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Teacher Challenges for Implementing Response to Intervention Using Distance Learning

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This is to certify that the doctoral dissertation by

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Abstract

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Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020 resulted in widespread school closures, leading to a rapid transition from traditional face-to-face instruction to distance learning. Educators who used this traditionally face-to-face multi-tiered instructional framework to provide services to students with disabilities faced obstacles with implementation due to the transition to distance learning. This qualitative, phenomenological approach study explored the challenges and strategies of implementing Response to Intervention during the COVID-19 epidemic. Using the theoretical framework of social learning theory and the situated cognition theory, this research explored the implementation of RTI during the COVID-19 school closures from the perspective of new and veteran elementary school teachers providing services to students with disabilities. The research questions explored factors that allowed the implementation of the RTI process and how these factors support or negate student learning via distance learning. The data were collected through open-ended surveys with 40 participants across the Washington DC Metropolitan Area. The key findings of this study indicated that factors from previous studies continued to impact the implementation of RTI using distance learning and technology. Themes include access to technological tools, professional development and collaboration, and supportive administration. The social change implications include enhancing distance learning effectiveness, informing policy, and identifying ways to support students with disabilities and their families.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my beloved mother N.M.S who showed me the reward in hard work. To my son J.W for always being a positive influence in my life. To R.K.L, thank you for encouraging me to pursue this journey and seeing what a difference it would make. To my loving supportive family, thank you for always cheering me on and being my biggest supporters. To all my friends who are like family, I love you and you make my circle solid. To my classmates, M.A.H and Y.R, thank you for your continued support to get to the finish line. Thank you for cheering me on every step of the way and believing that I could achieve this. Philippians 4:6-7 NASB1995 [6] Be anxious for nothing but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. [7] And the peace of God which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your heart and your mind in Christ Jesus.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

The recognition and remediation of students with a specific learning disability has evolved since the early1960s. Today, policies, identification methods, strategies, and interventions have marked significant changes in how special education services meet student needs. Specifically, in 2004, a multi-tiered framework of support referred to as RTI (RTI) was adopted to support all learners. The RTI framework requires the implementation of support and programs to consistently assist students suspected of having a disability. In theory, with consistent support and programming, also referred to as implementation with fidelity, students with disabilities would receive early identification and intervention to close skill gaps currently impeding their academic growth. However, in 2020, school closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic across the United States disrupted the services educators provided students in the RTI process and compromised implementation with fidelity, creating more of a student academic deficit. As COVID-19 continued to threaten public safety through the end of the 2020 school year and in the first half of the 2021-20222 school year, providing access to educational services through online access became the best strategy for mediating the needs of all students, yet online services for special needs students had challenges of their own.

Background to the Study

By law, students with disabilities must have continuous access to free appropriate public education (FAPE) within the least restricted environment, regardless of the nature or severity of the disability. RTI is a multi-tiered system initiated on December 3, 2004, through the Reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Educational

Improvement Act. The Act not only required teachers to be “highly qualified” to provide educational services but also required states to implement RTI as a method for early identification of students with specific learning disability and mediation for students with disabilities (California Department of Education, n.d.). For interventions to be highly effective, the RTI model framework should be delivered within the school-based setting and have small teacher-student ratios, the primary form of instruction until March 2020. Before the COVID-19 epidemic, delivery of services and interventions had always been provided face-to-face for students with disabilities, with most services being provided within the school-based setting. But COVID-19 forced school leaders to shift what had once mandated face-to-face instruction and support to online instruction. All the states, except for Maryland and Montana, provided guidelines for distance learning instruction by April 2020.

Transitioning to distance learning as the primary service delivery for RTI highlighted community issues for educators, including in-home/school communication, parental support for student learning, student attendance, and inequity related to technology access. During the COVID-19 pandemic, legislation was not modified to address access issues for continuous instructional support mandated by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, RTI. Academic support for students with disabilities shifted from primarily teacher-led to parent-led during distance learning. By April 2020, 1 in 7 teachers had previous experience in distance learning tools, with school districts providing 1- to 4-day training before reopening (Lake, 2020). Additionally, districts nationwide provided distance learning plans without curriculum guidelines, instruction

outlines, or progress monitoring methods (Lake, 2020).

With these changes, students with disabilities were presented with significant lost access to health care services and the educational support mandated by law. By November 2020, the American Enterprise Institute found a significant gap in access to technology devices and high-speed internet to engage in distance learning for underrepresented communities such as students of color and students with disabilities (Cusick et al., 2021). Although Maryland school districts applied for waivers related to state-mandated testing, mandated instructional days, and district evaluations, districts across Maryland did little to address the gap in services implemented by K-12 teachers for students with disabilities (Cusick et al., 2021). Another barrier to the new instructional model was the instructional time of the online school day. Specifically, the online school day resulted in fewer school hours, further decreasing academic services and instructional time for students behind grade level. This study explored the implementation of RTI services with fidelity following the COVID-19 school closure and reopening of schools using distance learning from the perspective of the teachers who provided those services.

Problem Statement

The COVID-19 epidemic changed the traditional landscape of educational K-12 practices worldwide, which led to widespread school closures. Schools across the United States saw declining enrollment and a need for distance learning solutions to meet the academic needs of students (Fields, 2021). Among educators' diverse challenges, implementing RTI became a concern when the policy for supporting students with

disabilities remained unchanged. RTI is a multi-tiered framework designed to provide targeted support to students with disabilities, which traditionally relied on face-to-face instruction and interventions provided by teachers. However, transitioning RTI to an online distance learning model presented a variety of obstacles educators had to navigate. School days shifted to an abridged school day, reducing the number of hours teachers and students met and, consequently, the amount of instruction, practice, and assessments provided within the new, shortened time frame (Hamilton et al., 2020). Therefore, key questions arose about how effectively educators implement RTI services using distance learning platforms, the impact of the transition on learning outcomes, the barriers to implementation, and what factors influenced successful implementation. In some cases, students did not access instruction provided by educators (Goldstein et al., 2020). Students also faced significant challenges adjusting to limited social interactions, new school demands, lack of motivation, and concerns regarding falling behind (Parker et al., 2021). Students of color were disproportionately impacted within communities leading to poor coping strategies throughout the pandemic (Parker et al., 2020). Further, school support systems varied during this time, and navigating distance learning became difficult for students (Parker et al., 2021).

The literature reviewed examined challenges to implementing RTI within the school-based setting and the challenges presented transitioning to distance learning from the perspective of teachers and administrators. This study focused on implementing a RTI with fidelity during the COVID-19 epidemic using distance learning to support students with disabilities. The study filled the gap by contributing knowledge to the literature used

by policymakers to implement RTI. The study addressed implementation challenges from the perspective of elementary school K-5 teachers during the COVID-19 school closure by implementing distance learning from March to December 2020. The study aimed to improve the implementation of distance learning as a tool for providing educational services.

Purpose of the Study

This qualitative, phenomenological study was conducted to explore the challenges and strategies of implementing RTI during the COVID-19 epidemic. The study focused on distance learning during the school closure and reopening of schools from the perspective of the new and veteran elementary school teachers who provided those services. The study used research questions from a previous study by Dawkins (2020).

Research Questions

1. What factors allow the implementation of the RTI process to students?
2. How do these factors support or negate student learning via distance learning?

Theoretical Foundation

The theoretical framework used in this study included the social learning theory by Bandura (1977) and the situated cognition theory by Seely Brown et al. (1989). Social learning theory states that children learn from observing others using attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation (Bandura, 1977). Before the COVID-19 epidemic, students received all their instruction in a face-to-face setting within a classroom, supporting students with disabilities using the model for teaching and learning. Due to limited in-person interaction, distance learning reduced the ability of students to access social

reinforcement, hands-on activities, positive teacher/peer feedback, and peer engagement. Distance learning also provided limited opportunities for students to observe the modeling of classroom behaviors within a structured environment with limited distractions, potentially impacting many students' motivation and ability to attend to instruction and complete tasks. COVID-19 also changed the delivery of the instructional model with technology, meaning new and veteran elementary school teachers attempted to understand the limitations and challenges of a new instructional model to provide intervention that sustains attention, motivation, and retention of skills learned during distance learning to support students with disabilities.

Situated cognition theory states that authentic learning is done when the learning is done in context and the environment it takes place (Seely Brown et al., 1989). Transitioning to new technological tools, transferring lessons to an e-learning format, and teaching students how to navigate the new mode of instruction with little to no resources for implementation challenged new and tenure teachers to identify what resources worked for implementing RTI. Distance learning reduced the ability of students to interact with their physical learning environment. Authentic learning can be challenging to replicate using online tools to create learning experiences requiring high student engagement, such as science experiments or math manipulatives to solve problems. Distance learning can limit the ability of students to collaborate and have meaningful interactions for learning using group projects or discussions. Authentic learning requires authentic assessment, which can be challenging to capture in the distance learning setting. Lack of student engagement in distance learning can impact assessment data by not truly

capturing a student's academic ability and real-world application of the skills learned.

This study helped support educators striving to provide high-quality, engaging instruction using distance learning tools to gain adequate results in student learning when implementing RTI. The theoretical framework helped determine the challenges of implementing RTI and determine what strategies, resources, and tools helped students sustain attention, increase motivation, and retain skills in context using distance learning through the perspective of teachers. Understanding the challenges of distance learning while reflecting on situation learning theory and situation cognitive theory will help educators develop effective strategies to support student learning using effective and engaging distance learning experiences.

Nature of the Study

With the phenomenology approach, the study built the narrative of how instruction and implementation of RTI services were delivered during the Covid-19 epidemic beginning in March 2020 to December 2020 through the lived experiences of teachers; the study provided insight into the challenges they faced shifting from face-to-face instruction to online platforms, student's ability to access services, instructional practices, as well as the disconnect between policy and implementation. The questions from a previous study were used and have been vetted to ensure the same topics are provided to each survey participant (Patton, 2015). The study found similarities and differences in the data shared by educators implementing RTI during COVID-19. The role of a researcher was to provide an environment free of bias, help the educators feel comfortable, provide flexibility, and not risk exposing the identity of the educators who

participate.

Definition of Terms

Achievement: The academic or behavioral gains as evidenced by progress monitoring data or behavioral data

Efficacy: To implement a research-based program as recommended by the researchers to maximize instruction and student growth.

Fidelity: The implementation process of an evidence-based practice or program delivered as intended by the researchers (IRIS Center, n.d.).

Inclusion: The practice or policy of providing equal access to opportunities and resources for people who might otherwise be excluded due to their limitations in functioning.

Regression: When students cannot maintain their learned academic skills.

RTI/Instruction (RTI): "refers to an instructional framework that promotes a well-integrated system connecting general, gifted, supplemental, and special education services in providing high quality, standards-based instruction, and intervention that is matched to students' academic, socio-emotional, and behavioral needs" (Alabama Department of Education, 2009, p.1).

Assumptions

Assumptions included all students not having the same access to distance learning tools. Additionally, elementary school students presented significant regression in reading and math skills taught in academic areas due to the service break. Lastly, teachers would have difficulty learning and implementing new technology to provide highly

engaging instruction and instructional strategies for students to remain engaged to make academic progress. The assumption regarding IDEA and the requirement for the implementation of RTI was that it would remain unchanged despite the limitations of accessibility to FAPE during the COVID-19 school closure. The data collected through the surveys and research from the literature review identified key factors related to technology access, the break in service, and what challenges teachers faced with implementation.

Scope and Delimitations

The study aimed to report on the academic progress made during distance learning using traditional reading intervention models. The scope was limited to recruiting 200-300 teachers with at least 3 years of experience teaching in a Maryland school district and willing to volunteer to participate in this study. The teachers also had to have at least 3 years of fidelity in administering interventions. Fidelity refers to the ability to implement a research-based intervention with the recommended time frame and frequency suggested by the program's developers. Delimitations of the study did not include students K-2 for data sources, not considering outside factors such as parental involvement and administrative support for implementations.

Limitations

The limitations or barriers experienced during this study include limited research studies on the impact of distance learning and limited access to secondary data, such as teacher surveys regarding distance learning. Another limitation was obtaining permission from the county to conduct the study. A significant limitation included getting enough

surveys for the data sample. Ways to mitigate limitations included using multiple avenues to increase participation related to the study, such as contacting the teacher's union, handing out flyers with survey codes, and only using a platform that does not collect personal data. The literature and data were gathered throughout the study.

Significance of the Study

COVID-19 affected access to educational services provided by educators for students with disabilities during the school closure. This study aimed to identify challenges and strategies in implementing the RTI framework with fidelity during the COVID-19 epidemic, enhancing the effectiveness of implementation, and informing future policies.

Significance to Practice

Technology use has not disappeared since schools reopened, and COVID-19 continues to threaten public safety. This study can provide information that helps policymakers and school leaders to find effective ways to support students. By studying the challenges that impacted the implementation of RTI with fidelity, technology, support, and services can be better implemented if another school closure is required. The study contributed to a body of literature on implementing RTI by addressing the supports needed for successful implementation and identifying barriers to implementing distance learning.

Summary

Chapter 1 provided an overview of the study, including the history, policies, and practices that led up to RTI. The following chapters will include the current literature on

RTI, the methods used for the study, an analysis of the data collection process, and a discussion of the findings. Chapter 2 will discuss the current literature on the resources, models, and implementation methods related to RTI. Chapter 3 will explain the research design used and the methodology selected for the study. Chapter 4 presents the data collected and the study's findings. Chapter 5 will summarize the study, its conclusions, and recommendations for future research related to RTI.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter introduces how specific learning disability was defined, early identification methods, and policies leading up to the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) in 2004. The chapter continues with the history of disproportionate identification leading to the implementation of the RTI framework and its multi-tiered levels to support student learning. Furthermore, the chapter provides an overview of the process for identification and the models of instruction used to provide targeted instruction to address student needs. It concludes with examining topics related to RTI research and implementation.

Literature Strategy

The literature strategy included selecting websites, journal articles, and books relating to distance learning, RTI during COVID-19, identification of special education students, the Individuals with Disabilities Act, teacher perceptions to RTI, and teacher perceptions of RTI implementation. The keywords searched were *RTI implementation in elementary education* and *challenges to RTI implementation* in Education Source databases, Walden University Library Publications, Google Scholar, ERIC, and SAGE Journals, and a Thoreau multi-database search.

Literature Review Related to Key Concepts

Early Identification

The initial identification of students with specific learning disabilities began in 1963 with Dr. Samuel Kirk, who described learning disabilities as a disorder in the development of speech, language, reading, and other related skills needed for

communication (Naeset, 2011). At the time, these students were described as displaying difficulties in one or more of the psychological processes related to spoken or written language, which included listening, thinking, talking, reading, writing, spelling, or arithmetic (Naset, 2011). These students were categorized as perceptually handicapped because of an inability to organize and interpret sensory information, which impacts an individual's ability to read and hear. This distinction separated students identified with specific physical and cognitive learning disabilities from those who had learning difficulties due to economic disadvantages (Nauset, 2011). In 1968, specific learning disability was added as a qualifying category for special education, and in 1969, the Specific Learning Disabilities Act was passed in Congress as Public Law 91-230.

It was not until 1975 that The Education for All Handicapped Children Act (Public Law 94-142) was drafted to protect the rights of individuals with disabilities. (Rhodes, 2007) Specifically, two landmark cases, *Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Children v. Pennsylvania* in 1971 and *Mills v. Board of Education* in 1972 (Ford & Russo, 2016), helped push individuals with disabilities out of the special education classroom and into the general education classroom. This move was termed "inclusion," and thus, the need for specialized programs within education was born. The Education for All Handicapped Children Act also helped to guide states as well as local educational agencies in improving access to free appropriate education (FAPE), services, and programs for individuals with disabilities as well as their families.

In 1990, Congress reauthorized the Education for All Handicapped Children Act as the IDEA with revisions made in 1997 and 2004. The Act has helped to improve

access to services for individuals with disabilities within local schools, with nondisabled peers replacing the need for separate schools and institutions (Rhodes, 2007). Under IDEA 2004, specific learning disability identification occurs when a student has a severe deficit in at least one of eight academic areas: oral expression, listening comprehension, written expression, basic reading skills, reading fluency skills, reading comprehension, mathematics calculation, and mathematics problem-solving. Before 2004, students with a specific learning disability represented 50% of the population receiving special education services.

With new guidance on the types of services that students should receive, a concern with the overidentification of students began to emerge that was disproportionate in the areas of race and ethnicity. For example, Black students were 1.4 times more likely to be referred than White students (Gordon, 2022). Additionally, according to the 37th Annual Report to Congress from 2013, Black students are over 1.5 times more likely to be over-identified as a student with a specific learning disability in addition to being placed in more restrictive environments (Ford & Russo, 2016; Maki & Adams, 2019). Factors that have led to the over-identification of Black students include poverty, lack of culturally responsive teaching, poor services, and inaccurate teacher perceptions (Morgan, 2020).

Methods of Identification

Before 2004, the discrepancy model was the primary way of identifying students with specific learning disabilities. The discrepancy model used standardized formal assessments to determine discrepancies (at least two standard deviations below the areas

of cognitive ability and academic achievement to determine the presence of a learning disability (Maki & Adams, 2019). The reauthorization of IDEA in 2004 allowed states to use alternative data-driven methods to provide a broader spectrum of determining eligibility. This eligibility method differed from state to state and even from local education agencies to local education agencies, which created more issues for educators. At the state level, policy and practice were determined for educational initiatives, but adoption and sustainability depended primarily on the knowledge and preparedness of all the stakeholders responsible for implementing them (Berkeley, 2020).

Stages of Implementation

The implementation stages behind the RTI involved (a) exploration and adoption, (b) program installation, (c) initial implementation, (d) entire operation, (e) innovation, and (f) sustainability. Support for state and local educational agencies' implementation of RTI has been available through the federal Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) technical assistance centers. But here is an apparent discrepancy between research and practice for implementation (Berkeley et al., 2020).

Introduction of RTI

With the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act in 2004, the methods for identifying students with disabilities and providing remediation services have shifted to RTI. The RTI framework was introduced as a scientific research-based approach to address the needs of students already identified as struggling learners or those suspected of a disability. The U.S. Department of Education does not endorse a specific model to use outside the emphasis of providing scientific research-based

instruction to struggling learners. The benefit of using RTI as an approach to support students is its ability to close skills gaps in foundational skills while continuing to be exposed to their grade-level curriculum. The framework introduced a three-tiered process of implementing strategies with consistency in structure over a 6- to 8-week period and frequency to target specified areas of need to improve student achievement. The multi-tiered approach to early identification is structured into three tiers, from most minor to most intensive.

A Three-Tiered Approach

The three-tiered approach is meant to provide instruction for all learners based on their present academic functioning and how they respond to support provided by an educator. The first level of support, Tier 1, is provided to all students. It entails a universal approach to high-quality instruction for all students within the general education classroom. Universal design for learning uses strategies to ensure all students have equal access to the curriculum by removing barriers to their specific style of learning (Gorski, 2019). These strategies focus on how information is presented, how students can show what they know, and how teachers engage with students in learning (Morin, 2021). Several steps in this process require schools to collect baseline data, analyze where students are performing, and determine subsequent steps so that students can continue to succeed academically. When students show a lack of growth, as documented through task assessment tools such as homework and teacher-designed tests, Tier 2 interventions are recommended.

Tier 2 is the level providing targeted interventions in reading and math. In this

tier, small group instruction is provided on targeted skills using supplemental materials that address student deficiencies with intensive teaching practices at least three times a week (Gorski, 2019). Support continues at this level for typically 6 to 8 weeks while additional data are collected to determine if progress is being achieved. If a student shows little to no progress on this level, Tier 3 is recommended for intensive intervention and further consideration evaluation.

Tier 3 is the most intense level of intervention. In this tier, students are identified as having a disability or in the identification process and require specialized instruction to address their learning deficits. Before this tier, students are supported without a documented approach to support specialized instruction. Several factors affect student performance, such as lack of appropriate instruction, missed instruction due to absence, and the student's learning style.

A Systematic Approach to Data Collection

Before Tier 3, there was no systematic approach to documenting strategies or the time required to collect baseline data to determine if additional data were needed through formal assessments. Individualized education plans provide annual goals, objectives, related services, and service hours required to address student deficits. Instructional strategies and research-based interventions address student needs with a more monitored approach documented at least quarterly. Formative and summative data are collected from previous academic periods to determine eligibility for specialized instruction. Tier 3 level typically lasts 6 to 8 weeks, with the school team meeting to review additional supports, strategies, or different interventions that can be implemented for non-

matriculating students.

All three tiers must use either evidence-based or research-based strategy. Current trends within the classroom to address student needs are broken into two categories: evidence-based and research-based. Evidence-based practices refer to activities performed within a classroom or lesson deemed effective through systematic studies evaluated in a controlled environment (Aped, 2020). Research-based practice describes activities for intervention targeting specific skills developed upon research but has yet to be tested within a controlled setting (Aped, 2020). Current evidence-based practices to address the needs of students with learning disabilities include, but are not limited to, reviewing previous learning, introducing information in small amounts, asking questions to probe student learning, scaffolding, providing feedback, and monitoring (https://ies.ed.gov/).

Interventions and Methods

Current research-based literacy intervention programs provide direct instruction and online resources for Tier 3 students, focusing on target remediation in phonemic awareness, phonics, word study, reading comprehension, vocabulary, and fluency. Tier 3 interventions used within the school system for reading remediation are typically grouped by grade level and based on the skills being addressed. Table 1 compares research-based interventions cited by the Institute of Education Science.

Table 1

Research-Based Interventions

Name of Intervention	Grades	Skills Addressed	Face to Face Or Web-based	Method of Implementation
Achieve 3000	2-9	• Comprehension • Fluency	Web-based	Whole class Individual
Corrective Reading	3-5	• Comprehension • Fluency	Face to Face	Small Group
Earobics	K-3	• Alphabet • Reading Fluency	Face to Face	Individual
Fundations	K-3	• Alphabet • Phonemic awareness • Vocabulary • Decoding • Spelling	Face to face	Small Group Individual
Leveled Literacy Intervention	K-2	• Reading Fluency • Literacy Achievement		Small group
Iready	K-12	• Phonological Awareness • Phonics • Vocabulary • Reading Comprehension	Web-based	Individual
I-station	K-8	• Phonemic awareness • Decoding • Vocabulary • Comprehension • Phonics • Fluency • Word Analysis	Web-based	Individual
Passport Reading Journeys	6-12	• Word Study • Comprehension • Vocabulary • Writing	Face to face	Small Group Individual Whole Class
Read 180	4-10	• Alphabet • Comprehension	Web-based and face to face	Small group Whole Class
Reading Recovery	1st	• Comprehension • Oral Language • Print Knowledge • Reading Achievement • Reading Fluency	Face to Face	Individual
SPIRE	K-6	• Phonemic Awareness • Phonics • Spelling • Vocabulary • Fluency • Comprehension	Face to Face	Individual Small Group
Soar to Success	3-8	• Phonics • Decoding • Comprehension • Fluency	Face to Face	Individual Small Group
Voyager	K-5	• Phonemic Awareness • Letter-Sound Recognition • Word Reading • Sight Words • Vocabulary	Face to Face	Small Group
Waterford Early Reading Program	K-2	• Letter Recognition • Spelling • Comprehension • Writing	Web-based	Individual

Name of Intervention	Grades	Skills Addressed	Face to Face Or Web-based	Method of Implementation
Wilson Reading System		• Phoneme Segmentation • Sight Words • Vocabulary • Fluency • Oral Language • Comprehension		Individual Small Group

Types of Instructional Models

The systematic instruction model is curriculum-based, with a planned lesson sequence that builds upon each other (Iris Center, n.d.). Before starting instruction, a benchmark assessment is provided to determine strengths and weaknesses as a baseline. The lesson instruction begins in the lowest area related to the baseline data corresponding with the curriculum sequence. The lessons provide introductory skills and tasks and gradually implement more complex task applications for the student to demonstrate mastery. Mastery is defined as meeting the instructional goals with 80% or higher. Systematic instruction focuses on students using prior knowledge to build additional skills, whereas instruction involves phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension (CDE, n.d.).

Explicit or direct instruction focuses on teaching a specific skill or concept to reach specific learning outcomes by the end of the lesson provided. The lessons are scripted with instructions on introducing a new concept while connecting previously learned concepts to meet the objectives outlined (Iris Center, n.d). The first part of the lesson involves explaining in clear, student-friendly, concise language the specific skills that will be taught while providing step-by-step instructions. Then, the student attempts the steps. While the student attempts the steps, the teacher provides guidance and

feedback. The last step of the lesson reinforces the skill with a student-independent practice session and is used as a formative assessment. Once the independent practice is complete, the teacher determines if additional modeling, practice, and feedback are needed (CDE, n.d) or to determine if the student has mastered the concept.

The immediate corrective feedback model allows students to practice specific skills and receive immediate feedback for incorrect responses. When an incorrect response is given, the student has explained the error and how the error can be corrected. The teacher provides unbiased, specific, measurable, and consistent feedback with the feedback model. Along with clear, constructive student feedback, it allows the facilitator to be cognizant of the student's mastery level and continued challenges.

Frequent Review is when a student has mastered a targeted skill, and the intervention facilitator introduces a more complex task incorporating previously learned tasks. The facilitator periodically provides formal assessments to determine if the student has maintained skill mastery over time while learning new skills to build (Intervention Central, n.d.). The skills are practiced within short periods to provide repeated opportunities to practice the skills needed to continue mastery at the same rate or better.

Like Frequent Review, opportunities for independent practice focus on maintaining skills learned over time with regular practice after the skills have been taught (Iris Center, n.d). The opportunities can be used as a formative, summative assessment or as an opportunity for the student to receive appropriate teacher assistance, independent practice, or guidance with minimal teacher support. Practice opportunities have an extended period between using the skills needed to practice mastery but provide the

student the opportunity to demonstrate a specific mastery at the same, or hopefully, at a better rate.

Scaffolded Instruction focuses on skill, task, or concept instruction with additional support to individual students. The additional supports appeal to the individual student's needs in helping them attain mastery levels. Learning occurs through dialogue, questions, feedback, modeling, and support (NIU.EDU, n.d). Instructionally, many of the models discussed can be used to support student learning simultaneously to close achievement gaps in reading. Another strategy used is reading. Reading instructional time is broken up into parts that address grade-level content and students' areas of need. Combining research-based interventions with additional methods of instruction helps students learn new skills, reinforce the skills with additional practice, and fade support when mastery is achieved.

Implementation

Before implementing research-based interventions, teachers must complete mandatory training on efficacy, data collection accuracy, and systematic implementation fidelity. Interventions can be administered face-to-face or through web-based programs on the options provided. These interventions follow a recommended cycle of 30-45 minutes daily for three to five days a week. The instructional model for tier 3 interventions follows one of six methods for instructional delivery: systematic instruction, explicit or direct instruction, immediate corrective feedback, frequent Review, opportunities for practice, and scaffolded instruction. The different models help to support student learning with different approaches to remediation.

Within a suburban East Coast public school system, the English/Language Arts instructional block consists of a five-day-a-week, ninety-minute time frame broken up into three parts. The three parts are a skills mini-lesson (fifteen to twenty minutes), a reading workshop mini-lesson for writing workshop mini-lesson (twenty minutes), and small group instruction (forty-five minutes). The lessons span eight-day cycles and, when planned effectively, provide time for teachers to deliver direct instruction for the whole group and additional support in small groups. Ideally, the grade standards are covered within the whole group instruction, and small groups are used to fill in the gaps with either carefully leveled materials or county-approved research-based interventions. Tier 3 students would receive small group instruction daily with this model either in a separate group within the general education classroom setting or as a pull-out service in a separate classroom.

COVID-19 has shifted how instructional support and interventions have been provided. The COVID-19 pandemic shifted what was once a brick-and-mortar setting to a virtual school day containing a condensed school day and calendar opportunities. The English/Language instructional block shifted to sixty minutes of whole group instruction four days a week with 30 minutes of independent work time. Small group instruction was limited to one day a week and used as a catch-up day for students not meeting within groups. The school closure shifted the various levels of support needed to implement RTI from school to home, creating challenges for many stakeholders. Since the beginning of the global pandemic in March 2020, the early identification and providing support to students with or suspected learning disabilities has had a shift change. This shift change

is the online environment.

Furthermore, this shift change has also resulted in online meetings and the implementation of digital resources. Tier 3, the most intense level of intervention for students with Learning Disabilities (LD), requires small group specified instruction in the areas of need to achieve academic progress. Due to COVID-19, IDEA special education services have been impacted in evaluation, Free and Appropriate Education (FAPE), and equitable services across the country.

On March 16, 2020, The US Department of Education Office of Civil Rights communicated to local educational agencies to comply with recommendations from the CDC to determine what further actions were needed. Local educational agencies were to take necessary actions to protect the civil rights of students who received services through the Individuals with Disabilities Act or Section 504 (OCR, 2020). Actions those local educational agencies considered included not providing educational services if the general population was not receiving educational services, local school teams meeting to determine comparable services, and the school teams not being able to deny delivery of services when school reopened for distance learning (OCR, 2020).

Immediately following school closures in March 2020, in the State of Maryland, school teams were informed to halt the evaluations, identification meetings, and services for students identified with disabilities. Local educational agencies were not required to convene face-to-face for eligibility meetings and were informed to document attempts to meet via phone or virtually (MSDE, 2020). Challenges such as access to internet connections, childcare, parental support for technology, access to devices, and access to

digital platforms for instruction presented inequitable access for parents, teachers, and students. State funding was provided to local educational agencies to address concerns of disproportionate access by providing each child with a device such as a Chrome book. Other resources included high-speed internet services and free educational resources such as tutoring and learning platforms to supplement the loss of face-to-face instructional time (MSDE, 2020).

The state of Maryland directed school teams to meet with parents within 30 days (about four and a half weeks) of the school closures to draft documentation for services on Individual Learning Plans. School teams were mandated to draft Individual Learning Plan documents as amended services to the legalized individualized educational plans. Individual Learning Plans were used to provide equitable access to educational services through distance learning to support students with disabilities by providing accommodations and modifications based on the student's needs (MSDE, 2020). Parents could accept modification to services or decline modification during this time, and both options were documented.

This impact of reduced school hours on the delivery of interventions and special education services due to COVID-19 has caused a rise in class action lawsuits. Distance learning has been the primary instructional method for the suburban East Coast public school system since March 2020. However, it is unknown how students who required tier 3 instruction were provided services during the online transition. The COVID-19 protocols changed instructional time for fewer and shorter instructional days. It also limited the peer interaction of at least 14,9555 students. Many of these students were

functioning below grade level, requiring RTI instruction. As the suburban East Coast public school system revisited, once again, its instructional methods became a hybrid model; documenting the barriers to implementation helped inform policy regarding the implementation of RTI.

Past Studies on RTI

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, RTI studies explored various aspects related to challenges to face-to-face implementation in the school setting. Maryland is one of three states that has adopted a general model for the three-tiered system of support (Berkeley et al., 2020). Based on that, RTI looks vastly different from state to state based on what the school systems choose to adopt, which may impact long-term sustainability. A study by Maki & Adams (2019) showed a significant discrepancy between states on how children with a specific learning disability were identified with the RTI model. The study highlighted that the RTI framework did not provide specific guidelines for adapting and rolling out the initiative, which left some states ill-prepared for implementation.

When exploring the challenges related to implementing the three-tiered system, educators expressed varying concerns related to research, instruction, progress monitoring, how to use data, and implementation with fidelity. Lopuch (2018) discussed that the current model is complex with different components and that moving to a simpler model for RTI, as discussed in Exceptional Children by Fuch (2017), could help improve fidelity. With all the responsibilities that educators currently have, Fuchs cited studies that have found implementation with fidelity is a significant issue. Lopuch (2018) mentions that factors that impact implementation include the initial screening process

being lengthy for intervention and disruption to instructional time, which also impacts the most qualified person's ability to provide the instruction needed for students to progress.

In a study done by Hendricks and Fuchs (2020), RTI was used as a way of early identification and as a system approach to support diverse learners, which found that there was a lack of research supporting the validity of the approach being able to support students through the tiered approach. With the face-to-face method of instruction using RTI, educators expressed concerns regarding a system of implementation that works for them and their students. Teachers having the tools to meet student needs, and the resources has been an ongoing issue. Rabin et al. (2019) found that poor training, lack of buy-in, and administrative support impacted practical implementations within the school setting. Additionally, implementation issues have also been due to a lack of accessible materials, an inflexible curriculum that did not allow time for implementation, and underprepared teachers (Hayes et al., 2020).

Lindström, E. R. et al. (2019) discussed using Data-Based Individualization as a team approach to supporting struggling learners. It stated that to effectively address student needs, a standard-based protocol and a systematic approach to progress monitoring will help determine the additional support needed for students to progress. As a team, teachers make systematic changes to the curriculum with weekly goals to target student needs. These would be considered Tier 2 and Tier 3 support with RTI. Highlighted areas of concern mentioned with this method are that teachers may face issues with time, staffing for implementation, and access to funding for resources. It was also noted in this study that students with more severe needs often had significantly

higher issues with behavior and motivation, which impacted the effectiveness of the implementation of the interventions provided (Lindström et al. 2019, p.3).

In a study by Alahamari (2018), educators expressed issues related to targeting tier 2 and 3-level interventions being stressful and overwhelming when it came to planning and implementing. Additionally, there can be concerns with how long an intervention needs to be implemented and how progress should be measured. With struggling learners behind below grade level, it is impossible for the expectation of growth to be on grade level by the end of one school year. Zirkel (2018) stated that teacher concerns surrounding the implementation of RTI were defining adequate progress for students and determining the time for support implementation.

With a lack of training and issues with planning, concerns surrounding how to gather data, use data, and monitor progress have been ongoing (Ciullo, 2016). There is no standard way to collect data using the RTI framework, so methods for using data to inform the next steps for tiers 2 and 3 have been an area of concern (Al Otaiba et al., 2019). The overarching themes were negative teacher perception related to implementation, difficulties implementing IDEA, and over-identification of students in special education. Poon-McBryer & Fong (2018) determined that leadership school leadership played a significant role in successfully implementing RTI. This study highlighted eight guiding principles as effective practices for successful implementation through leadership. The eight practices included high levels of learning through research practices, empowering students along with parents in the decision-making process, high-quality instruction, building a caring community, supporting students with special needs,

creating a partnership with parents as expected by the Individuals with Disabilities Act, incorporating multi-levels of instruction for students with a range of skills, and creating a cycle of curriculum-based assessments to support appropriate instruction (Poon-McBryer & Fong, 2018 p.163). Leadership strategies that led to successful school-based implementation included empowering teacher leaders who took ownership of initiatives and had a stake in the decision-making process, facilitating a schedule that allocated time for co-planning, consulting with peers, and planning for classroom-based supports (Poon-McBryer & Fong p.167).

Additionally, leadership emphasized onsite professional development, coaching, and fostering an environment that promoted lifelong learning among the educators involved (Poon-McBryer & Fong, n.d., p.168). Thomas et al. (2020) noted that implementation of RTI can vary even across districts due to the students' varying needs, the unique challenges of the population, and the different structures across grade levels. It noted that most secondary school students require more intensive tier-three interventions within a small group setting to address deficit needs. Implementing the intervention can present a logistical issue with scheduling and teaching grade-level curriculum needs while simultaneously teaching curriculum standards with resources that can be several grade levels below the student's expected level of performance.

Types of Instructional Models

The systematic instruction model is curriculum-based, with a planned lesson sequence that builds upon each other (Iris Center, n.d.). Before starting instruction, a benchmark assessment is provided to determine strengths and weaknesses as a baseline.

The lesson instruction begins in the lowest area related to the baseline data corresponding with the curriculum sequence. The lessons provide introductory skills tasks and gradually implement more complex task applications for the student to demonstrate mastery. Mastery is defined as meeting the instructional goals with 80% or more. Systematic instruction focuses on students using prior knowledge to build additional skills, whereas instruction involves phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension (CDE, n.d.).

Explicit or direct instruction focuses on teaching a specific skill or concept to reach specific learning outcomes by the end of the lesson provided. The lessons are scripted with instructions on introducing a new concept while connecting previously learned concepts to meet the objectives outlined (Iris Center, n.d).. The first part of the lesson involves explaining in clear, student-friendly, concise language the specific skills that will be taught while providing step-by-step instructions. Then, the student attempts the steps. While the student attempts the steps, the teacher provides guidance and feedback. The last step of the lesson reinforces the skill with a student-independent practice session and is used as a formative assessment. Once the independent practice is complete, the teacher determines if additional modeling, practice, and feedback are needed (CDE, n.d.) or to determine if the student has mastered the concept.

The immediate corrective feedback model allows students to practice specific skills and receive immediate feedback for incorrect responses. When an incorrect response is given, the student has explained the error and how the error can be corrected. The teacher provides unbiased, specific, measurable, and consistent feedback with the

feedback model. Along with clear, constructive student feedback, it allows the facilitator to be cognizant of the student's mastery level and continued challenges.

Frequent Review is when a student has mastered a targeted skill, and the intervention facilitator introduces a more complex task incorporating previously learned tasks. The facilitator periodically provides formal assessments to determine if the student has maintained skill mastery over time while learning new skills to build. Intervention Central, n.d.). The skills are practiced within short periods to provide repeated opportunities to practice the steps of the skills needed to continue mastery at the same rate or better.

Like the frequent review model, opportunities for independent practice focus on maintaining skills learned over time with regular practice after the skills have been taught (Iris Center, n.d). The opportunities can be used as a formative, summative assessment or as an opportunity for the student to receive appropriate teacher assistance, independent practice, or guidance with minimal teacher support. Practice opportunities have an extended period between using the skills needed to practice mastery but provide the student the opportunity to demonstrate a specific mastery at the same, or hopefully, at a better rate.

Scaffolded instruction focuses on skill, task, or concept instruction with additional support for individual students. The additional supports appeal to the individual student's needs in helping them attain mastery levels. Learning occurs through dialogue, questions, feedback, modeling, and support (NIU.EDU). Instructionally, many of the models discussed can be used to support student learning simultaneously to close achievement

gaps in reading. Another strategy used is reading. Reading instructional time is broken up into parts that address grade-level content and students' areas of need. Combining research-based interventions with additional methods of instruction helps students learn new skills, reinforce the skills with additional practice, and fade support when mastery is achieved.

The social learning theory and situated cognition theory framework help us to understand that through observation, authentic learning occurs in a context, which helps to improve attention, retention, motivation, and reproduction. Given the current intervention models used primarily for face-to-face implementation, the study filled the gap by exploring veteran teachers' strategies to adapt the models for distance learning. The study also explored student mastery rates in the online setting.

Summary

Chapter 2 provided an overview of the current literature on the response to the intervention process, models used for addressing student needs, framework, and outcomes. Chapter 3 will discuss the research design, questions, methodology, and participant selection process.

Chapter 3: Research Method

This chapter will provide information on the research methods used for this study. It begins with the study's research questions, a summary of the research design, the sampling strategy, and the target population. The chapter also provides information on the instruments used along with the process used for data collection. The chapter concludes with the tools used for data collection, methods for data analysis, and ethical procedures.

Research Design

The approach chosen for the study is phenomenology, which was used to explore and describe the teachers' experiences in providing the RTI to Tier 3 students pre-, during, and post-COVID-19. Phenomenology is used to explore lived experiences through people or a group of people for a deeper understanding of a phenomenon (Patton, 2015). Data were collected through surveys and then analyzed, highlighting similarities in the educators' lived experiences. Surveys that provide open-ended questions shed light on the participants' perceptions based on their personal experiences living through the phenomena (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). By having these stakeholders share their experiences, the study provided more valuable policy information to consider when determining how RTI can be improved post-COVID-19 to support educators and students better, answering the research questions:

1. What factors allow the implementation of the RTI process to students?

2. How do these factors support or negate student learning via distance learning?

The open-ended research survey questions allowed new and veteran elementary school

teachers to share their different experiences with the transition from face-to-face instruction, the support that was provided to them, the structures set in place for distance learning, and what challenges they faced with implementing RTI for students with disabilities during the COVID-19 school closure. Teachers sharing their experiences can help shift the need to support all students better using distance learning.

Role of the Researcher

My role as the researcher is to protect the identity of the participants, with questions created free of bias related to the focus of the study, and to provide questions systematically to ensure key points are discussed (Patton, 2015). The recruitment process included soliciting participants for the survey through flyers, organized teacher events, and via email. The survey questions guided the participants to give details on the implementation challenges and allowed them to elaborate on areas they chose to share based on their experiences. I provided qualitative survey questions that were unbiased and did not predict the study's result. As a researcher, it is vital bias is prevented before, during, and after the survey process. To mitigate the biases, questions that did not sway the participants' answers and adhered to the phenomenological approach were used, including asking open-ended questions. Participant biases were minimized by masking identifying information during the data collection process, using vetted questions, and using the format for questions approved through the IRB process. The questions used for this qualitative study were adapted from a previous study conducted by Burgin et al. (2022).

Methodology

Participant Selection

The sampling strategy was group characteristics sampling. Group characteristics sampling involves creating a specific information-rich group to identify patterns and themes from the raw data collected (Patton, 2015). I recruited new and veteran teachers in the elementary setting from Grades 3-5 who were tenured and implemented RTI during distance learning. Through this sampling strategy, the data collected provided rich descriptions of the transition to and implementation of distance learning, including factors that impacted the implementation of RTI for teachers supporting students with disabilities.

The sample population identified for the study required similar characteristics to share similar experiences of pre-, during, and post-COVID-19 RTI implementation. The characteristics of the sample population were veteran teachers, having at least 3 years of experience implementing reading interventions, and working with students with a reading disability. Additionally, participants were knowledgeable about the RTI process, strategies, and current models of instruction used to address student needs. Knowledge of the RTI process, support, and implementation enabled me to provide in-depth information on the shift and the impact COVID-19 had. In determining the sample population, none of the participants were part of what would be considered a vulnerable population (children, prisoners, or individuals with disabilities). The IRB process required completed forms to ensure the study was conducted ethically and did not harm potential participants. Informed consent and site forms were provided for the partner

organization before data collection. No data were collected on campus, and the partner organization did not distribute the study information; therefore, the partner organization agreement form was not used during the data collection process.

Once the plan was approved, employees of the Washington D.C. Metropolitan Area were contacted via social media, organized meetings, and emailed to recruit participants for the survey. Participants who met the sample population criteria were identified were provided the informed consent flyer with a QR code to the survey link. The survey was conducted within 8 weeks through Survey Monkey, an online platform. The participants were notified by email with an encrypted connection to submit their input. The sample size for the study was 40 participants recruited through multiple methods. The methods used for collecting data involved posting materials on social media sites with no direct contact with the users who were provided informed consent before participating in the survey, messaging teacher groups, and providing flyers to teacher groups at off-campus meetings (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019).

Instrumentation

Given the phenomenological approach, open-ended survey questions were used for teachers to provide information on their experience related to RTI during distance learning to improve implementation in a form. The benefits of using an encrypted survey included ease of use for the participants, privacy protection, and data integrity. The data will be kept after the study is completed; therefore, an encrypted survey provided the researcher with data security, data transfer safety across devices, and compliance with data storage. The introduction for the survey included background information describing

the study's purpose, how the data will be used after being collected, and a disclosure that stated participants could opt out at any time during the survey completion.

Procedures for Data Collection

The data collection process was completed online via encrypted surveys. Teachers were provided with the survey's link and purpose before they submitted their responses via Survey Monkey. The survey features excluded all the respondents' information, including their name, email address, IP address, and any features that allowed custom data.

Data Analysis Plan

The purpose of the study was to explore and describe the experiences of teachers who implemented RTI for their tier three students, to inform policy related to RTI within the virtual setting, and to improve the implementation process of RTI. The data analysis plan used a thematic approach, inputting transcripts into Quirkos to color code the data with relevant information for each category. Thematic coding is when the researcher organizes the raw data from the transcripts into comprehensive categories (Williams &Moser, 2019). The first coding method was handing, which entailed going through the documents and using different tools to highlight and note phrases on the document by hand. After the coding, each question was reviewed to summarize what was said, and then use keywords that emerged as a theme related to what was written. Quirkos exported the data collected into color-coded text, word bubbles, and a spreadsheet.

Issues with Trustworthiness

The study was conducted to determine teachers' challenges in implementing RTI during COVID-19. Providing new and veteran teachers with a clear explanation of the study's purpose, the methods used to collect data, and the plan for addressing confidentiality helped support any issues with trustworthiness. Participants were provided with information informing them of the credibility of the information they shared on their part in terms of the study, which was not used outside of the study's context. The strategies I used to address credibility were using questioning like the formatting of previous research projects involving RTI, developing a familiarity with the dynamics related to the organization I studied, using random sampling to negate researcher bias, and using triangulation in data collection methods (Shenton, 2004).

Ethical Procedures

The ethical procedures used to protect participants included excluding questions related to personal issues related to specific staff members or students, ensuring the data did not have any identifying information on it, making sure that the participants were aware of the purpose of the study, gaining consent for recording the information and letting participants know that they were able to opt out of the study at any time.

Summary

Chapter 3 explained the phenomenological approach, participant selection strategy, and data collection and analysis process. It also discussed maintaining an ethical process and issues of trustworthiness. Chapter 4 presents the study's findings.

Chapter 4: Results

This qualitative, phenomenological inquiry delved into the implementation of RTI amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, the study explored the challenges encountered and the strategies employed by both new and veteran elementary school educators during the transition to distance learning amidst school closures and subsequent reopening phases. By adopting a phenomenological approach, this research endeavored to construct a comprehensive narrative elucidating the instructional modalities and RTI service delivery from March 2020 to December 2020, drawing directly from teachers' lived experiences. This study shed light on educators' multifaceted challenges as they navigated the shift from traditional face-to-face instruction to online platforms, the efficacy of student access to RTI services, the evolution of instructional methodologies, and the inherent disparities between policy directives and their practical implementation.

Within this chapter, I discuss the methodologies employed for data collection, present the findings derived from the collected data, and provide a comprehensive analysis. Subsequent sections will outline the emergent themes derived from the survey data utilizing Quirkos software. I will also discuss how credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability played a role in the study.

Setting

IRB approval was granted on October 20, 2023 (IRB #10-20-23-0169574). Eligible participants were required to have experience teaching reading or math interventions for at least 1 year, providing instruction to students with disabilities either individually or in group settings, and familiarity with distance learning platforms.

Recruitment efforts leveraged multiple channels, including social media platforms, flyers, and email outreach distribution.

Participants were given two avenues to access the questions on Survey Monkey. One method involved distributing flyers with QR codes at teacher events off-campus, facilitating direct access to the informed consent and survey. Alternatively, approved flyers with a link to the consent form and survey were shared within teacher networking groups on Facebook. Additionally, individuals could request an invitation via email if they expressed interest in participating. Participants were encouraged to disseminate the survey further within their professional circles to maximize engagement.

Demographics

The study included 40 educators from the Washington, D.C. Metropolitan Area. The first question of the survey addressed teacher experience. Six had 2-5 years of teaching experience, six had 6-10 years, four had 11-15 years, and 24 had 16 or more years. Thirty-four out of 40 (85%) educators who took the survey were veteran teachers during the transition to distance learning. A group of participants with varying skill levels provided different insights based on their experience with technology and instruction. With time comes greater experience in facilitating instruction and providing support to meet student needs. With the theoretical frameworks of social learning theory and situation cognition theory, different levels of experience determine what types of systems, tools, resources, and supports different educators implement to help students learn within their environment and retain and sustain learning.

Data Collection

After obtaining approval from the IRB, I disseminated the study's flyer announcement along with the informed consent protocol and QR code in two Facebook teacher groups for review and approval. Approval was granted within a day, resulting in a few participants completing the survey. Following the same approach, I also shared the information within a teacher group on Reddit. The post was removed within a few hours, resulting in no participants gained from that platform. I moved ahead to explore different social media mediums. I engaged with seven Facebook teacher network group chats. However, within the initial 2 weeks, only eight participants completed the study. Most participants were recruited through professional networking events and targeted Facebook teacher groups between November 18, 2023, and December 22, 2023. Additionally, I contacted educators within my network via private messages and encouraged them to participate in the study. Furthermore, I encouraged those teachers to share the information with other educators who met the sample population criteria. Furthermore, I attended an off-campus teacher event where I distributed flyers to elementary educators, emphasizing the survey's anonymity and flexibility, allowing them to complete it at their convenience.

The phenomenological study utilized open-ended questions collected through Survey Monkey, ensuring anonymity by excluding identifying information such as email addresses, IP addresses, names, or places of employment. Participants anonymously responded to 10 questions adapted from a previous study conducted by Burgin et al. (2022). Approval was obtained to utilize their questionnaire. This anonymous approach

fostered a low-pressure environment, offering flexibility for completion and enabling participants to engage transparently on various topics from their perspectives without divulging detailed identifying information.

Data Analysis

The survey questions prompted educators to delve into various aspects of their teaching practice, including planning, lesson delivery, instructional challenges, technology integration, administrative support, and professional development. To capture nuanced insights into their transition from traditional face-to-face instruction to remote learning, educators reflected on how their core methodologies evolved. Specifically, educators were encouraged to examine their pre-pandemic strategies for addressing student needs, identify the professional development requirements they encountered during the shift to remote instruction, and confront any shortcomings in fostering dynamic learning environments. To analyze the data, responses from the survey were meticulously reviewed and categorized to extract pertinent information related to each question, facilitating a thorough understanding of the content and its contextual relevance. While individual responses varied, some educators shared similar experiences, underscoring common challenges and successes throughout the transition.

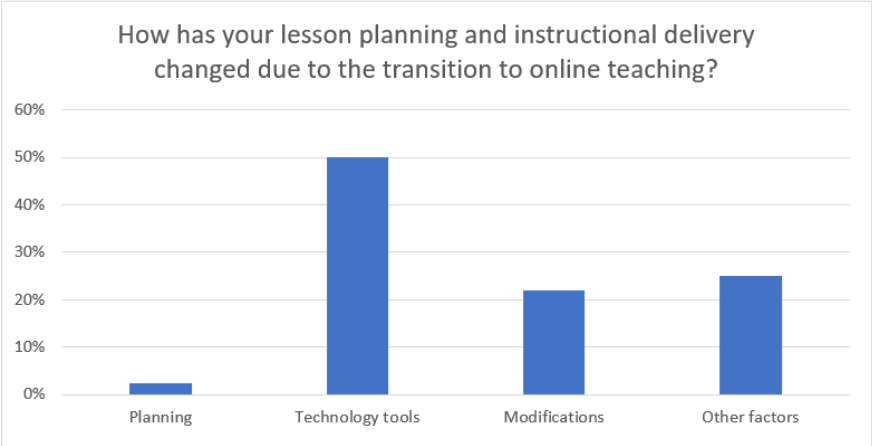
Question 2: How Has Your Lesson Planning and Instructional Delivery Changed Due to the Transition to Online Teaching?

Transitioning to distance learning significantly changed lesson planning and instructional delivery for educators. Among the most notable shifts were the increased demand for planning time, heightened reliance on technology resources, a broader array

of instructional platforms, and the necessity to adapt lessons to accommodate diverse students' needs in the digital realm (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

Responses to Question 2



As distance learning became necessary, 1 in 40 (2.5%) of educators required extended planning time, highlighting the shift from traditional instruction methods to digital delivery. This shift required educators to invest additional time in tasks such as transforming content into digital formats like PowerPoint presentations, utilizing various digital platforms to disseminate information, and mastering new instructional tools.

Moreover, the increased availability of technology resources enabled 20 out of 40 (50%) educators to enhance their lesson planning and delivery. With access to platforms like Google Meet and Zoom, educators could engage with students virtually, facilitating interactive learning experiences through applications like Funhub. These advancements empowered educators to craft more dynamic and engaging lessons tailored to their student's unique needs.

Recognizing the challenges posed by distance learning, 9 out of 40 (22.5%) educators acknowledged the need to adapt and modify their lessons to support better student learning in the digital environment. For some educators, 10 out of 40 (25%), issues such as pacing issues and other difficulties highlight the importance of understanding the various factors impacting instructional delivery during remote learning.

Ultimately, navigating these instructional challenges was crucial for educators, as it directly influenced students' access to quality education. By effectively addressing these obstacles and leveraging available resources, educators could ensure that all students receive the support and instruction needed to thrive in a remote learning environment. Based on social learning theory, distance learning limits students' ability to access instruction and services based on their ability to access stable internet and digital literacy. Students with stable access to the internet and some digital literacy could have increased opportunities to observe their peers, practice problem-solving with collaboration, and independently repeat the necessary steps needed for retention and reproduction.

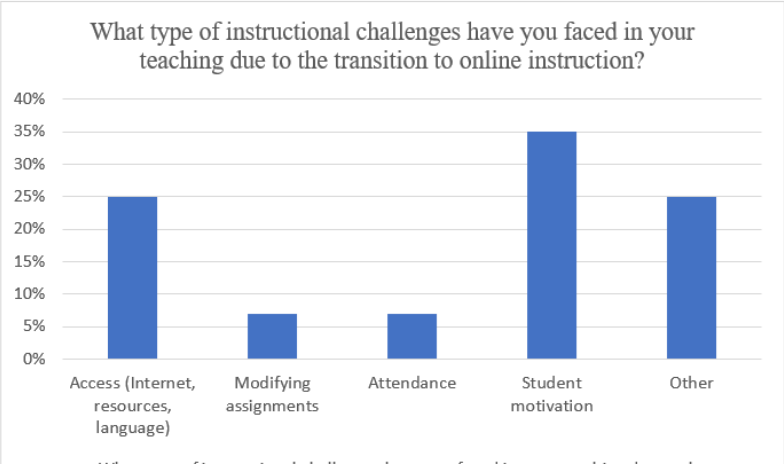
Question 3: What Type of Instructional Challenges Have You Faced in Your Teaching due to the Transition to Online Instruction?

Educators faced multifaceted instructional challenges during the transition to online instruction, encompassing issues such as internet access (WiFi connectivity, resource availability, and language barriers), modifying resources, attendance tracking, student motivation, and other factors like training or small group meetings (see Figure 2). Of these challenges, student motivation and participation emerged as particularly

significant, as highlighted by 14 out of 40 (35%) surveyed educators. They noted various manifestations of disengagement, including students turning off their cameras, succumbing to distractions in their environments, utilizing devices for non-academic purposes, and struggling due to language barriers (especially for ESOL students) or lower reading/comprehension skills.

Figure 2

Responses to Question 3



Social learning theory states that children learn from observing others using attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation (Bandura, 1977). Educators were able to incorporate applications and websites that provided students with opportunities to connect, give feedback, and gamify learning to gain and sustain the interest of different learners. Gaining and sustaining interest was key in student motivation for learning and completing work. The participants expressed that not being able to access some of the digital curriculum resources through websites being blocked or facing challenges through fee-based subscription access impacted their ability to facilitate instructional activities

that they had prepared, so at times, it became a hindrance.

Moreover, assessing students' abilities was challenging for 10 out of 40 (25%) of the educators due to difficulties accessing instruction. Many students faced obstacles like unreliable WiFi connectivity, which impacted their access to essential information. Additionally, navigating online tools to access required resources posed a hurdle for some learners, while those with disabilities found it challenging to replicate hands-on experiences virtually. Accessing instruction also pertains to attendance. Student attendance was noted as an instructional challenge for 3 out of 40 (7.5%) educators. Educators supported each other to help locate students. Students were not logging in to distance learning platforms for intervention sessions, and one educator noted not seeing some students until it was time to return to in-person instruction. Chronically absent students missed a significant amount of instruction, which impacted the overall progress made and contributed to skill regression due to sessions missed.

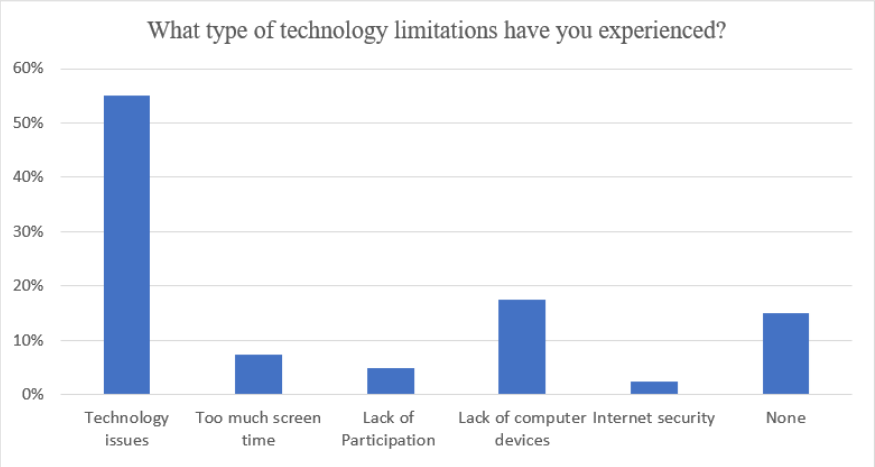
Distance learning also hampered educators' ability to provide hands-on support, particularly for students with fine motor difficulties or those requiring tactile manipulatives. This shift necessitated resource modifications to better cater to student's needs for 3 out of 40 (7.5%) educators to bridge the gap between virtual and traditional learning environments. Other factors that 10 out of 40 (25%) educators mentioned included technology training, difficulty meeting small group needs, and cost of equipment needed to facilitate distance learning. Limitations on technology faced by educators had a direct impact on instructional delivery.

Question 4: What Type of Instructional Challenges Have You Faced in Your Teaching due to the Transition to Online Instruction?

Technology limitations significantly impacted educators 22 out of 40 (55%) during distance learning, affecting various aspects of instruction and student engagement (see Figure 3). Issues related to internet connectivity and platform accessibility hindered the teaching process. Unstable and unreliable internet connections were a common challenge, with teachers and students struggling to maintain consistent access. This resulted in missed instructions, difficulties participating in discussions, and incomplete assignments.

Figure 3

Responses to Question 4



Moreover, the lack of immediate technical support exacerbated these issues, further impeding the teaching and learning experience. Sharing WiFi and bandwidth constraints at home compounded these challenges for many students, exacerbating the instability of their connections. Consequently, students faced obstacles in engaging with

peers, completing independent work, and accessing educational materials.

Access to computer devices was another significant barrier, with a notable portion of educators, 7 out of 40 (17.5%), highlighting issues such as equipment shortages, outdated devices, and the necessity of device sharing among students. The reliance on caregivers during the pandemic further restricted students' access to devices during the day, limiting their learning opportunities.

Furthermore, educators, 2 out of 40 (7.5%), raised concerns regarding excessive screen time and real-time participation due to lack of engagement as well as lack of digital literacy, and 2 out of 40 (7.5%) of educators' technology limitations further complicating the distance learning environment. Another limitation mentioned by 1 out of 40 (2.5%) educators included internet security concerns. Concerns regarding issues such as malware, hacking, and data breaches raised concerns regarding internet safety for students. Despite some limitations for educators, 6 out of 40 (15%) of educators stated they had no technical issues. Technology did offer some benefits, enabling real-time interaction between educators and students and using multimedia tools to enhance learning experiences.

Understanding the extent of technology limitations educators face is crucial for comprehending the impact on student learning outcomes. Addressing these challenges requires concerted efforts to improve internet infrastructure, provide adequate device resources, and offer robust technical support systems to facilitate practical distance learning experiences for all stakeholders. With situation cognition theory, students' opportunity to have authentic learning occur in the context and environment was limited

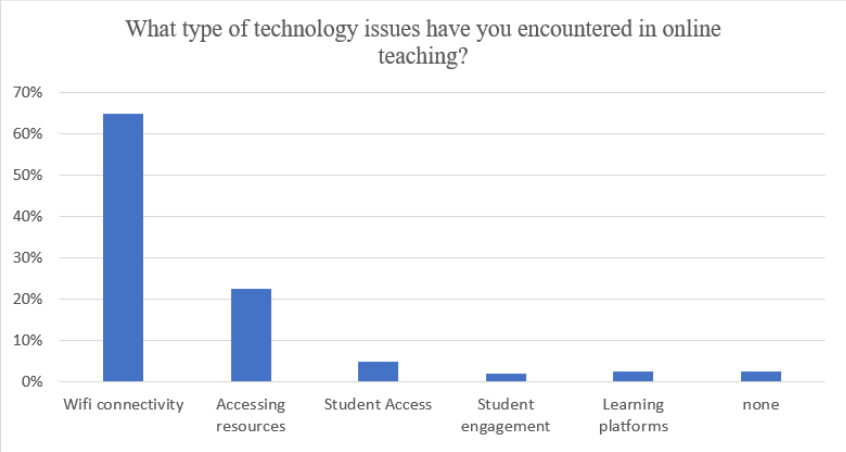
to the accessibility to their resources. Additional resources that provided expanded opportunities for students to engage with the curriculum and give more practice were often limited to what districts could afford or provide access to.

Question 5: What Type of Technology Issues Have You Encountered in Online Teaching?

Educators highlighted several technology-related challenges, including Wi-Fi connectivity, resource accessibility, student access, engagement, and insufficient training (see Figure 4). A substantial number of educators, 26 out of 40 (65%), cited Wi-Fi connectivity as the most prevalent issue during distance learning. Students encountered difficulties such as slow internet connections, compatibility issues, application freezes, computer glitches, and interruptions during instructional meetings. Access to student resources impacted 9 out of 40 (22.5%) of educators, impacting students' ability to access instruction. Students struggled to navigate platforms and tools per 2 out of 40 (5%) educators and find materials. Students also struggled with outdated devices that were incompatible with different sites needed to access instructional resources.

Figure 4

Responses to Question 5



Furthermore, 1 out of 40 (2.5%) educators emphasized that technology issues significantly affected student engagement. Learning new technologies for instructional delivery posed another challenge. One educator, 1 out of 40 (2.5%), struggled to navigate various platforms and applications within a limited timeframe, while 1 out of 40 (2.5%) educators experienced no technology issues at all.

Through observation, educators gained insights into the factors influencing students' learning and progress post-transition to distance learning. To address student needs effectively, educators employ innovative methods to provide support and foster engagement. Social learning theory states that children learn from observing others using attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation (Bandura, 1977). Before the COVID-19 epidemic, students received all their instruction in a face-to-face setting within a classroom, supporting students with disabilities using the model for teaching and

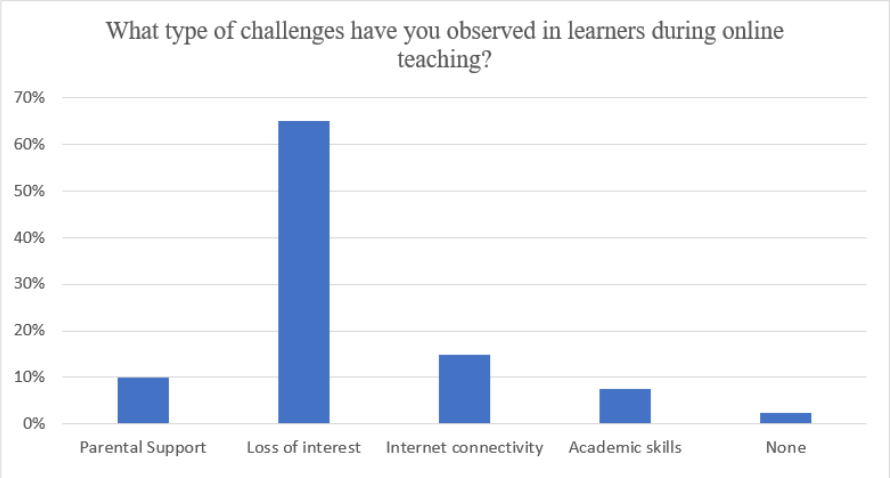
learning. Due to limited in-person interaction, distance learning reduced the ability of students to access social reinforcement, hands-on activities, positive teacher/peer feedback, and peer engagement, especially with an additional barrier of issues with wifi connectivity.

Question 6: What Type of Challenges Have You Observed in Learners During Online Teaching?

Educators have identified many challenges that learners faced during distance learning, ranging from a lack of parental involvement and waning interest to internet connectivity issues and below-grade-level skills (see Figure 5). Notably, 26 out of 40 (65%) educators pinpointed a loss of interest as the most prevalent obstacle observed. Many students exhibited disinterest, with some even disengaging entirely from the learning process, as one educator noted that some students seemed to “throw in the towel.”

Figure 5

Responses to Question 6



Throughout distance learning, students struggled to maintain focus, lacked social interactions with peers, grappled with varying learning styles, and often lacked the foundational skills necessary for grade-level assignments. Behaviors such as browsing other internet sites, falling asleep, diverting attention away from instruction, and misplacing school-provided learning tools became commonplace. Additionally, educators noted a rise in students experiencing heightened social-emotional issues, including increased anxiety and sadness, as well as instances of students being unable to log in at all, further exacerbating their disinterest in learning.). Situation cognition theory states that authentic learning is done when the learning is done in context and the environment it takes place (Seely Brown et al. 1989). Distance learning posed challenges in facilitating hands-on learning opportunities. The absence of physical interaction between students, their peers, and educators hindered the utilization of tactile strategies for engagement, impeding students' visual and real-time engagement in problem-solving. Similarly, providing immediate feedback and implementing strategies proved challenging without face-to-face interactions. Managing off-task behaviors during distance learning posed challenges, as face-to-face instruction offered more significant opportunities for redirection and real-time modeling with peers of behavior expectations.

The school serves as a sanctuary for many students, but distance learning disrupts their access to the social-emotional support typically provided by educators and school resources. According to 4 out of 40 (10%) educators, parental support became crucial in filling this gap, requiring parents to step into roles traditionally occupied by educators and offer hands-on assistance with instruction and task completion.

However, not all students had robust parental support, which hindered their ability to work independently, stay focused, and submit assignments. Effective communication between parents and schools became imperative during distance learning, facilitated by platforms such as Class Dojo. Educators utilized these tools to schedule meetings, relay information about upcoming assignments and missing work, and provide tutorials to support student learning.

6 out of 40 (15%) educators have observed significant student frustrations from internet connectivity issues during distance learning. These challenges manifest in various forms, including device freezing, computer screen glitching, and weak broadband signals, causing interruptions in instruction. These connectivity obstacles hinder students' access to essential educational resources, impeding their learning experience. Furthermore, three out of 40 (7.5%) educators observed a significant impact on younger learners, who struggled with accessing digital resources due to their limited digital literacy and capabilities. Younger students, particularly kindergarteners, faced challenges navigating electronic devices and internet tools, compounded by their shorter attention spans and difficulty communicating within the digital classroom. One educator, 1 out of 40 (2.5%), reported no challenges observed by learners.

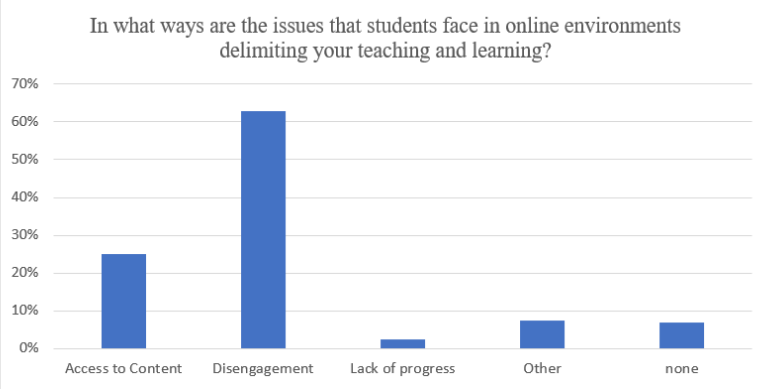
Question 7: In What Ways are the Issues That Students Face in Online Environments Delimiting Your Teaching and Learning?

Students' challenges in the online learning environment significantly impact the efficacy of teaching and learning (see Figure 6). These challenges include limited access to content, disengagement, lack of progress, attendance concerns, and parental support.

Disengagement emerged as a prominent hurdle, with 25 out of 40 (62.5%) educators highlighting students' struggles with distractions in their home environments. This distraction led to non-responsiveness during instruction and difficulty maintaining focus, exacerbated by the absence of hands-on activities typical in traditional learning settings. Situation cognition theory states that authentic learning is done when the learning is done in context and the environment it takes place (Seely Brown et al., 1989). Distance learning reduced the ability of students to interact with their physical learning environment. Authentic learning can be challenging to replicate using online tools as stated by educators in the study, to create learning experiences requiring high student engagement, such as science experiments or math manipulatives to solve problems. Participant #24 stated that it was "hard to be hands-on," which in turn made it "difficult to engage students." Distance learning can limit the ability of students to collaborate and have meaningful interactions for learning using group projects or discussions. Lack of student engagement in distance learning can impact assessment data by not truly capturing a student's academic ability and real-world application of the skills learned. Participant #35 stated, "It is harder to problem solve with students when they can turn off their computer and walk away when frustrated."

Figure 6

Responses to Question 7



Access to content posed a significant barrier, affecting 10 out of 40 (25%) educators who reported students grappling with limited vocabulary, language barriers, fine motor challenges, and difficulties in decoding material. These obstacles necessitated adapting or modifying materials to cater to students' needs. Consequently, students faced hurdles in making progress due to their inability to access the material effectively without appropriate modifications. Challenges to accessing digital platforms presented themselves with unstable internet and a lack of digital literacy for students and parents who needed to access resources to support their learning.

Other issues that delimited teaching and learning that impacted a small percentage of educators, which made up 3 out of 40 educators (7.5%), included students who frequently missed instruction and required additional support to bridge the gap and catch up with their peers 1 out of 40 teachers (2.5%), lack of parental support 1 out of 40 educators (2.5%) and consistent overall lack of progress despite attendance not being an issue for 1 out of 40 educators (2.5%). This often-entailed dedicated reteaching sessions

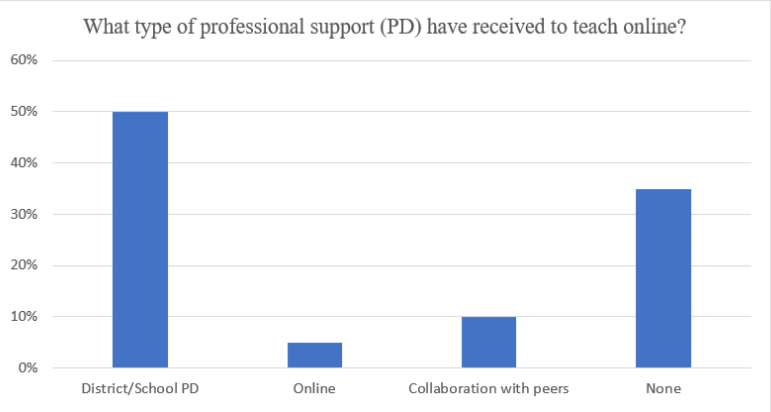
to reinforce essential skills and concepts, which 1 out of 40 (2.5%) teachers reported. One educator reported that no factors delimited their teaching and the student's learning to make up 1 out of 40 (2.5%). Authentic learning can be challenging when repeated missed opportunities exist to access learning. Missed instruction does not allow students to retain, sustain, and have continued opportunities to increase academic progress.

Question 8: What Type of Professional Support Have You Received to Teach Online?

Professional development experiences during the transition to distance learning varied significantly based on educators' backgrounds and resources (see Figure 7). According to a survey, 20 out of 40 (50%) educators benefited from training provided by their district or school-wide initiatives. These initiatives proved instrumental in enhancing digital literacy, as noted by one educator who highlighted the invaluable resources. Among these were platforms such as Pear Deck, Google Classroom, Microsoft Teams, and Jamboard, which facilitated collaborative learning environments. Using situation cognition theory, educators were able to make significant gains in their digital literacy skills with support from their district and school-based training. An additional resource was collaborating with colleagues to create opportunities for authentic learning.

Figure 7

Responses to Question 8



Additionally, educators reported gaining proficiency in learning management systems like Brightspace and leveraging Google technologies to foster student engagement. Tools such as Read & Write were particularly beneficial for students struggling with decoding, illustrating the commitment to inclusive learning practices. However, challenges persisted for some educators, with 14 out of 40 (35%) indicating they received no formal training during the transition. Many turned to their peers for support, with 4 out of 40 (10%) collaborating within their departments or school buildings. Peer interactions proved vital for developing lesson plans, refining digital presentations, and mastering the intricacies of learning management systems.

Meanwhile, a smaller subset of educators, approximately 2 out of 40 (5%), took the initiative to seek out online professional development opportunities independently. By leveraging resources available on the internet, they proactively enhanced their digital literacy skills, showcasing a dedication to continuous learning and professional growth. The effectiveness of leadership varied from educator to educator. Identifying the types of

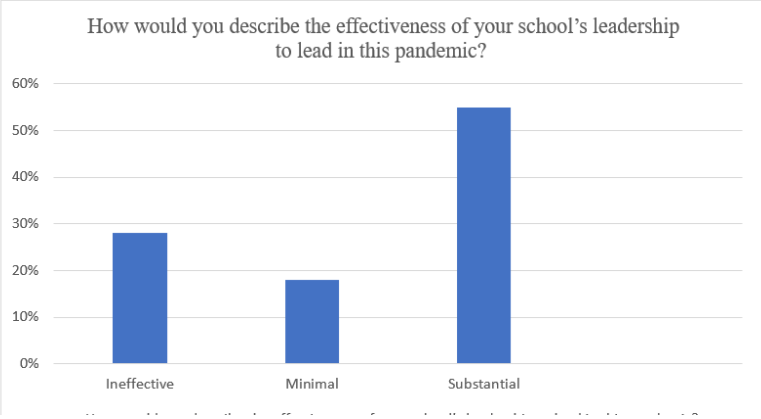
leadership initiatives that educators identified was essential to the success of transitioning to distance learning.

Question 9: How Would You Describe the Effectiveness of Your School's Leadership to Lead in This Pandemic?

Educators' perspectives on leadership during distance learning varied widely, ranging from highly supportive to ineffective (see Figure 8). A significant majority, 22 out of 40 (55%), regarded their administrators as substantially effective in navigating the transition to distance learning. These administrators facilitated support through regular meetings, check-ins, home-delivered supplies, transparent communication, and well-structured school-based support plans. They also encouraged open dialogue, offered recommendations, and demonstrated adaptability and responsiveness to teachers' evolving needs. Authentic learning and growth could be done within the context of having clear direction and support from administrators. Administrators were able to set the standard for expectations for interactions with colleagues, school-based staff, and families.

Figure 8

Responses to Question 9



However, 7 out of 40 (18%) educators perceived their administrators as minimally effective, attributing their limitations to budgetary constraints, district directives, and student-related challenges. Additionally, a quarter of educators, totaling 11 out of 40 (25%), found their administrators to be ineffective. Some educators elaborated further, expressing concerns about administrators being overly optimistic, while others sought additional support from their union. Substantially effective administrators provided teachers with leadership that met their students' needs, made them feel heard, was responsive, and could shift gears when needed. Reflection on the experience allowed educators to voice their perceptions of what worked and what didn't.

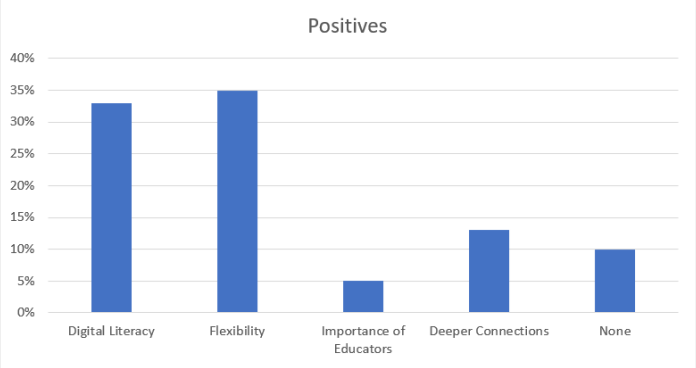
Despite challenges, distance learning allowed educators to acquire new skills to facilitate remote education. Through firsthand experience, educators can now articulate both the drawbacks and benefits of distance learning, offering insights to enhance its implementation for better meeting students' academic and socio-emotional needs, particularly in implementing RTI strategies.

Question 10: Share 2-4 Takeaways from the Online Teaching; Include Both Positive and Negative Thoughts

Educators have embraced the positive aspects of distance learning, recognizing its profound impact on their professional and personal lives (see Figure 9). Notably, the transition to remote education has highlighted key benefits such as enhanced digital literacy, increased flexibility, a reaffirmed appreciation for educators, and cultivating deeper connections. A significant portion of educators, constituting 13 out of 40 (32.5%), have acknowledged a marked improvement in digital literacy due to transitioning to distance learning. This transition has empowered them to refine their instructional approaches, leveraging technology to enrich their lessons and foster heightened student engagement. Moreover, the flexibility afforded by distance learning has been a significant benefit for many educators, with 14 out of 40 (35%) expressing a newfound sense of safety and security in conducting their work from the comfort of their homes. This flexibility has enabled them to deliver instruction from any location while yielding financial savings by eliminating daily commuting costs. For a subset of educators, distance learning has facilitated the establishment of deeper connections within their personal lives and with their students. Approximately 5 out of 40 (15%) educators have cherished spending quality time with loved ones while fostering more robust, personal relationships with some students.

Figure 9

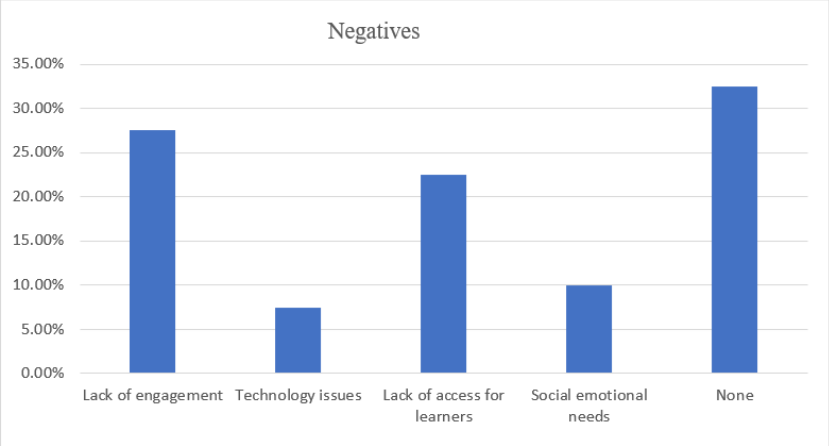
Positives



However, it is essential to note that not all educators have experienced uniformly positive outcomes from distance learning (see Figure 10). A minority, comprising 10%, did not report any discernible benefits from the transition. Nonetheless, the collective reflections of educators underscore the multifaceted impact of distance learning, revealing a spectrum of experiences ranging from enhanced professional development to enriched personal connections.

Figure 10

Negatives



As highlighted by educators, negative aspects of distance learning encompass various challenges, including a lack of engagement/social interactions, technology issues, unequal access for learners, and inadequate resources for addressing social-emotional needs. Specifically, educators noted that the absence of engaging social interactions during distance learning significantly hampers students' academic and social-emotional development. A notable 11 out of 40 (27.5%) educators emphasized the detrimental impact of this absence on students' growth in both areas.

Moreover, technological challenges, such as unstable internet connections, hindered students' access to digital platforms and instructional materials. Recognizing the pivotal role of stable internet connectivity, 3 out of 40 (7.5%) educators stressed its necessity for maximizing the benefits of distance learning, enabling students to access essential resources, interact with peers, participate in collaborative platforms, and engage in teacher-led instruction effectively

Furthermore, 9 out of 40 (22.5%) educators underscored the unequal access to distance learning resources, particularly for students with cognitive, motor, attention, and language deficits. Despite the availability of supportive tools like Read & Write, educators found themselves significantly modifying curriculum to accommodate diverse student needs and sustain engagement. Another critical observation related to students' evolving social-emotional needs during distance learning. 4 out of 40 (10%) of educators noted a shift in students' ability to access the support systems available in traditional school settings, impacting their well-being at home and in the digital learning environment. A substantial portion 13 out of 40 (32%) of educators did not identify any negative aspects of distance learning. Appropriate data analysis depends on the purpose and way data is collected to provide a comprehensive and trustworthy account of the participant's experiences (Bloomberg and Volpe, 2019, p. 199).

Coding and Themes

Data analysis begins with managing a large volume of raw data provided by participants, categorizing it, and reflecting on the patterns of statements until themes emerge (Bloomberg and Volpe, 2019, p. 199). A thematic coding approach was employed to analyze the collected data comprehensively. Initial codes were formulated to capture pertinent technology, platforms, student learning, transition, and professional development segments. The data was organized into categories within Quirkos and separated according to the statements provided by participants. Data segments were summarized and analyzed through thematic coding to identify consistent themes and subsequently refined to address the overarching research questions. An initial coding was

done to provide initial categories of themes with supporting statements. The emerging themes were access to technology, professional development, collaboration, and supportive administration. A second coding round was done to identify keywords and participants for the themes.

Table 2

Initial Coding

Theme	Question #	Participant Quote
Access to technological tools	2. How has your lesson planning and instructional delivery changed due to the transition to online teaching?	Participant #2: "Meeting is done via google meet and all assignments are posted in google classroom." Participant #10: "The shift to online teaching has prompted several changes in instructional approaches. Educators often had to restructure their lesson plans to suit a virtual environment. Some of these adaptions include digital content integration, synchronous & asynchronous learning, and adaption of assessments." Participant #34: "I incorporate more digital tools and applications in my lessons. I use more apps from Google to enhance how I present information."
Professional Development and Collaboration	8. What type of professional support (PD) have you received to teach online?	Participant #1: "Independent training through collaborations with colleagues, buying PD's online to assist with best practice and buying language apps that would support the goals and strategies per student." Participant 10: "Digital Literacy Training: Given the importance of digital tools in online teaching, professional development may focus on improving educators' digital literacy skills. This can include training on using learning management systems, collaboration platforms, and other online tools effectively." Participant #27: "Our county was actually very supportive during online instruction and offered multiple PDs and trainings on technology. It was just overwhelming to learn so much in such a short period of time."
Supportive administration	Q9: How would you describe the effectiveness of your school's leadership to lead in this pandemic?	Participant #10: "I would say it was successful. School leaders demonstrated adaptability in responding to the rapidly changing circumstances of a pandemic. This included the ability to make informed decisions promptly, adjusting plans as needed, and remaining flexible in the face of uncertainty." Participant #14: "The school leadership was concerned and gave use the tools we needed to be successful. We had regular staff meetings to voice concerns, frustrations, success stories and request supplies. The leadership visited us on line and provided suggestions to strengthen our lessons. The leadership bought us gifts and mailed them to our houses. They asked us to send pictures and connected with us regularly so we wouldn't feel isolated and alone." Participant #20: The school should provide timely and clear communication to teachers, students, and parents about changes, safety measures, and expectations during the pandemic. Offering support, resources, and guidance to educators in adapting to online teaching, addressing challenges, and ensuring the well-being of students and staff.
Supportive Administration	Q9: How would you describe the effectiveness of your school's leadership to lead in this pandemic?	Participant #37: "Our county took a deep breath, stepped back, and then leaned into it full force. Our CEO and staff worked very grad to prepare us. We had two weeks off (because it was also Spring Break), then two weeks of online intensive training, then invited the kids' families to pick up devices, and started with a couple of hours 4 days a week and office hours/individualized help on Wednesdays, and I got a lot done in office hours before and after those short times and on Wednesdays. Our school was less in the lead, but quick to follow the overall system initiatives, and it was for the most pat a successful turning of a very large boat."

Table 3

Second Round of Coding

Theme	Question #	Participant Quote	Participants
Access to more technological tools • Longer lesson preparation to transition • Integrate more digital resources to engage students • Modifications and accommodations needed to meet needs • Virtual meeting platforms	2. How has your lesson planning and instructional delivery changed due to the transition to online teaching?	Participant #2: "Meeting is done via google meet and all assignments are posted in google classroom." Participant #10: "The shift to online teaching has prompted several changes in instructional approaches. Educators often had to restructure their lesson plans to suit a virtual environment. Some of these adaptions include digital content integration, synchronous & asynchronous learning, and adaption of assessments." Participant #34: "I incorporate more digital tools and applications in my lessons. I use more apps from Google to enhance how I present information."	1, 2, 5, 6, 7, 10, 11, 15, 18, 20, 22, 23, 26, 27, 28, 31, 34, 35, 37, 39
Professional Development and Collaboration • Collaboration with colleagues • District wide trainings • School based professional development	8. What type of professional support (PD) have you received to teach online?	Participant #1: "Independent training through collaborations with colleagues, buying PD's online to assist with best practice and buying language apps that would support the goals and strategies per student." Participant 10: "Digital Literacy Training: Given the importance of digital tools in online teaching, professional development may focus on improving educators' digital literacy skills. This can include training on using learning management systems, collaboration platforms, and other online tools effectively." Participant #27: "Our county was actually very supportive during online instruction and offered multiple PDs and trainings on technology. It was just overwhelming to learn so much in such a short period of time."	Participants: 1, 7, 10, 12, 14, 20, 24, 27, 30, 31, 32, 33, 35, 37, 38, 39,40, 2, 5, 6, 23, 28, 29, 34
Supportive administration • Weekly meetings • Adaptability • Clear communication • Created a plan • Home visits • Provided tools to be successful • Flexibility • Visibility • Praise • Encouragement • Connectedness	Q9: How would you describe the effectiveness of your school's leadership to lead in this pandemic?	Participant #10: "I would say it was successful. School leaders demonstrated adaptability in responding to the rapidly changing circumstances of a pandemic. This included the ability to make informed decisions promptly, adjusting plans as needed, and remaining flexible in the face of uncertainty." Participant #14: "The school leadership was concerned and gave use the tools we needed to be successful. We had regular staff meetings to voice concerns, frustrations, success stories and request supplies. The leadership visited us on line and provided suggestions to strengthen our lessons. The leadership bought us gifts and mailed them to our houses. They asked us to send pictures	Participants 2, 6, 9, 10, 11, 14, 15, 16, 19, 20, 22, 23,24, 27, 28, 32, 33, 34, 35, 37, 38, 39

Theme	Question #	Participant Quote	Participants
		and connected with us regularly so we wouldn't feel isolated and alone."	
		Participant #20: The school should provide timely and clear communication to teachers, students, and parents about changes, safety measures, and expectations during the pandemic. Offering support, resources, and guidance to educators in adapting to online teaching, addressing challenges, and ensuring the well-being of students and staff.	
	Q9: How would you describe the effectiveness of your school's leadership to lead in this pandemic?	Participant #37: "Our county took a deep breath, stepped back, and then leaned into it full force. Our CEO and staff worked very grad to prepare us. We had two weeks off (because it was also Spring Break), then two weeks of online intensive training, then invited the kids' families to pick up devices, and started with a couple of hours 4 days a week and office hours/individualized help on Wednesdays, and I got a lot done in office hours before and after those short times and on Wednesdays. Our school was less in the lead, but quick to follow the overall system initiatives, and it was for the most pat a successful turning of a very large boat."	

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Evidence of trustworthiness protects the participants from harm, protects their privacy, and ensures anonymity before, during, and after the research study is completed (Bloomburg & Volpe, 2019). Trustworthiness in research depends on validity, reliability, and maintaining ethical standards about anonymity and confidentiality (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). Reliability and credibility determine trustworthiness by reflecting the real-world phenomenon being studied through the study's participants while providing different researchers with similar results if the same methods are implemented in various environments (Bloomberg and Volpe, 2019, p. 202).

The methods I used to recruit new and veteran teachers provided informed consent, transparency, and confidentiality to ensure trustworthiness between the researcher and the participants. Educators were not asked their names or locations when

fliers were distributed. Survey Monkey was set not to collect participants' IP addresses and emails when survey responses were submitted.

Survey respondents provided no identifying information during the study. Participants were provided with documents informing them how the information they shared would be used and how long it would be stored. I addressed possible issues with credibility by formatting the questions using the same language and styles as a previous research study involving RTI. This helped me develop a familiarity with the dynamics related to the organization I am studying and using characteristic sampling for my target population to negate researcher bias, using triangulation in data collection methods (Shenton, 2004, p.4).

Transferability

Transferability, or external validity, is the extent to which the findings of one study can be applied to other situations (Kalu & Bwalya, 2017). Transferability of a study refers to the possibility the study's results can be related to the broader population (Bloomberg and Volpe, 2019, p. 205). The participants provided detailed descriptions of their transition to and implementation of RTI using distance learning to provide instruction to students with disabilities. On a broader scale, given the research study body of literature, settings, participants, and related experiences, transferability would ensure that the same factors would impact other educators who transitioned to distance learning due to the COVID-19 school closure. Dependability is essential to being able to replicate similar results to future researchers.

Dependability

Dependability refers to the meticulous process the researcher uses to collect, document, and interpret data. Explaining the research events should provide other researchers with a well-articulated, detailed sequence of events and a clear record for review that mirrors prior research while building upon the body of research for future studies (Bloomberg and Volpe, 2019, p. 204). The process for my data collection, system of organization, and explanation of themes were supported directly using the participant's statements provided within the raw data collected. To ensure accuracy, direct quotes were supplied along with the participant numbers. The data charts were reviewed several times for each participant's response. Using participants' statements and keywords helped to determine overarching themes about their lived experiences in a way that reflected their perceptions.

Confirmability

Confirmability is reached when a researcher's findings and interpretation of the study reveal the participants' lived experiences through the raw data collected (Bloomberg and Volpe, 2019 p. 204). Confirmability explores how our implicit biases, as well as prejudices, could impact the validity and interpretation of the data. This can be mediated by ongoing critical reflection on our analysis methods when interpreting the data and continually reflecting on the data source to support our analysis. I maintained confirmability throughout the study by using direct statements to support the themes I used to analyze the raw data. Using the raw data to display the percentages of educators impacted by various factors, I could connect the key factors to what factors facilitated the

implementation of RTI and what factors supported or undermined student learning.

Results

Research Question 1: What Factors Facilitate the Implementation of the RTI Process For Students?

The successful implementation of RTI (RTI) relied on several critical factors, notably technological access, robust professional development, collaborative efforts, and supportive administrative leadership. The advent of distance learning significantly expanded educators' access to technological tools, enabling them to tailor educational materials to suit individual student learning needs while delivering engaging digital content to facilitate learning. Concurrently, comprehensive professional development initiatives facilitated educators' growth by enhancing their digital proficiency and equipping them with diverse tools for effective digital instruction planning and implementation. This ongoing professional development varied in format and delivery, accessible through school-based and district-wide digital platforms and collaborative endeavors among colleagues.

Teacher collaboration and continuous professional development played a pivotal role in enhancing educators' instructional practices, ensuring a smooth transition to distance learning, and effectively addressing students' diverse instructional needs. Administrative support was equally crucial, with educators reporting that supportive leadership during the school closure and transition to distance learning was characterized by regular communication, flexibility, and encouragement. Administrative efforts encompassed providing clear plans, virtual staff connectivity opportunities, and resources

such as professional development sessions. Regular check-in meetings between staff and administration ensured timely issue resolution, district updates dissemination, and staff well-being prioritization.

Research Question 2: How do These Factors Support or Undermine Student Learning During Distance Learning?

These factors significantly bolstered student learning by empowering educators with the tools and knowledge to transition to online platforms seamlessly. They adeptly navigated core curriculum requirements, employed appropriate resources, addressed student engagement challenges, and fostered effective home-school relationships. Despite successes, challenges persisted, primarily stemming from factors beyond teachers' control, notably disparities in internet access, technological literacy, parental support, and student engagement. The theoretical framework used in this study focused on how distance learning impacted students with disabilities and was based on social learning theory and situation cognition theory.

Theoretical framework refers to information from many sources collected on a known topic that provides theories, evidence, interpretations, and possible conclusions about the approach used in a study (Bloomberg and Volpe, 2019, p. 189). The theoretical frameworks used in this study are the social learning theory by Albert Bandura (1977) and the situated cognition theory by John Seely Brown, Allan Collins, and Paul Duguid (1989). Social learning theory states that children learn from observing others using attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation (Bandura, 1977). Situation cognition theory states that authentic learning is done when the learning is done in context and the

environment in which it takes place (Seely Brown et al., 1989).

Theoretical frameworks underscored the pivotal role of the learning environment in shaping student learning experiences. Distance learning posed challenges in facilitating hands-on learning opportunities, particularly in math and reading instruction. The absence of physical interaction hindered the utilization of math manipulatives, impeding students' visual and tactile engagement in problem-solving. Similarly, providing immediate feedback and implementing reading strategies proved challenging without face-to-face interaction, impacting reading instruction efficacy. Behavior management also posed challenges, as face-to-face instruction offered more significant opportunities for redirection and real-time modeling with peers of behavior expectations. Inconsistencies in skill practice arose due to inadequate parental support, difficulty navigating online resources, and student submission irregularities, exacerbated by distractions in remote learning environments. In-person instruction provided teachers invaluable insights into students' work processes, enabling personalized feedback. The study's results and how they align with the research questions, gap, methodology, and framework play a key role in how the research can be used for future studies.

Study Findings and Alignment

The study's results aligned closely with the research questions by identifying specific factors facilitating distance learning for educators providing services to students with disabilities. These factors included technology access, collaborative efforts, and supportive administration. The findings revealed how these elements contributed to a successful transition to distance learning and the challenges educators face in lacking

these supports.

Addressing Gaps in the Literature

The study aligned with gaps in the existing literature by exploring how educators implemented RTI (RTI) during distance learning. It provided insights into the phases, tools, and supports used, highlighting their impact on student success. Additionally, the study identified areas for improvement to enhance distance learning outcomes for students with disabilities, especially those without access to hands-on instruction and a face-to-face school environment.

Summary

This chapter presents the overall results of the research study, the data collected, and the study's alignment. The analysis of the raw data presented consistent themes among the participants that provided information to answer the research questions. The steps for data collection, coding, and analysis provided evidence to support the study's trustworthiness. The study's trustworthiness, which included credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformity, was explained to provide an accurate description of the research process to other researchers who would like to review and help further research on implementing RTI using distance learning instruction. In Chapter 5, I will summarize the study's key findings, limitations, recommendations, and implications for social change.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

In this qualitative, phenomenological inquiry, I delved into the complexities of implementing RTI amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, I explored the challenges and strategies encountered by both new and seasoned elementary school educators during the transition to distance learning amid school closures and subsequent reopening phases. By focusing on the perspective of elementary school K-5 teachers during the COVID-19 school closures, I aimed to contribute to the literature used by policymakers to implement RTI effectively, particularly in times of crisis. Educators in the Washington, DC, Metropolitan area participated in a 10-question anonymous survey, sharing their experiences, challenges, strategies, successes, and takeaways regarding the transition to distance learning and RTI implementation during the pandemic. Three prominent themes emerged from the survey data, shedding light on the successful implementation of RTI during distance learning:

1. Access to more technological tools
2. Professional Development and Collaboration
3. Supportive Administration

In this chapter, I will discuss my interpretation of the study's findings and their alignment with the theoretical framework, the literature review, the study's limitations, recommendations for future research, and the study's implications for social change.

Interpretation of the Findings

Interpretation of the Findings in Relation to the Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework used in this study included the social learning theory

by Bandura (1977) and the situated cognition theory by Seely Brown et al. (1989). Social learning theory states that children learn from observing others using attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation (Bandura, 1977). Situated cognition theory states that authentic learning occurs when it is done in context and in the environment in which it takes place (Seely Brown et al., 1989).

Based on social cognitive theory, before the COVID-19 epidemic, students received all instruction in a face-to-face setting within a classroom, supporting students with disabilities using the model for teaching and learning. However, participants expressed challenges with limited in-person interaction, as distance learning reduced the ability of students to access social reinforcement, hands-on activities, positive teacher/peer feedback, and peer engagement. Distance learning provided limited opportunities for students to observe the modeling of classroom behaviors within a structured environment with limited distractions. Distance learning potentially impacted many students' motivation and ability to attend to instruction and complete tasks. COVID-19 changed the delivery of the instructional model with technology. This means new and veteran elementary school teachers are now attempting to understand the limitations and challenges of a new instructional model to provide intervention that sustains attention, motivation, and retention of skills learned during distance learning to support students with disabilities.

In regard to situated cognition theory, transitioning to new technological tools, transferring lessons to an e-learning format, and teaching students how to navigate the new mode of instruction with little to no resources for implementation challenged new

and tenure teachers to identify what resources worked for implementing RTI. Distance learning reduced the ability of students to interact with their physical learning environment. Authentic learning can be challenging to replicate using online tools to create learning experiences requiring high student engagement, such as science experiments or math manipulatives to solve problems. Lack of student engagement in distance learning can impact assessment data by not truly capturing a student's academic ability and real-world application of the skills learned.

Theme 1: Access to More Technological Tools

Participants said transitioning to distance learning gave them more access to technological tools. It allowed them to meet students using a variety of digital platforms to provide RTI services during designated school hours but limited school instructional hours. Platforms like Google, Teams, and Zoom allowed educators to meet with students to provide services. Participant 2 stated, "Meeting is done via Google Meet and all assignments are posted in Google Classroom." Digital platforms also allow educators to meet with students with the flexibility to provide additional support when needed. However, challenges to accessing digital platforms presented themselves with unstable internet and a lack of digital literacy for students and parents who needed to access resources to support their learning. Educators also shared that lesson planning took longer when transitioning to distance learning platforms. Participant 10 stated,

> The shift to online teaching has prompted several changes in instructional approaches. Educators often had to restructure their lesson plans to suit a virtual environment. Some of these adaptations include digital content integration,

synchronous and asynchronous learning, and adaptation of assessments. Despite having access to additional resources, educators faced a considerable increase in workload due to the transition to online platforms for resources, instruction, and assessment.

Concerning social learning theory, distance learning limited students' ability to access instruction and services based on their ability to access stable internet and digital literacy. Students with stable access to the internet and some digital literacy could have increased opportunities to observe their peers, practice problem-solving with collaboration, and independently repeat the necessary steps needed for retention and reproduction. This impacted students' ability to make significant progress and whether distance learning services providing RTI were effective. Students' access to instruction and resources also impacts motivation.

Another challenge was that educators who used distance learning platforms to meet with students had to convert curriculum material to digital presentations accessible to all students in their digital formats. Additionally, students with disabilities required modifications and accommodations with the presented material to access the information to complete their work. Educators participating in the study reported that they adapted their lessons to meet the specific learning needs of students using designated intervention materials. Additional challenges, such as students' ability to navigate digital platforms and access devices, emerged as significant barriers. The participants also expressed that not being able to access some of the digital curriculum resources through websites being blocked or facing challenges through fee-based subscription access impacted their ability

to facilitate instructional activities that they had prepared, so at times, it became a hindrance. This study offers new insights into the potential challenges educators might encounter when implementing RTI in a distance learning environment. Previous literature has not addressed these challenges with implementing RTI and using distance learning.

With situated cognition theory, students' opportunity to have authentic learning occur in the context and environment was limited to the accessibility to their resources. Additional resources that provided expanded opportunities for students to engage with the curriculum and give more practice were often limited to what districts could afford or provide access to.

Theme 2: Professional Development and Collaboration

Ongoing professional development and collaboration with colleagues facilitated the implementation of RTI. The transition to distance learning began with integrating online platforms as the primary method of providing direct instruction to students. Situation cognition theory is applied to educators in this area. Their ability to learn within the environment and context with the provided professional development gave them the tools to implement distance learning with various tools, strategies, and supports for their students.

Educators had limited time to learn and use digital platforms to support student learning. The support provided to educators to learn distance learning platforms, methods for integrating technology, and new applications to increase student engagement ranged from significant to none. Participant #10 stated,

Digital Literacy Training: Given the importance of digital tools in online teaching,

> professional development may focus on improving educators' digital literacy skills. This can include training on using learning management systems, collaboration platforms, and other online tools effectively.

Many educators were supported by learning the latest technology and improving their digital literacy through district- and school-based training opportunities. Participant #27 stated, "Our county was actually very supportive during online instruction and offered multiple PDs and trainings on technology. It was just overwhelming to learn so much in such a short period." Those who did not have the same opportunities sought opportunities through online resources or collaboration with colleagues. Participant #1 stated, "Independent training through collaborations with colleagues, buying PDs online to assist with best practice, and buying language apps that would support the goals and strategies per student. A small group of educators did not receive any support in transitioning to distance learning, which impacted their ability to adjust and learn how to solve issues with technology and platforms as quickly. Educators who did not receive support with ongoing professional development struggled with gaining the digital literacy skills needed to transition seamlessly. They experienced increased difficulty with learning digital tools, migrating lessons onto digital platforms, and struggled with troubleshooting technology issues.

Theme 3: Supportive Administration

Supportive administration played a key role in facilitating RTI during the transition to distance learning. Participant #37 stated,

> Our county took a deep breath, stepped back, and then leaned into it full force.

> Our CEO and staff worked very hard to prepare us. We had two weeks off (because it was also Spring Break), then two weeks of online intensive training, then invited the kids' families to pick up devices and started with a couple of hours 4 days a week and office hours/individualized help on Wednesdays, and I got a lot done in office hours before and after those short times and on Wednesdays. Our school was less in the lead but quick to follow the overall system initiatives, and it was, for the most part, a successful turning of a very large boat.

The administration helped to facilitate RTI by equipping students and teachers with the necessary tools and support to facilitate a successful online learning environment.

According to social learning and situated cognition theory, students would be unable to access services and RTI without the distribution of equipment and tools for instruction. The long-term impact would be a lack of access to learning in the context needed to grow and a regression in skills due to an inability to observe, retain, and reproduce the skills necessary to make academic progress. Some educators noted that students who struggled with accessing instruction, absenteeism, and assignment submission struggled with making academic progress during this time.

Educators noted things like flexibility, praise, visibility, and a clear plan as supports that helped them. Participant #10 stated,

> I would say it was successful. School leaders demonstrated adaptability in responding to the rapidly changing circumstances of a pandemic. This included the ability to make informed decisions promptly, adjusting plans as needed, and

remaining flexible in the face of uncertainty.

Administration providing educators a space to feel heard and valued as a community also helped during this difficult time. Participant #14 stated,

> The school leadership was concerned and gave us the tools we needed to be successful. We had regular staff meetings to voice concerns, frustrations, success stories and request supplies. The leadership visited us online and provided suggestions to strengthen our lessons. The leadership bought us gifts and mailed them to our houses. They asked us to send pictures and connected with us regularly so we wouldn't feel isolated and alone.

Educators also mentioned weekly meetings, clear communication, home visits, and providing necessary tools to teach and for their students. Participant #20 stated,

> The school should provide timely and clear communication to teachers, students, and parents about changes, safety measures, and expectations during the pandemic. Offering support, resources, and guidance to educators in adapting to online teaching, addressing challenges, and ensuring the well-being of students and staff.

Interpretation of the Findings in Relation to the Literature

RTI is an approach to supporting students that can close skills gaps in foundational skills while continuing to expose them to their grade-level curriculum. The framework provides a three-tiered process of implementing strategies with consistency in structure and frequency to target specified areas of need to improve student achievement.

The immediate corrective feedback model allows students to practice specific

skills and receive immediate feedback for incorrect responses. When an incorrect response is given, the student has explained the error and how the error can be corrected. The teacher provides unbiased, specific, measurable, and consistent feedback with the feedback model. Along with clear, constructive student feedback, it allows the facilitator to be cognizant of the student's mastery level and continued challenges.

Frequent review is when a student has mastered a targeted skill, and the intervention facilitator introduces a more complex task incorporating previously learned tasks. The facilitator periodically provides formal assessments to determine if the student has maintained skill mastery over time while learning new skills to build (Intervention Central, n.d.). The skills are practiced within short periods to provide repeated opportunities to practice the skills needed to continue mastery at the same rate or better.

Like Frequent Review, opportunities for independent practice focus on maintaining skills learned over time with regular practice after the skills have been taught (Iris Center, n.d.). Scaffolded instruction focuses on skill, task, or concept instruction with additional support for individual students. The additional supports appeal to the individual student's needs and help them attain mastery. Learning occurs through dialogue, questions, feedback, modeling, and support (NIU.EDU). Instructionally, many of the models discussed are provided face-to-face and can be used to support student learning simultaneously to close achievement gaps. Access to digital platforms for instruction, knowledge of RTI models, and professional development to streamline the use of digital tools facilitated the implementation of distance learning. Conversely, distance learning reduced the amount of face-to-face instruction due to limitations in

proximity, technology, and shortened school hours, which were factors that compromised student learning during this period.

Theme 1: Access to More Technological Tools

Distance learning provides educators with technological resources to meet with students and enhance student engagement. With RTI, many intervention resources were meant to be provided face-to-face and were scripted with instructions on introducing a new concept while connecting previously learned concepts to meet the objectives outlined (Iris Center, n.d). Educators shared that lesson planning took longer when they transitioned to distance learning platforms. The practice of converting scripted lessons to digital lessons required a significant amount of digital literacy to provide modifications and accommodations for student access. Although educators had access to more digital tools, challenges to accessing digital platforms presented a lack of digital literacy for students and parents who needed to access resources to support their learning. These factors created barriers to providing the necessary support for students with disabilities.

Distance learning decreased opportunities for immediate corrective feedback, frequent review, scaffolded instruction, and opportunities for independent practice for some students. The immediate corrective feedback model allows students to practice specific skills and receive immediate feedback for incorrect responses by the educator. Students who could access instruction with the tools needed during distance learning had more opportunities for retaining, practicing, and reproducing the skills needed to master concepts while gaining experience within the distance learning environment with the context given than students who did not. Educators could see the impact over time for

students who had stable access compared to students who did not.

Theme 2: Professional Development and Collaboration

Past studies for implementing RTI indicated that effective leadership strategies that led to successful school-based implementation included empowering teacher leaders who took ownership of initiatives and had a stake in the decision-making process, facilitating a schedule that allocated time for co-planning, consulting with peers, and planning for classroom-based supports (Poon-McBryer & Fong p.167). Additionally, leadership emphasized onsite professional development, coaching, and fostering an environment that promoted lifelong learning among the educators involved (Poon-McBryer & Fong, n.d., p.168). Educators expressed that the facilitation of RTI during distance learning was enabled through district and school-wide ongoing professional development and collaboration with colleagues. Providing the educators with the tools they needed to provide direct instruction to students with disabilities included increasing teacher digital literacy. Ongoing professional development is essential to effectively use digital tools to meet student instructional needs and implement RTI in digital spaces, facilitating student growth with fidelity.

Theme 3: Supportive Administration

Implementing RTI was facilitated through supportive administration. Before distance learning, the overarching themes were negative teacher perceptions related to implementing RTI, difficulties implementing IDEA, and over-identification of students in special education. Poon-McBryer & Fong (2018) determined that leadership school leadership played a significant role in successfully implementing RTI. The study

highlighted eight guiding principles as effective practices for successful implementation through leadership.

The eight practices included high levels of learning through research practices, empowering students along with parents in the decision-making process, high-quality instruction, building a caring community, supporting students with special needs, creating a partnership with parents as expected by the Individuals with Disabilities Act, incorporating multi-levels of instruction for students with a range of skills, and creating a cycle of curriculum-based assessments to support appropriate instruction (Poon-McBryer & Fong, 2018 p.163). With the transition to distance learning, educators expressed significant support from their administrators through their flexibility, care, clear communication, planning, tools provided, and spaces they created for educators to feel heard.

The findings align with the theoretical frameworks of social learning theory and situation cognition theory. The shift to distance learning limited students' access to social reinforcement and authentic learning experiences, impacting their motivation and ability to engage effectively. Furthermore, educators' ability to adapt to new technological tools and instructional methods was influenced by their environment and the support provided by their administration.

Limitations of the Study

One limitation of the study was that some of the participants began their careers as educators during the pandemic. Due to their new experience in this role, they may have missed nuances with implementing RTI due to limited opportunities for support.

Being new to a role can impact a person's efficacy in implementing support, strategies, and lesson planning compared to a more experienced educator (Wilke, et al., 2020). An additional limitation of the study pertained to not having rich descriptions from the survey participants. The anonymous survey provided privacy and the flexibility of being completed during a time that worked for the participants. With that, some participants responded with as little as one-word answers without elaborating on the context. Another limitation was the timing of the study. The survey ran between Halloween and Thanksgiving and just before Christmas, which is a busy time for many educators. Multiple fliers, group postings, and emails were sent out about the study to recruit participants. During the study period, the school calendar was densely packed with events between holidays and leading up to the winter break. This busy schedule significantly affected participants' availability and participation rates.

Recommendations

The limitation of this research, which is not having rich descriptions from some participants, could be addressed by conducting interviews for the next phase of this study. Interviews would provide researchers with more in-depth descriptions of what instructional days were like during distance learning, how assessments were performed, and how data collected at that time was used to determine student growth. Another recommendation for future research would be to assess the impact of distance learning based on socioeconomic background and demographics to determine if some groups of students were more impacted than others. Socioeconomic status plays a huge role in the types of resources student's access. Data from a study focusing on educators' experiences

with technology access reveals the obstacles students encounter when engaging in distance learning. This evidence aids school districts in identifying and addressing the key challenges faced by learners, enabling them to implement targeted interventions that can alleviate the impact on all students effectively.

Additional information on how students from kindergarten to fifth grade transitioned to distance learning and how they performed academically and socially compared to student groups who did not experience the school closure and transition would provide substantial information for remediation and support for target students. Lastly, future research on how school-based budgets play a role in accessing technology. Equitable access to the internet and devices was a significant issue that impacted students so understanding how school and district funding impact student's access to technology pertinent information would be to explore.

Implications

COVID-19 affected access to educational services provided by educators for students with disabilities during school closures. This study aimed to identify challenges and strategies for implementing the RTI framework with fidelity during the COVID-19 epidemic, enhance its effectiveness, and inform future policies. The study aimed to help policymakers and school leaders find effective ways to support students using distance learning tools to access intervention services and instruction. By studying the challenges that impacted the implementation of RTI with fidelity, technology, support, and services can be better implemented if another school closure is required.

The study will contribute to a body of literature on implementing RTI by

addressing the supports needed for successful implementation and identifying barriers to implementing distance learning. The facilitators for distance learning were access to technology tools, professional development, and supportive administration. These factors significantly bolstered student learning by empowering educators with the tools and knowledge to transition to online platforms. They adeptly navigated core curriculum requirements, employed appropriate resources, addressed student engagement challenges, and fostered effective home-school relationships.

Educators expressed challenges focused on the lack of equitable access to the Internet, parental involvement, access to computer devices, absenteeism, student engagement, and social-emotional student support. The implications for social change would provide students with more equitable access to instruction on digital literacy at a younger age. Technology is changing fast, and some students do not have access to the amount of knowledge and tools accessible to other students due to a lack of digital literacy. Creating a push for more enriching experiences for the students to increase their digital literacy will equip them to be college and career-ready for the future workforce.

Another implication for social change would be equitable access to student computer devices so that all students can increase access to digital resources and support. Computer device access provides students opportunities to access more intervention resources, digital tools for support, and increased practice with digital literacy that would benefit them instructional. Students would be able to identify tools and resources to grow their independence as learners navigating online platforms and resources to enrich their learning experiences. Lastly, the implications for social change would be providing

students and families access to social-emotional support. Educators expressed that school was a safe place for students and families to access resources. Identifying additional community support for students and families can help provide continued needs when school resources are unavailable.

Conclusion

The open-ended phenomenological research survey questions allowed for new and veteran elementary school teachers to share their different experiences with the transition from face-to-face instruction, the support that was provided to them, the structures set in place for distance learning, and what challenges they faced with implementing RTI for students with disabilities. My sample populations were based on group characteristics sampling to create a specific information-rich group to identify patterns and themes from the raw data collected (Patton, 2015, p.528). New and veteran teachers in the elementary setting from grades 3-5 who were tenured and implemented RTI during distance learning.

Through this sampling strategy, the data collected would provide significant statements to provide rich descriptions and three overall themes for facilitating RTI during distance learning. The results indicated that access to technology, professional development, collaboration, and supportive administration were all essential for educators to provide the support needed for students with disabilities using distance learning. The findings contribute to the literature by filling in the gap surrounding the implementation of RTI using digital platforms to support students with disabilities. The study's conclusions impact social change by highlighting larger issues about digital

literacy, and technology access, and providing students with ongoing support to meet their academic and social-emotional needs.

Through this study, valuable insights were gained into the challenges and strategies of implementing RTI during the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings underscore the importance of access to technology, ongoing professional development, and supportive administration in facilitating effective distance learning and RTI implementation. Addressing these factors will be critical in ensuring equitable access to education and support for all students, particularly those with disabilities.

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