no pre-determined system of codes developed prior to the interviews (Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019). The authors also stated that using inductive coding is beneficial as the codes are developed directly from the data generated by the participants themselves rather than the researcher.

During the coding process, the transcripts were read multiple times to ensure accuracy. The information was organized, labeled, and arranged into groups identified by common words and phrases. Lester (2020) researchers should create a list of important statements and reflections and group them into themes and patterns that drive the study. Open coding was beneficial because it identified similar words, specific themes, and patterns that showed barriers within the RtI process that contributed to teachers' perceptions and lack of knowledge regarding the model. Castleberry and Nolen (2018), interpretation of analysis is dependent on identifying and reporting patterns and themes that can then be applied to data and used to develop meaningful categories. Open coding

is also noted to be a process that identifies issues, similarities, and differences that are exposed through the participants descriptions and understood by the researcher (Cascio et al., 2019). This process enables the researcher to begin to comprehend the world from the standpoint and views of each participant (Williams & Moser, 2019).

The data was also color coded to help simplify it into recognizable patterns. Color coding was also utilized by using different colors to highlight matching codes. Some of the common words and phrases were, lack of knowledge, professional development/training, implementation, research-based interventions, limited time, lack of support, modeling/coaching, and so forth. In addition, all the participants who were interviewed had very similar experiences, thoughts, and perceptions; thus, shared several responses, phrases, and words that were the same or very similar. A research matrix with rows, and columns was also designed to organize communal phrases and words that were communicated by the participants.

### **Accuracy and Credibility of the Findings**

Ensuring credibility of results is a critical element and important step when conducting research. Hayashi et al. (2021) stressed that research findings should demonstrate credibility and objectivity, be reliable and transferable, and show dependability and validation. Similarly, credibility is essential when establishing research trustworthiness. Adler (2022) emphasized that trustworthy research should be transparent and explicit and should show rigor to ensure soundness of the findings. The author also

stressed that if research does not show sound trustworthiness, the entire process and the findings will be in question and considered unreliable (Adler, 2022).

During this qualitative study, there were effective strategies that were included to ensure the credibility of the results and to enhance the rigor of the study. One of the methods used to ensure the accuracy of the findings was ensuring that the collection of data was accurate through data quality checks. Interview responses, coding, and patterns were checked and rechecked for any inconsistencies, outliers, or missing information. Church et al. (2019) noted that the codes and themes must be a true and accurate reflection and interpretation of the data collected. Accuracy in data collection and results is crucial when making informed decisions, to ensure quality of the research, and to keep research reliability (AbuHalimeh, 2022). The author also noted that data is the structure in all research and must reflect the project and must be accurate, complete, consistent, and valid. By taking necessary steps to check and re-check the data, it increased and strengthened the findings; thus, enhanced the integrity of the study.

An additional method used to verify and check for accuracy of the findings was conducted through the process of member checking. Member checking was an effective way to ensure that I had presented their interpretations of the transcribed interviews and findings in an accurate and trustworthy manner. According to Erdmann and Potthoff (2023), member checking is an efficient method that allows participants within a study to confirm or correct their responses while also allowing to clarify any possible misunderstandings. It was critical to ensure that the researchers' understanding of the

findings was reinforced by the participants and supported by their experiences. Allowing the participants to review their responses and ensure that there were no errors in the interpretation ensured credibility. Additionally, this method allowed for cross-checking of the researcher's truth versus the participants truths and to ensure they corresponded with each another. The member checking process also added to the richness and validity of the study and was key in strengthening the findings.

### **Procedures for Discrepant Cases**

When conducting research, reviewers tend to gather information that has commonalities, and/or similar patterns and themes; however, there are times when information and results can demonstrate discrepancies. In the event of deviant cases, there are some approaches that can be implemented to help in resolving the issues. First, elaboration or modifications can be made by gathering a collection of additional data to make further comparisons against the original information collected (Johnson et al., 2020). Researchers can also have an additional meeting with the participant to discuss the accuracy of their responses in the interviews (Simoni et al., 2019). The participant may provide further, elaborative information that can help in resolving the discrepant results or refutational findings. In addition, the researcher can reexamine and take a more in-depth, careful, and overall look of the information to ensure that there are no errors or biases that may have compromised the results (Rose & Johnson, 2020). After careful review of the data there were no indications of discrepant cases or inconsistent results.

### **Data Analysis Results**

The data for this qualitative study was collected through in-depth interviews regarding teachers' experiences with the implementation of RtI. There were four questions that were developed to help guide the qualitative study and the collection of data. The following questions were used:

1. What significant barriers do general education teachers experience that contribute to the inadequate implementation, delivery, and maintenance of the RtI process?
2. What significant barriers do special education teachers experience that contribute to the inadequate implementation, delivery, and maintenance of the RtI process?
3. What supports and resources do general and special education teachers believe should be provided to them for more effective and adequate implementation of RtI?
4. What do general and special education perceive as some of the most beneficial outcomes of the RtI model when implemented and delivered adequately?

Ten teachers were interviewed regarding their experiences with the implementation of RtI. During the interviews, field notes were taken to capture as many details and context as possible to aid in the understanding of the phenomenon being studied. Field notes should be taken when conducting qualitative research as they are rich



in information and provide details of what the researcher is hearing and observing (Deggs & Hernandez, 2018). Field notes were very useful in the reflective process as they were taken before, during, and after the participant responded to the interview questions. The field notes also served as a record of the discussion taking place as notes, observations, inferences, and reactions were jotted down throughout the interview.

The data generated from the responses was transcribed and broken down into categories to perform a thematic analysis. Thematic analysis was beneficial when conducting a qualitative study as it gave a clear depiction and interpretation of recurring themes and patterns of the data collected (Majumdar, 2022). After collecting data from the field notes and interview responses, open coding was used to reveal similar words and phrases which then formed themes and patterns. Open coding was key in this qualitative study as it provided direction through revealing distinct patterns and themes that were embedded in the data (Williams & Moser, 2019). To ensure that the data was correct, the transcription was reviewed multiple times and checked for accuracy. Color coding was also useful for eye tracking, organization, and was used to highlight aligned themes, groupings, ideas, and fragments (Liu, et al., 2021). Developing themes generated from the interview responses aided in the project development and conclusion of the study.

### **Discussion of Findings**

Between the years of 2014 to 2019, one of the lowest performing elementary schools in a local, south Texas district that implements RtI was the focal point of this basic qualitative case study (Texas Education Agency Accountability Ratings, 2019). The

Campus Improvement Plan indicated that RtI was an area of need within the focus K–5 elementary school. In addition, the plan noted the need for additional academic RtI support and interventions for students who were struggling academically.

This qualitative study was intended to examine teacher perceptions, barriers, and attitudes regarding the implementation and maintenance of RtI. The results of this study emerged from the data collected from in-depth interviews with 7 general education and 3 special education teachers ranging from grades kindergarten through fifth. The data from the interviews was used to determine factors that contributed to teachers' perceptions regarding the RtI process within their campus. To ensure confidentiality, the data collected from the teachers was alpha-numerically coded. The data collected was coded to determine categories and similar groups for organization purposes. Organizing the data into similar groups and categories provided further clarification to the case study. In addition, copies of the interview responses were e-mailed to each participant to ensure that responses were accurate. The participants reviewed their responses and accuracy was confirmed.

Nine themes emerged from the data collected from the interviews including: (a) limited knowledge on overall RtI process (b) minimal and inadequate professional development/training in RtI, (c) minimal to no time to implement RtI, (d) extensive paperwork with minimal support to facilitate process, (e) minimal knowledge of research-based interventions, (f) limited support from administration and (g) limited RtI resources, (h) RtI coaching, (i) increased academic achievement.

The data collected from the interviews demonstrated that all teacher responses were similar and consistent with the themes that were generated. The themes that emerged throughout the interviews were interrelated and played a role in teachers' attitudes about the RtI process. Teachers' lack of knowledge, training, and support are major components that contribute to the ineffective implementation and maintenance of the RtI model. Teachers noted that an increase in professional development/training were needed throughout the school year to address gaps, inconsistencies, and concerns regarding RtI implementation. Some of the professional development noted by teachers that could aide them in more adequate delivery of RTI was how to select research-based interventions, what to expect in tiers II and III, and how to incorporate RtI in daily practices. Aside from the above-mentioned themes, some of the other concerns noted were progress monitoring and the amount of time students should remain on RtI. The teachers also emphasized that in-class modeling and coaching would assist them greatly in obtaining skills to adequately deliver RtI.

The following information was organized by the RQs and the themes that were revealed based on the data analysis and findings. RQs 1 and 2 are linked to Themes 1 through 7 whereas RQ 3 is consistent with Theme 8, and RQ 4 relates to Theme 9.

### **Research Questions 1 and 2**

RQs 1 and 2 were combined as questions were the same; however, one focused on general education teachers while the other focused on special education teachers.

Responses from both groups were clearly similar; thus, were combined to demonstrate consistency and correlation. RQs 1 and 2 were as follows:

RQ1: What significant barriers do general education teachers experience that contribute to the inadequate implementation, delivery, and maintenance of the RtI process?

RQ2: What significant barriers do special education teachers experience that contribute to the inadequate implementation, delivery, and maintenance of the RtI process?

Although the participants had a common understanding that RtI is designed to help struggling students through differentiated instruction and interventions, they did not fully understand the procedures behind the model. Based on the responses from the general and special education teachers, both groups believed there were significant barriers that hindered them from implementing and maintaining effective RtI in the classroom. They agreed that because of these barriers and challenges, students who were lower performing were not receiving the RtI support they needed to succeed academically. The teachers in the study also expressed that this could be a contributing factor to the students performing significantly lower than average in all testing core subjects in STAAR state exams. The following themes were consistent with the transcribed interview responses.

***Theme 1: Limited Knowledge on Overall RtI Methods***

Having adequate knowledge and skills is key when implementing any form of intervention or strategy in the classroom. Troester et al., (2022) emphasized that it was critical for educators to have adequate understanding of the process of RtI, for it to function properly. This was especially true with RtI methods as its purpose was to help struggling students align academically with their grade level peers. Based on the interview responses, teachers noted they had minimal knowledge regarding RtI and did not feel confident with the process or applying it in their classrooms with their students. Teachers 1 through 10 stated that they were not comfortable with the implementation, delivery, or maintenance of RtI due to their limited knowledge of the procedures. Their interview responses provided were consistent with Theme 1 of limited RtI knowledge.

The teachers were asked about their level of knowledge regarding RtI and their responses ranged from limited to very limited knowledge about the process and procedures. Although the participants were able to state the purpose of the RtI model, they were unable to explain the process or key components due to their inconsistent implementation and knowledge. Teacher 1 stated, “RtI on my campus is inconsistent; it’s not pushed enough, and I do not feel knowledgeable or confident in applying it at all.” The teachers knew that the model consisted of three tiers and that tier one included whole group instruction; however, had minimal experience and knowledge about what to do in each tier. For example, Teacher 10 reported that she “can identify struggling students in the tier one level but does not know what to do thereafter.” Teachers 2 and 3 explained

that their skills were limited and did not feel confident in implementing RtI with fidelity because of their lack of understanding of the process. Teacher 7 stated that “her knowledge about the implementation is non-existent and does not feel confident at all with the process.” Teachers 8 and 9 explained that they knew minimal about the RtI process and had very little information about the procedures and how to apply it in their classrooms. Lastly, teacher 10 stated that her “limited knowledge does not allow her to adequately implement RtI and needs further and ongoing training.”

The responses collected from the interviews clearly showed that teachers shared similar feelings regarding the process and the procedures surrounding RtI methods. In the ten interviews conducted, each teacher shared their concerns with their lack of overall knowledge about the RtI process. The teachers clearly knew the intent of RtI methods; however, did not have adequate knowledge or information on how to effectively start or implement the process in their classrooms. Each of the teachers also noted that they did not know how to adequately incorporate RtI into their daily practices due to their lack of knowledge and limited time.

### ***Theme 2: Minimal and Inadequate Professional Development/Training in RtI***

Based on the responses, teachers were not satisfied with the professional development, training, and in-service opportunities they received within their campus. Arrimada et al. (2020) noted that RtI implementation has a great demand on teachers that do not have the sufficient or necessary training they require to effectively apply it. RtI procedures required additional and ongoing professional development/training

throughout the school year to increase their skills. In addition, each teachers' experience was noted to be negative. Due to their RtI discrepancies and limited knowledge, their perceptions about the benefits from RtI were discouraging. Teacher 3 stated "my experiences with RtI have not been very positive and at times, adds a lot of stress on me because I know that I should be an expert by now. I've been a teacher for 16 years and should know how to implement RtI in my classroom with my students. Unfortunately, that's not the case."

All participants agreed that professional development and training were necessary; however, had not received adequate training throughout the years. Teachers 4, 5, and 6 stated that they only had RtI professional development once a year during mandatory beginning of year training. "Other than that, it is briefly discussed in grade level or alignment meetings". Most participants stated that in addition to the beginning of the year professional development, they at times had training in the middle of the school year. All teachers agreed that few training in one school year was not sufficient and required further professional development/training throughout the school year to further increase their understanding of RtI. They also agreed that they would benefit from RtI expert hands-on training in their classrooms. Their responses were consistent with Theme 2 regarding lack of adequate professional development.

The teachers were asked about their perceptions regarding the RtI professional development and training they received at their campus. The participants were also asked what type of professional development opportunities they felt were required to enhance

their knowledge of RtI methods. All teachers stated that the training they received was “inadequate, ineffective, and do not benefit from them at all”. They also stated that the information they received in their training was “always presented through PowerPoints and is the same every year”. Teacher 1 stated, “the information is read from PowerPoint slides. I can read that on my own. It is ineffective.” Teacher 3 noted that “teachers don’t pay much attention during training because it’s always the same ineffective PowerPoints slides.” Teacher 9 spoke about how the RtI presenter rushed through the PowerPoint slides “just to get it over with”. Teacher 5 also mentioned that questions were never asked at the end of the presentation because teachers “do not feel confident asking due to the minimal effort they put into the training.”

All participants agreed that “much more professional development and training opportunities are necessary.” They also stated that it was not only needed at the beginning of the school year but should be offered all year long. Teacher 2, 4, and 10 explained that they needed a significant amount of training opportunities to fully comprehend the RtI process. Teacher 2 stated, “if we had further and adequate training, we would feel more confident to use it in our classrooms with our lower performing students.”

***Themes 3 and 4: Minimal to No Time to Implement RtI and, Extensive Paperwork With Minimal Support to Facilitate Process***

Based on the participants responses, teachers did not feel that the implementation process of RtI is adequate or beneficial to students. All participants agreed that due to



their lack of knowledge regarding RtI, the implementation process was ineffective. Teachers 1 through 10 stated that they did not know of any teachers within the campus that fully comprehend RtI methods. Teacher 1 stated, “I only know a few teachers who semi-implement RtI in their classrooms, but still don’t know the full process.” Each participant agreed that there were several “challenges and barriers” that impede their application and maintenance of RtI in their classrooms. Their responses were consistent with Themes 3 and 4.

The participants were asked about the adequacy of RtI implementation within their campus. Teachers were also asked about what challenges and/or barriers they experienced that impeded the implementation of RtI. All teachers reiterated their lack of knowledge and understanding of the RtI model. Teachers 2 and 3 emphasized that they were dissatisfied with the minimal emphasis that was placed on the application of RtI. Teacher 3 stated, “it’s discouraging to know that RtI morale is so low within our campus. It makes me feel like I’m not doing my best as a teacher. I know I should be implementing RtI in my daily practices, but I don’t know much about it so how can I apply it effectively?” Similarly, teachers 1, 5, and 6 stressed that their understanding of the process was not adequate, so their skills to apply it in their classrooms were inadequate.

All participants agreed that time was one of the major concerns that needed to be addressed. Teacher 9 stated, “I don’t even have time in my 45 minutes to teach a full lesson so how can I find time to implement RtI?” All teachers were somewhat

knowledgeable of the tiers that make up the RtI model but were uncertain about the process in each tier. Teacher 4 noted that she was aware that tiers 2 and 3 required small group instruction. “From what I understand about the process, when students are in tiers 2 and 3, they need additional help in a small group. Unfortunately, I don’t have time to do that with my students. There’s just not enough time in each period.” Some of the teachers reported that they have too many students in their class that require additional help and there was limited time in each period. Teacher 7 stated, “I teach first graders and it takes a good amount of time just to settle all the students down, much less implement RtI”.

One teacher described the dynamics of her students and stated that she had a “class full of low functioning students so I see it impossible to service them all”. Most teachers emphasized that they were unable to apply interventions during the short amount of time they had in each period. “I think teachers would need block periods to work with RtI students. At least 90 min. It’s unreasonable to think that teachers have enough time in just 45 min”. All participants agreed they required extensive training on time management and differentiated instruction to assist them in their application of RtI in their classrooms.

Another issue that was shared by all participants was the amount of paperwork they were required to complete. All teachers agreed that the packets they were given for each student on RtI was extensive and complicated. They also agreed that the paperwork was very time-consuming and difficult to complete due to their limited knowledge and implementation. Teacher 10 stated, “I have a very difficult time understanding all the

paperwork. It's another area that I need training in." Some of the teachers noted that they had asked for additional training on the paperwork they are required to fill out; however, had not received the training. Teacher 7 shared similar feelings about the required documentation they are required to complete. "I literally make up some of the information in the packet. I don't know how the process works, so I can't fill in the forms accurately." Some of the teachers stated that they had spoken to the RtI lead teacher on campus but had not provided them with the training they needed to fill out the forms correctly. All teachers agreed that time and paperwork were critical in the RtI process and required further training and information to successfully complete these requirements.

***Theme 5: Minimal Knowledge of Research-Based Interventions***

According to the responses provided by the participants, it was evident that they lacked knowledge of research-based interventions and how to apply them. All teachers were aware and agreed that research-based interventions were key in the RtI process; however, did not have sufficient knowledge about how to locate them or implement them with their students. 6 out of 10 participants stated that they were provided with a list of websites of where to locate research-based interventions during an RtI training at the beginning of the school year. Although some of the teachers were provided with a list of websites, they were uncertain about how to identify what interventions coincide with the student's needs. Their responses were consistent with theme 5.

The participants were asked about their knowledge regarding the research-based interventions that support RtI model. All teachers were aware that research-based

interventions played a key role when working with struggling students who required RtI. Each of the teachers were knowledgeable that research-based interventions were designed to help students respond effectively to RtI; however, it was evident by their responses that their understanding of how to select or apply the interventions was minimal. Teacher 8 stated that she knew what the intent of the interventions were but didn't know how to match them to her students' individual needs or limitations. Teachers 1 through 10 stated that they have searched the websites but did not know what interventions to choose for their students. Teacher 1 stated, "I have tried to get on some of the websites and there is a lot of interventions to choose from, but I don't know how to match the intervention to my student's needs."

Teachers 2, 4, and 5 stressed the importance of receiving training on how to choose and implement interventions. It was apparent that the teachers knew the potential benefits of using the interventions but did not know how to effectively apply them to meet the needs of their students. "The research-based interventions look like they can be helpful to my students; however, I don't know how to choose them according to my student's needs" stated teacher 5. Of the 10 participants, all agreed that the training they had at the beginning of the school year provided them with minimal information about research-based interventions and was an area of need that needed to be addressed. Teacher 7 explained, "Usually, there is a slide or two in the RtI presentation that addresses research-based interventions but that is not enough. A list of websites doesn't help us. We need to learn how to identify the students' needs and how to correspond the

intervention to their struggling areas. They have not taught us that.” One teacher also stated, “I speak for myself when I say, even if I knew how to choose interventions for the specific needs of my students, I wouldn’t have enough time to implement them”. This is an area that is considered a high area of need for all participants who were interviewed. Based on the teachers’ responses, there was a clear discrepancy in research-based interventions. All teachers agreed that this was another limitation they had in common that did not allow them to effectively implement RtI in their classrooms.

#### ***Theme 6: Limited Support from Administration***

The responses obtained in the interviews related to RQ1 and RQ2, demonstrated a clear disconnect between teachers who were required to implement RtI and administration support. All 10 teachers shared their experiences with administration and the assistance they received from the campus and/or district. Of the 10 teachers, only 3 had received RtI some assistance and support from an administrator and/or dean. They also shared that the support they had received was minimal and had not been followed up on. The responses they provided were consistent with theme 6 of limited support from administration.

The participants were asked to share their experiences with administrative support regarding their concerns or issues with RtI. Teacher 1 stated that she reported several of her concerns with her assistant principal and only received minimal answers and support. She stated, “After several weeks of struggling with RtI, I asked for help from my principal, and she referred me to my assistant principal. I asked my assistant principal for

assistance, and she provided me with the cluster RtI specialist's phone number. I called but the specialist was not available, so I left a voicemail. I haven't received a call back yet." Similarly, teachers 5 and 8 reported that they were also referred by the principal to either the assistant principal or the dean; however, were not provided with adequate support. Teachers 2, 3, and 4 shared related feelings and stated that they had not reported their concerns to anyone because they felt that they were going to go unnoticed and did not feel they were going to receive the support they needed. Teacher 4 stated, "Why bother asking if I know they are not going to help me. They haven't helped other teachers, so I doubt they will help me either." Eight participants felt like the administrators were not very knowledgeable themselves about the RtI process. Teacher 9 emphasized, "How would administrators know anything about RtI? They are not the ones in the classroom teaching, so how would they know?"

All participants agreed that the leaders of the school also needed further training in RtI. Teacher 7 stressed, "If the leaders in our campus were knowledgeable about RtI, then we would be receiving the help we need immediately from them. We wouldn't have to be getting help from other people in the district who are never available to us." Lesh et al. (2021) stated that administrators needed to be knowledgeable and see the value in RtI to ensure teacher buy-in and effective implementation. Having teachers buy-in to the RtI process was important for it to be successful. All participants who were interviewed shared similar feelings and frustrations regarding RtI support and the minimal assistance they had received. All teachers agreed that their concerns continued to be unaddressed,

and issues continued to be present; hence, impeding their ability to implement RtI efficiently.

***Theme 7: Limited RtI Resources***

Teachers shared their concerns and frustrations regarding the resources they had available to them for RtI implementation. Most of the participants felt that administration and resources go hand in hand. Teacher 3 stated, “How can we work with RtI in our classrooms with our lower functioning students, without the resources we need to enhance our skills? What we have is nowhere near adequate. It’s never going to help our students if things don’t change.” Most of the participants felt like administration should provide them with additional resources to assist them in fully understanding, implementing, and enhancing RtI. The responses the teachers provided were consistent with theme 7 of limited RtI resources.

Resources are of the utmost importance when applying RtI methods. For RtI to be implemented and maintained efficiently, teachers must be provided with a significant number of resources for the individual needs of the students and for the different tiers. As stated by teacher 8, “How do they expect for us to apply RtI procedures adequately if we don’t have resources to choose from? If they want the students to fully benefit from RtI, we need more resources”. Similarly, teacher 3 stated that they “need a variety of materials to work with the students who are struggling. Aside from additional training, we also need hands on materials such as manipulatives, audio, and visual aids, and maybe some educational board games, or graphic and interactive materials. Especially at the

elementary level”. Teachers 1 and 7 emphasized their need for English Language Arts resources; in particular, in reading, reading comprehension, writing, and grammar.

“Many of the students who are behind struggle in their reading and comprehension skills. They also struggle a lot in their writing, especially in capitalization and punctuation. I would like to see additional resources in these areas” expressed teacher 9. All teachers agreed that they lacked in the availability of resources and stated that without proper materials, they could not implement RtI effectively. Teacher 6 stated, “Just like surgeons can’t perform an operation without proper instruments; well, teachers can’t perform RtI methods without proper training and resources”.

### **Research Question 3**

RQ3 was, What supports and resources do general and special education teachers believe should be provided to them for more effective and adequate implementation of RtI? Based on the responses from the general and special education teachers, they were confident that additional resources such as job embedded RtI coaching would be key in their effective implementation of RtI. All teachers stated that they needed additional and extensive training, support, and resources to successfully apply RtI in their classrooms. The participants shared their feelings about the importance of RtI resources in relation to effective and successful implementation. Their responses were consistent with theme 8 of RtI coaching.

### ***Theme 8: RtI Coaching***



The participants were asked about what resources they felt were necessary to assist them in effectively applying RtI methods in their classrooms. All participants shared their ideas and feelings about how certain resources could be beneficial in their RtI practices. Based on the responses, it was evident that in-class coaching sessions was a resource that both general and special education teachers could benefit from to increase their knowledge and skills in RtI. Teacher 4 emphasized, “I really feel that if they provided us with coaching in our classrooms, we would learn so much more about RtI. If no one shows us how to apply it in our actual classroom setting, then we will never really grasp the full effect.”

Because most of the participants stated that time is an issue when implementing RtI, an actual demonstration of how it is applied within one class period would be valuable. March et al., (2020) described coaches as experts who modeled the practice, observed teachers implementing the new skill, and provided regular feedback for ongoing improvement. Teacher 2 stressed that “leading by example is one of the best ways to learn. If RtI coaches lead and we can observe that in our classrooms, we have a better chance of learning how to apply RtI effectively.” Teacher 10 stated, “I am sure that teachers would feel much more confident if they had resources like RtI coaches, hands-on training, or actual videos in real-time, of teachers who successfully implement RtI in their classrooms.” Teacher 4, 5, and 9 stated similar responses noting that in-class coaching, or modeling could help them tremendously. Teacher 4 emphasized, “I would love to have an

RtI specialist come into my classroom, take over, and implement RtI with my students. Then I could actually see how they do it in real-time. That would help me a lot.”

Videos of RtI coaches implementing RtI in the classrooms were also a resource that participants felt would be beneficial if in-class support was not available to them. Teacher 6 stated, “RtI coaching would be the best form of training, but I don’t think that is something that is available to us. Since coaches may not be available to teachers, I would like to see a real video of teachers around the district who successfully incorporate RtI into their daily routine. It would be very beneficial for me to see something like that and just copy-cat that strategy.” 3 of the 10 participants stated if there were teachers on campus that were experts in applying RtI in their classrooms, they could benefit from observing and learning from them. Teacher 1 noted, “Unfortunately, there is no one on campus that is confident in their RtI procedures, so we don’t have that option.” All participants shared their ideas and opinions about resources that would assist them in the effective implementation of RtI.

All agreed that in-depth training from RtI coaches, modeling in the classroom, and/or videos in an actual classroom setting would benefit them and increase their ability to successfully apply RtI in their classroom. They also agreed that specific training in research-based interventions and how to select the corresponding intervention based on student’s individual needs could be beneficial to them. Teacher 6 emphasized that “a list of websites and interventions does us no good if we don’t know how to match them to our students needs or how to use them properly.”

All teachers agreed that some form of coaching should be offered to them in their classrooms because it would benefit them to see it applied in real-time. They also agreed that learning through observing teachers who were more experienced and were implementing RtI successfully in their classroom could benefit them as well. Teacher 3 compared observing teachers implementing RtI in their classrooms, to step-by-step YouTube videos that help when people need instructions on how to put something together. “When I want to learn how to put something together or correctly install something, I search it up on YouTube. It’s the same concept. I want to see a teacher do it and do it well so I can learn from them”.

It was apparent from the responses that working alongside RtI coaches could help increase teachers’ knowledge, skills, motivation, and fidelity. All participants shared their concerns about “insufficient meaningful training and no coaching available” and agreed that experts who are knowledgeable about the RtI process would be a resource that could help them tremendously. Sabnis et al. (2020) emphasized that coaches played a significant role in the teachers learning process towards increased RtI competency. Psencik et al. (2019) also noted that instructional coaches were vital as they are highly skilled trainers that guided the learners and strengthened their instructional efficiency resulting in an increase in student academic achievement. Based on the data collected, in-class coaching sessions could be a significant part of teachers’ learning processes and development. RtI coaching could help teachers reach their goal of delivering RtI efficiently and adequately meeting the needs of struggling students.

**Research Question 4**

RQ4 was, What do general and special education teachers perceive as some of the most beneficial outcomes of the RtI model when implemented and delivered adequately? Based on the interview responses, the participants believed with adequate professional development/training, administration support, RtI coaching, and a variety of resources, RtI could produce positive academic results. “If we had all the support in place, then struggling students would greatly benefit from this model. Students who are behind academically could be getting adequate support from their teachers and therefore get better grades”. Their responses were consistent with theme 9 of increased academic achievement.

***Theme 9: Increased Academic Achievement***

All teachers who were interviewed knew the intent of RtI and its possible benefits when implemented adequately. The participants were aware that RtI was an early intervention model that helped identify students who were struggling academically. Teacher 5 stated that “RtI identifies students who are experiencing difficulties in their learning and are provided with different interventions to help them improve in their academics”. RtI early intervention could also prevent inappropriate referrals and labeling of students in special education if detected in the early grades (Arias-Gundin & Llamazares, 2021). Teacher 2 emphasized that “if RtI was implemented early on and adequately, students who participate in state exams might have a greater chance of passing”. The participants also agreed that there may be less failures with the adequate

implementation of RtI. Teacher 10 reported that “there are several students that struggle in their academics that fail a subject or a grade level every year”.

All teachers agreed that the benefits of effective RtI were endless and could even help in other areas that related to increased academic achievement such as behaviors, confidence, and motivation. Teacher 7 stated, “I truly believe that students who increase in their academic performance will feel better about themselves, and their motivation will grow”. Raben et al. (2019) stated that RtI can be used in different subject areas including reading, mathematics, writing, social studies, and science. The authors also noted that RtI could positively benefit a wide range of underachieving students who, without intervention, may experience debilitating problems throughout their school years (Raben et al., 2019). All teachers who were interviewed agreed that teachers would benefit greatly from accurate implementation of RtI as student’s academic achievement could improve; thus, increasing teacher, student, and parent morale and overall campus rating.

### **Discrepant Cases**

When conducting qualitative research, it was essential to further examine negative cases to ensure accuracy. According to Rose & Johnson (2020), “researchers should search for theories, data, or discrepant information that run counter to themes or analyses developed in the research” (p. 12). Analysis of discrepant cases was an important part of research as it served as a review and search for data that may contradict or disprove findings in a study (McAleese & Kilty, 2019). To determine accuracy and validity, I listened to audio recordings several times, transcribed, coded, and analyzed all data,

responses, and themes to ensure that all information collected was consistent and that it corresponded with the participants perceptions and opinions. This process was key in revealing if there were any discrepancies in this qualitative study. After thorough re-examination of the data, it was determined that there were no discrepant cases, and the collection of data was sound, accurate, and consistent. All participants responses were true reflections of their experiences with RtI and provided critical information to the study's objective and intent. This step was vital to the study's authenticity and validity.

### **Accuracy of Data Analysis**

When conducting qualitative research, data validation and check for accuracy is essential to determine a study's reliability and consistency. Capturing accurate data during in-depth interviews was key when collecting rich information, establishing themes, and to ensure verification and validation of data (Simoni, et al., 2019). In this study, member checking was implemented to ensure validation and accuracy of the data collected. Member checking is a valuable tool in qualitative research as it involves and invites participants to check, correct, comment, or approve the data and interpretations collected by the researcher (Iivari, 2018). All participants were provided a copy of the interview transcription and reviewed for accuracy. According to the participants, the information and results were correct, and no changes or modifications were needed.

To ensure that bias was not present, all responses were noted and summarized using the participants own words or phrases and using original context. In addition, if the participants used unfamiliar words or phrases, clarification or elaboration was sought.

Another method used to address possible bias was sharing the transcribed data and results with the participants to ensure their perspectives and opinions were reflected accurately. At the end, I provided each participant with my name and contact information including my work extension, mobile phone number, and email address. Contact information was provided if participants had additional questions or concerns about the research study. This also helped in minimizing researcher bias.

### **Connection of the Study Findings to the Conceptual Framework**

The framework behind this qualitative study was based on Malcolm Knowles theory of andragogy, self-direction, and adult education in learning. The findings of this study including limited RtI knowledge, inadequate professional development, minimal time for implementation, extensive paperwork, minimal knowledge of research-based interventions, limited support and resources, coaching, and increased academic achievement can be addressed through the principles of Knowles adult learning theory. Knowles theory addressed these findings as the principles focused on how a person attained their knowledge and skills, and the attitudes needed to attain changes in their practices (Mukhalalati & Taylor, 2019). The RQs developed in this study could be addressed by Knowles theory of the demonstration of relevant concepts to teachers versus less effective forms of learning such as through presentations such as PowerPoints. Knowles's notion of demonstrating concepts had shown to be more efficient as teachers could learn through experiences in real time (Yarbrough, 2018).

Malcolm Knowles also asserted that learning through actual experiences through demonstration could help individuals transition from dependency to self-sufficiency as they learned and practiced through expert modeling. This notion correlated to the findings of this qualitative study as teachers required professional development that was engaging, meaningful, directly related to RtI, and delivered and modeled by experts. Knowles's ideas were also significant in professional learning as it tapped into the learner's prior knowledge and what they learned within the experimental element of the program (Mukhalalati & Taylor, 2019). El-Amin (2020) also supported this learning theory as adults benefited more and were more receptive to learning experientially such as through simulations, role-playing, and interaction.

The findings were also consistent with Vygotsky's adult learning theory as teachers required professional learning and coaching from experts in RtI. This qualitative study's findings correlated with Vygotsky's notion of learning and problem solving under the adult guidance of more capable peers and adequate support from an expert (Shah & Rashid, 2018). According to the findings, this was consistent with Vygotsky's adult learning theory as teachers at the focus campus needed professional learning and guidance from practitioners who had expertise in RtI and are skillful in its implementation and maintenance.

### **Project Deliverable Based on Findings**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine elementary general and special education teachers' experiences with the implementation of RtI. 10 teachers who



were responsible for implementing RtI in their classroom participated in the interview sessions. Inadequate implementation of RtI due to teachers lack knowledge and skills was the focal point of this project study. Teachers also reported a lack of necessary skills required to effectively implement, deliver, and maintain RtI interventions. Due to these discrepancies, students who required RtI support had not received adequate academic support; thus, lacked academic achievement.

After a thorough review of interview transcriptions, nine themes were revealed including: (a) limited knowledge on overall RtI process (b) minimal and inadequate professional development/training in RtI, (c) minimal to no time to implement RtI, (d) extensive paperwork with minimal support to facilitate process, (e) minimal knowledge of research-based interventions, (f) limited support from administration and (g) limited RtI resources, (h) RtI coaching, (i) increased academic achievement. Based on the findings the most beneficial project development would include comprehensive professional development sessions combined with RtI in-class coaching during the 2023 academic school year.

By providing this support, teachers could increase their knowledge, skills, and enhance their daily practices in RtI; thus, improving and supporting the academic success of students who were struggling. Within the project, I provided teachers with recommendations and strategies based on current research. I also provided current information and showed relevant videos on the three tiers that make up the RtI model. Furthermore, I provided teachers with resources and information on how to find and

apply research-based interventions. This project assisted teachers in building their knowledge, understanding, and skills of RtI; hence, improving students learning and the overall accountability of the focus campus.

### **Limitations**

The limitations of this qualitative study included the sample size. Sim et al., (2018) emphasized that sample size is significant when conducting a study as too large or too small of a sample size could affect the study and impact the conclusions obtained from the study. Samples should not be over or under sample size as both may cause limitations. Sim et al., (2018) noted that sample sizes that are too small may hinder the findings from being generalized; whereas a sample size that is too large gives more room for differences and/or errors. The number of participants in this study was small; therefore, the likelihood of generalizability was minimized. According to Carminati (2018), generalizability was one of the main focuses of a qualitative study and should demonstrate quality, consistency, and be straightforward.

### **Summary**

Conducting research requires that various critical elements be in place to ensure reliability and validity of the study. Qualitative studies are designed to allow for a better understanding of a particular phenomenon with detailed insight and careful analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the topic in question (Barrett & Twycross, 2018). It also enables the development of themes and patterns which provides further insight on the topic or subject that the researcher is examining. The importance of precise data

collection is essential when conducting a qualitative study to ensure accurate data analysis and conclusions (Clark & Veale, 2018). This includes accuracy in selecting what design is most appropriate for the study, when choosing participants, ensuring confidentiality, accuracy in data collection and data analysis, and considering the limitations of the study (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). Without these critical elements, the results could potentially be flawed, and the outcome of the study could be compromised and inconsistent.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine teachers' experiences and perceptions about RtI implementation in a K-5 elementary school. Section 2 of this study provided a description and justification of the research design used for this basic qualitative study. It also provided information about the participants, how they were chosen, how access was obtained to the campus and participants, and confidentiality regarding how they were protected. This section also discussed data collection and analysis procedures, the role of the researcher, and limitations of the research study.

## **Section 3: The Project**

### **Introduction**

Previous research has shown that RtI has benefits for students who are struggling academically. RtI, which came into effect in 2004, is a three-tiered intervention system that educators use to identify students who are not performing at the same academic level as their grade level peers (Sabnis et al., 2020). A local south Texas elementary school had been considered one of the lowest performing schools for several years in a row. This was true in its academic performance, and accountability rating, and in its STAAR metrics. Even though RtI delivery was a mandatory component for struggling students, educators at this local elementary school continued to struggle in its implementation as shown by state and district accountability ratings.

According to a campus improvement plan for the focus campus, early identification of students who required further RtI or academic support was necessary to reduce the gaps between special population students and all students. Al-Onizat (2021) noted that RtI is essential because it helps teachers in identifying students with learning difficulties, assessing their academic success, and demonstrating the level of deviation from their average peers. This area of need was critical because the focus campus had also been considered one the lowest performing elementary schools within the district in recent years.

The aim of this basic qualitative case study was to explore elementary teacher's experiences and perceptions of RtI implementation, delivery, and maintenance within

their campus. Furthermore, I sought to explore the barriers that hindered the RtI process. Although all participants were familiar with the purpose of RtI, they expressed concerns, negative experiences, shortcomings, and frustrations related to the implementation of RtI methods in their classrooms. The interviews conducted provided an in-depth understanding of the discrepancies and challenges that teachers faced, that limited their RtI skills. This study may provide district leaders, administration, teachers, and other educational investors with beneficial information they can use to improve the RtI process. The study may also clarify what additional RtI resources may help increase students' academic success in the classroom and in state testing.

As a result of the findings of this case study, I developed a series of professional development opportunities and in-class coaching sessions to address teacher needs and to assist in the goal of increasing student academic achievement. The professional development and in-class coaching sessions were developed based on the themes that emerged from the data analysis process including (a) limited knowledge on overall RtI process (b) minimal and inadequate professional development/training in RtI, (c) minimal to no time to implement RtI, (d) extensive paperwork with minimal support to facilitate process, (e) minimal knowledge of research-based interventions, (f) limited support from administration and (g) limited RtI resources, (h) RtI coaching, and (i) increased academic achievement. The intent of this project is to provide meaningful information on the application and maintenance of RtI methods.

The information provided in the ongoing professional development sessions may further increase teachers' RtI skills and knowledge for application in their daily practices. The project also offers teachers in-class RtI coaching to improve their practices. Teachers benefited from ongoing and intense professional development and training opportunities once per 6 weeks throughout the academic school year with supplemental training during the summer months. Teachers may also benefit from RtI coaching once a week for the first 3 weeks of project implementation.

Thereafter, teachers will be provided with a clearly developed plan of action and specific research-based interventions that they can refer to during RtI implementation. In addition, ongoing support from administration and RtI coaches will be provided depending on the teacher's progress, level of need, and their level of confidence with their RtI delivery. This support can be provided through in-class coaching sessions, real time videos of teachers who mastered RtI implementation, or through ongoing professional development opportunities. Professional development can be provided during grade-level meetings; before or after school professional development times; and throughout the course of the academic school year including beginning, middle, and end of year in-services.

The goal of these professional development opportunities and in-class coaching sessions is to improve teachers' implementation of and daily practices related to RtI. In addition, the project may further teachers' self-efficacy skills and increase their confidence and fidelity, hence, potentially supporting increased student academic

achievement and state testing scores. Furthermore, the project may allow teachers to develop their RtI skills and gave them a clearer understanding of RtI procedures including the process and what methods are used to adequately implement and maintain the model.

In Section 3, I will provide a rationale for the project. The section includes details on the project genre, a literature review, a project description, and an evaluation plan. The section will conclude with a review of project implications to summarize potential social change. As I discuss, the project may lead to positive social change in local and surrounding districts, and in other institutions that require further RtI improvements.

### **Rationale**

In Section 2, the case study revealed barriers that teachers faced that hindered them from effectively implementing RtI in their daily practices. The findings of this qualitative study also revealed insight into what teachers required to execute and maintain RtI appropriately and adequately. Based on the results of the interviews and data analysis, additional and ongoing professional development and in-class coaching sessions could benefit the teachers at this site. Meaningful professional development is essential when improvement is needed in a particular area or practice. In-class coaching is also an effective tool that could improve teachers' implementation of RtI. Ivanova et al. (2022) noted that professional development and coaching is considered a powerful tool that helps teachers develop and maximize their skills. This plan was created to address deficiencies in RtI procedures and to improve its implementation at this focus campus.

Because of the low ratings and continuous improvements in RtI as an area of need in the campus improvement plan, teachers require ongoing professional development opportunities and in-class Rti coaching. The provision included in this plan could provide teachers with the support and knowledge they need to improve their RtI skills. Richter, et al. (2022) stated that professional development can influence positive reform, teacher collaboration, improve classroom practices, and can lead to higher student achievement. In addition, professional development according to Martin and Mulvihill (2023), should be based on the perspectives, experiences, and opinions of the teachers, rather than providing professional development topics without teacher input. The authors also noted that professional development is considered key in a teacher's personal, developmental, and constructive learning process, and should include opportunities for participant engagement and reflection.

Professional development in RtI was necessary for this local elementary school because students who received RtI were not responding adequately and continued to struggle academically. Students who were receiving RtI support in tiers 2 and 3 continued to struggle and fell further behind their peers. Benedict et al. (2021) emphasized that RtI is based on evidence-based instruction across all tiers; however, such instruction is not easy to attain due to the difference of curriculum and instruction in tier 1, as compared to tiers 2 and 3. General and special education teachers reported that students continued to struggle academically despite the fact they received RtI support. Participating teachers indicated that students continued to struggle in their academic performance due to



teachers lack in RtI knowledge and skills. Due to the link in ineffective RtI implementation and poor student academic performance it was critical for teachers to receive training to improve their RtI daily practices.

### **Review of the Literature**

The purpose of this research study was to examine teachers' experiences with RtI and their views regarding the implementation and maintenance of the model. In addition, the case study revealed critical information about teachers' needs and support they require to increase their skills and knowledge of RtI methods. In this section, I conducted a review of literature that included information that is directly related to my project. To support this section of literature review, I examined current research that coincides with RtI professional development and in class RtI coaching.

### **Approach Used to Gather Literature**

The topics discussed in the literature review were based on the themes that coincided with my project study. I discussed and highlighted the need for additional professional development and training that teachers need to properly and adequately implement RtI. I also discussed the need for RtI coaching to increase teachers' knowledge on RtI methods, and on research-based interventions. In addition, I highlighted the need for additional resources and support from administration.

I conducted a comprehensive search for relevant material that was published within the last 5 years and directly related to my project. Obtaining material within this time frame was necessary to gather the most appropriate and up to date information

regarding current RtI practices. The research focused primarily on peer-reviewed material and full text resources and was obtained from the Walden University Library. Several databases were searched including Academic Search Complete, Education Source, ERIC, ProQuest Central, Sage Journals, and Taylor & Francis Online. I also obtained journal articles from Google Scholar and basic Google search. The key search terms I used included: response to intervention in education, RtI professional development, response to intervention barriers, RtI coaching, teacher attitudes towards response to intervention, progress monitoring, RtI research-based interventions, and RtI implementation. The searches limiters were narrowed down to publication dates from the past 5 years, full-text, and peer reviewed scholarly journals only. As literature materials were obtained, they were added to this section until saturation was reached.

### **Professional Development for Response to Intervention**

Professional development is a significant part of the learning process for teachers and is a critical part of becoming a successful educator. Professional development is a tool that is provided regularly in education to introduce new strategies, refine existing teacher practices, and to improve teachers' professional knowledge, competence, and skills (Pham & Doan, 2022). Professional development also provides teachers with the opportunity to obtain new information, share their experiences and expertise with other teachers, and to reflect on their current practices and knowledge (Kwee, 2020). Eroglu and Ozbek (2023) emphasized that teachers should develop and improve their practices and skills through professional development for them to be effective. The authors also

noted that some of the advantages of professional development are to inform, reflect, collaborate, plan, and to share activities and personal experiences.

Research has shown that the intent of professional development in the field of education is to increase knowledge, develop skills, and influence improvements in teacher's practices (Tannehill et al., 2021). Professional development opportunities should be supported by administrators and teachers and should be focused and aligned with relevant curricula (Fernandes et al., 2023). Although the goals of professional development are supported by educators, the usefulness may differ depending on the duration, presentation, learning activities, and the rationality of the training (Meyer et al., 2023). According to Garcia and Weiss (2019), one of the weaknesses of professional development is that many teachers do not consider the activities useful and feel there is a clear disconnect between what they learn in the training and what they can apply in their classrooms. This coincides with the focus of this research study and the professional development that is provided throughout the academic school year in RtI.

One of Malcolm Knowles's beliefs was that adult learners should take initiative and be motivated to learn (Abdullah et al., 2021). When adult learners are motivated to learn, they take initiative and learn more efficiently than adults who are waiting to be taught. Several teachers reported that the professional development provided at the focus campus lacked in its effectiveness due to the short and ineffective PowerPoint presentations and the handouts that are provided to them. As a result, they stated that minimal impact was made on their learning, knowledge, skills, and daily practices. The

teachers also stated that they continued feeling unmotivated and underprepared in their knowledge, skills, and their daily practices (Popova et al., 2022). Popova et al. (2022) emphasized that the content, delivery, duration, and organization are key when presenting professional development. The authors noted that professional development should be subject specific, concrete, realistic, informative, and sustained, versus one-time workshops, to be more effective and to help teachers improve their skills and practices.

For teachers to benefit from RtI professional development, sessions should consist of active learning, collaboration, modeling, feedback, and reflection, coupled with ongoing coaching and expert support (Mason et al., 2019). Hiershenee, et al. (2022) also agree that professional development experiences should be intensive, long-term, structured courses that are subject specific with learner-centered, active learning opportunities that are led by prominent experts that provide the teachers to act as students within each session. The authors also stated that this form of professional development should provide enthusiasm, vigor, and build pride in the profession. In addition, Malcolm Knowles asserted that adults learn best when they acknowledge that obtaining new knowledge and skills will help them improve in executing their work more effectively (van der Walt, 2019). By providing this type of professional development, versus one-time sessions that do not provide in-depth information needed to implement RtI adequately, teachers can increase their knowledge and skills and apply RtI methods more effectively.

Quality professional development workshops can be offered in a variety of forms, times, and days. Workshops should be frequent and ongoing and can be offered before, during, or after school, or on the weekends, and throughout the summer months. High quality workshop training is intended to improve teacher's abilities including their knowledge, skills, attitudes, and competence. As a result, will improve the quality of learning; thus, enhancing student performance (Aida, 2023). Sessions can be provided to teachers through RtI experts who offer targeted workshops and training that focus on RtI implementation. Additionally, teacher workshops led by experts can influence and increase teacher capacity and knowledge (Liu, 2022). Furthermore, targeted workshops attract practitioners with similar goals of improving their daily practices and increasing their knowledge (Zhang, et al., 2019). Normally, professional development and/or workshops at this focus campus are offered to a whole group and provided once or twice a year. It is also typical for teachers to be provided with information via PowerPoints that are read slide-by-slide and verbatim from a big screen. This form of training is not effective and does not provide adequate or valuable information that will positively impact teacher learning.

Teachers also learn best from professional development opportunities that are relevant and valuable and provide them with realistic ways to apply what they have learned and deliver subject matter that can be maintained over time (Ju & Liu, 2022). Knowles argued that professional learning should entail both relevant information and materials that are pertinent to a learner's intent, objective, and real-life situations (Scholtz,

2023). This is especially true in the area of RtI. Whitworth et al. (2020) emphasized that teacher's learning through professional development plays an essential role in enhancing their skills to adequately implement RtI by providing teachers with ongoing phases of learning. Allison et al., (2023) also stated that long term support for teachers through continuous professional development opportunities allows time for teachers to reflect on their experiences and continue focusing on critical skills that are necessary to apply RtI methods. Knowles supported this belief as he noted that adults who are proactive in professional learning intend to solve problems and generate positive results in their daily practices and their life.

### **Coaching for Response to Intervention**

Coaching is important in all professions as it provides consistent and ongoing support that helps professionals learn new skills and have a better understanding of what they are trying to implement or deliver. In seminal research, Vygotsky stated that adults learn and develop through being stretched and challenged to transform themselves with support of a framework established by their mentor or coach (1962). Coaching has been in use for decades in the highly changing sports world, large and small businesses, retail, and very importantly, in the field of education. Erchul (2023) stated that consultation research and practice started in 1970 and was the foundation for educational coaching. Erchul (2023) also stated that coaching has progressed since the 1970's and evolved from consultation research and practice to coaching. In addition, Erchul stated that educational coaching has advanced over time with the help of various supporting influences that have

aided in its development including professional development, training/in-services, literacy, adult learning, mentorship, and so forth. (2023).

Beard and Wilson (2018) emphasized that coaching helps practitioners refine and apply the skills they acquired adequately and helps them in maintaining their skills and practices. Coaching is also helpful as it is perceived as a valuable and supportive tool that is not viewed as evaluative in nature (Beard & Wilson, 2018). Cofino emphasized that since coaches are nonevaluative, they can help educators maintain an attitude of growth in a non-intimidating way and encourage long term development (2023). Another benefit according to Jung et al. is that coaching provides meaning and security to work practices (2023). The authors also emphasized that coaching helps practitioners identify, resolve, and manage problems, difficulties, and conflicts; thus, improving their execution and helping them recognize their capability and development (Jung et al., 2023). Van Nieuwerburgh (2018) suggests that providing teachers with continuing support through professional development opportunities and coaching is essential to allow learning through self-awareness and reflection on their ongoing experiences and gives teachers a sense of responsibility. Fouracres (2020) also agreed that coaching promotes self-awareness, self-determination, and self-efficacy as practitioners identify their own strengths and build on that to reach their desired goals and increase their skills. Coaching also helps practitioners establish a development plan and provides ongoing support and feedback (Bywater et al., 2021).

Due to teachers' lack of RtI knowledge and skills, it was key to provide in-class coaching sessions to increase their understanding of the RtI process. According to Reddy (2023), school-based coaching has surfaced more recently as an effective method for increasing teacher's knowledge, application skills, and security, while simultaneously improving student academic success and behavior. Professional development alone may not be effective as it may lack in time/length of session, and the intensity of specific topics that teachers require training in to improve their instructional practices (Fairman, et al., 2020). Various teachers shared their concerns regarding the professional development opportunities offered at their campus stating they were rushed through and not effective. Due to the increased concerns and need of support that teachers required to develop their skills in RtI, in-class coaching sessions can expand and reinforce the effectiveness of typical professional development opportunities (Arden & Benz, 2018). Stevenson (2023) emphasized that helping educators comprehend and successfully get through challenges they encounter is the purpose of professional learning and is essential to improve teacher's skills.

Coaching has essential components that make it an effective tool to complement professional development opportunities. Coaching is described by Kraft et al. as a professional development activity that is individualized, intensive, sustained, context specific, and focused (2018). Kraft et al. describes the components as the following:

(a) individualized—coaching sessions are one-on-one; (b) intensive—coaches and teachers interact at least every couple of weeks; (c) sustained—teachers receive coaching



over an extended period of time; (d) context specific—teachers are coached on their practices within the context of their own classroom; and (e) focused—coaches work with teachers to engage in deliberate practice of specific skills. (p. 553).

According to Pianta et al. some advantages of coaching is that it can provide teachers with organizational, instructional, and emotional support as its focus is to improve teacher practices with the goal of increasing student academic achievement (2022). Reddy et al. also agreed that coaching is a professional practice used to support teacher’s instructional needs, knowledge, skills, and goals (2022). This type of coaching can be a beneficial tool for RtI implementation and can improve RtI practices at the focus campus. Reddy also noted that modeling, feedback, and opportunities for practice is embedded in coaching to increase fidelity and maintenance of RtI (2022). Armour (2021) also emphasized that coaching delivered by an expert with extensive experience and knowledge, has also been associated with adult learning and development, and transformation.

Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory is described by Eun (2019) where two or more individuals engage in social interaction and the more skilled person leads in the growth and development of the less skilled. Vygotsky’s theory also suggests that knowledge and skills are co-created by the more competent and less competent participants as they interrelate and equally persuade one other (Eun, 2019). This is a form of interaction that could occur between the observed RtI skilled expert and the less capable observers. This is consistent with many of the interview responses as most teachers stated that they

require coaching from experts that have extensive and successful experience with the implementation and maintenance of RtI.

According to Bywater et al. (2021), coaching has also been linked to collaboration, commitment, empathy, and a positive working environment. Hicks (2022) agreed that coaching influences relationships and creates a mutual dialogue that helps practitioners work through their challenges and reach their personal and professional goals. Hicks also added that coaching influences empathy as it creates an understanding of what the other person is feeling, relates to their experiences, creates a rapport, and builds trust (2022). Cofino (2023) added that coaching:

can help teachers feel that their learning is valued, that they are a valuable member of the school community, and that their professional growth is an important part of being a teacher — all of which directly impacts overall teacher happiness and thereby teacher retention (p. 27).

Providing this form of coaching to teachers can create a more supportive environment where they feel valued and supported over the long term. As a result, this can influence teacher's positive attitudes and increase their motivation to effectively implement RtI methods to struggling students; thus, increasing student academic performance.

### **Project Description**

The results from the interview responses and the data analysis generated in Section 2 were the driving force behind the purpose of this project. Teachers who participated in the study reported that they have struggled with the implementation of RtI

for a significant amount of time. This warranted the need for extensive professional development and RtI in-class coaching which can increase their knowledge and skills. Standard professional development activities are brief and episodic in nature and are based on topics that are selected by the district office or the regions associated with the district or cluster, both of which are disengaged from actual classroom experiences and contexts (Fairman et al., 2023). The project calls for in-depth professional development at the beginning of the school year, throughout the school year during grade level meetings and alignment days, at the end of school year to close the academic year, and throughout the summer months as needed. The professional development program will focus solely on RtI methods and will provide teachers with step-by-step information beginning with the first phase of Tier 1 or universal screening and will continue with the following phases of subsequent Tiers 2 and 3. The sessions will also include specific training on topics such as progress monitoring, research-based interventions, and maintenance.

Professional development will also be paired with in-class coaching sessions to increase teacher engagement and experience. Herranen et al. (2021) emphasized that it is essential to focus on content that is directly related to teacher's actual classroom practices and should encourage learning through practice, modeling, expert reinforcement and feedback, and reflection through continuous professional development opportunities. In-class coaching sessions were an additional item that was noted frequently when interview data was collected.

**Existing Supports and Needed Resources**

Some of the existing supports that are in place are administration and teacher approval to present recommended RtI professional development opportunities and in-class coaching sessions. However, dates of presentations will be pending based on agenda items and targeted audience consisting of general and special education teachers who work directly with RtI. In addition, I will require a room within the campus to provide the training and be set up with a laptop/computer and a projector to present material. If needed, I will ask the librarian to supply teachers with a Chromebook if needed and will ask the technology support teacher to assist during the sessions in the event of any technical issues. I will also obtain permission to utilize the copy machine as needed to make copies of packets that will be given out to the audience. Lastly, it would be a great incentive for teachers to be offered official professional development hours that count towards their certification hours. This will be addressed to the district's main office to inquire if this is a possibility.

I will also obtain permission from the administrator at the focus campus to allow in-class coaching sessions during instruction, as this would be key for effective RtI implementation and maintenance.

**Potential Barriers**

Some of the barriers that could potentially create challenges is limited time during the beginning of the year in-services. Although permission has been granted for this project's presentation, there are typically back-to-back in-services that teachers are

required to attend leaving minimal to no time for RtI sessions. Agenda items are usually spread out throughout the day and teachers sign in for each session acknowledging their presence and participation. In addition, RtI sessions that will be held during the duration of the school year may interfere with their planning, conference, and grade level meeting times. This may pose an issue for teachers who truly value their planning and conference times.

Lastly, teachers may lack the desire and motivation to attend the sessions. In Section 2, most of the teachers who were interviewed stated that the RtI training they had received in most recent years lacked rigor, content, and quality. Teachers also stated that previous RtI training was ineffective and did not address any of their concerns or issues. It may be difficult to influence teacher buy-in as they may be hesitant and unmotivated to attend RtI sessions. Thomas et al. (2022) emphasized that helping teachers understand the purpose and intent of RTI while simultaneously attaining teacher buy-in is essential for leaders to establish prior to implementation. In addition, displaying a positive attitude about RtI and providing teachers with acknowledgement and a welcoming environment may also increase teacher participation.

### ***Solutions to Barriers***

A possible solution for time restraints and availability can be to collaborate with administrators and discuss times that teachers can attend RtI sessions. Teachers who work directly with RtI can be broken down into smaller groups and attend the sessions at different times throughout the day during professional development days. Predetermined

time slots on the agenda that RtI sessions can possibly take the place of are United Way, dyslexia, or technology presentations as those can be presented to teachers on an alternate day. For sessions during the school year, a predetermined schedule can be developed so that teachers can prepare prior to the established dates.

For teacher motivation and appreciation, I would provide snacks and drinks to acknowledge their participation. I would start each presentation with much needed energy and positivity to increase teacher motivation and stimulation. To build rapport, I would discuss the personal experiences and challenges I have faced with RtI to create connections with my audience. I would utilize minimal PowerPoint slides and work with actual scenarios and possibly, videos of teachers that have successfully implemented in their classrooms. I would also provide writing instruments including pens, pencils, and highlighters, along with notepads for every teacher for notetaking. Brain-Breaks and bathroom breaks would also be allowed as needed. For in-class coaching sessions, a meeting must be set up with the district's main office and the Special Services Department to inquire about coaching availability and funding.

### **Proposal for Implementation**

Implementation dates will be pending; however, anticipate sessions to take place during the 2023-2024 school year. To determine dates, a meeting will take place with the administrator and dean of the focus campus. If the beginning-of-year sessions are not available due to short notice, I anticipate sessions to start in 2023-2024 during the middle-of-year and completed by the end-of-year professional development days. Once

approval for presentations is approved, I will collaborate with the principal and the dean of instruction to establish a RtI session schedule. I will ask for a minimum of 3 sessions with additional days based on the teacher's needs and request 3-hr blocks for each session. A PowerPoint presentation of the rationale for the RtI sessions will be provided to the principal and dean of instruction for review along with any additional materials that will be given to the teachers. RtI modules will be provided through the education service centers of two regions, and dates will be determined based on availability. Lastly, upon approval, in-class coaching sessions will be determined at a later date after completion of sessions and modules. Dates will be based on RtI coaches' availability throughout the academic school year.

### **Roles and Responsibilities of Researcher and Others**

My role as the researcher is to oversee and ensure that all RtI resources and session dates are implemented. I will be responsible for collaborating and obtaining approval from appropriate administration/faculty including the school principal, dean of instruction, technology support teacher, librarians, and special education supervisor. Upon approval from the principal and dean of instruction, I will be responsible for creating a schedule and relaying that information to the participating teachers. The principal will be responsible for grouping the teachers and assigning the days they will attend the RtI sessions. The librarian's role will be to provide teachers with Chromebooks as needed and the technology support teacher will ensure that the location of RtI sessions is set up with internet, laptop, and a projector. In addition, the principal will oversee and

assign days and periods for in-class coaching sessions. The teachers will be responsible for attending the sessions, completing the modules, and participating in in-class coaching sessions. Lastly, my role will be to evaluate and provide feedback after every session, and follow-up throughout the school year. Evaluations will be provided after every session which will allow for reflection, areas of improvement and refinement, and to receive feedback from teachers.

### **Project Evaluation Plan**

It is essential to have a project evaluation plan in place to ensure that the RtI sessions are effective and adequately presented with rich information that is directly related to teachers RtI experiences and areas of need. Evaluation plans according to Guyadeen and Seasons are a systematic method that is valuable when generating information about the project to improve, adjust, or refine the program and is key when making forthcoming decisions (2018). Park et al. (2021) also noted that evaluations such as questionnaires or surveys given at the beginning and ending of a program are beneficial to assess the effectiveness of the program development. For this project, a formative self-report survey/questionnaire will be given to each teacher at the beginning and ending of each session to determine the effectiveness of the RtI sessions. This form of assessment will provide feedback and essential data on how the information being provided through the presentations addresses the teacher's needs. In addition, informal assessments will be conducted throughout the sessions including observations, listening,



and noting teacher concerns in a journal, exchange of questions and answers, and teacher participation.

Summative evaluations will be given to the participants at the end of the school year after sessions and in-class coaching sessions have been provided. A questionnaire will be given to teachers to evaluate the overall effectiveness of the project that was provided throughout the school year. The evaluation will provide valuable information on what teachers learned and determine areas of improvement and refinement. Feedback provided by teachers will be used to determine future development of projects and necessary changes if needed.

### **Project and Evaluation Goals**

The goals of this project are to address teachers' concerns regarding RtI implementation and to help in the improvement of teachers RtI knowledge, skills, and practices. By improving these skills and practices, teachers can implement RtI methods more effectively and as a result, enhance student academic performance and achievement. Another goal of the project is to improve students' state assessment scores. Many struggling students who were receiving RtI did not pass their state exams and as a result, were not eligible to advance to the next grade level. By improving teachers skills in RtI, students who continue to struggle academically could have a better chance of passing their state exams; thus, could increase campus ratings and accountability.

The evaluation goals are aligned with the program goals and can determine the effectiveness of the project including the professional development activities and the in-

class coaching sessions. The evaluation goals will also include teacher participation and how they are applying what they learned in the sessions, to their classroom practices. The formative and summative evaluations of this project could provide valuable information that can demonstrate efficacy and validity of the professional development and in-class coaching sessions. This could help when determining if any modifications to the project are needed and for the development of future professional development opportunities.

### **Key Stakeholders**

Based on the results of the study, this project was developed primarily for teachers who require in-depth professional development to increase their understanding and skills in RtI. This project was also designed to support other stakeholders as they each play a critical role in student achievement. The key stakeholders included in this project are first and foremost, the students who require adequate and effective RtI instruction. Additional stakeholders include administration and the general and special education teachers who provide instruction to the students who struggle academically and require RtI.

Administrators are significant stakeholders as they are the ultimate decision-makers that operate campus and student goals; therefore, their support and participation is vital. Maral (2022) stressed that decision making is one of the most significant elements of educational leadership and directs the goals, means, tools, and resources of the campus. Similarly, general education teachers are the first line of defense for students who are struggling in their academic performance. General education teachers are the primary

responders in identifying students in Tier 1 who are not performing at the level of their peers and are falling behind expectations (Camden et al., 2022). Special education teachers are also considered essential stakeholders as they collaborate with general education teachers to create and maintain an effective RtI infrastructure (Lesh et al., 2021). For all stakeholders involved in this project, collaboration is critical to provide the instructional support necessary to effectively implement and maintain RtI.

### **Project Implications**

This case study was conducted to examine teacher experiences with the implementation of RtI. Based on the results of this qualitative study, it was noted that teachers lacked in the knowledge and skills that were necessary to successfully implement RtI. This study also confirmed that teachers needed extensive professional development sessions to increase their ability to competently apply RtI methods. The results of the study also reflected the need for in-class coaching sessions to demonstrate the function of RtI process during actual class time. In-depth professional development paired with in-class coaching sessions may help teachers apply and maintain RtI methods with commitment and fidelity. Teachers can then develop adequate skills to effectively deliver RtI to struggling students and as a result, increase academic performance.

### **Social Change**

This project has the capability to influence positive social change at the district, community, and surrounding district level. The project calls for an increase in professional development paired with in-class coaching sessions, both of which could

change the outcomes of negative teacher experiences in RtI. Daughtery (2023) stressed that there is a clear correlation between extensive professional development and increased students' achievement. Increasing teachers' understanding and skills in RtI can positively impact their delivery of instruction as they may obtain valuable information that they can apply in their daily practices with fidelity. The goal is to improve teacher's daily practices in RtI to efficiently meet the needs of struggling students; thus, enhancing student academic success, state exam scores, and help in closing the achievement gap. As teachers continue to improve their practices in RtI, students may continue to improve academically and can perform equal to their grade-level peers. By doing so, the students may have a greater chance of graduating from high school, entering and graduating from college, and becoming productive and contributing citizens of the community.

This project can also bring forth social change by influencing positive collaboration between teachers. As teachers continue to enhance their RtI skills and students continue to improve, they may be more likely to share their successes and practices with other teachers who also require assistance in RtI. Positive collaboration between teachers creates a sense of belonging, a more welcoming environment, builds relationships/bonds, and provides emotional support (Damjanovic & Blank, 2021). Teachers who have positive experiences can develop an increase in their motivation and provide students with continuous quality education; thus, improving their literacy and long-term success. By doing so, teachers can create positive social change for students, their families, and within society.

### **Importance of Project for the Larger Context**

This project has the capability to generate positive impacts on a larger scale by starting at the campus level, and expanding throughout the district, surrounding districts, and perhaps, into other states. With improvements in RtI implementation and an increase in students' achievement, the project could also assist other schools within the district. As the project would gain attention through its success, it may be possible that surrounding districts who have similar concerns with RtI could benefit from this project of in-depth professional development and in-class coaching sessions. Also, with continued success of the project, and increase in teacher knowledge and skills would occur; thus, improving the success of struggling students and improved testing scores, campus ratings, and accountability.

### **Summary**

In Section 3 I described the proposed project that was based on data collected from teacher interview questions in Section 2. The goal and intention of this project is to improve general and special education teacher's understanding and practices in RtI at a local K–5 elementary school. To accomplish this goal, the project recommends extensive and ongoing professional development geared specifically towards RtI implementation. The project also proposes the implementation of RtI in-class coaching sessions to further improve teacher's skills through real-time practice during actual instructional time. Extensive professional development in conjunction with in-class coaching sessions is appropriate to address teachers' concerns and lack of understanding regarding RtI

implementation. It will also address inadequate teacher delivery of the RtI process which hinders struggling students' academic growth as teachers do not have the adequate skills to effectively implement the model.

An extensive literature review that reflected and supported the recommended project was also included in Section 3. The literature review provided a saturation of information that supports the need for adequate and effective RtI professional development and in-class coaching sessions. Also included are the resources that are available and those that are needed to successfully carry out the proposed project. Potential barriers to implement the project were discussed along with possible solutions to overcome those barriers. Moreover, I discussed the goals of the project and how an evaluation plan supports further development of the project. A description of the stakeholders was also presented in this section. Lastly, project implications were also discussed, including how the proposed project can promote social change at the local level and in a larger context.

## Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

### **Introduction**

In Section 4, I discuss the project's strengths and limitations as well as offer recommendations for alternative solutions to the local problem. In addition, I reflect on myself as a scholar and project developer, as well as an explanation of leadership influencing change and the importance of the work. Last, I review the project's implications, applications, and direction for future research.

### **Project Strengths and Limitations**

#### **Project Strengths**

One of the key strengths of this project is that it was designed specifically for teachers who are struggling and face challenges with RtI implementation. I developed the project based on teacher concerns regarding RtI that were stated in participant interviews. The project was developed to address teacher concerns who work directly with RtI methods and do not feel confident with their implementation of RtI due to their lack of knowledge and skills. DiMarco and Guastello (2021) stated that some of the challenges that teachers face are the lack of clarity of RtI, their roles, and how they are accountable for a system they are not knowledgeable about. The purpose of this project is to help teachers increase their understanding of the process and to improve their daily RtI practices. The data I gathered and analyzed was helpful in developing the project. As teachers become more knowledgeable through this project, their skills, motivation, and fidelity of RtI implementation may increase. Ultimately, this may strengthen their ability

to adequately deliver RtI to struggling students in their class; thus, potentially improving student's academic performance.

Another strength is that this study was based on current research that supports the local problem and the need for the development of the project. The use of recent research that supports the local problem provides the most current information available, expands professional's knowledge base, builds credibility, and helps in problem solving and decision making (Levin & Levin, 2019). I communicated to the participating teachers that the study was based on the most current research; my goal was to strengthen the reliability of the project; and increase teacher buy-in.

The professional development sessions can inform teachers of RtI processes through active learning and participation such as discussion, question & answer, modules, videos, PowerPoints, and so forth. Similarly, the in-class coaching sessions may promote teacher buy-in and provide opportunities to observe experts correctly implementing RtI methods in their classrooms. Schiemann et al. (2018) defined a coach as a professional who understands what their clients need by inquiring through questions, paying attention to details, and listening carefully to what the goals of the learner are. Kraft and Blazar (2018) also stated that traditional training has shifted to a more specialized process targeted to a smaller group through instructional coaching. The authors described coaching as an expert who works one-to-one with teachers to provide steady, recommendations, and support based on frequent classroom visits and observations. This form of coaching support may be encouraging and beneficial for



teachers because it may offer new information and practices that will help them reach their goal of adequate RtI implementation and increased academic achievement.

### **Project Limitations**

One of the major limitations I foresee with this project is teachers' willingness and time to participate in the professional development sessions. Most of the teachers interviewed stated that they had been teaching for several years and had experienced ineffective professional development with minimal to no impact on their instructional practices; in particular, in RtI. Kraft and Blazar (2018) emphasized that professional development has historically been delivered through all-day sessions and provided the same tips, strategies, and information to the entire audience, grade level, or school. Teachers who have professional development that does not align with their instructional practices will most likely have a negative mindset towards professional learning.

Martin et al. (2019) stressed that the effects of professional development can be adverse if the information being presented is not relevant to the specific needs that teachers need to improve their practices. If this is the case, teachers may not be receptive to participating in the project's activities or attending entirely; thus, teacher learning will not reflect in their RtI practices. For this project to make a positive impact on teacher RtI practices, participants must fully engage in all professional development opportunities and activities the project has to offer. By fully participating in all sessions, teachers may be more likely to experience positive changes in their RtI practices compared to teachers whose participation is minimal or who do not attend altogether.

An additional limitation that could impede the effects of the project is the sample size used in the study. Although a qualitative study is designed to use smaller sample sizes that provide rich and in-depth information that leads to saturation, small sample sizes can also be viewed as insufficient with limited validity and linked to minimal possibility for generalization (Vasileiou et al., 2018). Participants in this study may not perceive this project as reliable due to the small sample size and may contribute to limited interest and effectiveness of the project. In addition, this study was limited to one elementary campus which could also indicate limited transferability.

Lastly, in-class coaching sessions may not be approved immediately due to funding or limited experts in the district that can provide RtI support. As previously mentioned, the sample size may not be perceived as sufficient, and the district may not consider it acceptable or reliable. In addition, the district may not feel that the study generated ample evidence to support the need for RtI coaches. Consequently, the district may not feel confident to move forward with the approval of the in-class coaching sessions.

### **Recommendations for Alternative Approaches**

The major problem that guided this basic qualitative study was teacher concerns regarding the implementation of RtI. Based on the results of the study a series of professional development sessions combined with in-class RtI coaching was developed. In-depth professional development sessions were developed and proposed to aid teachers in increasing their knowledge and skills to efficiently deliver effective RtI methods to

students who are struggling academically. However, if the proposed plan is ineffective or there is minimal interest, alternative approaches are recommended.

One alternative approach is to create a schedule that aligns with professional development days that are scheduled throughout the year. By creating an alternative schedule teachers can choose which sessions they can attend based on their planning, conference times, grade level meeting days, or vertical alignment sessions. In addition, to accommodate teacher's demanding schedules, the professional development sessions can be pre-recorded, and they can choose which sessions best fit their schedules. This is consistent with the theoretical framework of this basic qualitative study that includes Malcolm Knowles theory of andragogy, growth, and maturity. Machynska and Boiko (2020) described Malcolm Knowles theory of andragogy as adults who view themselves to be self-reliant and responsible individuals as they have matured from being dependent to being a self-directed adult. By teachers choosing their own sessions, they may feel a greater sense of accountability and autonomy which may lead to improved motivation, interest, and participation.

An additional approach would be to schedule professional development sessions once a month, before or after school hours. A pre-determined schedule can be created with prearranged days that teachers can attend the RtI sessions. Teachers would have to attend a minimum of three sessions; however, would have the opportunity to attend all sessions if desired. The sessions would address various RtI topics which would be noted on the schedule. Teachers would have the opportunity to choose the sessions that best

coincide with the challenges they face with RtI implementation. This approach is convenient as the professional development sessions will not interfere with instructional, planning, conference, grade level, or vertical alignment days. This approach also allows teachers the opportunity to attend as many sessions as they feel they need to improve their RtI practices. By attending more than the minimum required or repeating sessions teachers can ask additional questions, ask for clarification, listen to other teachers, further improve their practices, and collaborate with colleagues.

RtI in-class coaching sessions were also projected to enrich teachers' professional growth by including RtI experts providing in-class sessions during instructional time. These sessions would allow teachers to observe RtI coaches deliver RtI practices to their students who are struggling in real time. Another alternative approach would be to allow a small group of teachers to observe a class in which RtI is being implemented effectively and with fidelity. These in-class RtI implementation observations could be conducted within the focus campus or at another elementary school where RtI is being implemented effectively.

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

The transition from a doctorate student taking required courses and getting through a rigorous program to becoming a researcher and scholar has been nothing short of rewarding. Being a part of the Walden University doctorate program has fulfilled me intrinsically and extrinsically. Not only has it helped me in my writing and research

skills, but it has also helped me become a more effective teacher and a better person overall. Throughout my time as a Walden University student, my writing skills have developed immensely. These skills have helped me when filling out required documents for my special education students such as Individual Education Plans or Contingency Plans. During the time I was taking courses, I developed the ability to use much of the new information I learned and applied it to my classroom practices with my Special Education students. I was also able to share the information I learned with other general and special education teachers and helped them improve their daily practices as well.

Being a special needs educator throughout the years has given me the ability to identify discrepancies that can negatively impact students who are struggling academically. Prior to becoming a student at Walden, I had concerns about the RtI process; however, did not have the resources or skills to further research the issues that teachers were facing. Being in this program and going through the research process has helped shape me into a confident scholar. I have had many responsibilities throughout this project starting with identifying a local problem, investigating the problem, and gathering evidence to support the problem. The further I went into the sections of the project, the more knowledgeable I became about the expanding and ongoing problem regarding RtI implementation. The process of saturation in the literature review gave me the knowledge and confidence I needed to work as a competent researcher and move on to the subsequent phases of the project.

While completing Section 3, I strengthened my researcher role by interviewing teachers, collecting data, and analyzing data. According to Spencer et al. (2020), scholarly practices include academic research, literature review, collecting and synthesizing data, and reflexivity. Since I considered myself a developing and confident scholar at this point, I ensured that the interview questions and data collected were relevant to the study. Listening to the participants' concerns, taking notes, making observations, and making connections between their responses helped me in creating themes. Transcribing and coding the data gave me a deeper understanding and insight of the common challenges that teachers were facing with RtI implementation. Although I had my concerns regarding RtI within this focus campus at the beginning of the study, I was unaware of the deeper challenges that teachers were facing and more importantly, the negative impact it had on students who were struggling academically.

Throughout the research process, I also learned to acknowledge and appreciate the importance of confidentiality and maintaining ethical practices. There were times during the interviews that I wanted to share other teachers' similar experiences with different participants; however, had to adhere to and maintain confidentiality throughout. The further I got into conducting interviews, the easier it was for me as a researcher to maintain confidentiality. Maintaining confidentiality is a practice that I will continue to abide by and follow when conducting research in the future.

## **Project Development**

As a special education teacher and a candidate in the Doctor of Education program at Walden University, I chose to conduct research on inadequate RtI implementation. The topic of ineffective RtI implementation has been an ongoing issue within the study's focus campus for several years and warranted exploration and in-depth research. Based on this ongoing issue, a proposed project was developed to help improve the successful implementation and maintenance of RtI practices. The basis of this project centered on interview responses noting teachers' challenges and negative experiences with RtI. Ugonna et al. (2021) noted that the value of research and project development is a key contributor and is linked to improved knowledge and growth, increased resources, and future progress.

As an educator who shares similar experiences with the participants and currently a teacher who teaches students who struggle academically and did not respond to RtI previously, I became more aware of RtI inconsistencies and the need for research on this topic. As I researched this topic further, I also reflected on the ineffective RtI professional development teachers had been receiving over the years. With the data collected, I began to contemplate a project that could make a difference for all teachers that struggled with RtI and had not received adequate support through professional development.

Based on the themes established, a project including professional development and in-class coaching sessions was developed with deep consideration on how to best support teachers with RtI implementation. The desired outcome of the project would be

to provide teachers with in-depth information on the RtI process to increase their knowledge and skills to improve their daily practices. The in-class coaching sessions could be beneficial for teachers as experts will demonstrate how to successfully implement RtI methods with the students in real-time. Teachers can observe experts deliver effective RtI methods including whole group instruction, small group Tier 2 and 3 instruction, research-based interventions, and additional support as needed for struggling students. Professional development sessions combined with in-class coaching sessions may have the potential to enhance teacher knowledge, improve RtI implementation, increase student academic achievement, and improve state exam scores.

### **Leadership and Change**

Throughout the completion of this project, a sense of leadership was developed. Ouedraogo et al. (2023) emphasized that leadership roles include knowledge, competence, scholarship, trust, credibility, and the ability to demonstrate commitment to enable and support change. Fulfilling each of my roles as a researcher helped in creating personal leadership skills that can influence positive change. As participants begin to feel supported with effective professional development combined with in-class coaching sessions, they may become more receptive to positive change. In addition, with continued success of the project, teachers may begin to see an improvement in their RtI practices and an increase in student academic success. Consequently, general and special education teachers may become more knowledgeable and become positive leaders in their own respect. Canterino et al. (2020) stated that change includes the transition from individual



leadership to plural leadership views as organizations become a group of leaders that share common goals and visions that encompass change.

This project was developed specifically to increase general and special education teachers RtI knowledge and skills, and to improve their daily practices with a goal of strengthening student academic achievement. Making a connection between the project and RtI improvements can lead to greater changes at the campus, district, and surrounding districts level. This project can also lead to continued research that will contribute to further RtI improvements and continued academic student success at a greater level.

### **Reflection on Importance of the Work**

Deep reflection of my own personal experiences and other teachers' experiences with RtI over the years validates the objective of this research study. It was critical to conduct in-depth research on RtI challenges to clearly demonstrate the need for additional professional development and in-class coaching to aid teachers in RtI implementation. The more information that was gathered, it became evident that general and special education teachers lacked in RtI knowledge and as a result, lead to ineffective implementation. More importantly, conducting research on teacher's perceptions and barriers was crucial as it led to key themes that helped guide the study. Although the participants knew the purpose of RtI during the interviews, they did not feel knowledgeable of the process or how to effectively implement the methods. As I continued with the interviews and heard similar challenges and negative experiences

from the participants, I felt it was of great importance to provide them with the professional development and RtI coach support they needed to increase their knowledge. With the information collected from the interviews, the significance of meaningful professional development combined with in-class RtI coaching sessions became evident.

The ultimate goal of the project is to help teachers gain knowledge in RtI through professional development and RtI coaching. Sancar et al. (2021) emphasized that teachers professional learning is critical to enhance the quality of teaching and skills, and for the improvement of student learning and achievement. By implementing this project teachers can enhance their skills in RtI and can efficiently apply the methods in their daily practices. By improving their quality of teaching RtI teachers can successfully foster the needs of students who are struggling academically; thus, improving their academic performance. Çimen (2021) stressed that efficient teachers can make the most substantial difference to student learning and success; in particular, disadvantaged students. The research process and project development were of great importance as it was designed not only to support general and special education teachers but more importantly, to support students who were struggling in academics and require adequate RtI support.

### **Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research**

This research study centered on teachers' experiences with the implementation of RtI. Information collected from the participants revealed that their experiences with the RtI process have been negative. The participants also stressed the need for meaningful and ongoing professional development to increase their knowledge and skills. They also

emphasized the need for in-class RtI coaching sessions which could allow them to learn by observing experts deliver RtI in their classrooms during instructional time. Based on this information, a project was developed to support teachers in RtI through professional development and in-class coaching sessions. In addition, this study was guided by Malcolm Knowles's framework that supports adult professional learning. This project coincides with Knowles's andragogic theory including self-concept, adult learner experience, willingness to learn, orientation to learning, and inner motivation to learn (Veiga-Branco, 2018). Teacher support, increased student academic achievement, and improved state exam scores are all contributing factors to the importance of this project and could lead to positive social change.

Support from meaningful professional development and in-class sessions could lead to increased teacher effectiveness in RtI skills and methods. This development in teacher's RtI skills can lead to positive social change as it can improve teacher's instructional approaches in RtI and can benefit students' academic success. As teachers improve in their practices, it may reflect in student's response to RtI methods and in their academic and state exam performance. Social change may occur as teachers and students alike may feel more confident and motivated to continue performing at their best. Butera et al. (2021) emphasized that teaching is a form of social change and teachers are considered agents of social influence as their instructional practices can create change in their students. The authors also noted if teachers take the role of mentors and focus on the student development, they can encourage profound study, continuing education, and

equitable education (Butera et al., 2021). This can also increase accountability at the teacher, campus, and district level. Min et al. (2022) stated that teacher and school improvement increases the learning ability and growth of students and inspires teachers to become practicing agents of individual and social change. Based on the results of this research study, it may be likely that this project can enhance teachers' knowledge in RtI and increase student achievement and level of engagement, both of which can influence positive social change.

Following the implementation of the developed project, additional research into teacher's perceptions and experiences of RtI implementation could be beneficial for follow-up research. Follow-up research could potentially benefit and further validate the effectiveness of the research efforts. Future research can focus on how teachers are progressing in RtI application and how students are responding to RtI methods and strategies after implementing professional development and in-class RtI coaching sessions. Examining and measuring teacher's receptiveness to the project, how teachers improved in their RtI practices, self-efficacy, motivation, and students' response to teachers' delivery of RtI methods could be valuable in guiding further research.

Further research including the developed project can also be extended to other campuses within the local district and can be provided at all levels including elementary, middle school, and high school. In addition to the qualitative in-depth interviews that were conducted, quantitative methods to include surveys could be used as a form of data collection to add richness and depth to the research. A transition from qualitative to a

mixed methods approach would be beneficial as additional data would further support the research. Mixed methods research as defined by Timans et al. (2019) is a unified research approach that uses both qualitative and quantitative measures to explore deeper into the research subject and obtain greater insight. Further research can also lead to further professional development and can contribute and guide leaders when making future decisions about RtI.

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to examine general and special education teacher's experiences with RtI implementation in a K-5 elementary focus campus. To further understand the problem and the experiences and perceptions of teachers regarding RtI, I conducted semi-structured interviews with 10 participants. Based on the participants' responses about their experiences with RtI it was evident that they all lacked knowledge and skills in RtI and did not feel confident with its implementation. After all data was collected, the analysis of the results demonstrated the great need for support and resources through meaningful professional development and RtI coaching. As a result, a project was developed to provide support and address the immediate needs of the teachers who are responsible for implementing RtI. One of the goals of this project was to increase teachers' knowledge and skills to improve their daily RtI practices. Another goal of the utmost importance was to provide adequate RtI support to students who are struggling; hence, improving their overall academic achievement.

This study provided great insight into the challenges and lack of knowledge that special and general education teachers have faced over the years. I discovered that these discrepancies have hindered teachers' instructional delivery of RtI and as a result, has negatively impacted the progress of students who are struggling academically.

Throughout this intensive examination and long process, I came to understand the value and importance of RtI. I also realized how its inadequate delivery can negatively impact both teachers and students alike. For these reasons, this study is significant and beneficial for teachers as it can assist them in learning how to effectively deliver RtI methods and help struggling students' progress in their academics. In addition, completing this study has provided me with knowledge on how to be a skilled researcher, investigator, project developer, and an agent of change who will always commit to educational change and student achievement. These skills will also help guide me towards future research in RtI or other areas that warrant examination for the betterment of education.

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## Appendix A: The Project

### **Rationale for Development of Project**

Teachers at a local elementary school within a local district shared their concerns and stated the need for extensive professional development opportunities on the implementation and ongoing delivery and maintenance of RtI. In addition, struggling students who receive RtI continue to struggle in their academic achievement and are unable to earn passing scores in STAAR state exams. Providing valuable professional development opportunities paired with in-class coaching can provide teachers with the knowledge and abilities they require to adequately assist students who continue to struggle in their academics and passing state exams.

### **Purpose of Recommended Project**

The purpose of this project is to optimize the quality of RtI methods by improving teacher's skills and increasing their motivation and fidelity. Teachers will improve their practices by identifying and building on their strengths and weaknesses, create a plan of action, receive ongoing support and feedback from RtI experts, and reflect and refine as needed. Teachers are also in need of in-depth and specific training to increase their knowledge and skills in the areas of tiers 2 & 3, progress monitoring, research-based interventions, and maintenance of RtI. The professional development and coaching sessions will be relevant and directly related to the teacher's concerns regarding RtI. The sessions will also encourage active learning and participation and provide continuous

support throughout the academic school year. In addition, in-class coaching sessions will include modeling and real-time teacher practice and participation.

### **Presentation of Recommended Project**

The project will be presented via PowerPoints, packets, videos, and modules. The sessions will be presented during the in-services at the beginning of the school year or during grade level meetings, curriculum alignment days, end of year in-services, and during the summer months if necessary. Direct support through in-class coaching sessions will be provided once a week for three consecutive weeks and a minimum of one session every six weeks thereafter.

### **Learning Outcomes for Participants**

The participants will be provided with information about RtI implementation in the areas of:

- ✓ Tier 1-Whole group instruction and how to identify students who are not making instructional progress and are not at the level of their peers. Tier 1 is considered the Universal Screening level of RtI.
- ✓ Tier 2-Small group instruction with students who did not make adequate progress in Tier 1.
- ✓ Tier 3-Small group or individual instruction and is considered the most intense level of RtI.
- ✓ Progress Monitoring
- ✓ Research-based interventions

- ✓ RtI Maintenance
- ✓ RtI Coaching

## Agenda

The professional development sessions will take place during the 2023-2024 beginning of school year in-services.

### Day 1 Professional Development Session (6 hours)

Time	Activity
8:00-8:15 AM	Greetings & Introductions
8:15-9:00 AM	PowerPoint Presentation/Purpose of Professional Development
9:00-9:45 AM	Snowballing Activity: RtI challenges
9:45-10:00 AM	<b>15-Minute Break</b>
10:00-11:00 AM	Pre-recorded RtI Education Conference (YouTube) Group Discussion
11:00-11:45 AM	Major RtI Challenges: Group Discussion
11:45 AM-12:45 PM	<b>--LUNCH--</b>
12:45-1:15 PM	Response to Intervention: Collaborating to Target Instruction (Elementary level) YouTube Group Discussion
1:15-2:00 PM	Reaching all High School Students: A Multi-Tiered Approach (Middle & High School level) YouTube Group Discussion
2:00-2:15 PM	<b>15-Minute Break</b>
2:15-2:45 PM	Exit Slip Activity: 3 significant things you learned about RtI and will apply in your daily practices.
2:45-3:00 PM	<b>Reflections/Closing</b>

### Day 2 Professional Development Session (6 hours)

Time	Activity
8:00-8:15 AM	Greetings/Welcome Back Participants

<b>8:15-9:00 AM</b>	Think, Pair, Share Activity: RtI Supports
<b>9:00-10:00 AM</b>	PowerPoint-Tiers 1 & 2 Overview Group Discussion
<b>10:00-10:15 AM</b>	<b>15-Minute Break</b>
<b>10:15-11:00 AM</b>	Implementing RTI: Why is Implementation Important? (YouTube) Group Discussion
<b>11:00-12:00 PM</b>	Research-based Interventions Overview- MTSS in Education Effective Interventions for Tier 2 vs Tier 3: What's the difference? YouTube Group Discussion
<b>12:00-1:00 PM</b>	<b>--LUNCH--</b>
<b>1:00-1:50 PM</b>	RTI In Action Series: Screening & Progress Monitoring Pt. 1 (YouTube) Group Discussion
<b>1:50-2:00 PM</b>	<b>10-Minute Break</b>
<b>2:00-2:45 PM</b>	Exit Slip Activity: List 3 important features of Tier 1 & 2 in RtI Around the Table: Small Group Discussion
<b>2:45-3:00 PM</b>	<b>Reflections/Closing</b>

**Day 3 Professional Development Session (6 hours)**

<b>Time</b>	<b>Activity</b>
<b>8:00-8:15 AM</b>	Greetings/Welcome Back Participants
<b>8:15-8:45 AM</b>	Snowballing Activity: What you know about RtI coaching
<b>8:45-9:45 AM</b>	PowerPoint-RtI Coaching Group Discussion
<b>9:45-10:00 AM</b>	<b>15-Minute Break</b>
<b>10:00-11:00 AM</b>	Case Study: Group Discussion
<b>11:00-11:45 AM</b>	Special Education & General Education: Working Together (YouTube)

	<b>Group Discussion</b>
<b>11:45 AM-12:00 PM</b>	Meet Your RTI Specialist (YouTube)
<b>12:00-1:00 PM</b>	<b>--LUNCH--</b>
<b>1:00-2:15 PM</b>	Class Schedules Schedule RTI Coaching Sessions
<b>2:15-2:30 PM</b>	<b>15-Minute Break</b>
<b>2:30-3:00 PM</b>	Exit Slip: 3 Reasons Why You Think Coaching is Important Group Discussion

**PowerPoint Presentation**

**UNDERSTANDING RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION (RTI): AN OVERVIEW**

Presented by:  
Laura L. Morales

**ACTIVITY (5 MINUTES)**

What is your definition of Response to Intervention? (20 words or less)

**ACTIVITY (5 MINUTES)**

What is your definition of Tier 1 of RTI? (20 words or less)

**CHECK FOR UNDERSTANDING TIER 1**

- ✓ Whole class instruction
- ✓ Core instructional interventions
  - ✓ All students
  - ✓ Preventative
  - ✓ Proactive
  - ✓ Whole class
  - ✓ 80-90%

(Arias-Gundis & Llamazares, 2021)

**ACTIVITY (5 MINUTES)**

What is your definition of Tier 2 of RTI? (20 words or less)

**CHECK FOR UNDERSTANDING TIER 2**

- ✓ Targeted group interventions
- ✓ Small group strategies
- ✓ Some students (at-risk)
- ✓ Mostly general education setting
- ✓ Core instruction + 30 minutes/3-5 times per week
  - ✓ 12 weeks
  - ✓ 5-10%
- ✓ Weekly progress monitoring

(Arias-Gundis & Llamazares, 2021)

**LET'S LOOK A LITTLE BIT DEEPER...**

Tier 1	Tier 2
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➢ Universal screening</li> <li>➢ Students respond to standard core curriculum</li> <li>➢ High quality instruction</li> <li>➢ Benchmark level</li> <li>➢ Grade level peers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➢ Targeted students who did not respond adequately to Tier 1 instruction</li> <li>➢ Below expected benchmarks</li> <li>➢ Receive interventions targeting specific deficits</li> <li>➢ Additional small group instruction (30 mins)</li> <li>➢ Frequent progress monitoring</li> </ul>

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/341616163-Understanding-Response-to-Intervention-RTI

**PROGRESS MONITORING**

[https://youtu.be/02a0D11hrv?si=gzk0\\_4pMSaab8CS](https://youtu.be/02a0D11hrv?si=gzk0_4pMSaab8CS)

**WHAT IS IT?**

- ❖ Assesses student progress in identified academic areas students are struggling in
- ❖ Check students progress in goals and objectives
- ❖ Determine need for instructional modifications

**HOW IT WORKS**

- ❖ As soon as student is identified, progress monitoring should begin in relation to Tier 1
- ❖ Student should be monitored frequently (IDEAL is weekly)
- ❖ Recommended time: 8-10 weeks

Hintze et al., (2018)

**RESEARCH-BASED INTERVENTIONS**


- ✓ Instructional strategies targeted for struggling students
- ✓ Scientific research to practice
- ✓ Provided by general and/or special education teachers, or content specialists
- ✓ Focus on Tier 2 and 3 students
- ✓ Sessions between 30 to 45 minutes
- ✓ Fidelity
- ✓ Helps teachers in the decision-making process when determining if student needs a referral for special education services

Alahmari (2019)

**ACTIVITY (5 MINUTES)**

What is your definition of Tier 3 of RTI? (20 words or less)

CHECK FOR UNDERSTANDING  
**TIER 3**



- ✓ Most intense level
- ✓ Systematic & specialized instruction is provided
- ✓ Individual student interventions
- ✓ Few students (at-risk)
- ✓ General education and Resource setting
- ✓ Core instruction + 30-45 minutes/5 times per week
  - ✓ 8-10 weeks
  - ✓ 5% or less
- ✓ Progress monitoring 2 times a week (Arias-Gundis & Llamazares, 2021)

**STUDENTS WHO DO NOT RESPOND TO TIER 3**

- Ensure that interventions were completed adequately and at least 4-5 times a week
- Ensure assessment integrity
- Confirm goals are realistic
- Ensure number of data points is sufficient to draw conclusions (between 9-12)
- Repeat or increase interventions if needed
- Implement new interventions
- RtI team to consider what else could be done to assist the student who is not responding to Tier 3 instruction and interventions

**NEXT STEPS...**

- Determine if comprehensive evaluation is needed
- Special education services can be requested by the parents or school
- Assess child's strengths and weaknesses
- If the student qualifies for special education services, a team will determine if the general or special education setting is more beneficial for the student
- May be provided instruction in general education setting with inclusion support
- May be provided instruction in special education Resource setting
- Individualized Education Plan
- Admission, Review, and Dismissal (ARD)



### Appendix B: Participant Interview Questions

1. How knowledgeable do you feel about the overall Response to Intervention process within your district and campus?
2. What are your perceptions about the types of Response to Intervention Professional Development and training that are offered on your campus and school district?
3. How is Response to Intervention material presented during Professional Development and training on your campus and district?
4. What type of training do you feel need to occur within your district and campus that would assist teachers who implement Response to Intervention?
5. Do you feel the Response to Intervention implementation process within your campus is adequate? Provide examples to support your answer.
6. What are possible barriers, issues, or challenges that impede the implementation of Response to Intervention?
7. How knowledgeable are you about the research-based interventions that support the Response to Intervention model?
8. What supports and/or assistance do you receive within your district and campus that help address any concerns you may have regarding the Response to Intervention process?

9. What specific resources do you feel can improve the Response to Intervention process?
10. Would you like to share anything in regard to your knowledge and experiences with Response to Intervention?

### **Appendix C: Protocol for Interview Process**

Date:

Time:

Location:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

#### Predetermination Criteria Questions:

1. Are you a general or special education teacher?
2. Are you familiar with the Response to Intervention (RtI) method?
3. Do you have experience working with RtI?
4. Do you participate in campus RtI meetings?

#### Process of Interview:

1. Introductions of researcher and participant.
2. Ensure permission from participant.
3. Thank subject for their participation in the study.
4. Explanation, purpose, and expectations of the study.
5. Review of confidentiality.
6. Inform subject of use of information and results obtained from interview.
7. Inform subject of possible length of interview.
8. Allow time for interviewee questions or concerns.
9. Begin interview session.
10. Thank subject for their participation.

**Appendix D: Letter Requesting Permission to Use Facilities and Gain Access to  
Participants**

Date:  
Principal of Elementary Campus  
Address

RE: Consent to Conduct a Research Study

Dear:

The intent of this letter is to request permission to conduct a research/basic qualitative study at your elementary campus. I am fulfilling doctoral program requirements at Walden University and am in the process of conducting a basic qualitative study within the district. The title of my basic qualitative study is Teachers' Experience with the Implementation of Response to Intervention.

I am seeking consent from administration to allow me to recruit a group of special and regular education teachers from your campus to anonymously complete an interview (copy enclosed). Interested teachers who choose to participate in the study will be given a consent form to be signed (copy enclosed) and returned to the primary researcher at the beginning of the process.

If approval is granted, participants will complete the interview in their classroom or in another quiet setting on the campus. Interviews can be conducted before or after the completion of their workday or perhaps, during their planning period. The interview should take no longer than 20-25 minutes. Should this study be published, only collective results will be noted within the basic qualitative study. No costs will be acquired by either your campus or the individual participants.

Your support to conduct this study on your campus will be greatly appreciated. I will follow up with a telephone call next week and will answer any questions or concerns that you may have during that time. You may contact me at my email address.

If you agree, please sign below, and return to me or submit a signed letter of permission on your district letterhead granting me permission to conduct my basic qualitative study at your campus.

Sincerely,

Laura Morales, Walden University

Approved by:

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Print Name and Title

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Signature

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Date