Teachers’ Perceptions on RTI Implementation

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March 28, 2018
Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine teachers’ perspectives on RTI implementation. The qualitative study gathered data for analysis from semi-structured interviews from seven educators in an urban elementary school in Tennessee. Additional data were collected through quick surveys and artifacts. The study revealed that teachers stated that the curriculum of the RTI program needed to be changed, because the current curriculum did not help students who had problems with comprehension, and it was not individualized to meet the needs of each student. Additionally, teachers identified the need to have more personnel on hand to help teach enrichment classes to students who do not qualify for tier 2 or tier 3 interventions. Extra personnel would allow teachers to fully concentrate on students in intervention without the distraction of tier 1 students in the room. Finally, teachers expressed the belief that structured assessment schedule did not allow for their personal judgment or knowledge of the students.
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To my first proof reader, my wonderful mom, thank you for reading my dissertation rough drafts. To my husband and children, thank you for supporting me through this endeavor.
Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my parents. My dad, Johnny Foshie, he has been my cheerleader behind the scenes. He has always told me that I could do anything I set my mind to do. My mom, Diane Foshie, has been my proofreader throughout this dissertation and listened to countless readings of this study. My granny, Betty Beach, who is the strongest 84-year-old woman I know, has pushed me to be a strong independent woman.

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Chapter One

Introduction

Response to Intervention (RTI) became a requirement for schools in the U.S. in 2004, when the newly reauthorized Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) went into effect (Buffman, Mattos, & Weber, 2010). The original goal of RTI was to reduce the number of students referred to special education in elementary school. RTI is multi-tiered platform. It requires teachers to test students and then group them according to their abilities. Once the student are grouped according to their abilities, they are then pulled from the regular education classroom for a certain amount of time each day and work on certain skills needed in order to be successful in their regular classroom.

There are several flaws with the current Response to Intervention implementation system. “Students struggle with cognitive processing, decoding, and fluency even after being in a Tier intervention group for an entire year” (Fletcher, Stuebing, Barth, et.al., 2011, pp. 13-14). These types of struggles should not occur after students have been working on these skills fluently for a sustained period of time. Another problem with RTI is that current practices still use a single measure to place students in tiers, and they are monitored at various times throughout the year (Otaiba, Wagner, Miller, 2014). Best practices in RTI utilize multiple forms of data before placing students in tiers, and include more than just one type of assessment piece that monitors the students’ progress.

Research Problem

There are many flaws with the Response to Intervention implementation system (Fletcher, Stuebing, Barth, et.al., 2011). According to Fletcher, Stuebing, Barth et. al. (2011), students should not continue to struggle in fluency, cognitive processing, and decoding after they
have been working on these skills for an entire year in an RTI intervention group. In some implementations of RTI, students are moving from one tier to another tier in RTI frequently. Such moves occur each time the RTI team meets and looks at the data. The RTI team meets monthly to discuss students, and the each student is tested bi-weekly in reading or math.

The RTI model lies in the use of tiered instructional practices (Shapiro, 2017). The teaching staff must receive sufficient and ongoing professional development to deliver a Tier 1 core instructional program to implement the intervention with fidelity. RTI models indicate approximately 75%-80% of children should be expected to reach successful levels of competency through Tier 1 instruction in the classroom (Shapiro, 2017). This is not happening in most school systems in the United States today. Tier 1 instruction occurs as a whole class, with the regular education classroom teacher. Tier 2 is done in small groups, and may be taught by the regular classroom teacher or another individual who is trained in the school. Tier 3 is intensive intervention that occurs in very small groups and is personalized to each student (Morin, 2014).

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to: 1) determine what teachers and other staff in a school perceive as effective RTI; 2) determine what the barriers are to an effective implementation of a RTI program; and, 3) determine what changes need to be in order to increase the efficacy of the RTI program.

**Research Questions**

**Rationale for the Study**

Across the United States, Response to Intervention is being implemented to reduce the number of students who are referred for special education services. This began in 2004 with the IDEA Act. The federal government requires local schools to find a way to address deficits in
reading and mathematics, rather than placing them without intervention into special education programs (Hale, Kaufman, Naglieri, & Kavale, 2006).

Local schools spend money each year to fund their RTI programs. RTI is supposed to help students meet their goals in the area(s) in which they are deficient. The students attend school five days a week to learn and grow. Effective RTI programs are designed to meet the individual deficits of each student. Students are frequently moving in and out of tiers at a very fast pace. The question arises as to whether or not the RTI program is being implemented with positive consistent outcomes for the students?

The Researcher

The researcher graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree in English from East Tennessee State University in Johnson City, Tennessee, and then graduated with two Master of Education degrees from East Tennessee State University in Johnson City, Tennessee (Master of Education degree in Library and Information Science and a Master of Education degree as a Reading Specialist). The researcher then graduated with an Educational Specialist degree from Carson-Newman University in Jefferson City, Tennessee with a concentration in Education Leadership and Administration.

The researcher is currently a library media specialist in a public school. She has taught in public schools for seven years. She currently teaches students in grades 3, 4, and 5, with experience in both inner city and rural schools, with experience teaching students in grades K-8. During that time, the researcher has taught RTI to students in grades K-8, including RTI Tiers 1, 2, and 3.

The researcher’s school district uses Aimsweb as the progress monitoring component, as well as the online data management component. The researcher is the Aimsweb champion for
her school, which means she has access to all the data on the Aimsweb platform for her school. As the Aimsweb champion, she is also in charge of helping teachers when they are locked out of their accounts; need assistance in entering data scores in Aimsweb, or helping them address any other questions or issues that relate to the online platform.

**Definition of Terms**

Aimsweb: An online program used for RTI universal screenings, progress monitoring, and data management (Aimsweb, 2017).

Best Practices: Tried and true practices that have been used by educators for years and have been backed by research and data. These practices have been proven to work in the classroom (Alber, 2015).

IDEA: The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act is a law put in place to make sure students with disabilities receive the same treatment, and are provided any services need in schools. These services are provided at no charge to students age 2 thorough 18 (U.S. Department of Education, 2017).

Emotionally Disturbed: Emotionally disturbed is a term that is described as a person who has traits such as severe mental health or emotional disorders. These disorders may be anxiety disorders, bi-polar disorders, conduct disorders, eating disorders, and obsessive-compulsive disorder; however, that list is not all-inclusive (Special Education Guide, 2017).

Fluency: Reading text with speed, accuracy, and proper expression (Education.com, 2017).

RTI: Response to Intervention is a multi-level approach that helps struggling students in schools (RTI Action Network, 2017).
Tier 1: Instruction that is taught to all students in the regular education classroom regardless of their scores on the benchmark (Hoover, 2011).

Tier 2: The second step of RTI implementation. Students who are struggling in Tier 1 to make progress are placed in a Tier 2 group for more structured intervention (RTI Action Network, 2017).

Tier 3: The last step of RTI implementation. Students who are not making progress in Tier 2 are moved to a Tier 3 group for intensive interventions to meet their needs (Hoover, 2011).

Summary

In order to help struggling students reach proficiency, RTI must be implemented correctly. There may be several barriers that prevent RTI from being implemented correctly in schools. However, educators must find a way to work through these barriers and do what is best to ensure the student is receiving the best education possible. This study examined educators’ perceptions of effective RTI programs, current barriers to implementation, and changes to increase positive students outcomes resulting from interventions.

Chapter One provided an introduction to the study that included the introduction, research problem, purpose of the study, and research questions. The rationale for study, the researcher, and definition of terms was presented followed by the summary. Chapter Two contains a review of the literature from broad to specific, and the theoretical lens and related theoretical literature. The literature begins by describing state and federal laws, and progresses to the background of RTI and its best practices. A section addressing the effective implementation of RTI is also included. Extensive research about RTI and why it is important, including best practices in reading and math is addressed in Chapter Two. Chapter Three explains the
methodology of the study and Chapter Three includes description of qualitative research, description of the specific research approach, description of the study participants and setting, data collection procedures, ethical considerations, data analysis procedures, and a summary.
Chapter 2

Review of Literature

This review discussed the State of Tennessee and Federal laws governing the identification of students with disabilities and provides the history of the implementation of a program of Response to Intervention (RTI). The reviewed literature also focused on the history of intervention for struggling students, best practices for reading and math intervention, and Response to Intervention.

Related Literature

State and Federal Laws

Federal laws have played a critical role in determining what happens in education since the passage of the Improving America’s Schools Act (IASA) of 1994 (Goertz, 2003). After the passage of the IASA, each state started implementing standard-based teaching approaches. The standard-based teaching approaches had different indicators for success, and each state faced a different consequence if they failed to reach their goals. The Federal government then decided to implement a new policy called the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001. The NCLB Act was enacted in part to eliminate the variability in state policy (Goertz, 2003). The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 required schools to test students in reading and math to ensure they are making adequate yearly progress (AYP) as defined by the federal government (Goetz, 2003). NCLB had stipulations for schools that did not meet AYP. These schools and the school districts faced harsh penalties. These penalties included: 1) the state can takeover the school, 2) the management of the school would be turned over to a private firm, 3) the school can be shut down and reopened as a charter school, or 4) some or all administration, staff, or faculty can be replaced (Guisbond, 2012).
Congress explained that the goal of NCLB was to improve education for all students, with its main purpose being to ensure that all students receive a high quality education and that they are provided with the same opportunities (Handler, 2006). A requirement of NCLB is early intervention in the regular education classroom. One of the focus areas of early intervention is literacy in the regular education classroom, which is expected to reduce the number of referrals for special education evaluations. The hope is that the reduction in special education referrals would be a direct result of improved intervention techniques used with struggling readers in the regular education classroom. The NCLB and IDEA have teamed up and worked together to improve how K-12 instruction is provided and to be successful with the achievement of all students, including those with disabilities (Danielson, Doolittle, & Bradley, 2007).

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is a federal law that deals with the education of children with disabilities (Cortiella, 2006). Congress passed a law in 1975, called the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (ESEA), that ensured states and local school systems would serve the needs of students with disabilities. In 2004, Congress came up with IDEA because they felt students with disabilities were being treated differently and not being taught on the same level as other students in the school system (Cortiella, 2006). Drastic changes to IDEA and close alignment to NCLB were designed to provide students with disabilities access to the same high and rigorous curriculum, to the best extent possible to meet their goals and help them be successful in the school (Cortiella, 2006).

The NCLB and IDEA both showed clear evidence that congress’s intent was to enhance the educational outcomes of children with disabilities through authentic engagement with regular academic content taught by professionals and measured at the state level assessments (Handler, 2006). IDEA has a clear focus that has increasing educational outcomes for students with
disabilities where they gain greater instructional opportunity in the regular education classroom and have instruction taught by the regular education teacher (Handler, 2006). IDEA made sure that all supplementary materials are documented and tried in the regular classroom before a student can be referred for special education services (Elliott, 2003). NCLB and IDEA have been updated and shown unified processes for educational procedures, responsibilities, and success of students (Elliott, 2003).

NCLB was replaced 2016 by a new law called the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). ESSA will take full effect over the 2017-2020 school years as part of a tapered effect (NSBA, 2015). ESSA requires schools to meet certain accountability standards on state tests, and students are required to be placed in RTI intervention. According to Understood.com (2017), the major difference in ESSA and NCLB are:

- ESSA allows states more flexibility to set the student accountability framework.
- ESSA encourages districts to get rid of unnecessary testing.
- NCLB focused on student achievement, but ESSA focuses on more than just the test scores when evaluating schools.
- Under ESSA there are no federal penalties for struggling schools.
- Under ESSA if students are struggling, the school district or state must come up a plan of action to improve.

**History of Interventions**

In 1975 the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EHCA) was passed in order to provide funds to support disabled children in schools and the community (Ikeda, 2012). The goal of EHCA was to make sure disabled children received the services they needed in schools. These students were tested using psychometric tests, and then labeled and placed in either resource or
self-contained classrooms. The traditional form of testing students to find out if they had a specific learning disability (SLD) was to compare students’ IQs to the their achievement in school (Jimenez, 2010). People in the field of education questioned using students’ IQs and comparing them to their achievement. The IQ discrepancy model was used to predict a student’s reading skills and determine if the child should receive special education services based on what the IQ discrepancy model said (Gustafason, Svensson, & Falth, 2014). Due to the fact the children were being pulled out of the regular classroom to receive services, these children were not receiving a high quality education (Ikeda, 2012). Reauthorizations of the EHCA led to the IDEA, which focused on students staying in the general education classroom and participating in inclusion. RTI was used to satisfy the requirements of the IDEA law that was put in place in 2004 (Ikeda, 2012). Prior to the IDEA Act of 2004, there were four common models that were used to diagnose learning disabilities (Proctor & Prevatt, 2003). The four common models are: the grade-level discrepancy model, standard score comparison model, regression comparison model, and simple discrepancy model.

Congress passed the reauthorized IDEA bill in 2004, which explained the intent of the law that deals with students with disabilities (Hale, Kaufman, Naglieri, & Kavale, 2006). The bill explained that students must be in either RTI or another approach that uses basic psychological processes before a child can be classified with a specific learning disability (SLD). Since that time, emotionally disturbed (ED) has also become classified as a disability.

**Specific learning disability (SLD).**

RTI must be used before someone can be identified as having a specific learning disability (SLD). According to the Special Education Guide (2017), a SLD is “a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or using language,
spoken or written, that may manifest itself in the imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or do mathematic calculations.” The SLD does not include vision, hearing, or motor disabilities. These students will be required to participate in RTI and follow through with the required testing per state requirements before a referral to special education can be made.

**Emotionally disturbed.**

Emotionally disturbed is a fairly new term to the special education field. According to the Special Education Guide (2017), common traits of emotional disturbance as described by the National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities (NICHCY) are:

- anxiety disorders,
- bipolar disorder,
- conduct disorder,
- eating disorders,
- obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), and
- psychotic disorders; however, they note that this list isn’t all-inclusive. To learn about the precise characteristics connected to a child’s emotional disturbance, look into the specific subcategory that affects the child.

Emotionally Disturbed (ED) students received RTI services before being diagnosed as ED (Gresham, 2005). The reason behind this is that since RTI is based on achievement, if an ED student continues to show a decline in growth, then he/she should qualify for services.

RTI and comprehension assessment are the way to address the problems when trying to identify children with SLD. The approach may be standard protocol or a problem-solving model, but they are an addition to the field (Hale, Kaufman, Naglieri, & Kavale, 2006). RTI serves a large group of underachieving students, who are not succeeding through early identification and intervention.
Gifted and talented.

RTI has been used for identification of students with disabilities (Seedorf, 2014). This has led to gaps with students who are gifted and talented (GT), because they are often overlooked. RTI is being implemented with students who are struggling and for at-risk students, but teachers are not pushing the gifted and talented students to the next level. RTI is supposed to be implemented for all students and help them reach their full potential, but the gifted and talented population is falling behind academically. Seedorf (2014) stated that teachers need to be aware of students who are gifted and talented in the classroom and need to push them to succeed and give them higher-level materials to work on in the classroom. Teachers also need to attend professional development on how to implement GT curriculum in the classroom.

Best Practices

“Best practice” is an expression that originated from professions like law, medicine, and architecture (Zemelman, Daniels, Hyde, 2005). It is used to describe something that is solid and stable. That is how the term came into play in the education field. In education, the term best practices refers to “serious, thoughtful, informed, responsible, and state-of-the-art teaching” (Zemelman, Daniels, Hyde, 2005). Educators stood at a special place in time, because “the art of teaching is rapidly becoming the science of teaching” (Marzano, Pickering, Pollock, 2001).

Best practices became critical when states put national and state standards in effect in schools (Zemelman, Daniels, Hyde, 2005). Teachers were not pleased with the move to teaching these new standards in the classroom. There are currently two types of standard reform movements going on in schools today. The first is the push to meet a certain criteria on standardized test at the state and federal level, and the second is the push to incorporate effective practices that are backed by research into the core instruction in the classroom in order for
students to be successful (Zemelman, Daniels, Hyde, 2005). In order for teachers to be successful in implementing best practices in the classroom, they must understand their students’ backgrounds, prior background knowledge, interests, and motivations (Ivey & Fisher, 2005). Early reading interventions is a best practice that is effective in improving basic and foundational skills like phonemic awareness, word attack, and word reading in elementary school children (Vaughn, Wanzek, Murray, Scammacca, Linan-Thompson, & Woodruff, 2009).

According to Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock (2001), the following are used as research-based, best practices in the modern classroom:

- Matrixes using compare/contrast
- Venn diagrams for compare/contrast
- Graphic organizers for classification
- Graphic organizers for analogies
- Webbing for student notes
- Personal recognition

**Best practices for online databases.**

The evidence-based approach use is where educators bring scientific knowledge about clinical practices and interventions to the classroom and use them with students (Powers, Bowen, & Bowen, 2011). According to Powers, Bowen, & Bowen (2011), this process was developed by social workers:

Creating questions about clients needs to guide a literature search, locating best evidence with electronic access to databases, assessing the evidence for usefulness by creating hierarchy of research, determining whether result of the literature search and research assessment apply to the client, involving the client
in the intervention decisions by presenting finding from the search and discussing treatment options, implementing interventions on the basis of evidence findings, and evaluating the intervention outcomes (p. 119).

**Best practice in reading.**

The main goal of reading is to understand what you are reading from the print (Pullen & Lane, 2016). Chapman and King (2013) said, “Every teacher who wants to be a facilitator of learning must also be a reading teacher, because reading is an essential component of learning in every subject.” One of the best practices in reading is to teach differentiated instruction. Differentiated instruction involved knowing each student and adjusting each lesson and task to each individual student in the classroom. The classroom reading teaching should ask essential questions to the students to help stimulate higher-order thinking skills (Chapman & King, 2003). The teacher should give pre-assessments, on-going assessments, and post-assessments to understand the reader’s progress throughout the process and to meet the needs of the individual students. Research has shown that the best way to learn how to read is by being interactive (Nathan, 2003). This means that as you read, you recognize the whole words in the sentence, and in the paragraph, and how they interact with one another. The reading process is also compensatory. The reader must learn how to figure out words that he/she does not understand by trying to find clues in the text.

There have been several research studies conducted that show that phonological awareness and decoding skills are important in order to be a proficient reader (Pullen & Lane, 2016). It is important that students are taught decoding skills to help them with reading fluency and comprehension. Research has shown that it is best to use manipulatives when teaching
phonemic awareness. Pullen and Lane (2016) suggested using the following manipulatives when teaching phonemic awareness to students:

a) use lower case letters, b) model blended sounds, c) select target words from the text, d) guide students in moving the letters to represent blending and segmenting sound in words, e) conduct word work with intrasyllabic units, f) conduct word work at the phoneme level, g) help students encode new words, h) help students decode new words, i) use both real words and nonsense words, j) introduce word work using continuous sounds, k) focus on both accuracy and automaticity, l) expand children’s knowledge by helping them form “challenge” words, m) plan manipulative letter work carefully, and n) use other types of manipulative letters (p. 29-32).

These methods were effective in improving students’ phonemic awareness and in helping students to become efficient readers in the future (Pullen & Lane, 2016).

**Best practices in writing.**

Writing in schools has been criticized for a long time (Dean, 2010). According to Dean (2010), the following eleven elements are research-based and can improve students writing in the classroom:

1. The teacher should teach writing strategies in the classroom.
2. Students should summarize the information they are learning.
3. Students should be working collaboratively on writing projects.
4. Specific goals should be set for each individual student.
5. Students should be using a word processor to write.
6. Students should be combining sentences, and not using short choppy sentences.
7. Students should know how to prewrite.
8. There should be some kind of inquiry activity.

9. Make sure the students are processing the writing approach.

10. Make sure the students are studying the different models of writing.

11. Students should be writing to learn the content.

Dean (2010) explained that educators would use these eleven strategies in the classroom to teach mini-lessons on writing. For example, teachers could teach students how to prewrite a story by brainstorming or jotting down simple thoughts and ideas. There is no specific form to follow when teaching the students what step to follow first, other than prewriting. The other ten steps can be taught in any order as mini-lessons. The students can write about almost anything that interests them. Reading is the foundation to everything else, and it important that students understand and have a lot of reading and writing in the classroom.

**Best practices for blended learning.**

Blended learning is used in schools around the world (DeNisco, 2014). Blended learning occurs when a student learns both in the classroom and online. The online learning can happen at school or home, and either the school, teacher, or learner determines the pace. The learning that occurs in the classroom is usually one-to-one or small groups. Blended learning was designed to make education more personalized for each individual student. This type of learning is self-paced, and can provide support for struggling students. The Department of Education found that students in blended courses scored higher on tests than students in regular classes (DeNisco, 2014).

There are four types of blended learning models (DeNisco, 2014). The first type is called the rotation model. This is one of the most common forms of blended learning. In this type of blended learning, students rotate between the regular classroom and online learning. This can be
thought of as something like a flipped classroom. The second type is called the flex model. In this model, students must attend school each day. The students will either participate in online learning or regular classroom learning while they are at school. The third model is called the a la carte model. In this model, students choose some online courses while they still attend regular classes at school. The students take the online classes at school or at home. The fourth type is called the enriched virtual model. In this model, students attend school part time and work on online courses at home part time. Blended learning continues to be successful, as more classrooms become one to one with technology. Blended learning can be successful, but some students do return to the regular classroom (DeNisco, 2014). Most students who return to the classroom do so because they do not complete the work on the online course when a teacher that is standing over them making them turn the work immediately does not supervise them.

**Best practices in mathematics.**

Research has shown that several students struggle in the area of mathematics (Lembke, Hampton, & Beyers, 2012). Mathematics is important to many life skills, so students must know how to perform basic math operations. Students who are not proficient in math skills are at risk for failing academically. To help students succeed in the classroom, teachers need to use best practices with developmental math (Cafarella, 2016). When teachers begin introducing new concepts, they should use the Algorithm Instructional Technique (AIT). This technique uses teacher modeling and step-by-step instructions to students on how to solve math problems. The students are then placed in small groups to work on the problems, and teachers provide feedback on the students’ work. Other effective best practices are note taking while the teacher is modeling, math activities, and mathematical games that enhance students’ knowledge (Cafarella, 2016).
Best practices in competency modeling.

Competency modeling is talking about the knowledge, abilities, skills, and other traits needed to perform a job (Campion, Fink, Ruggeberg, Carr, Phillips, & Odman, 2011). People who show those characteristics are often the top performers at their jobs. The human resource departments in some districts use this approach to hire their new personnel. Competency models can help determine which teachers will be willing to go the extra mile, and which ones will want to tap out when times get tough.

Best practice in collaboration.

Research has shown that several schools are successful with implementing best practices when they have time to collaborate (Angelis & Wilcox, 2011). Teachers meet with one another to work on lesson plans, new strategies, common assessments, and they can also discuss test results from various students during this time. The collaboration can be extended to the community outside of the school (Angelis & Wilcox, 2011). It is important for teachers to communicate with one another because they need to talk about what is working in the classroom. Teachers can learn valuable skills from one another. They can also learn about students that they may have in intervention classes.

Assessments.

Research has shown that the best type of assessment to use is formative assessment (Robb, 2013). These assessments give teachers a solid foundation of where each student stands as far as reading level, placement, and learning. This type of assessment will guide the teacher on where to go with the student to meet the end of year benchmarks (Robb, 2013). Dynamic assessment (DA) has been around for a long time (Gustafson, Svensson, & Falth, 2014). Assessments and interventions go hand in hand with one another. Schools must examine the
students learning using dynamic tests that are valid and informative. DA assessments usually occur as pre-test, during the intervention phase, and post-test. The greatest accomplishments of RTI are the increase in schools’ assessments, and the schools’ using the assessment data to identify students who are struggling in reading and math (Fuchs & Vaughn, 2012).

**Theoretical Lens and Related Theoretical Literature**

Lev Vygotsky was a Soviet psychologist and social constructivist who developed the zone of proximal development (ZPD). The zone of proximal development is the difference between what a student can do with help and what he or she can do without help. A child follows an adult’s example and over time develops the ability to do certain tasks without help or assistance (Innovative Learning, 2011). The zone of proximal development is the gap between what a learner has already mastered and what he or she can achieve when provided with educational support. Vygotsky opposed the use of standardized tests as a means to measure student intelligence. Vygotsky suggested that determine/assess intelligence, it is more helpful to compare students’ ability to solve independent problems without assistance versus their ability to solve problems with the assistance of someone who has already mastered that skill (Coffey, 2017).

Every teacher desires to see each child succeed in the classroom, and every child in the class is a unique individual (Lindeman, 2017). Because children are individuals and learn different ways, educators must use many different teaching styles in the classroom in order to meet the needs of the students each and every day. Educators are required to collect huge amounts of data about every student in the classroom starting at the beginning of the year. The teachers must also make portfolios, use learning standards, document, assess, and use the data they have been given to drive their instruction each and every day. When these practices fail,
teachers collaborate with other colleagues, adjust their instruction to meet each student’s needs, have students work in small groups, reflect on what went wrong, reassess the students, and try some other strategies (Lindeman, 2013).

Response to Intervention is a major development in the history of educational reform, with its focus on evidence-based instruction and data-driven decisions (Hudson & McKenzie, 2016). The move to the RTI model began in 2004 with the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA), and it is implemented and used in all 50 states today (Hudson & McKenzie, 2016). In order to implement RTI correctly, all human and financial resources at the school must be used (Stahl, 2016). Many schools use school psychologists, reading specialists, literacy coaches, special education teachers, speech-language therapists, and ESL teachers as part of the decision-making RTI team. To be successful in the RTI implementation process, the school must assess the students, analyze the data, and place students in tiers without any funding for the RTI program (Stahl, 2016).

Schools can choose to implement RTI using either a problem-solving approach or a standard treatment protocol (Rinaldi, Averill, & Stuart, 2011). The problem-solving approach to intervention is solid and is different for every child because it is individualized to each child’s response. The standard treatment protocol is not individualized to each child; instead, children are in groups learning the same concept for a fixed amount of time. RTI has the ability to impact grades K-12 in all academic areas, and should be used as a preventative measure first (Rinaldi, Averill, & Stuart, 2011).

It takes more than collaboration to enhance student performance, but collaboration can increase the school’s ability to serve all students, especially students who have disabilities (Mundschenk & Fuchs, 2016). RTI is one such approach that can be used to help students with
disabilities. RTI can be paired with professional learning communities to make collaboration and RTI implementation successful. When these two are paired correctly, students with disabilities benefit in the school (Mundschenk & Fuchs, 2016). Teachers said there were several areas in which they needed more training in order to be successful in their field (Meyer & Behar-Horenstein, 2015). Those areas were: differentiating and scaffolding core instruction in order to accelerate student learning; analyzing data to determine how to share students across the grade level; analyzing data to group students for Tier 2 interventions and identify them for Tier 3 interventions; identifying research-based interventions targeted at specific student needs; and, regrouping students receiving interventions outside the classroom to make room for migrant students arriving later in the school year. All of these practices deal with helping students become individual learners. RTI is about making sure the student is learning at his/her pace and the learning is individualized (Meyer & Behar-Horenstein, 2015).

Research has shown that teacher efficacy is affected by support, structure, and efficiency by which the teacher is capable of effectively controlling success experiences for students (Nunn & Jantz, 2009). Teacher efficacy is important in the outcome of implementing RTI. When morale is down, teachers do not teach as well as they do when morale is up. Teacher efficacy must continue to stay on the rise in order for teachers to interact and implement RTI correctly (Nunn & Jantz, 2009).

Response to Intervention

Response to Intervention is used in schools across the United States. RTI is designed with students in mind (Turse & Albrecht, 2015). RTI is the way to start early intervention and determine a need for special education services (Hudson & McKenzie, 2016). The RTI movement sparked in schools because of the IDEIA Act of 2004. This act required the schools to find a way
to monitor students who were considered at-risk and try to provide a form of intervention to them before referring them for special education services in the school. The goal of RTI is to serve a large minority group of students who are not achieving at a successful rate, or who are faced with some type of difficulty in school (Hale, Kaufman, Naglieri, & Kavale, 2006). RTI is a very popular approach that is being used to help identify high-risk students (Hill, King, Lemons, & Partanen, 2012). RTI could successfully improve educational opportunities for culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students (Finch, 2012). The RTI Network (2017) defined RTI, as “a multi-tier approach to the early identification and support of students with learning disabilities and behavior needs.” RTI is used in schools by the teachers and assistants to help students that are struggling with specific skills or lessons (Special Education Guide, 2017). RTI is used for every student, not just for students who have special needs or learning disabilities. According to Jimenez (2010), “Core components of RTI include high-quality classroom instruction, universal screening, continuous progress monitoring, research-based interventions, and fidelity of instructional interventions (p.932).”

RTI uses high-quality instruction and universal screenings that are given to all students in the general education classroom (RTI Network, 2017). RTI uses curriculum based measurement (CBM) to progress monitor the students while they are in Tiers (Hale, Kaufman, Naglieri, Kavale, 2006). Students who are struggling will be provided with interventions that have increasing levels of intensity to help them achieve their goals (RTI Network, 2017). Different personnel at the school, including teachers and assistants, can provide these interventions. The students will be progress monitored to see how well they are doing at various times throughout the intervention process. The decision about how often and what types of intervention occurs on each student depends on the needs of the student (RTI Network, 2017). The data gathered from
RTI is used to determine whether or not a student is eligible for special education services (Turse & Albrecht, 2015).

**Background of Response to Intervention**

The main idea for RTI began in the 1960s (Gustafson, Svensson, & Falth, 2014). In 1977, Stan Deno and Phyllis Mirkin in collaboration with the Minneapolis Public School System, helped develop RTI (Deno & Mirkin, 1977). Bergan (1977) also helped develop an RTI program. RTI was initially described as “data-based program modification (DBPM)” (Deno & Mirkin, 1977). This system was initially designed for special education students, who were being transitioned back into the regular classroom due to new regulations. This module used curriculum based measurement (CBM) to assess the students’ reading skills and develop goals and outcomes for the students (Deno & Mirkin, 1977). CBM testing is a good way to identify struggling readers (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006). CBM testing should be given at the beginning of the school year, and then given at regular intervals throughout the intervention period for the intervention to be successful.

Bergen (1977), and Deno and Mirkin (1977) varied in their RTI approaches. Bergan used what was called a problem-solving approach that addressed the behavior needs of special education students (Bender & Shore, 2007). Deno and Mirkin used a remedial intervention plan where CBMs were used to assess students with disabilities and check their progress over time. This is called the standard treatment protocol (Bender & Shore, 2007)

**Implementation of RTI**

RTI is multi-tiered because it has different tiers that students can move to during the implementation phase (Cakiroglu, 2015). There are three different Tiers in RTI that each
represents a gradual increase in services to students that are designed to help the struggling student in school. RTI can be shown graphically as a color-coded triangle to demonstrate how students are placed in one of three different Tiers (Hill, King, Lemons, & Partanen, 2012). Tier 1 is the level of service that all students receive in the regular education classroom (Cakiroglu, 2015). Students who receive Tier 1 services are meeting grade level expectations. These students are receiving services in the general classroom as a whole class (McCrary, Brown, Dyer-Sennette, & Morton, 2017). Students who receive Tier 2 services need a little extra help beyond what they are getting in the classroom (Cakiroglu, 2015). These students receive Tier 2 services outside of the general education classroom, usually in small groups (McCrary, Brown, Dyer-Sennette, & Morton, 2017). Students who receive Tier 3 services need a lot of extra help beyond what they are getting in the classroom, and these students are likely to be referred for special education services at the end of intervention (Cakiroglu, 2015). These students receive services outside the classroom, usually in small groups (McCrary, Brown, Sennette, & Morton, 2017).

RTI is different from the traditional screen, evaluate, and referral path to early intervention services. It provides tiered interventions for young children in authentic settings, allowing teachers to intervene early. RTI is a systematic and intentional teaching practice that can help prevent non-diagnosed children from needing special education services and from receiving unnecessary labels (Lindemand, 2013 p.17).

The school looked at factors in the classroom along with data when making instructional decisions about RTI (Hoover, 2011). Each school that used RTI has an RTI team that helped make decisions about the needs of the learners who are having difficulty. The RTI team can use quantitative and qualitative data to decide what Tier to place a student in when they are unsure.
The RTI program has multiple layers and examining the progress of the individual child through testing will help the teacher understand what area the child needs additional help in (McCrary, Brown, Dyer-Sennette, & Morton, 2017). If a child has issues with attention span or interest, the teacher should document that on paper and talk with the RTI team when they meet to discuss what can be done to help him/her. The school should work together to foster a culture of learning for each student. The school worked together and advocated for all children’s needs (Hale, Kaufman, Naglieri, & Kavale, 2006). Once these steps are done, children are placed in their Tiers and given high-quality, research-based instruction.

**Tier 1.**

Tier 1 is the heart of the RTI program. General education teachers attended professional developments about RTI and went the classroom excited to teach Tier 1 (Jones, Yssel, & Grant, 2012). All students receive Tier 1 RTI instruction by their classroom teacher during the regular school day. Tier 1 is used as a preventative measure for all students. Tier 1 aligns with state standards to deliver high-quality instruction in reading and math (Shapiro, 2017). During Tier 1 instruction, best practices for reading and math are taught to students to ensure that they received the best education possible (Fuchs & Vaughn, 2012). These best practices should also incorporate reading, writing, and math goals for each student in the Tier 1 instruction. During Tier 1 instruction, teachers use universal screening tests on students to assess their skill levels (Morin, 2017). Schools spend a lot of time and money to ensure that Tier 1 is the core of the RTI program. Any person who is teaching Tier 1 instruction must attend professional development training and be qualified to teach the program to the students. The ideal number of students in Tier 1 is 75-80% of the children in the classroom (Shapiro, 2017). If less than 75-80% of the classroom students’ do not meet the benchmark, the lessons must be differentiated or core
instruction must be changed to meet the needs of most learners in the environment (Hoover, 2011). The school will send home a letter with the parent if the child is struggling to let them know the child is going to be put in Tier 2 or Tier 3 intervention (Morin, 2017).

Tier 1 RTI instruction is important because there are many children who are below grade level in literacy skills (Jones, Yssel, & Grant, 2012). A new practice that is working for RTI Tier 1 is scaffolding. According to Jones, Yssel, and Grant (2012) the following five items are needed for success of RTI at Tier 1: (1) screening all students, (2) monitoring students who are not meeting the benchmark, (3) differentiating instruction, (4) providing Tier 2 small-group sessions, and (5) providing Tier 3 intense small-group interventions (p. 211).

**Tier 2.**

If a child is not making progress in Tier 1, he/she will be placed in Tier 2 (Morin, 2017). Tier 2 small group instruction is made up of 5 to 8 students per teacher (Shapiro, 2017). Tier 2 is small group instruction that takes place in addition to what the child learns in the regular classroom (Morin, 2017). Tier 2 children fall below the benchmarks and pose a risk for failure, but not one that requires them to be put in Tier 3 intervention (Shapiro, 2017). Tier 2 instruction must be used in addition to core instruction, not as a replacement to it (Hoover, 2011). Every child learned at a different pace, and teachers must differentiate during Tier 2 to accommodate students’ needs by modifying and differentiating instruction (Lindeman, 2013). Tier 2 is not special education services, but teachers are expected to adjust the learning to help meet the needs of the students. “It is important for teachers to document the why, how, and how often they intervene, and for interventions to be research based” (Lindeman, 2013). Tier 2 instruction can be administered to students by various personnel in the building (teachers, interventionist, and assistants) that have had the proper training to teach the reading or math program they are
administering to the students (Hoover, 2011). Students in Tier 2 will receive 30 minutes of intervention each day. These students will have the intervention adjusted based on their needs. These students will be monitored every two weeks. The RTI team will meet monthly to discuss the progress of these students. During these meetings, the RTI will determine if any changes need to take place such as adjust of intervention, change in intervention teacher, or any other necessary adjustment to help the student move back to Tier 1. If a child is making significant improvements in Tier 2 after a specific time set by the RTI team, the child will be moved back into Tier 1 intervention (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2017). If a child is not making adequate progress at the Tier 2 intervention level after a specific time period, then the child will be placed in Tier 3 intervention for additional support.

**Tier 3.**

There is a small group of students who might not “get it” during Tier 2 instruction (Lindeman, 2013). These students will need additional support and to be placed in Tier 3 interventions. Tier 3 is considered the most intensive level of intervention a student can receive before being referred for special education services (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2017). Tier 3 requires “intense, individualized interventions with varied instructional practices focusing on the whole child, his environment, and his family” (Lindeman, 2013). Tier 3 includes the students who are struggling the most and the ones who have disabilities (Hoover, 2011). Tier 3 groups usually only have one to three students in them. This allows the teacher to adjust the learning to the individual student. The data team needs to begin reviewing data from students who are placed in Tier 3 intervention regularly to see what types of interventions need to be put in place, or if the child needs to be referred for special education services (Lindeman, 2013). Students in Tier 3 intervention groups spend 45 minutes each day in intense intervention with a trained educator.
These students will receive support based on the needs that have been identified on the progress-monitoring test they have taken. There will also be meetings held every month where the RTI team will discuss the progress of these students and talk about if these students are making progress, if adjustments need to be made, and if any additional intervention practices need to occur.

**Progress monitoring.**

Assessment is a critical part of the RTI process (Stecker, Lembke, & Foegen, 2008). The NCLB Act of 2001 required that schools use some form of progress monitoring when they implemented a RTI program. ESSA that recently replaced NCLB also requires that schools use some form of progress monitoring to implement the RTI process. Progress monitoring is used in RTI to assess students as they progress through the Tiers. There are also benchmark tests that are performed three times a year to see percentile rankings and where students should be placed. Progress monitoring should be performed monthly. Students who are not making progress need to be monitored at least every other week. The scores need to be graphed, and teachers should study and discuss the data monthly. According to Stecker, Lembke, and Foegen (2008), the following steps should be taken to ensure progress monitoring is successful: 1) select appropriate measurement materials, 2) evaluate technical features, 3) administer and score features, 4) use data for goal setting, and 5) judge instructional effectiveness (p. 51-52). Progress monitoring can help save schools money and provide schools with important tools needed to address the educational needs of learners who do not respond to small group tutoring (Fuchs & Vaughn, 2012).
The School’s Role in RTI

The school’s role in RTI is to provide evidence based research interventions to each and every student, and to make sure that every student is making progress (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006). The NCLB Act and IDEA of 2004 were put in place to ensure that interventions were used on students before they were referred for special education services (Brown-Chidsey & Steege, 2005). ESSA has now replaced NCLB, but works hand in hand with IDEA to ensure RTI procedures are followed in schools (NSBA, 2015). These interventions must be research and evidence-based in order to comply with both of these laws.

The school must make sure that RTI is working effectively (Center for Exceptional Children, 2009). For this to happen, the school must focus on the RTI process as whole, progress monitoring, and research-based instruction. Professional development may need to occur in order for staff to be prepared to teach the RTI materials effectively to the students. RTI will work if students are identified and begin intervention in a timely manner (Blankenstein, 2004). Schools that are successful with RTI implementation have been trained on intervention strategies that work, and are using them in their schools.

The Stakeholders’ Roles in RTI

The Principal’s role in RTI.

School principals play a vital role in Response to Intervention. School principals must know everything about RTI, including policies, procedures, and how to implement it (Center for Exceptional Children, 2009). Strong leadership is a key factor in the implementation of RTI (Vaughn & Roberts, 2007). The school leader must collaborate and help develop a strong RTI program (Center for Exceptional Children, 2009). The leaders in the school should be the ones who are encouraging the teachers to use intervention strategies for the at-risk students in the
classroom (Bender & Shores, 2007). Principals play a key role in determining whether or not RTI will succeed or fail at the school level (Shores & Chester, 2008).

The Teacher’s role in RTI.

Teachers play a key role in the implementation of RTI. This includes general education teachers and special education teachers. General education teachers help provide Tier 1 instruction to all students in the classroom (Bender & Shores, 2007). This instruction must be research-based and effective in order to meet the needs of most learners in the classroom. The special education teacher and other staff communicate and work together to adapt interventions that meet the needs of each learner at Tier 2. When teachers are meeting and discussing how to meet the needs of each learner, they should use many types of data (Fuchs, Mock, Morgan & Young, 2003). Special education teachers became even more involved at Tier 3, where students are really struggling. General education teachers and special education teachers must collaborate and work together to form a plan to help each student in RTI in Tier 3. These plans must use research-based instruction and progress monitoring for each student (Fuchs, Mock, Morgan, & Young, 2003).

The regular education teacher uses RTI data to make data-informed decisions about the students in his/her class to improve classroom instruction (Gallagher, Means, Padilla, 2008). This data-informed decision-making means that teachers must collaborate with one another and look at various forms of data in the school to determine what is best for each individual student. This will require timely access to data for teachers and collaboration and planning on the teacher’s part (Gallagher, Means, Padilla, 2008).

The special education teacher plays a key role in RTI (Mitchell, Deshler, Lenz, 2012). The special education teacher is a collaborator, interventionist, diagnostician, and manager when
it comes to RTI. As a collaborator, the special education teacher must communicate with parents, teachers, other professionals, and service providers in the building. As an interventionist, the special education teacher must do progress monitoring, provide intensive instruction, provide supplemental instruction, and use evidence-based instruction. As a diagnostician, the special education teacher must explain and discuss assessment results in RTI team meetings, explain and discuss assessment results in IEP team meetings, participate in basic skill assessment professional development, identify proper level of intervention with team, participate in functional skill assessment professional development, implement SPED eligibility test, implement basic skills assessment, and implement functional skills assessment (Mitchell, Deshler, Lenz, 2012). Low responders are students who are not making progress like they should in a Tier 2 or Tier 3 intervention (Vaughn, Wanzek, Murray, Scammacca, Linan-Thompson, & Woodruff, 2009). Students’ response is vital in identifying students with disabilities. The special education teacher will need to provide guidance on how to help when students are continuing to show low or no growth in Tier 2 or Tier 3 instruction.

**Other professionals roles in RTI.**

RTI is not just for general classroom teachers or special education teachers (RTI Network, 2017). According to the RTI Network (2017), RTI should include the following individuals

- General education teachers
- Special education teachers
- Title I support personnel
- Building level/district administrators
- Reading specialists/literacy coaches
• Speech language pathologists
• School psychologists
• ESL teachers
• State and national agencies
• Parents and families
• Students

The RTI Network (2017) explains that collaboration is one of the key components to ensure that RTI is successful in the school. There must be a common framework, common language, and common procedures in order for RTI to run smoothly and operate the way it was intended.

According to the National Association of School Psychologist (NASP) (2006), speech-language pathologists (SLPs) play important roles in RTI settings. Thanks to RTI, SLPs can help educators understand and identify students’ needs when it comes to language skills, and they can help with the planning and implementation of the intervention strategies at the school.

**Parents’ role in RTI.**

RTI does not end at school; parents also play a role in the process. According to the NASP (2006):

Parents and families must be meaningfully involved in RTI development, beginning with planning and continuing as implementation occurs at the SEA and LEA levels, including participation in the activities federally mandated, state and local Special Education Advisory Panels. As an RTI approach is shaped, procedures must guarantee that parents/families will be notified of and involved when student difficulties are first noted, and continued as team-decisions; adjustments in instructions; changes in educational, related service, or support personnel occur; and evaluation for identification
are initiated. Similarly, parents must ensure that schools are required to provide written information on a regular basis about their child’s progress or lack of it. (p. 25).

It is important for the school to listen to parents because they provide important information about their children (Turse & Albrecht, 2015). Parents are supposed to be included in the decision-making process, especially if students are in Tier 2 or Tier 3.

According to the RTI implementation guide (2016), parent communication and support is a very important part of RTI. The RTI implementation guide (2016) makes the following recommendation when talking with parents:

- The culture of collaboration should focus on achievement of each individual student and needs to involve the teachers, administrators, parents and community.
- Communication with parents should occur on a regular basis and in a similar format.
- Each letter should be brief and easy to read.
- Parent materials need to written in the parents’ native language.
- Staff needs to speak personally, by phone or in person, with the parent or guardian when a child is placed in or removed from Tier II or Tier III.
- Parent communication should be positive, so that the parents’ will be encouraged to stay involved in the RTI process. (p.63).

Tennessee’s Response to Intervention Model

According to the RTI implementation guide (2016), RTI’s goal is to address the individual needs of each student. The RTI framework is made up of high-quality instruction and intervention that are adjusted to meet the needs of each individual learner. The Tennessee education system builds its tier model around models that range from general education to special education. Students in Tennessee are placed in reading or math based on their needs in
the general education curriculum. If the student is not responding after being placed in these “intensive interventions,” he/she may require further interventions or testing (RTI implementation, 2016).

The primary goal of RTI is to help students succeed (RTI implementation guide, 2017). The Tennessee RTI implementation guide (2016) has tools and resources for schools and districts to use when implementing RTI. The tools and resources are research based and have been shown effective.

Tennessee schools and districts have very different contexts and individual needs that can vary widely. There are many areas of the RTI Framework where local education agencies (LEAs) are able to make changes, adjustments and choices to meet those individual needs (RTI implementation guide, 2016 p. 10).

Tennessee’s RTI implementation program must include the following elements: 1) Universal Screening; 2) Tier 1 Intervention; 3) Tier 2 and Tier 3 Intervention; 4) Progress Monitoring; 5) District and School RTI Teams; 6) Fidelity of Implementation; 7) Parent Communication; and, 8) Highly Trained Personnel (RTI implementation guide, 2016).

Tennessee schools must give a universal screener to students three times a year. (RTI implementation guide (2016). The data from this screener is used to inform future tier decision-making processes. The universal screener provides an overview of the student’s academic skills in reading and math. This test is given to all students to see if they are performing at grade level. The universal screener is at the beginning of the year, middle of the year, and right before the end of the year (RTI implementation guide, 2016).
**Response to Intervention Large Scale Model**

There are several large-scale models of RTI that have been used in other states, including, Iowa’s Heartland Area Education Agency (AEA), Ohio’s Integrated Systems Model (OISM), Minneapolis Public School’s Problem-Solving Model (PSM), and Pennsylvania’s Instructional Support Teams (IST). These models all have one thing in common: they all use research-based methods to closely monitor students (Burns & Ysseldyke, 2005).

**Iowa’s heartland area education agency (AEA).**

The AEA has three-tiered problem-solving model for RTI, which they began implementing in 1988 (Jankowski, 2003). In 1995, the state adopted new models in an effort to make RTI more uniform within school districts across the state. The new approach has two components, “a systematic problem-solving process used to analyze student needs, and a problem-solving approach” (Jankowski, 2003). The goal of the new program is to find interventions that will be best for the needs of each individual learner.

**Ohio’s integrated systems model (OISM)**

Ohio’s integrated system model uses data to design, evaluate, and decide who receives what types of intervention services (Grigorenko, 2008). The approach Ohio uses is also three-tiered like Iowa’s. The two are very similar, but, Ohio’s OISM uses different type indicators to determine if a student is eligible for special education services once they have not met their goals in Tier 3 of RTI. Ohio has moved away from the intervention-based assessment model that it used in the past, and has moved to the OISM due to failures in the RTI support system (Grigorenko, 2008).

**Minneapolis public school’s problem-solving model (PSM).**
Minneapolis public schools began implementing RTI in 1977 when Deno and Mirkin helped develop the first RTI program in collaboration with the public school system at that time (Deno & Mirkin, 1977). At that time, they did not know that RTI would grow to the large scale it has today. Since that time, Minneapolis has developed a problem-solving model (PSM) that it began using in 1993 (Fuchs, 2003). In the PSM model, students are given a benchmark test with their general education teacher in the regular classroom (Burns & Ysseldyke, 2005). The next step is to look at the benchmark and identify students who are struggling based on a certain percentage rating and places them in an intervention group. The last step is to continually monitor the students in intervention and if they are not making progress to refer them for special education services.

**Pennsylvania’s instructional support team (IST)**

Pennsylvania’s Instructional Support Team (IST) uses a referral and problem-solving model (Burns & Ysseldyke, 2005). The IST uses collaboration between the classroom teacher and the special education teacher. In order for this collaboration to work, RTI training is given to both classroom teachers and special education teachers. The IST model has a three-tier approach and uses progress monitoring to assess students in order to monitor their progress (Burns & Ysseldyke, 2005).

**Concerns with RTI**

Response to Intervention has made a major impact on education since it began being implemented in all 50 states (Hudson & McKenzie, 2016). Despite the impact that RTI has made, educators still have some concerns with the program. Teachers attend professional development to learn how to implement RTI in the classroom, but many face issues when they return to the classroom and try to implement those new strategies into the curriculum (Jones,
Many teachers are reluctant to implement RTI due to the ever-changing education system and how easily things come and go in education (Thompson & Fearrington, 2013). Some educators’ fear RTI will make them change the way they teach. Educators are facing problems like scheduling problems and finding enough personnel to provide RTI implementation (Jones, Yssel, & Grant, 2012). Some schools suffer from lack of support from principals, support staff, and school psychologist. Support from these individuals is crucial to the success of any RTI program. These problems must be addressed before intervention can be implemented successfully at any school. Some people fear that RTI will place English language learners (ELL) in tiers for intervention for reading and math, instead of placing them in an ELL class where they can receive the proper ELL services that they need and qualify for (Finch, 2012). Another concern is that RTI may cause children with disabilities to suffer by having to stay in tiers instead of getting much needed special education services they need in a timely manner (Hudson & McKenzie, 2016). Hudson and McKenzie (2016) explained the concerns they have with RTI are: (a) the timeliness related to a student being referred for a comprehensive evaluation to determine eligibility for a specific learning disability, and (b) the amount of time that is often consumed while students remain in RTI support tiers prior to being identified as having a specific learning disability (p. 48). Researchers feel that students are spending too long in tiers, and that it causing them to fall further behind. These students could be getting special education services that they need (Hudson & McKenzie, 2016). Otaiba, Wagner, and Miller (2014) stated that the average age for students being identified with learning disabilities was 10, although research said early intervention and detection could help prevent this problem. There also seems to be over and under identification of minority students in low socioeconomic schools. There is also no way to know if students who have not been classified as Tier 2 or Tier 3
and then become at-risk have actually responded well to Tier 1 instruction due to the way the RTI model is set up. Finally, the test used in RTI does not determine IQ-Achievement (Otaiba, Wagner, & Miller, 2014). There are differences in the laws among the states about RTI implementation, and that helps further complicate the concerns educators have with its implementation (Finch, 2012).

Literature suggests that 80% of students receive Tier 1 instruction, but a recent study found that was not the case (Stahl, 2016). The study showed that only 59% of first grade students at the school being studied was receiving Tier 1 instruction. The study also showed that there were issues with the way RTI was implemented in the school. These are all real concerns of RTI and affect teachers as well as students in the classroom. Students need to be provided with 90 minutes of core instruction and then intense instruction that supports their individual needs to be successful in RTI (Stahl, 2016).

Collection of Data Monitoring

Collecting, analyzing, and using data plays a vital role in the success of the NCLB law (Gallagher, Mean, & Padilla, 2008). The NCLB law pressured schools to meet certain achievement criteria and proficiency standards for all students in the school, regardless of their race or disability (Deno, Reschly, Lembke, Magnusson, Callender, Windram, & Strachel, 2009). IDEA gave school districts the choice to use RTI to collect data on students before deciding if they were eligible for special education services (Ardoin, 2006). Teachers collect and use student data, such as individual Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP), to track and monitor students in school (Gallagher, Mean, & Padilla, 2008). According to Ardoin (2006), progress monitoring must have the following characteristics:
(a) be quick to administer, (b) have adequate reliability and validity, (c) be representative of what the student is learning, (d) aid in intervention development, and (e) be sensitive to the gains in academic performance so that intervention effectiveness can be evaluated. One assessment tool that is reported to satisfy these criteria is curriculum-based measurement in reading (p. 713).

Screening data for students is usually collected three times a year and called benchmarks (Deno, Reschly, Lembke, Magnusson, Callender, Windram, & Strachel, 2009). The benchmarks are used to determine if students are on grade level or below grade level. Based on what the benchmarks show, the students will be grouped into RTI tier groups. Once students are placed in RTI tier groups, they are progress monitored (Stecker, Lembke, & Foegen, 2008). Progress monitoring helps teachers understand what area they need to focus on when teaching the students. The teachers will be able to see where the student needs additional help by looking at the progress monitoring assessments, and can adjust the RTI interventions accordingly. This is why data monitoring is crucial to RTI.

**Aimsweb.**

Aimsweb is an online program that is used in schools today (Aimsweb, 2017). It is an assessment and RTI universal screener, progress-monitoring program, and data manager. Aimsweb can provide charts and data for schools and help with RTI implementation. It is currently being used in the United States and in Canada. School districts pay a fee to purchase the Aimsweb platform and then use the information for successful RTI data collection.

**Past and present assessment practices.**

The traditional form of assessment was standardized, norm-referenced achievement tests (Stecker, Lembke, & Foegen, 2008). Classroom teachers have also used their own tests to assess
students. The newest addition to testing is the benchmark testing that is done three times a year for RTI. Schools also have end of year tests that are high-stakes testing. Curriculum-based measurement (CBM) is also used as a form of progress monitoring (Stecker, Fuchs, & Fuchs, 2005). According to McCrary, Brown, Dyer-Sennette, & Morton (2017), these are some forms of assessment that are acceptable to use for RTI: 1) anecdotal notes, 2) conferences, 3) story retelling, 4) running records, 5) child observation, 6) self-assessment, and 7) portfolios (p. 34-36).

**Fidelity.**

A key component of the implementation of RTI is fidelity of implementation (Harn, Parisi, & Stoolmiller, 2013). According to Harn, Parisi, & Stoolmiller (2013), “Fidelity of implementation is the degree to which a treatment/implementation is implemented as intended.” Fidelity of implementation for RTI was developed to make sure that RTI was being conducted and used as it was intended with the students in the schools. There are different types of fidelity. One type of fidelity is treatment. Education uses treatments with intervention to be a multidimensional approach. The education field considers the what, how, how long the practice is taught, and how well it is being taught to check the fidelity (Harn, Parisi, & Stoolmiller, 2013). In order for fidelity of implementation to work, teachers must be providing instruction and progress monitoring using research-based methods (Bianco, 2010).

Fidelity of implementation can be challenging for the school system (Bianco, 2010). The research suggests that teachers be given fidelity checks when implementing RTI. Fidelity checks should be administered at regular intervals, and the RTI team should determine how often fidelity checks should be performed. A special education teacher, principal, instructional coach, or other leader in the school should perform fidelity checks. The fidelity checks should be
unannounced, and should only last about fifteen minutes. The goal of teacher fidelity checks is to ensure that teachers are correctly implementing the RTI curriculum to the students (Bianco, 2010). The National Research Center on Learning Disabilities (NRCLD) published several articles about fidelity and how it should be implemented in schools (Keller-Margulis, 2012). According to Keller-Margulis (2012):

The NRCLD (2006) suggests three dimensions for fidelity monitoring of RTI, including frequency, method, and support systems. Fidelity checks should also be scheduled to occur periodically in such a way that it is both predictable and unpredictable. This approach would allow for the data collected to reflect true implementation and account for possible behavioral change in response to anticipated observation (p. 344).

### Curriculum Based Assessments

Most testing that is done in schools today is standardized testing (Hargis, 2014). Curriculum Based Assessment (CBM) can be used in any basic skill area, but has mostly been used in public school for testing reading, math, spelling, and written expression (Graney & Shinn, 2005). Hargis (2014) said, “Curriculum-based assessment is designed to insure that there is a correspondence between the tests and testing procedures, and the scope-and-sequence skills on the curriculum in use” (p. 2). These assessments are in place for validity and to make sure that students with disabilities are either making progress or being referred for further services. CBA should be able to show tasks and activities that the student needs to improve in, and tasks that the student has mastered. According to Jones (2008), The Due Process Protections says CBMs must be administered in the following manner:

1. Assessments need to be given so they are not discriminatory based on race or culture.
2. Assessments need to be given in the language that the test taker speaks, so the data is accurate and shows what the student knows and how well he/she can perform on each task.

3. Assessments must be used for testing and they must be valid and reliable.

4. Assessments need to be given by educators who are trained and knowledgeable.

5. Assessments need to be given using the instructions that were provided with the assessment.

6. Assessments need to include a variety of tools and strategies so they can gather important functional, developmental, and academic information.

7. Evaluation must not rely on a single measure of assessment as the sole criterion.

8. Assessments must be technically sound instruments.

9. Evaluation must take into account existing information from different sources.

CBM was originally designed for teachers to use data to document student growth and modify instruction as necessary (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2005). The most commonly used CBM test in reading is an oral reading test to determine proficiency. The reading (R-CBM) test last for one minute, and the student reads the test aloud (Graney & Shinn, 2005). The R-CBM has been found to be reliable based on research. This test should be given at least once a month to students who are struggling. The most commonly used CBM test used in math is math computation facts that are timed (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2005).

Current Problems with RTI Implementation

Congress created ESSA and IDEA to improve K-12 instruction and make schools come up with a new way to identify students for special education services, and to take a proactive research-based approach to improve the achievement of all students (Danielson, Doolittle, &
Bradley, 2007). The goal of the RTI process is to serve all students and to make sure they are growing from that instruction. According to Danielson, Doolittle, and Bradley (2007), RTI implementation is not successful in schools because teachers and administrators have not had the proper professional development needed in order to successfully run the RTI program. “There has not been sufficient attention paid to the implications of RTI for the preservice preparation of personnel who will play critical roles in implementation” (Danielson, Doolittle, & Bradley, 2007, p. 633). RTI is supposed to be implemented in the classroom setting using evidence-based practices such as multi-tiered method, progress monitoring, other assessments, and implementation fidelity. Research showed that teachers did not use all of these RTI implementation pieces, and they must be used together in order for RTI to be successful in schools (Danielson, Doolittle, & Bradley, 2007). In order to reach the goals originally intended for the successful implementation of RTI process in schools, teachers and principals must be trained in the implementation of RTI and there has to be a system in place to support the implementation of sustaining evidence-based practices in RTI (Danielson, Doolittle, Bradley, 2007). The RTI process was intended to be helpful for regular and special education students, but evidence showed that the RTI model and its lack of ease of implementation is not beneficial for any student in the school system (Reynolds & Shaywitz, 2009).

Summary

This chapter presented a review of literature that described the history of Response to Intervention and how it is implemented in the school system. The theoretical lens identified the framework for RTI implementation. Then, specific literature was given about RTI tiers, progress monitoring, and concerns about RTI. Finally, current problems with RTI implementation were presented. When the researcher discussed current problems RTI implementation, she presented
researched evidence on how RTI implementation has struggled to date in the school systems. This research helped the researcher develop the basis for the need to conduct a qualitative study on RTI and helped answer the following three questions: 1) What constitutes effective Response to Intervention?; 2) What are the barriers in the RTI program?; and, 3) What changes should be made to increase the efficacy of RTI? In chapter three, the methodology for the study is described
Chapter 3
Methodology

Description of Qualitative Research

Qualitative research methods were used to conduct this study. The purpose of this qualitative study was to gather data from quick surveys, semi-structured interviews, and a collection of artifacts. The semi-structured interviews of RTI teachers sought to answer the following research questions:

1. What do elementary teachers and administrators perceive as the characteristics of an effective RTI program?
2. What do elementary teachers and administrators identify as the barriers to implementation of an effective RTI program?
3. What changes should schools make to increase the efficacy of the RTI program?

Qualitative research is about people and how they interact together (Smythe & Giddings, 2007). Qualitative research tells people’s stories, and how they interact with one another and feel. “As soon as you let go of the idea of truth as something objective, timeless, generic, and able to be clearly articulated in a conclusion, you will be able to embrace qualitative paradigms” (Smythe & Giddings, 2007, p. 57). This type of research brings things that matter to light that might be considered taboo. Qualitative research also gives insight and understanding about real people (Smythe & Giddings, 2007). In qualitative research, the researcher asks a question and tries to avoid making assumptions (Smythe & Giddings, 2007).

A peer debriefer was used during data collection. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), peer debriefing is defined as “the process of exposing oneself to a disinterested peer in manner paralleling analytic session and for the purpose of exploring aspects of the inquiry that might
otherwise remain only implicit within the inquirer’s mind” (p.308). The peer debriefer helped the researcher probe for bias and deeper understanding.

**Description of the Specific Research Approach**

This qualitative research was conducted using grounded theory. The grounded theory approach was developed in the 1960’s from real life observation (Grbich, 2013). Grounded theory uses observations as an approach to establish meaning. This theory allows the researcher to take a close look at the participant’s experiences while they are interacting in society (Grbich, 2013). By using a semi-structured interview, valuable information was gathered from educators who teach RTI every day. These educators were able to elaborate and provide valuable data for the researcher’s study. The semi-structured interview was a grounded, qualitative tool used to collect information about RTI procedures in a school, and teachers were able to be honest and open about how and why they felt some procedures needed to change. The study focused on the following questions: 1) What do elementary teachers and administrators perceive as the characteristics of an effective RTI program?; 2) What do elementary teachers and administrators identify as the barriers to implementation of an effective RTI program?; and, 3) What changes should schools make to increase the efficacy of the RTI program?

The research was conducted in an elementary school. Six regular education classroom teachers and one instructional coach were interviewed for the study. Two teachers from 3rd grade, two teachers from 4th grade, two teachers from 5th grade, and one instructional coach participated. Purposeful sampling was used to pick the teachers for this sample. The reason purposeful sampling was used is because the researcher needed a mix of veteran and new teachers for research. Purposeful sampling occurs when the qualitative researcher constructs a list of characteristics in advance, and the potential participants who share these characteristics are
selected as participants (deMarrais and Lapan, 2004). Semi-structured interviews were used to gather data, and allowed for probing to clarify and gain deeper insights. The interviews were conducted and the data was processed.

**Description of the Study Participants and Setting**

**Setting.** This study focused on RTI implementation of students in 3rd through 5th grade at an elementary school in East Tennessee. The elementary school has approximately 240 students and sixteen regular education teachers. This school was chosen because the researcher is a teacher at the school. The student diversity of the school is the following: 68.3% White, 28.1% Black, 2% Hispanic, and 1.6% Asian or Asian/Pacific Islander. The school is located in the middle of an urban city. 57% of the population at the school fell below the poverty income guidelines according to a survey that was conducted during the 2016-2017 school year. The entire school receives free lunch due to a grant provided by Community Eligibility Program. This program provides free breakfast and lunch to all students in the school regardless of their parents’ income.

**Participants.** Six teachers and one instructional coach participated in semi-structured interviews. The teachers included four veteran teachers and three new teachers. Veteran teachers are teachers who have five or more years teaching experience and new teachers are teachers who have less than five years teaching experience. The teachers provided instruction in the subjects of reading, math, science, and social studies.

**Data Collection Procedures**

This qualitative study focused on RTI implementation and best practices. First, quick surveys were conducted on every teacher at the school to draw a general picture and inform the semi-structured interviews. Next, semi-structured interviews were set up with the seven
participants, and conducted in order to gather each teacher’s perspective on RTI implementation. Artifacts will be collected based on what is appropriate during the coding phase of the semi-structured interviews. Once the interviews were completed, the data were analyzed. Each participant was interviewed at the school in a location of his/her choice. The researcher recorded the interviews and took notes during the entire interview to ensure accuracy of the teachers’ perspectives was reflected. The educational backgrounds of the participants were identified. This included years of experience in the classroom, and how many years they had taught RTI. Next, the interviews were reviewed and transcribed individually. During data analysis, recurring themes discussed among the participants while giving their perspectives on RTI implementation and best practices were recognized. Thematic data coding was significant for this study because of the desire for knowledge on RTI implementation and best practices. By organizing the data thematically, the researcher was able to identify a possible connection among the participants regarding RTI implementation and best practices.

Quick surveys were sent out to fourteen educators in the school by email (Appendix A). Semi-structured interviews were conducted over a two-week period. During each interview, the researcher completed field notes with all words spoken for the respondent and recorded all interviews with participant’s approval. An interview guide was constructed (Appendix B). Questions gathered demographic information and were open ended. Each participant was asked the same questions during the interview.

Artifacts (Appendices C-I) were gathered and analyzed as part of the data collection process.
**Ethical Considerations**

Before conducting research, the researcher obtained signed consent forms from the school district (Appendix J), the administration (Appendix K), and the educators (Appendix L). The researcher gained permission from Carson-Newman University and the Institutional Review Board before any research was conducted. The researcher made sure confidentiality was maintained. All participants involved in the research study were assured that their identity would remain anonymous. No harm came to the subjects involved in this research study.

**Data Analysis Procedures**

This study used inductive analysis. Inductive analysis is a qualitative research where themes, patterns, and specific categories develop as the data is being analyzed. In this research method findings come after interviews are conducted, time has been spent with participants, and the transcription process is done (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003).

A peer debriefer was used to make sure the paper was free of bias and deeper understanding was utilized. The debriefer offered an opportunity to gain guidance and improve the credibility of the study.

**Constant Comparative Method**

The researcher analyzed data using an inductive approach. One form of inductive analysis is called the constant comparative method. The main purpose of the constant comparative method is to compare things to develop a theory (Boeije, 2002). This study compared teachers’ perspectives to develop a theory on how to best practices for RTI implementation.
Coding

When the researcher reads through the interviews and sees similar thoughts and ideas, this is known as codes. The codes are then given names to represent the repeating ideas (LeCompte and Schensul, 1999). Coding can help the researcher determine what information is relevant in the interview. Charmaz (2002) explained that the following steps should be followed during the coding process:

1. Study the data before consulting the scholarly literature.
2. Engage in line-by-line coding.
3. Use active terms to determine what is occurring in the data.
4. Follow leads in the initial coding through further data gathering (p. 684).

After comparing incidents or codes from data sets, commonalities emerged from data sets. The commonalities are then broken down into categories. The first step to take is to put information from the interviews into a category. After determining the category, the researcher can define the category and further break down the categories as needed into smaller pieces (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993).

Summary

The goal of the study was to find teachers’ perspectives on RTI implementation and best practices. Seven individuals from the following groups were selected to complete the semi-structured interviews: 3rd grade teachers, 4th grade teachers, 5th grade teachers, and an instructional coach. Qualitative research was chosen because it allowed the researcher to see the teachers’ perspectives on RTI implementation and how to improve the RTI program in the school system. For this study, seven individuals from the following groups were selected to complete the semi-structured interviews: 3rd grade teachers, 4th grade teachers, 5th grade teachers,
and an instructional coach. An inductive approach was used to analyze the data. Inductive analysis is where themes, patterns, and categories come from the data that are analyzed.
Chapter 4

Analysis of Data

The data collected and analyzed from this research provides a better understanding of teachers’ perspectives on RTI implementation and best practices. The following research questions guided the study. What do elementary teachers and administrators perceive as the characteristics of an effective RTI program? What do elementary teachers and administrators identify as the barriers to implementation of an effective RTI program? What changes should schools make to increase the efficacy of the RTI programs?

The qualitative study consisted of data collected from quick surveys, artifacts, and semi-structured interviews with seven participants. The interview questions ranged from describing teacher demographics to explaining what the participant perceived as the characteristics of an effective RTI program. This chapter discusses the analysis of the data collected through quick surveys, artifacts, and semi-structured interviews of the participants.

Quick surveys were given to fourteen regular education classroom teachers. Each regular education teacher in grades 3-5 received a quick survey. The quick surveys were sent out by email. The quick surveys asked the teachers, “What do you think is the biggest problem with the RTI implementation? How do you feel it could be fixed?” Ten of the fourteen surveys were returned. The results of the quick surveys were used to help guide the semi-structured interviews and determine what artifacts to use in this study. Next, six teachers and an instructional coach were interviewed using semi-structured interviews. The data were analyzed, and artifacts were obtained to ensure triangulation of data. Triangulation of data involves collecting and analyzing data using different sources or methods for validation purposes (Carlson, 2010; Creswell & Miller, 2000). This study used quick surveys, semi-structured interviews, and artifacts. A peer
debriefer was used to add to the credibility and validity of the study. Peer debriefing involves “the researcher working together with another colleague who holds impartial views on the study. The impartial peer gives feedback to enhance credibility and ensure validity” (Debriefing.com, 2018).

Demographic Results

Participants were selected from an urban school district in Tennessee. Quick surveys were sent to fourteen regular education teachers, but only ten returned them. The quick surveys were sent out by email to teachers in grades 3, 4, and 5 who were in the same school where the semi-structured interviews were conducted. The quick surveys were completed anonymously and did not contain names in order to maintain confidentiality of all teachers. Six classroom teachers and an instructional were interviewed. The participants in the interviews were referred to as participants A through G, and they were all referred to as female in order to maintain anonymity and confidentiality. All participants were provided with a copy of the consent form to sign and read prior to participation in the interview. No invited participant opted out of the study.

Table 4.1 shows participants demographics including years teaching, grade level taught, and RTI subject and tier taught.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Years Teaching</th>
<th>Grade Level Taught</th>
<th>RTI Subject and Tier Taught</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>Science Tier 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Fourth</td>
<td>Reading Tier 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Third</td>
<td>Math Tier 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Third</td>
<td>Math Tier 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Fifth</td>
<td>Math Tier 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Fourth</td>
<td>Math Tier 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Fifth</td>
<td>Reading Tier 2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Data were collected using face-to-face interviews with the participants at a location of their choice. All participants were asked the same questions. Questions one through four sought basic information about the participant and his/her teaching experience. Questions five through seventeen were open-ended questions that provided information to answer the research questions of the study.

**Research Questions**

1. What do elementary teachers and administrators perceive as the characteristics of an effective RTI program?

2. What do elementary teachers and administrators identify as the barriers to implementation of an effective RTI program?

3. What changes should schools make to increase the efficacy of the RTI program?

**Analysis of Quick Surveys**

Quick surveys were given to fourteen regular education teachers. Ten quick surveys were returned. The quick surveys were analyzed and coded to see if any themes emerged. The participants were asked what is the biggest problem with RTI implementation and how could it be fixed. Table 4.2 shows the responses of each quick survey participant.

Table 4.2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Participant’s Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>The programs are not effective. Tier 1 kids need to have something to do also.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Working it into teacher’s schedules. Finding stuff for Tier 1 students to do while teaching groups. Hiring people to the groups, so teachers can use core extension time to help with their own classroom needs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Common assessments do not tell the whole story. Using a computation based test for math, when so much of today’s math standards are solving based. Using fluency only does not assess comprehension. Some kids keep going in/out of RTI-never truly making gains. The 25th percentile will not</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
suffice for students to be level 3. Length of time it takes to get children through the process wastes a “year” of their academic life. Programs used are not lined up with TN state standards adequately. What about other students and their academic time?

4  The biggest problem with RTI is the motivation of the students. Students, who are low achieving, tier 2 and 3, are usually the same students that have behavior problems and do not care about their achievement. I believe the only way to fix this is to put the responsibility on the parents and encourage learning and success in their children.

5  The assessments do not always show how well the students are doing or how they are struggling, and we put them in RTI based on that. I really do not know the answer, but maybe better assessment that can prove whether or not the children are progressing.

6  Pinpointing individual student’s weakness. Create assessments to target specific needs.

7  The biggest problem is how to help struggling students in both reading and math.

8  It takes too long to get students into intervention that needs it. We always hear, “let’s wait another month and try this and that.” As classroom teachers we should be trusted enough to know our students instead of going mostly on data.

9  The RTI curriculum-the students get bored with it after a few weeks because it is the same thing over and over again. There is no variety of material or strategies. The solution is to offer multiple strategies and various materials that can be used alternately throughout RTI.

10 My students are continually repeating the same curriculum in Tier 2 and 3. They get bored easily and do not pay attention. I think the curriculum needs to be revamped.

During analysis of the quick surveys, two themes emerged. These themes were assessment and repetition of curriculum during RTI.

Analysis of Semi-Structured Interviews

The first four questions on the semi-structured interview contained basic data about the participant. The information from questions one through four is contained in the beginning of this chapter. Questions five through seventeen are arranged under the sub-heading of the main research question in which they fall under.
Response to intervention is required in every school in Tennessee. Teachers are required to teach RTI daily, so what the teachers’ perceive as the characteristics of an effective RTI program are important. The following questions were analyzed, and themes were formed based on participants’ responses to semi-structured interview questions.

What do elementary teachers and administrators perceive as the characteristics of an effective RTI program?

Question Five: How many students in your class are performing below grade level?

Students are expected to perform on grade level in school. The researcher asked the participants how many students in the class were performing below grade level. One theme emerged following analysis of the participants’ responses to the fifth question; more than 33% of students were performing below grade level in the classroom. Four out of six teachers explained that over 33% of their students were performing below grade level. One participant said that her classroom had over 40% performing below grade level in reading or math. All six of the classroom teachers had at least five students who were in either a tier 2 or tier 3 group for reading or math that were performing below grade level in their classrooms. According to Shapiro (2017), no more than 25% of a class should be performing below grade level. Hoover (2011) also suggested that if less than 75-80% of the classroom students do not meet the benchmark, the lessons must be differentiated or core instruction must be changed to meet the needs of most learners in the environment. The literature from chapter two clearly states that no more than 25% of the class should be performing below grade level or a problem exists that needs to be addressed immediately.
Question Six: How do you identify a student who is struggling with reading or math?

Teachers are required to identify which students are struggling in the classroom. The researcher asked the participants how they identified a student in the classroom who was struggling in reading or math. During analysis of the participants’ responses, three themes emerged. These three themes were: Using previous year’s work, using daily work (formal evaluation of specific skills), and using Aimsweb assessments. All seven participants stated that they used students previous year’s work, daily formal work (formal evaluation of specific skills), and data from Aimsweb to identify students who were struggling in reading or math in the classroom. Participant D said:

I use grouping cards, check the classroom records from previous years, and check the student’s grades from previous years. I check to see if the student has read to the teacher, completed math activities that would help him/her, and I look at the Aimsweb reports to confirm that the student is struggling in reading or math.

The researcher examined two pieces of Aimsweb assessments data (Appendices C-D) from students in the school, which confirmed what the participants said about being able to look at the Aimsweb data and see that a student was struggling. The artifacts confirmed that the students were struggling in the areas of reading and math. The students’ graphs from Aimsweb start going up and then drop down, and then go back up and down again clearly showing each student is struggling. When a student’s graph goes up, it indicates the student is making progress. When the student’s graph is going down, it indicates the student is not making progress. The bi-weekly Aimsweb test given for reading and math do not tell the teachers what additional skills the struggling students need help with. They are given as a monitoring system to see if the struggling student is meeting his/her goal in the RTI program. These artifacts were included because the
participants mentioned using Aimsweb data to identify struggling students in reading and math. The researcher took these artifacts and confirmed they were used for this purpose.

**Question Seven: What comprehension strategies are most effective for your struggling readers?**

The participants were asked what comprehension strategies were the most effective for their struggling readers. During analysis of the participants’ responses three themes emerged. These three themes were: to re-read answers to questions, underlining the passage, and reading the passage more than once. Four participants said that the most effective strategy for their struggling readers was to have them go back and read the passage more than once. The participants said if the students were struggling, they needed to see and hear the passage more than once. The participants explained that sometimes the struggling students would work in groups and do choral reading if they were struggling. Three of the participants said one of the effective strategies for their struggling readers was underlining the passage with which the student was encountering comprehension difficulties. The participant explained that after the students underlined the passage or passages, the students would go back to the passage and attack the passage again for clearer understanding. Five of the participants agreed that one of the effective strategies for the struggling reader was to re-read the answers to the questions. They added that sometimes the struggling reader hurried through the assignment and would not properly answer the questions or simply did not understand the questions being asked. The participants said having the students partner and work with a buddy to re-read the questions to find needed answers could solve this problem.

**Question Eight: What is your role in RTI?**
Teachers play a key role in the implementation of RTI. This includes general education teachers and special education teachers. General education teachers help provide Tier 1 instruction for all students in the classroom (Bender & Shores, 2007). Teachers facilitate instruction to learners during small group instruction in tier 2 and tier 3 RTI groups (Bender & Shore, 2007). The researcher asked the participants what their role was in RTI. During the analysis of the participants’ responses two themes emerged. These two themes were facilitator and student improvement. All seven of the participants said that their roles in RTI were to be a facilitator and to help students improve. Participant G said, “My role in RTI is facilitate student learning and to fill in gaps that the students have and hopefully get them closer to grade level.”

The literature from chapter 2 of this research confirms that one of the roles of an RTI teacher is to be a facilitator.

**Question Nine: Define success of the RTI process**

The participants were asked to define success of the RTI process. During analysis of participants’ responses three themes emerged. These themes were students moving to a new tier by being able to do the work independently, students reaching the goals that were set for them, and students moving from below grade level to on grade level or above grade level. Four of the participants said that success of the RTI process was students moving to a new tier. An example is a student in tier 2 moving up to tier 1 because the student is able to independently do the work needed to move up to the new tier level. Three of the participants said that success of the RTI process was seeing students reach the goals met. Participant E said, “Jane struggled with math and practiced every day. After several weeks, she met her goal and was able to move toward a new goal.” Five of the participants said that success of the RTI process was students moving from below grade to on grade level or above grade level. During the emergence of themes with
question nine, excerpts from the *Tennessee RTI Handbook* (Appendix E) were collected as an artifact. This allowed the researcher to see what the main goals of RTI were in Tennessee according to the handbook and compare it to the teachers’ responses. The *Tennessee RTI Handbook* confirmed what the participants said about success of the RTI process. The goal of the RTI program is to return the student to the regular education classroom if at all possible.

**Question Ten: What is your general impression of the RTI process?**

The participants were asked for their general impression of the RTI process. During the analysis of this question, two themes emerged. Those two themes were the curriculum needs to be revamped, and there is not adequate staffing. Three of the participants said that their general impression of the RTI process is that the curriculum needs to be revamped. The participants explained that the curriculum that is currently used only provides tests for fluency for reading, which does not help students who are struggling with comprehension. The participants explained their concern for students who struggle with comprehension issues. Four of the participants said that their general impression of the RTI process is that the school does not have enough staffing to support the RTI program. Additionally, the participants explained that the school does not have enough staffing to support tier 1 students, and that is a huge problem. Three of the participants said that tier 1 students are left in the classroom during RTI and are placed on computers unsupervised, while the teachers are helping the students in small groups. The three participants expressed an urgent need for more staffing to help with the tier 1 RTI students.

Participant F said:

In terms of trying to identify those kids that need intervention and have holes, it is good overall. I believe the intention behind the program is good, but the length of time it takes to get the students through the process is too long. By the time they get through the
process, they have lost an academic school year. The goal is to have them not be in a
special education classroom by the time they are in middle school, but if they are just
being identified in fourth grade they will continue through the RTI process and special
education in middle school. The intention and motivation behind RTI is well purposed,
but they need to come up with assessments that match TN state standards. This will help
teachers fill in the gaps where the students are struggling.

The researcher examined a fluency test from Spire (Appendix F). This artifact confirmed that the
reading test used for RTI in this school is only testing the fluency of the students.

**Question Eleven: What part of the RTI process has been the easiest to implement?**

The participants were asked what part of the RTI process was the easiest to implement.
During analysis of participants’ responses one theme emerged. This theme was that the RTI
teacher books are scripted for direct instruction. All seven participants explained that the easiest
part of the RTI process to implement is using the teacher’s edition of the books. Each participant
explained that the book they used is scripted and gave detailed instructions from start to finish on
how to teach each lesson to the students. Participant C explained that the easiest part of the RTI
process to implement was Moving with Math, because the teacher’s edition is scripted, and there
is a specific curriculum to follow. There are materials for the students that range from easy to
difficult and vary in degree of the student’s ability level. There are also some games in the
teacher’s edition that you can play with the students if you finish the lessons early. An excerpt
from *Moving with Math* teacher’s edition (Appendix G) was examined and verified the
participants’ assertion. It allowed the researcher to see how the lessons are scripted from
beginning to end. This artifact allowed the researcher to see how easy the teacher’s edition is to
follow when implementing the RTI program. This artifact confirmed the participants statement
that the RTI teacher’s editions are scripted from beginning to end and state exactly what needs to be done with the students.

**What do elementary teachers and administrators identify as the barriers to implementation of an effective RTI program?**

**Question Twelve: What part of the RTI process has been the hardest to implement?**

The participants were asked what part of the RTI process was the hardest to implement. During the analysis of question twelve one theme emerged. A theme was reading the Aimsweb data. Five of the participants stated that the hardest part of the RTI process to implement is reading the Aimsweb data and knowing when to move a student into another tier. Five of the participants explained that the Aimsweb data was skewed. They said when they looked at the data; they became confused and could not tell if the students were really performing above or below grade level based on the Aimsweb data. The participants also mentioned that because the Aimsweb data did not match what the students were doing in the classroom. They had to bring in extra data to meetings to prove the students needed to either stay in a tier or be moved to another tier. The participants expressed that Aimsweb data should be a better indicator of how their students were performing. Participant A stated that the hardest part of RTI implementation was getting the Aimweb tests for fluency or math to match up to how the students are actually performing in the classroom. She explained that a student may be struggling in the area of comprehension, but the Aimsweb data only show fluency, so the student scores really high, and it appears the student is ready to move out of his/her specific tier when he/she is not ready to move. This means the RTI teacher has to keep in constant contact with the regular classroom teacher and, look at other data, and try to determine what gaps are missing to keep this student in RTI, although the test says he/she is ready to move up. The researcher examined Aimsweb data
The Aimsweb data that the researcher reviewed showed the chart was moving up and down which indicated the student was not meeting the goal each time. This artifact confirmed what the participants had said about Aimsweb data being hard to read.

**Question Thirteen: What support has been provided to help you implement RTI?**

The participants were asked what support has been provided to help them implement RTI. During the analysis of question thirteen, three themes emerged. Those three themes were trainings, a RTI coach, and support staff. All seven participants said that there were three types of support provided to them to help implement RTI in their school. The three types of support provided to them were professional development trainings at the beginning of the year on tier 2 or 3 reading and math in Spire, Voyager, or Moving with Math; monthly meetings with an RTI coach and support staff throughout the building to help answer questions about RTI implementation when needed. Participant C said:

Trainings were held in the building at the beginning of each school year. We were provided a RTI coach once a month for support and monthly meetings and a curriculum guide was given to help us understand how to teach the lessons to the students.

**Question Fourteen: What do you perceive as the characteristics of an effective implementation of the RTI program?**

The participants were asked what they perceived as the characteristics of an effective implementation of the RTI program. During analysis of question fourteen three themes emerged: meet all learners needs no matter where they are; use built in assessments that occur when students are ready; and use an RTI program that goes along with the state standards and has an easy progression. Four of the participants explained that they perceived one of the characteristics of an effective implementation of the RTI program was meeting all learners needs no matter
where they are in the learning process. The participants explained that the learners come to them from all different levels, and the participants feel that every individual learner needs his/her individual need meet in order to be successful in RTI. Three of the participants explained that they perceived one of the characteristics of an effective implementation of the RTI program as using built in assessments that occur, when students are ready. The participants explained that assessments they currently use on students occur bi-weekly. The participants would like to be able to assess students when they are ready to test instead of having to test them every other week. They expressed concern that some students are ready to test every other week, while other students only need to test once a month. Five of the participants explained that they perceived one of the characteristics of an effective implementation of the RTI program as one that goes along with the state standards and has an easy progression. She said RTI should be research based, follow state standards, have a nice progression, and be easy for the teacher to implement.

Participant C said:

The characteristics to effectively implementing RTI were not only taking the students where they already are academically, but to try to elevate them and plug them into the current grade level. They need to find a bridge to match the two up, whether it is having kids in groups across multiple grade spans like 3, 4, and 5 that need the same foundational skills so those students can work on the foundational skills they lack and get back on grade level. She said RTI should be research based, follow state standards, have a nice progression, and be easy for the teacher to implement.
Question Fifteen: What are the barriers to an effective implementation of the RTI program?

The participants were asked what the barriers were to an effective implementation of the RTI program. During the analysis of question fifteen, one theme emerged, the program used is generic and is not individualized for each student who needs it. All seven participants explained that the RTI program used in the school is generic and is not individualized enough to meet each student’s needs. The participants explained that each student who is in RTI is unique and has a different need, and the program they use is generic. For example, the student workbook for reading starts with a simple skill such as first grade level work and continues working through to the next level. The book is not individualized to meet the needs of the student. The teachers are not sure how to pinpoint what the students’ need because the program is not individualized. Participant D said:

The kids are so behind that you spend a lot time on foundational skills, and the books focus on doing something once. This is very unrealistic, because the students need more practice and more time to learn these very basic skills they are not getting. The program is also not individualized, and many students may already have the skills the teacher is working on, and he/she has to work on it anyways with the RTI program we use. The program needs to be adapted in order for students to be successful.

The researcher examined a page from the *Moving with Math* student workbook (Appendix I). This artifact confirmed that this program is not individualized for students.
What changes should schools make to increase the efficacy of the RTI program?

**Question Sixteen: What changes should schools make to increase the efficacy of the RTI program?**

The participants were asked what changes should schools make to increase the efficacy of the RTI program and two themes were identified: create better assessments and find someone to teach tier 1 students while tier 2 and tier 3 students are in intervention. Five of the participants explained that one of the changes schools should make to increase the efficacy of the RTI program was to create better assessments. These participants explained that the current assessments do not give them accurate details about what skills each student is lacking. This creates a problem for the participants because they are unable to properly help the students in their RTI groups effectively. Three of the participants explained that schools should find someone other than the classroom teacher to teach tier 1 RTI instruction. These participants expressed their frustration with having tier 1 students in the classroom during tier 2 and tier 3 intervention times. The participants said the tier 1 students have nothing to do during intervention time other than sit at a computer and expressed how that was unacceptable. They said that if there was someone to teach tier 1 during that time, then those students would be excelling in academics. Participant F said:

> Considering it is state and federally mandated, schools are doing the best they can with what they have. They let the teachers bring in data, move students in and out of groups, and do a good job with what they have.

During the quick surveys, the participants also stated that they felt better assessments needed to be created. The quick survey and semi-structured interviews confirm that better assessments need to be created to increase the efficacy of the RTI program.
**Question Seventeen:** Tell me about a time when you had a student who struggled in the RTI program. What do you think would have made this student more successful?

The participants were asked to tell about a time when they had a student who struggled in the RTI program, and what they thought would have made that student more successful. During the analysis one theme emerged: using a different curriculum for RTI. All seven participants told about different students who had struggled in the RTI program, but they all said the one thing that would have made each student more successful was a different curriculum for RTI. The participants each expressed how the students struggled in many different ways from fluency to math. They talked about how the current curriculum in reading only addresses fluency, so if a student is struggling in comprehension the program is not helpful for that student. The participants also talked about how the current curriculum is not individualized, so if a student needs help in one area, he/she does not receive that type of help; instead, he/she works with a group at the pace of the group on a particular skill that is focused on in the workbook. Participant E said:

> I feel the program has not worked on any of my students. I feel the school system needs to look into using a different program altogether. When I worked somewhere else I used something called SRA, and it was great. SRA used phonemes and it brought up student scores.

**What do elementary teachers perceive as the characteristics of an effective RTI program?**

The data analysis revealed that elementary teachers perceive the characteristics of an effective RTI program as one that has many of the following characteristics: an RTI program that shows student progress throughout the tiers, assessments that help identify areas of student
weakness, support to help implement the program, and making sure the curriculum aligns with current state standards.

**What do elementary teachers and administrators identify as barriers to implementation of an effective RTI program?**

The data analysis revealed that elementary teachers and administrators identify the barriers to implementation of an effective RTI program as the program not being individualized and having trouble reading the Aimsweb data. The participants explained the program needed to be individualized to the needs of each student. They also stated the Aimsweb data is often skewed and does not represent how a student is actually performing in the RTI program. They revealed this made it hard to read the data provided by the graphs in Aimsweb.

**What changes should schools make to increase efficacy of the RTI program?**

The data analysis revealed that teachers felt schools should create better assessments and find someone to teach tier 1 students while tier 2 and tier 3 instruction was being held in order to increase the efficacy of the RTI program.

**Themes Revealed from the Study**

After analysis of all data, the researcher looked at the entire study for themes. Through the process of emergent thematic coding, the following themes were revealed: curriculum, assessment, and personnel. The data revealed that curriculum was theme throughout the study. The participants expressed a strong desire to have a different curriculum for RTI. Another theme was assessment. The coding process revealed that teachers feel they should input in when students are given assessments. Finally, the theme of personnel was revealed. The participants expressed concern for the students who need enrichment classes. They said with more personnel this could be possible. Another option for the extra personnel is that given more than 25% of
students are performing below grade level, the extra personnel could help form smaller tier 2 and tier 3 intervention groups.

The table below provides a glimpse into the coding process as the themes were formed.

Table 4.3

*Table of Data Leading to Themes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quotes</th>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“To be successful, the curriculum needs to be changed in order to meet the needs of individual learners. The reading curriculum that is currently being used for RTI tests for fluency only, and we need a program that tests for comprehension too.”</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>Curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The RTI program used is too vague. There are better programs out there that would help our students than what is being used in our district.”</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>Curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The curriculum is generic, and not individualized for each student. The students start at a 1st grade level and work their way up no matter where they are and what skills they need to work on.”</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>Curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Assessments need to be done when the students are ready and not on a set schedule.”</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The assessments are not an accurate indication of how well a student is performing in the RTI tier and needs to be addressed in order to help meet both our (the teachers’ needs) and the students’ needs.”</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Assessment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
“The assessments are done bi-weekly. Students should be assessed when they are ready instead of having a set schedule.”

“I think we need more people to teach the students who are in tier 1, because they sit around and have nothing to do but play on the computer while our tier 2 and tier 3 students are in their intervention groups.”

“I think someone besides the homeroom teacher should do the RTI intervention group. The district should hire more people to come in and do intervention groups because it takes away from teachers teaching.”

“We need trained staff to teach tier 1 students so they do not cause a distraction for the tier 2 and tier 3 students during intervention time.”

| “The assessments are done bi-weekly. Students should be assessed when they are ready instead of having a set schedule.” | F | Assessment |
| “I think we need more people to teach the students who are in tier 1, because they sit around and have nothing to do but play on the computer while our tier 2 and tier 3 students are in their intervention groups.” | E | Personnel |
| “I think someone besides the homeroom teacher should do the RTI intervention group. The district should hire more people to come in and do intervention groups because it takes away from teachers teaching.” | B | Personnel |
| “We need trained staff to teach tier 1 students so they do not cause a distraction for the tier 2 and tier 3 students during intervention time.” | G | Personnel |

**Summary**

Chapter four provided an analysis of demographic information, semi-structured interviews, quick surveys, and artifacts data. The purpose of this study was to: 1) determine what teachers and other staff in a school perceive as effective RTI; 2) determine what the barriers are to an effective implementation of a RTI program; and, 3) determine what changes need to be made in order to increase the efficacy of the RTI program. Data were collected from educators in an urban school in Tennessee. The research questions were: What do elementary teachers and administrators perceive as the characteristics of an effective RTI program? What do elementary teachers and administrators identify as the barriers to implementation of an effective RTI
program? What changes should schools make to increase the efficacy of the RTI programs? Data were collected using quick surveys, semi-structured interviews, and artifacts. Through open coding and analyzation using constant comparison, themes emerged from the data relevant to the research questions. Chapter five contains a summary of the study, discussion of research findings based on the data, and recommendations for further research.
Chapter 5

Finding, Implications, and Recommendations

Chapter five is divided into five sections to discuss the findings of the study. The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine teachers’ perceptions of RTI implementation. The five sections include the following: a summary of the study, a discussion of the findings and their relationships to the research questions, conclusion, limitations of the study, and recommendations for future study.

Summary

The participants for this study included seven educators from an urban school district in Tennessee. At the time of the study, the participants included two third grade teachers, two fourth grade teachers, two fifth grade teachers, and an instructional coach. Four of the educators were female and three were male. All participants were referred to as female to protect anonymity. Together these teachers have 85 years of teaching experience. Three of the teachers had less than five years of teaching experience. Four of the teachers were veteran teachers with five or more years teaching experience.

The data collected and analyzed from this study offer a greater understanding of teachers’ perceptions of RTI implementation in schools. This qualitative study consisted of data collected from quick surveys, semi-structured interviews, and artifacts. The following research questions were used to guide the semi-structured interviews:

What do elementary teachers and administrators perceive as the characteristics of an effective RTI program?

What do elementary teachers and administrators identify as the barriers to implementation of an effective RTI program?
What changes should schools make to increase the efficacy of the RTI program?

**Discussion of the Findings**

Through the analysis of data collected from the seven participants the questions for qualitative research study were answered. The findings of this study are based on the triangulation from three different sources: quick surveys, semi-structured interviews, and artifacts. Triangulation enhanced the dependability of research and allowed the researcher to collect and analyze data from multiple sources (Ary et al., 2014). The semi-structured interviews were recorded and transcribed. The researcher coded the answers to the semi-structured interviews. Individual themes emerged from each of the questions numbered five through seventeen. The following is a brief summary of the findings related to the themes that developed.

**Quick Surveys**

The quick survey was one of the first data-gathering instruments. The participants were asked through an open-ended, free-response question to identify their greatest challenge with RTI and how it could be fixed. Two themes emerged from the quick survey questions; finding an assessment that would better benefit students and repetition of curriculum during RTI.

**Semi-Structured Interviews and Artifacts**

Questions one through four asked basic demographic information about the participants and were presented in a table in chapter four. Question one asked the last names of the participants and is not mentioned anywhere in this paper to maintain the participants’ confidentiality. Question two asked how many years the educators had been teaching. After analyzing the data, it showed there were four veteran teachers who have been teaching five or more years, and three newer teachers who have been teaching four years or less. Question three asked what grade the participant taught. There were two third grade teachers, two fourth grade
teacher, two fifth grade teachers, and an instructional coach that participated in the semi-structured interviews.

**Question Five: How many students in your class are performing below grade level?**

The majority (66%) of teachers interviewed had more than 33% of their class performing below grade level. All six of the classroom teachers had at least five students who were in either a tier 2 or tier 3 group for reading or math that were performing below grade level in their classrooms. According to Shapiro (2017), no more than 25% of a class should be performing below grade level. Hoover (2011), also suggests that if less than 75-80% of the classroom students’ do not meet the benchmark, the lessons must be differentiated or core instruction must be changed to meet the needs of most learners in the environment. The literature from chapter two clearly states that no more than 25% of the class should be performing below grade level or a problem exist that needs to be addressed immediately.

**Question Six: How do you identify a student who is struggling with reading or math?**

All seven participants stated that they used students’ previous year’s work, daily formal work (formal evaluation of specific skills), and data from Aimsweb to identify students who were struggling in reading or math in the classroom. The following artifacts were included: Aimsweb student data for reading and math (Appendices C-D). The researcher examined two pieces of Aimsweb assessments data from students in the school, which confirmed what the participants said about being able to look at the Aimsweb data and see that a student was struggling.
Question Seven: What comprehension strategies are most effective for your struggling readers?

Over half of the participants (4 out of 7) said the most effective strategy for their struggling reader was to have them go back and read the passage more than once. Three of the participants revealed that one of the most effective strategies was underlining the passage with which the student was encountering comprehension difficulties. Five of the participants agreed that one of the best strategies for struggling readers was to re-read the answer to the questions. The participants said the students should partner and work with a buddy.

Question Eight: What is your role in RTI?

All seven of the participants felt their role in RTI was to be a facilitator of learning and student improvement.

Question Nine: Define success of the RTI process

More than half of the participants (5 out of 7) stated that moving students from below grade level to on or above level is success of the RTI process. Four of the participants said success of the RTI process was students moving to a new tier. Half of the participants said that success of the RTI process was seeing students meet the goals that have been set for them. The following artifact was collected: an excerpt from the *Tennessee RTI Handbook* (Appendix E). The *Tennessee RTI Handbook* validated the goals of the success for the RTI process.

Question Ten: What is your general impression of the RTI process?

Almost half of the participants (3 out of 7) said that the current RTI curriculum needed to be revamped. They said curriculum that is currently used only test readers for fluency and not comprehension skills. More than half of the participants (4 of 7) said that there was a problem with staffing. They said during RTI tier 2 and tier 3, tier 1 students are left unsupervised in the
classroom and they need some more staff to teach those tier 1 students. A fluency test (Appendix F) was collected and included an artifact. The test confirmed that it does not look at comprehension skills for students.

**Question Eleven: What part of the RTI process has been the easiest to implement?**

All seven of the participants said that using the teacher’s edition of the RTI handbook was the easiest part of RTI to implement. The teacher’s edition of the handbook is scripted for each lesson. An excerpt from the *Moving with Math* (Appendix G) teacher’s edition is included as an artifact. This artifact validated that the *Moving with Math* teacher’s edition is scripted for each lesson.

**Question Twelve: What part of the RTI process has been the hardest to implement?**

Most of the participants (5 out of 7) stated that the hardest part of the RTI process to implement is reading the Aimsweb data and knowing when to move a student into another tier. They said when they looked at the data; they became confused and could not tell if the students were really performing above or below grade level based on the Aimsweb data. The participants also mentioned that because the Aimsweb data did not match what the students were doing in the classroom. The researcher examined Aimsweb data (Appendix H). The Aimsweb data that the researcher reviewed showed the chart was moving up and down which indicated the student was not meeting the goal each time. This artifact confirmed what the participants had said about Aimsweb data being hard to read.

**Question Thirteen: What support has been provided to help you implement RTI?**

All seven participants said that there were three types of support provided to them to help implement RTI in their school. The three types of support provided to them were professional development trainings at the beginning of the year on tier 2 or 3 reading and math in Spire,
Voyager, or Moving with Math; monthly meetings with an RTI coach and support staff throughout the building to help answer questions about RTI implementation when needed.

**Question Fourteen: What do you perceive as the characteristics of an effective implementation of the RTI program?**

More than half (4 out of 7) of the participants explained one of the characteristics was meeting all learners’ needs no matter where they are in the learning process. Three of the participants said built in assessments should occur when students are ready instead of bi-weekly. The majority (5 out of 7) of the participants explained that the RTI program needed to meet the state standards and have an easy progression.

**Question Fifteen: What are the barriers to an effective implementation of the RTI program?**

All seven participants explained that the RTI program used in the school is generic and is not individualized enough to meet each student’s individual needs. They explained that each student in RTI is unique and has a different need, and the program currently used is generic. The student workbook for reading starts with a simple skill such as first grade level work and continues working through to the next level. The books are not individualized to meet the needs of the students. A page from a *Moving with Math* student workbook (Appendix I) has been included as an artifact. This artifact has validated that the program starts at foundational skills and continues in a pattern.

**Question Sixteen: What changes should schools make to increase the efficacy of the RTI program?**

The majority (5 out of 7) of the participants explained that one of the changes schools should make to increase the efficacy of the RTI program was to create better assessments. These
participants explained that the current assessments do not give them accurate details about what skills each student is lacking. Three of the participants explained that schools should find someone other than the classroom teacher to teach tier 1 RTI instruction when students are in tier 2 and tier 3 groups. These participants expressed their frustration with having tier 1 students in the classroom during tier 2 and tier 3 intervention times.

**Question Seventeen: Tell me about a time when you had a student who struggled in the RTI program. What do you think would have made this student more successful?**

All seven participants told about different students who had struggled in the RTI program, but they all said the one thing that would have made each student more successful was a different curriculum for RTI. The participants each expressed how the students struggled in many different ways from fluency to math.

**Conclusions**

The results of this qualitative study developed a more comprehensive understanding of teachers’ perspectives for RTI implementation. The elementary teachers and administrators perceive the characteristics of an effective RTI program as one that shows student progress throughout the tiers, has assessments that help identify areas of student weakness, has support to help implement the program, and making sure the curriculum aligns with current state standards. The elementary teachers and administrators identified the barriers of RTI implementation as the program not being individualized and having trouble reading the Aimsweb data. The educators explained the program needed to be individualized to in order to meet the needs of each student. The changes that need to be made to increase the efficacy of the RTI program are: schools should create better assessments and find someone to teach tier 1 students while tier 2 and tier 3 instruction was being held to increase the efficacy of the RTI program.
This study concluded that teachers perceived RTI implementation as difficult and challenging for educators. The teachers pointed out many struggles that they were faced with while implementing RTI. The educators need a voice in the RTI process. The teachers need to help create the assessments that are used for RTI implementation. The educators also need a way to express their frustrations with the RTI program and have someone to listen and provide feedback. It is the researcher’s hope that through more implementation and practice, the benefits of RTI outweigh the challenges.

Limitations

There were limitations in this qualitative research study. Research regarding Response to Intervention is easily accessible. However, there is a lack of emphasis concerning teachers’ perception of RTI implementation. Since RTI is state and federally mandated it impacts teachers at all schools and in all districts. The population could be a limitation. All of the participants were selected from a third through fifth grade school, which narrowed the field of potential participants. Further research might include a study involving kindergarten through eighth grade teachers. The study was also done at one school. The study could be open to more schools or multiple school districts. The study was done at a school with a low socioeconomic population. The assumption is that all participants answered the research questions truthfully. It was also assumed the participants understood the questions they were asked. However, errors in participants understanding of questions and bias could not be controlled.

Recommendations for Further Study

While this study sheds some light on teachers’ perceptions of RTI implementation, additional research should be done to help school administrators and local school districts make RTI implementation successful for everyone involved. Further, as this study only included
teacher participants from one school it could be expanded to include many schools and school districts to compare the results. Teachers need to have a way to express their voice, so a qualitative study that allows the teachers to express more information about the RTI process and how to improve on that process should be conducted. Qualitative studies, such as personal interviews or focus groups, would provide more in-depth understanding of teachers’ perceptions of RTI implementation. Quantitative research could be done on RTI student data to compare how each student is doing in each tier at multiple schools and districts. Additionally, qualitative and quantitative studies could be conducted with teachers to further explore the relationship between RTI implementation and RTI student achievement.
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Appendices
Appendix A:

Quick Survey
RTI Quick Survey

Please Return to A. Parker by email or place in mailbox

1. What do you think is the biggest problem with RTI implementation?

2. How do you think it could be fixed?
Appendix B:

Semi-Structured Interview Questions
Semi-Structured Interview for RTI Implementation

1. Last Name
2. How many years have you been teaching?
3. What grade do you teach?
4. What RTI tier do you teach?
5. How many students in your classroom are performing below grade level?
6. How do you identify a student who is struggling with reading or math?
7. What comprehension strategies are most effective for your struggling readers?
8. What is your role in RTI?
10. What is your general impression of the RTI process?
11. What part of the RTI process has been the easiest to implement?
12. What part of the RTI process has been the hardest to implement?
13. What support has been provided to help you implement RTI?
14. What do you perceive as the characteristics of an effective RTI program?
15. What are the barriers to an effective implementation of the RTI program?
16. What changes should schools make to increase the efficacy of the RTI program?
17. Tell me about a time you had a student who struggled in the RTI program. What do you think would have made this student more successful?
Appendix C:

Aimsweb Student Reading Data
Appendix D:

Aimsweb Student Math Data
Appendix E:

Excerpt from the Tennessee RTI<sup>2</sup> Handbook
RTI² and the Ready Student

The RTI² framework is critical to supporting children in becoming ready students. RTI² helps educators understand where students are and, through a multi-tiered system of support, assists them in moving forward. The framework integrates Tennessee Academic Standards, assessment, early intervention, and accountability for all students. This constant system of support enables students to persist on the path to readiness and is a key measure in ensuring that more and more students are able to ultimately develop the knowledge, skills, and abilities needed to be a positive member of society.

The foundation of the RTI² framework is twofold:
1. effective instruction, and
2. a culture of high expectations for all students.

In order to achieve the vision of all students graduating K-12 education ready to be successful in their chosen path in life, educators must provide high-quality, data-driven, differentiated instruction for all students every day. This instruction must be based on knowledge of students, including their strengths and opportunities for growth, their goals, and their learning styles. In addition to the specific work in the classroom that students engage with on a daily basis, students must learn in an environment where all adults hold them to high expectations and where they are able to develop productive traits and habits. In a strong, positive culture, educators constantly ask the questions: "What do my students need? And, how can I provide it?" The RTI² framework is a problem-solving methodology designed to answer these questions and ensure all students are able to benefit from strong instruction, receive support when they have a need, and thrive in a supportive environment that focuses on the whole child. The focus of RTI² should be founded on high-quality core instruction.

“Educators must provide high-quality, data-driven, differentiated instruction for all students every day.”
Appendix F:

Spire Fluency Test
It was summer, and Cole and Meg liked to play outside every day. They also liked to play with Skipper, their new puppy. They had to play indoors with Skipper though because their mom said he was too little to play outside.

One day Grandma came over to babysit. Cole asked if he could take Skipper outside. Grandma said it was okay if they watched the puppy closely. She said, "Don't let the puppy go near the road." So Cole and Meg took Skipper outside.

Skipper liked being outside. First he chased Cole, and then he ran after Meg. Next Skipper found a ball in the garden. Cole tossed the ball to Meg. Meg and Cole had so much fun with the ball, they forgot about Skipper. Then Grandma came outside.

"Where is Skipper?" she asked. Meg and Cole looked around.

"He was just here," said Cole. But they could not see Skipper now.

Cole and Meg ran around the yard calling Skipper's name, but the little puppy did not come. They looked in the front yard, and they looked in the backyard. Meg started to cry.

Grandma drove her car and looked for Skipper, while Cole rode his bike. Meg called for Skipper from home. Ten minutes later, Skipper was still lost. Now Cole started to cry too.

Grandma put the car back in the garage. "Come here. Look in the flowerpot on the floor," said Grandma.

There in the empty flowerpot was Skipper. He was sleeping. He was in the garage the whole time.
Appendix G:

Excerpt from *Moving with Math Teacher’s Edition*
Objective 1: To explore base ten blocks. To develop an understanding that 10 of one block is the same as one of the next larger block. PD

Materials: Base ten blocks, Place Value Mats (Masters 1 and 2 taped together), 6-sided dice, My Math Glossary (Master 23), Vocabulary Cards (Master 24)

Note: Before class, make copies of Master 24 (Vocabulary Cards). Make copies of Master 23 (My Math Glossary) and distribute to each student. See p. x of the foreword.

Vocabulary: place value

Introducing Base Ten Blocks

The main reason students make errors with whole number algorithms is that they do not understand multi-digit numeration. They do not know that 43 means 4 tens and 3 ones or 40 + 3.

Base ten blocks are ideal for teaching numeration concepts because students can see the abstract concept of place value each time they pick up a block. One tens block is always seen both as 1 ten and 10 ones.

Each pair or small group should have 20 ones blocks, 10 tens blocks, 10 hundreds blocks, and a place value mat. Explain the benefits and proper use of manipulatives. Set ground rules for using them.

We are going to begin using base ten blocks. See what you can discover about your blocks. Allow exploratory time. Students might make buildings, roads, and ramps.

We can find important patterns if we ask ourselves: how these blocks are the same and how they are different.

Write 2 columns on the board:
- Same
- Different

What is one way the blocks are the same? (e.g., same material) After a period of time, ask students to share.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Same</th>
<th>Different</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>made of wood</td>
<td>sizes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>natural color</td>
<td>shapes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>points &amp; corners</td>
<td>volumes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>solids</td>
<td>weight</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>made of 1 cm cubes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 of 1 block = 1 of the next larger block</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How many different sizes do you have? (3) Put 1 of each size in front of you. We call the smallest block the "ones" or "units" block. How many ones does it take to make the next-sized block? (10) We name this block the "tens" or "long" block.

How many of the ones blocks are the same as the largest block? (100) We name this block the "hundreds" or "flat" block. The words "ones," "tens," and "hundreds" are place value names.

Display 1 hundred, 2 tens, 5 ones. Place the blocks correctly on a Place Value Mat. Then say the words for the blocks, one hundred twenty-five.

About This Page

Work through the example together. What blocks are shown? (1 hundred, 4 tens, 5 ones) Write the number in the correct place on the chart. (145)

To say this number aloud, touch the biggest block and say its value. (100) Now touch the next biggest block and say its value. Find the value of this set of blocks by skip counting by tens. (40) Then touch the smallest block and say the value of these blocks. (5) Now say the number together as you touch the blocks. (one hundred forty-five)

Have students complete the page on their own or with a partner.

Follow Up Activities

Spin to 10

Each pair should have a 6-sided die, 20 ones blocks and one tens block. The blocks are placed between the players. Each player throws the die, takes the number of ones shown on the die, and places them next to the tens block. The winner is the first player who wins the tens block by throwing a number that adds exactly to 10. A player with 9 ones must toss a "1" to get 10 exactly; if he throws anything else, he loses his turn. This important game develops the concept that 10 ones are the same as 1 ten.

Skill Builders 1-2, 1-4, 5-2
Appendix H:

Aimsweb Math Data
Appendix I:

Moving with Math Student Workbook
Three-Digit Place Value

The clown sold 145 balloons.

We can show this number with base ten blocks.

```
1 hundred
4 tens
5 ones =
```

"one hundred forty-five"

Write the number. Shade the bubble next to the correct name.

1. 

```
Hundreds  Tens  Ones
```

○ one hundred five three
○ one hundred fifty-three

2. 

```
Hundreds  Tens  Ones
```

○ one hundred seventy-six
○ one hundred seven six

3. 

```
Hundreds  Tens  Ones
```

○ one hundred ninety
○ one hundred nine
Appendix J:

School District Approval
KNOX COUNTY SCHOOLS
ANDREW JOHNSON BUILDING

Bob Thomas, Superintendent

November 14, 2017

Adreana Parker
102 Hummingbird Lane
Greeneville, TN 37743

Adreana Parker:

You are granted permission in to contact appropriate building-level administrators concerning the conduction of your proposed research study: *Teachers’ Perceptions of RTI Implementation*. Final approval of this research study taking place within the Knox County School system is contingent upon acceptance by the principal(s) at the site(s) where the study will be conducted. Include a copy of this permission form when seeking approval from the principal(s).

In all research studies, names of individuals, groups, or schools may not appear in the text of the study unless specific permission has been granted through this office. The principal researcher is required to furnish this office with one copy of the completed research document.

Good luck with your study. Contact me at 865-594-1735 if you need further assistance or clarification of the research policies of Knox County Schools.

Sincerely,

John Beckett
Director
Research and Evaluation

Project Number: 171816
Appendix K:

Administration Approval
To Whom It May Concern:

Adreana Parker has permission to conduct research for the following study:

Teacher’s Perceptions of RTI Implementation

Principal

Date
Appendix L:

Educator Consent Form
Project Title: Teachers’ Perceptions of RTI Implementation
Principal Investigator: Adreana Parker, Carson-Newman University

Subject Statement of Voluntary Consent:

I have read this form or it has been read to me and I understand its contents. By signing the consent statement below, I agree to participate in this study. I understand this study involves participating in a semi-structured interview. I understand that I will be audio recorded during the interview by the researcher. The researcher will also be taking notes while conducting the interview. By signing below, I am freely agreeing to participate in the study. I may revoke my right to participate in the study at any time without harm or penalty.

__________________________
Subject (Print Name)

__________________________   ______________
Signature                        Date