

BARRIERS TO ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS
RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION
IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

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Dissertation Approval

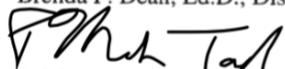
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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study identified the barriers to implementation of secondary English Language Arts Response to Intervention (ELA RTI) and ways to improve these intervention services. Data collected included a survey, classroom observations, artifacts, and semi-structured interviews with five classroom teachers and the district RTI Coordinator in a rural East Tennessee school district. The findings revealed that secondary teachers were somewhat knowledgeable about RTI, but many were unfamiliar with the RTI framework and the role of Tier 1 instruction. Educators reported a positive effect on student achievement when Tier 1 and Tier 2 instructors collaborate and a desire for increased collaboration time and training. Educators asserted that students who do not read for pleasure find rigorous text challenging to decode for explicit and implicit meaning, thus making it difficult to comprehend complex informational text. Positive student-teacher relationships are essential for educators in successful academic strategies that scaffold learning for students. The study revealed that barriers such as educator perceptions, lack of training, resources, and student motivation create impediments to the successful implementation of ELA RTI programs in secondary schools.

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Philippians 4:13

Dedication

I dedicate this work to my parents, Barkley and Mary Gray, who modeled for me a love of learning that made me a lifelong learner. Their love and sacrifice provided me an education and inspired me to be the best parent and teacher I could be. It is my prayer that their legacy will live on in me, and the lives of their grandchildren and great-grandchildren, in the years to come.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Response to Intervention (RTI) became part of the public school landscape when the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA) was reauthorized. In 2006, RTI was implemented in public schools and recognized as a way to provide high quality instruction to all students while reducing the number of special education referrals. With this legislation, Congress placed the responsibility with general education teachers to provide interventions to students struggling in math and English. While RTI focuses on math and literacy skills, it can be argued literacy skills are the most important aspect of the RTI framework. Research asserts the right leadership can make a difference in increasing student achievement. Harmon, Wood, Zakaria, Ramadan, and Sykes (2016) asserted, “It is difficult to dispute that literacy is the foundation for learning. The ability to read, write, speak, listen, view, and visually represent ideas permeates every facet of learning regardless of age or content and therefore has a strategic place in school classrooms” (p. 962).

With so much at stake, strong leadership is needed to implement English Language Arts (ELA) Response to Intervention (RTI) in secondary schools. Transformational leadership has the capacity to create schools with positive cultures and out-of-the-box thinking that will improve student achievement and implement the RTI framework with fidelity (Valentine & Prater, 2011 cited in Maier, Pate, Gibson, Hilgert, Hull, & Campbell, 2016, p. 104).

It is significant to note the International Reading Association (IRA) asserted easy answers and quick fixes to adolescent literacy problems should not be expected (Harmon, et al., 2016, p. 965), and yet, what are the alternatives? Again, the costs to young lives and society are high; therefore, the responsibility to address adolescent literacy achievement is one all educators must bear, and it begins with leadership. Maier, Pate, Gibson, Hilgert, Hull, and Campbell (2016) argued nothing less than transformational leadership is needed to implement the RTI framework with fidelity (p. 104). ELA RTI in the secondary schools has the potential to change student lives, but educators must first fully understand the research behind RTI and the role cognitive skills play in acquiring complex literacy skills (Feifer, 2008; p. 815; Maier, et al., 2016, p. 104; Wendt, 2013, pp. 46-47).

Theoretical Framework

The hallmark of RTI's components consists of a three-tier approach, and it is this approach that is most commonly practiced within the RTI framework. This framework is used by special education to identify any at risk students who may have a learning disability. In Tier 1 general education teachers use research based strategies and interventions to provide high quality instruction to all students. Data points and benchmarks are utilized to determine students needing Tier 2 interventions. In this tier, students receive more direct interventions in small group settings. Special education teachers are involved in Tier 3 to provide more intensive interventions. This three-tier approach requires general and special education collaboration if students are to achieve academic growth (Erchul, 2011, p. 191; Fisher & Frey, 2011, p. 99; Isbell & Szabo, 2014, p. 11).

Vygotsky's zone of proximal development holds significance for successful Tier 1 implementation. In Tier 1 classrooms, teachers have the opportunity to provide assistance to

learners struggling with reading skills and comprehension concepts. This assistance can be in the form of teacher assistance or peer assistance. In other words, it is important to meet the learner where he or she is in a skill level and provide scaffolding to assist the learner to reach higher (Armstrong, 2016, p. 134). Secondary educators need quality professional development and training to provide this scaffolding to students. Most secondary teachers are trained to teach content rather than reading skills and many find themselves challenged with the day-to-day demands of teaching standards and preparing for assessments; therefore, another barrier to ELA RTI success is the lack of literacy training secondary teachers. The problem is compounded when struggling adolescents lack literacy motivation and enjoyment (Cockroft & Atkinson, 2017, p. 43; Harmon, et al., 2016, p. 965).

Statement of the Problem

Research suggests ELA RTI is making a difference in elementary classrooms. Its research-based framework and three-tiered approach for addressing learning deficiencies seems to be working (Bineham, Shelby, Prazey, & Yates, 2014 pp. 230-231; Erchul, 2011, p. 191; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006, p. 93; Preston, 2016, p. 173); however, in secondary schools across the country, RTI faces several barriers to its success. These include lack of research regarding ELA RTI and adolescents, implementing the components of the RTI framework within the secondary setting, failure to recognize that adolescents approach reading and learning differently than elementary students, and a lack of research-based staff development that addresses these issues.

Research regarding ELA RTI and adolescents is scarce. In fact, a study of 40 middle schools reported there was little evidence to support the RTI framework as a prevention strategy for struggling content area readers (Prewett, et al, 2012, p. 139). A second barrier is difficulty when scheduling ELA RTI within the school day. Secondary scheduling is difficult. The

secondary schedule must create adequate time for students to complete coursework leading to graduation. This barrier links back to the lack of available research in regard to ELA RTI success in the secondary setting. Sansoti, et al., (2010) reported principals acknowledged RTI as an important component, but cited unavailability of time as a barrier to implementation (pp. 288, 291). The issue reinforces the lack of educator buy-in, coupled with a lack of resources.

The third barrier to ELA RTI success is failure to recognize that adolescents approach reading and learning much differently than elementary students. Secondary educators understand the ability to motivate student learning is a key component in student achievement; however, teachers may find it difficult to engage struggling readers. If fluency and comprehension are to improve, student motivation must be addressed. Research supported Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) theory that stated instruction must meet students at their learning level and provide scaffolding that raises student achievement (Paige, 2011, p.419; Miller, 2009 cited in Stover, O'Rear, Morris, 2015, p. 60).

The final barrier to ELA RTI success is a lack of research-based staff development to address the barriers to RTI success and provide strategies for addressing the difficulties struggling adolescent readers encounter. Bartholomew and DeJong (2017) reported secondary principals believed there is too little experience with RTI for schools to feel comfortable with its implementation. A lack of interventions for students in Tier 2 and Tier 3 are particularly problematic (pp. 268-269). Research supported struggling secondary students need different strategies for addressing reading deficiencies (Fuchs, Fuchs, & Compton, 2010, pp. 25-26; Preston, Wood & Stecker, 2016, p. 179; Faull, 2007, p. 166). Academic demands are difficult for secondary students unable to read on grade level, but also for those students who may be

several grade levels behind (Heller & Greenleaf, 2007 cited in Harmon, et al., 2016, p. 963). Struggling readers often find themselves paced out of the rigor in a typical high school class.

Tier 1 ELA instruction is equally as important as Tier 2 and Tier 3. While the most at-risk students will receive Tier 2 and Tier 3 intervention supports, there are students in Tier 1 struggling to keep pace with course rigor. In the past, students struggling with academic achievement simply signed up for vocational courses, while college bound students took a more rigorous pathway; however, in today's classroom, the CTE student in a mechatronics path may also plan to enter a post secondary program in engineering. The lines have blurred between vocational and general academia.

Barriers to secondary ELA RTI success present a high cost to students. Cockroft and Atkinson (2017) echoed McCoy (2013) that students with literacy difficulties may earn less income and fall into poverty. At least half of teenage crime offenders struggle with literacy. Perhaps most importantly, researchers found, "literacy has a significant relationship with a person's happiness and success" (Dugdale & Clark, 2008 cited in Cockroft and Atkinson 2017, p. 42). The psychological cost to students is low self-esteem and low expectations for a better life, and the lack of control many students feel over their academic future adds to the frustration (Harmon, et al., 2016, p. 965).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study is to identify the barriers to secondary ELA RTI success and identify ways educators can improve ELA RTI in secondary schools. This includes acknowledging and identifying the complex issues surrounding adolescent literacy struggles. In other words, secondary educators must be prepared to handle a vast array of complex literacy demands required for 21st century learning. Harmon, et al., (2016) pointed out there is a long

overdue acknowledgement struggling adolescent readers need literacy supports and cited Vacca and Alvermann (1998) who called the lack of acknowledgement ‘benign neglect’ of the stringent literacy requirements of adolescent readers (962). Perhaps the greatest hurdle RTI faces is strategies used to increase academic achievement with younger children simply do not work with adolescents. The reasons are complex. For example, secondary students inhabit a more complex world upon graduation than previous generations. Secondary students experience, “...multimodal texts, comprising written text, visual images, graphic elements, hyperlinks, video clips, audio clips, and other modes of representation, require different strategies for navigating and comprehension” (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996 cited in Serafini, 2012, p. 27). Serafini (2012) asserted navigating between print and digital worlds requires a different type of literacy (p. 27). New technologies require students to “construct and disseminate information” (Pilgrim & Martinez, 2013, p. 61). Serafini (2012) explained to navigate these new technologies, students are moving from the role of a code-breaker to an understanding of the design and visual elements found within these different modes of texts. Researchers named the vast array of tools encompassing technology the *New Literacy* (Pilgrim & Martinez, 2013, p. 63). The cost associated with the failure of equipping students with skills needed to navigate these types of literacy tools is significant.

Limitations of the Study

The scale of voluntary participants in the study limits the research. The study encompassed three high schools of varying sizes in a rural district in East Tennessee. Different demographics may deliver a different outcome of the study. Finally, the researcher works as the secondary coordinator in this rural district in East Tennessee that employs nearly 400 teachers and serves approximately 5,600 students.

Subjectivity Statement

Struggling adolescent readers must overcome several barriers to achieve academic mastery. Secondary educators are in the midst of a shift in the level of academic rigor needed to equip students with literacy skills for the 21st century. Each year, educators are tasked with improving ACT scores and academic achievement as on End of Course (EOC) exams. High schools must recognize and understand the impetus behind RTI implementation and work to create learning opportunities for all students in all levels of ELA RTI. The work extends beyond what takes place in the classroom. It must be a community effort to engage adolescents and support literacy efforts. In addition, students must become life-long readers and learners. This effort requires teaching adolescents the literacy skills needed for the 21st century and to look for the joy in reading. Researchers Cockroft and Atkinson (2017) reported a 2010 UK study of 30,000 students, ranging in ages 8-16 that looked at attitudes and behaviors toward reading. In the study, researchers (Cockroft & Atkinson, 2017) found a third of students, ages 14-16, reported reading enjoyment compared to half of those reported in ages 11-14, and both of these age groups reported reading less out of school than students in the 7-11 age group (p. 43). Schools need assistance to identify ways to bring joy and a passion for reading to struggling adolescent readers, while, at the same time, improving literacy skills.

Research Questions

1. How do educator perceptions and attitudes toward RTI implementation affect the success of ELA RTI?
2. How do adolescents approach reading and learning in secondary schools?
3. What strategies do successful educators use in ELA RTI?

4. What are the barriers to implementing a successful ELA RTI program in secondary schools?

Operational Definitions

1. *Response to Intervention (RTI)* is an alternative method for providing interventions to all students. Its key components include three tiers or levels of intervention services. RTI was implemented in public schools after the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) in 2004 (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006).
2. *Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)* is a concept developed by Lev Vygotsky and known as “the distance between the actual development level determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with a more capable peer” (Vygotsky, p. 86, cited in Shabini, Khatib, & Ebadi, 2010, p. 238).
3. *Lev Vygotsky* is a Russian psychologist known for social behavior theory and concept of the zone of proximal development (ZPD) (Daneshfar and Moharami, 2018).
4. *Sociocultural Theory* is a theory that states, “Children are immersed in a social environment where it represents them with all social, cultural and interpersonal experiences.” (Daneshfar and Moharami, 2018, p. 600). ZPD is part of the sociocultural theory, and it is this environment that is the “key source of development” (Daneshfar and Moharami, 2018, p. 600).
5. *IDEA* (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is a federal law reauthorized in 2004 and implemented in the 2006-2007 school year. Its reauthorization made RTI part of the public schools (Bineham, et al., 2014, pp. 230-231; Erchul, 2011, p. 191; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006, p. 93; Preston, et al., 2016 p. 173).

6. *New Literacy* is a term referring to the complex and vast array of technical tools requiring that require different cognitive skills (Pilgrim & Martinex, 2013, p 63).

Organization of the Study

This qualitative research study is organized with five chapters. Chapter One provides the introduction to the study, theoretical framework, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, research questions, limitations of the study, subjectivity statement, key terms/operational definitions, and the summary of the chapter. Chapter Two provides a review of the existing literature on ELA RTI, a theoretical lens, historical context, including ELA RTI in elementary and middle school classrooms, constructivism theory and Vygotsky's zone of proximal development, administrator and teacher perspectives, current ELA RTI research, and gaps in the literature regarding secondary ELA RTI. Chapter Three contains the methodology section and provides the qualitative research description, the specific research method used, description of the research participants, data collection procedures, data analysis, and chapter summary. Chapter Four provides a presentation of the data findings. Chapter Five provides conclusions garnered from the study of the data, as well as, research limitations and future research recommendations.

Summary

While there are barriers to ELA RTI success, its premise has important merits for educators to consider. Struggling adolescent readers may possess basic comprehension strategies, but basic strategies will no longer serve students engaging with more complex text (Harmon, et al., 2016, 962). Twentieth century literacy skills will not suffice for the 21st century. Literacy in the 21st century has a different, more complex meaning, as educators wrestle with the complexities of technology. Given the complexity of adolescent reading deficiencies, secondary

schools need the support of instructional coaches and experts in reading proficiencies. Skills needed to master beginning literacy skills in the primary grades are different than those needed for the adolescent learner (Feifer, 2008, 815; Wendt, 2010, p. 42).

A specific kind of leadership is needed to implement a mandated program like RTI in the secondary schools. Barriers to its success present a daunting challenge to many school leaders, and there is a need for more research that provides strategies for addressing such issues as scheduling, teacher buy-in, and the unique needs of struggling adolescent readers. In addition quality staff development is needed in secondary schools to address these issues if schools are to improve student achievement and prepare students for postsecondary success.

Chapter 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Response to Intervention (RTI) was heralded following the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEIA). In 2006-07 RTI was put in place in schools and recognized as a way to provide high quality instruction to all students and reduce the number of special education referrals (Erchul, 2011, p. 191; Fisher & Frey, 2011, p. 99). The RTI framework is data driven. Schools use data to identify at-risk students or children with learning disabilities, and there are several ways to gather data. Fuchs and Fuchs (2006) have written that schools may use a variety of data means to determine which students may be at-risk of academic achievement. One way is to review test scores of the previous year and to choose a “criterion such as scores below the 25th percentile to designate at risk” (Fuchs & Fuchs, p. 93). Schools may also choose a universal screening tool with a certain benchmark and test every student in a particular grade (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006, p. 93).

In the years since RTI was named as a means of addressing instruction and interventions, there is some evidence the practice is working with elementary students; however, with regard to secondary students RTI research is scant, and there seems to be confusion regarding its implementation and how to make it work in a high school setting. Lack of research and confusion with implementation may be perceived as barriers to RTI success in secondary schools. In order to thoroughly understand the research behind RTI, it is important to view it

through a theoretical lens. While RTI encompasses both math and English Language Arts (ELA) classrooms, the purposes of this research will focus on ELA RTI.

Researchers have reported the basic concepts of RTI are built on a solid foundation. These include high quality classroom instruction, a universal screener, progress monitoring, research-based instruction, interventions, and fidelity (Prewett, Mellard, Deshler, Allen, Alexander, & Stern, 2012, p. 136; Ridgeway, Price, Simpson, Rose, 2011, p. 85; Sansosti, Noltemeyer, Goss, 2010, pp. 286-287). Hart and Stebick (2016) echoed previous research findings and explained, “In essence, the RTI service delivery model consists of five core values: a multitier approach, student assessment in decision-making, evidence-based intervention, maintenance of procedural integrity and development of systems in place” (Glover & DiPerna, 2007 cited in Hart & Stebick, 2016, p. 45).

Theoretical Lens

RTI Framework

The Response to Intervention framework calls for several steps if RTI is to be fully implemented with fidelity. First, RTI requires three levels or tiers of instruction. Tier 1 is made of all students in a classroom. In this tier students receive high quality instruction with classroom teachers monitoring and assessing student progress. Stahl (2016) echoed Johnson, Mellard, Fuchs, and McKnight (2006) stating that Tier 1 “should meet the needs of 80% of the students” (p. 660). Tier 2 involves a more one-on-one level of instruction. Students who struggle in Tier 1 and qualify for Tier 2 receive more intensive instruction with either an RTI instructor or ELA aid. Tier 2 is in addition to Tier 1 instruction. As students progress through Tier 2 and improve in their abilities, they will move out of Tier 2. Ideally, the classroom teacher in Tier 1 will work to monitor student progress and, in collaboration with an RTI coordinator,

determine if the student needs more interventions through Tier 2. Tier 3 is a more intensive intervention strategy. Students placed in Tier 3, generally, are special education students. RTI also requires the administration of a universal screening assessment two times per year. Data are used to determine if students are to be placed in RTI Tier 2 or Tier 3. RTI is to supplement 90 minutes of literacy instruction during the school day (Stahl, 2016, p. 661). Finally, consistent progress monitoring is administered throughout the school year to determine if the decisions and interventions used in Tier 1 and Tier 2 are translating into student gains (Stahl, 2016, p. 659).

While the basic framework of RTI holds true for RTI implementation, two models have emerged for use in educational practice. The problem-solving approach has a focus on early intervention, while attempting collaboration with general and special education services. With this model student services are individualized and instruction focuses on specific needs for students. The standard treatment protocol model utilizes a “uniform instructional platform implemented with all targeted students. This approach also focuses on early intervening and identification of specific learning disability” (Preston, Wood, & Stecker, 2016, p. 177). Preston, et al., (2016) identified the major difference between the two models is the clear distinction between general and special education (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006; Fuchs et al., 2010 cited in Preston, et al. 2016, p. 177).

Sociocultural Theory and Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development

Sustaining positive outcomes found in RTI Tier 2 can be difficult for classroom teachers. For example, it is possible students may move in and out of Tier 2. The challenge for classroom teachers in Tier 1 is to sustain gains made in Tier 2 and to consistently monitor students. Educators may find some support in this area by revisiting Vygotsky’s zone of proximal development theory. Tier 1 classrooms consist of students with all ability levels. Teachers often

struggle to determine how to meet students at their level and raise their academic achievement. Sustainability can be difficult to maintain for the student testing out of Tier 2 and receiving only Tier 1 instruction. While this student has made progress he or she will still need academic attention in Tier 1 in order to maintain academic gains. Vygotsky's zone of proximal development emphasizes aiding a learner when conditions indicate he or she is struggling with a particular concept. This assistance can be in the form of teacher assistance or peer assistance. In other words, educators must be able to meet their students where they are on their level of learning. To do this successfully, educators must be able to create learning experiences that encourage and support students to reach higher than their current abilities (Armstrong, 2015, p. 134). Researchers asserted the influence of Vygotsky's sociocultural theory has shaped viewpoints with regard to the different facets that influence learning. A New Zealand study of 34 adolescents found classroom teachers who practiced scaffolding and student support provided an environment where students were comfortable to tackle new challenges. This supported Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) theory and confirmed classroom environment and positive teacher-student relationships can make a difference in student achievement (Fletcher & Nicholas, 2016, p. 484, p. 493). Daneshfar and Moharami (2018) pointed out ZPD was conceived from Vygotsky's sociocultural theory. This theory asserted development occurs within experiences represented in a social, interpersonal, and cultural context.

Vygotsky (1978) discussed the importance of expert interaction with a learner and the importance of timing in the process. In other words, educators meet the student in the place where there is struggle, and through expert interaction that includes timely and quality feedback students receive scaffolding that enables them to achieve success. Learning is achieved when the learner is able to perform the skill without expert support (Vygotsky, 1978, cited in Armstrong,

2015, p. 135). In fact, Daneshfar and Moharami (2018) asserted, Vygotsky's work emphasizes children develop at several different levels; therefore, the work in the classroom becomes even more significant since it is the teacher who recognizes these different levels and provides the correct scaffolding to move into these different levels (p. 601). These ideas are especially significant for secondary students. Daneshfar and Moharami (2018) cited Kozulin, 2003 and argued about the importance of "...semiotic tools, such as language are considered crucial for higher order mental functioning. Individuals' cognitive development relies on their master of these tools. However, these semiotic tools may not work effectively without a human mediator" (p. 602). Daneshfar and Moharami's (2018) research represented one of the most profound arguments as to why good teaching matters at every grade level. Teachers in ELA RTI Tier 1 can serve as mediators and guide students to mastery of the more complex aspects of literacy and language tools. To do this work, teachers need quality staff development and training.

Historical Context

RTI Roots

To understand how RTI works, one must examine its roots, and those can be found in several areas, especially the behavioral areas. Preston, Wood, and Stecker (2016) cited the work of Bergan (1977) and Deno and Mirkin (1977) and pointed to "behavioral consultation, data-based disabilities" (Preston, Wood, & Stecker, 2016, p. 173) as areas of influence in RTI development. Research has revealed a connection between RTI and the number of students labeled learning disabled (LD). Again, Preston, et al. (2016) pointed out the importance of staff development that provides educators with background and research surrounding RTI. This knowledge could increase administrative and teacher buy-in of the positive outcomes RTI may provide for struggling students (p. 173).

Response to Intervention also has roots in public health. In fact, RTI models mirror early public health efforts to prevent disease. For example, checkups and monitoring provide practitioners with information to discern when patients need second or third levels of health care and support (Wanzek & Fletcher, 2007 cited in Vaughn and Fletcher, 2012, p. 43). Similarly, education models typically follow one of two paths. The first model focuses on addressing behavior issues, while the second model is a research-based prevention program addressing reading and math deficits. Both models rely on data to inform practice. Data points are used to determine if interventions or special education referrals are needed (Vaughn & Fletcher, 2012, p. 43).

IDEA and RTI

Response to Intervention, or RTI, became part of the public school landscape when the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was reauthorized in 2004 and implemented in the 2006-2007 school year. RTI provided an alternative way for educators to address academic achievement among struggling students. In the past, districts used a variety of methods and instruments to determine learning disabilities (LD) in children; however, these methods varied across states and school systems. RTI, on the other hand, is a research-based framework in which the primary components depend on a three-tiered framework for addressing learning and achievement (Bineham, et al., 2014, pp. 230-231; Erchul, 2011, p. 191; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006, p. 93; Preston, et al., 2016, p. 173).

As a result of the policy change, the way schools identify students as LD also changed. RTI made it possible for school systems to provide interventions to students before labeling students as LD. In the past, this determination would have been made using IQ tests and/or academic achievement tests. The discrepancy model looked at whether or not a student had a

particular area in which the student's achievement was "significantly discrepant from their overall intelligence (Feifer, 2008, p. 812), and the IQ –achievement discrepancy model was used to identify and service students considered LD" (Dunn & Mabry, 2011, pp. 37-38). On the other hand, Peifer (2008) argued, the decision to move away from the discrepancy model primarily affected students with a learning disability (p. 812).

A positive aspect concerning RTI and IDEA is that RTI implementation has brought about some increase in collaboration between special education and general education, particularly in elementary schools. In addition, due to IDEA, parents are more inclined to receive due process, and RTI provides a framework that respects the rights of parents (Robinson, Bursuck, & Sinclair, 2013, p. 5).

ELA RTI in Elementary and Middle Schools

In a study assessing educator familiarity with RTI and its components, Kings and Lemons (2014) found that elementary teachers were reported as being more familiar. Elementary teachers also seemed to have more familiarity with the different tiers that make up the RTI framework. In addition, elementary educators were reported as having greater access to the tools needed for progress monitoring. It is also interesting to note elementary general and special education teachers seem to hold the same general understanding of RTI. The study also reported that educators in elementary schools reported RTI seems to address needs of students struggling with reading achievement (King & Lemons, 2014, pp. 193-195). These findings seem support King and Lemon's (2014, p. 189) assertion that elementary schools have been able to successfully adopt the RTI framework due to the abundance of research supporting its ability to effectively address reading interventions at an early level (p. 189).

Like secondary schools, middle schools often find themselves struggling with the similar RTI implementation issues. In fact, Fuchs, Fuchs, and Compton (2010, p. 22) have noted the scant research on middle and high schools and attribute it to scheduling and complex issues. Other researchers agree there is little research of RTI practices in middle and secondary schools (Ciullo, Lembke, Carlisle, Thomas, Goodwin, & Judd, 2016, p. 44). The issues range from scheduling conflicts, access to adequate screening and monitoring tools, and the emphasis on testing all combine to make RTI implementation challenging for even the most seasoned educators. Given these difficulties, it would seem difficult to find any success in middle school RTI delivery; however, a study conducted in two states with grades 6-8 found promising practices. For example, in Tiers 2 and 3 there were some positive practices observed with literacy intervention. Researchers noted checks for understanding and consistent and quality student feedback were positive literary practices. According to the research findings quality staff development, administrative support, and teacher buy-in are all essential if RTI is to be successful (Ciullo, et al. 2016, pp. 44-54; Prewett, et al., 2010, p. 145).

The focus on early identification of at-risk students in English language arts set the stage for delivery of interventions that address the academic needs of students. This focus and intervention prevent academic gaps from growing; however, the same goals should also be applicable in a middle school. It should be noted the research pointed to the need to move students with serious academic deficits directly to Tier 3. These students need immediate academic and intense interventions. On the other hand, other students may only require Tier 2 interventions. These issues emphasized the urgent need for educators to analyze data and to understand what to do with the information gleaned from the data. The deficits in academics become more pronounced as children enter middle school. Teachers can provide observation

data points that can give more information about a student's academic struggles so that established academic data follows students when they enter middle school. Fuchs, Fuchs, and Compton (2010) asserted adolescents exhibit reading difficulties that are more complicated. These difficulties may include difficulty in recognizing words and difficulties with specific "language skills and metacognitive skills" (p .25). Difficulties in these areas will affect comprehension. Traditional strategies used in elementary classes may not work when used in middle schools; therefore, educators need to be creative in designing lessons and in the delivery of interventions (pp. 25-26).

ELA RTI in Secondary Schools

While RTI in secondary schools follows the same framework as elementary and middle schools, research shows the similarities end there. King and Lemons (2014) identified differences in the way secondary teachers perceive RTI when compared to elementary teachers. For example, secondary teachers have reported less familiarity with RTI components. Secondary teachers also seem to believe special education teachers have a greater knowledge of RTI and its framework (p. 193-195). Perhaps this is due to the fact that RTI focus in secondary schools tends to center on "remediation, supplemental support, and content recovery, with the outcomes being to pass core courses/examinations and to graduate" (Pyle & Vaughn, 2010, p. 275). In fact, in a study examining the differences between elementary and secondary educators and perceptions of RTI, secondary teachers believed RTI was primarily used for behavior and/or content (King & Lemons, 2014, p. 195).

Researchers have cited a number of obstacles with RTI implementation in secondary schools. Among them are scheduling, school structure and culture, staff responsibilities, the lack of training in literary content, and lack of research in secondary RTI practices (Bartholomew &

De Jong, 2017, p. 265; Brozo, 2010; p. 278; Pyle & Vaughn, 2012, p. 275; Sansosti, 2010, p. 287).

Another factor influencing RTI success in secondary schools is the screening required of all students to pinpoint academic deficits. Students in middle and secondary schools have several data pieces available that identify areas of academic concern. Fuchs, Fuchs, and Compton (2010, pp. 24-25) argued using resources to allocate for screeners that will identify struggling students does not make much sense; rather, analyzing data and working with teachers to identify those students is a better use of resources. Since academic deficits can compound throughout school years, it only makes sense addressing academic deficiencies with secondary students may require a different approach. Educators may need to rethink the way intervention is delivered in secondary schools (p. 26).

Research reported students with literacy difficulties in secondary schools will most likely experience difficulties after high school. While the most at-risk students will receive Tier 2 and Tier 3 intervention supports, there are students in Tier 1 struggling to keep pace with rigor of coursework. Cockroft and Atkinson (2017) echoed McCoy (2013) that students with literacy difficulties may earn less income and fall into poverty, and at least half of teenage crime offenders struggle with literacy. Perhaps most importantly, researchers found, ‘literacy has a significant relationship with a person’s happiness and success’ (Dugdale & Clark, 2008 cited in Cockroft & Atkinson, 2017, p. 42).

Administrator and Teacher Perspectives

Sansoti (2010) cited the work of Fullan (2007) that pointed out in spite of legislative support, “most educational change efforts result in limited implementation success because school leaders are not knowledgeable about nor fully supportive of the change” (p. 287). RTI

success depends upon the buy-in of school leaders (Sansoti, 2010). A survey of more than 1,000 principals indicated the school leaders “perceived RTI to be important but difficult to put into practice within the high school setting” (Sansoti, 2010, p. 292). The survey also found barriers to RTI secondary implementation included the lack of content specific classroom materials and progress monitoring tools (p. 292). In other words, much of what makes RTI accessible and doable in elementary schools is difficult to manage in middle and secondary schools, with secondary schools being the most problematic. High schools are tasked with preparing students for the work force and college. With an increasingly high-tech work force and competition for acceptance into the best universities, high schools must prepare students to be critical and creative thinkers. This requires access to increasingly more complex text that requires higher order thinking and “sophisticated reading strategies” (Brozo, 2010, p. 279). Brozo (2010) has pointed out the progress monitoring tools and strategies used in RTI only skim the surface of accessing the reading ability of secondary students due to procedures used were established for primary and elementary grades (p. 279).

Research found addressing deficiencies in adolescents requires a different approach than those used to address literacy deficiencies in younger students. For example, Wendt (2013) discussed the importance of building fluency and pointed to studies that found students thought to be literate actually lacked fluency. While these students were able to navigate the early grades, the lack of fluency ability became a problem in high school and postsecondary (Pitcher, Martinez, Dicembre, Fewster, & McCormick, 2010; Wexler, Vaughn, & Roberts, 2010 cited in Wendt, 2013, p. 42). Research shows that fluency is a key ingredient in literacy instruction if students are to be successful in academic and work place settings. Again, Wendt (2013, p. 42) cited the research of Fang and Schleppegrel (2010) that pointed out successful techniques for

building fluency in younger children; however, “empirical evidence is lacking for the effectiveness of many of these techniques in the secondary classrooms” (Wendt, 2010, p. 42). Feifer (2008) pointed out education and science must work in tandem if students are to master the complexities involved in literacy achievement. For example, Feifer (2008) and Wendt (2013) reported barriers to RTI exist in secondary schools because educators are not familiar with the cognitive aspects needed for students to acquire complex literacy skills, and the time constraints in secondary schools do not lend themselves to allowing educators time to better understand these complex cognitive and neurobiological systems; rather, teachers are forced to devote more time on content literacy rather than literacy strategies and the techniques that will fire the transmitters in the brain to move students toward a higher level of mastery (Feifer, 2008, p.815; Wendt, 2013, pp. 46-47).

Cockroft and Atkinson (2017) reported another barrier to ELA RTI success is the lack of training secondary teachers receive for addressing literacy deficits. Most secondary teachers were trained to teach content rather than reading skills. The problem is compounded when struggling adolescents lack literacy motivation and enjoyment (Cockroft & Atkinson, 2017, p. 43; Harmon, Wood, Smith, Zakaria, Ramadan, & Sykes, 2016, p. 965). Researchers looked at attitudes and behaviors toward reading in a study in the UK of 30,000 students ranging in ages 8-16. It was determined a third of students, ages 14-16, reported reading enjoyment compared to half of those in ages 11-14, and both age groups reported reading less out of school than students in the 7-11 age group (Cockroft & Atkinson, 2017, p. 43). In 2015 the U.S. Department of Education noted the need to develop a reading passion in children; however, Cockroft and Atkinson asserted “advice on how to enable this appears limited to early intervention in primary school, overlooking the needs of the adolescent population” (p. 44).

Researchers have asserted transformational leadership is needed to implement RTI components with fidelity. Maier, Pate, Gibson, Hilgert, Hull, and Campbell (2016) identified several attributes of transformational leadership best suited for RTI success, and they are: (1) *Idealized Influence Attribute* is a characteristic relating to a leader's ability to influence others due to personal charisma. (2) *Idealized Influence Behavior* relates to one's influence on others due to personal values and beliefs. (3) *Inspirational Motivation* connects to one's ability to gain respect from others. (4) *Intellectual Stimulation* connects to a leader's ability to inspire creative thinking, and (5) *Individualized Consideration* occurs when a leader possesses the ability to adapt one's approach to different individuals (p. 104). Why is this important? It is important to understand the kind of leadership needed to implement a mandated program like RTI in secondary schools. RTI presents a daunting challenge to secondary school leaders, and quality professional development focusing on creative approaches and out-of-the box thinking of RTI implementation is paramount if secondary schools are to establish quality RTI programs.

Current Research: ELA RTI Successes

Elementary Schools

While Elementary schools have perhaps more experience with RTI implementation, research shows that implementation has not necessarily been any easier in elementary schools. Robinson, Bursuck, and Sinclair (2013) found in a study of two rural elementary schools that RTI implementation was better supported when teachers received staff development throughout the school year (p. 5). In addition, collaboration between general and special education also seemed to improve. Collaboration between the school and families also improved. Finding time within the school schedule to collaborate as a team is difficult; however, when it is feasible, the results seem to be worth the extra effort (p.5). RTI has improved student outcomes in

elementary schools (Barry, 2016, p. 22). The National Reading Panel (2000, cited in King & Lemons, 2014, p. 194) provided documented evidence early reading intervention in elementary schools is effective. In addition, RTI in elementary schools seems to firmly address the needs of struggling readers (p. 195). Research shows that an important piece of RTI is to identify students early with learning disabilities and to provide the added supports and interventions necessary for academic achievement. In a study of 15 low-income Head Start classrooms, researchers found a “significant improvement in the RTI treatment group in all areas of language skills” (Bineham, et al., 2014, p. 234). Additional research indicates RTI is working to decrease the number of students labeled LD, thereby providing more accurate referrals for special education services (Marston, Muskens, Lau, & Canter, 2003; Samuels, 2010; Torgesen, 2009 cited in Bineham et al., 2014, p. 233).

Middle Schools

A barrier to effective ELA RTI implementation in middle school is the lack of available research. The middle school years are crucial to student success in high school and postsecondary. For students entering middle school there is less of a focus on acquiring basic skills. The middle school curriculum is more demanding and students must have a solid foundation in basic skills to be successful. Researchers asserted the middle school grades provide an opportunity for RTI to be a driving force in student achievement. In fact, the National Middle School Association (2010, cited in Johnson & Smith, 2011) argued the RTI framework possesses qualities found in schools exhibiting achievement success for adolescents (p. 25). Tier 1 instruction that provides “differentiation, universal design, and embedded literacy strategies across content areas” (Johnson & Smith, 2011, p. 25) is instruction rooted in research-based strategies proven to improve student achievement (p. 25).

All is not lost for middle school RTI programs. For districts and schools willing to do the hard work of implementing a quality program, previous studies have shown that the results can be encouraging. In a case study of a Colorado middle school, educators worked for six years to implement a quality RTI program. The major focus of the work began with an examination of school data and improving instruction in Tier 1. It can be argued effective implementation strategies in Tier 1 provided a foundation for improved Tier 2 instruction and implementation. In addition, better collaboration between the school and its feeder elementary schools allowed the middle school to focus on instructional strategies to address student needs in academic and non-academic areas. Recognized as a high performing school, educators were able to adapt to changing demographics and student needs (Johnson & Smith, pp. 28-29).

In another study at an urban middle school, researchers found associated specific Tier 2 strategies yielded benefits for at-risk students. For example, researchers asserted the use of the RTI framework for intensive instruction to improve comprehension was promising. While students remained low performing, data indicated comprehension abilities had not stagnated. In other words, students remained cognitively capable of improving comprehension. Researchers asserted students in middle schools with high poverty conditions also experienced greater teacher turnover, and, as a result, less experienced teachers often work with at-risk students. Supports provided in RTI Tier 2 in this particular study yielded no significant difference between beginning teachers and veteran teachers (Fagella-Luby & Wardwell, 2011, p. 46); however, it is important to note these beginning teachers were provided with support that most likely kept students from falling further behind.

Researchers emphasized the importance of leadership in RTI implementation, and leadership entailed the ability to garner staff support. In a study of 40 schools researchers found

the majority of leaders preferred to put greater emphasis in Tier 1 supports. Most believed if general instruction could be improved in Tier 1 then students across all grade levels would benefit (Prewett, et al., 2012, pp. 141, 146).

Secondary Schools

Research on the success of ELA RTI implementation in secondary schools is significantly more difficult than ELA RTI implementation in elementary and middle schools, and research on its success is minimal. Researchers asserted there is a need for more intense research on content area instructional practices and remedial instructional practices (Fuchs, L.S., Fuchs, D., & Steckler, 2010, cited in Vaughn & Fletcher, 2012, p. 253). A study of two Minnesota secondary schools indicated RTI can be successful at the high school level when implemented with a “tiered model of intervention” (Sansosti, Noltemeyer, and Goss, 2010, p. 287); however, researchers asserted successful RTI implementation requires addressing barriers to its success. One of those barriers is scheduling. Sansosti, Noltemeyer, and Goss (2010) argued scheduling adjustments might need to be implemented if RTI success is to be sustained. In addition, researchers found there is a great need for interventions that provide evidence of student achievement at the secondary level (pp. 287, 291). Perhaps the first place to look is to review past research to discern what has worked before and then adapt those strategies to an educational environment that has become more advanced and complex. For example, Harmon, et al., (2016) cited the research of Langer (2001) as a blueprint for what works with struggling adolescent readers such as assisting students in making connections between real life and learning improves student success. A more intense focus on higher level thinking skills, providing instruction on specific learning strategies, and incorporating student interaction during classroom instruction

are areas that yielded student success. The challenge for today's classrooms is to incorporate these strategies and adapt them to more complex 21st century learning environment (p. 967).

Finally, researchers emphasized successful RTI implementations hinge on full support by building leaders. Supportive leadership is a common theme found throughout the RTI literature. Marzano, Walters and McNulty (2004; cited in Sansosti, Noltemeyer, and Goss (2010) asserted the importance of principal knowledge of current curriculum and instructional processes. In addition, educational leaders must also act as agents of change if RTI implementation is to be successfully implemented at the secondary level (p. 288).

Current Research: ELA RTI Issues

Administrator and Teacher Perspectives

From administrator and teacher perspectives, frustration with RTI centers on several concerns. Dunn and Mabry (2011) reported in a study of two school districts a number of frustrations with RTI implementation. Lack of with a lack of resources, time, and a number of educator frustrations were barriers to the successful implementation of RTI; however, at least some educators reported that perhaps successful implementation of RTI had more to do with educator attitudes than actual resources (pp. 49, 51).

Research pointed to the importance of professional development for successful RTI implementation. Castillo, March, Tan, Stockslager, Brundage, McCullough, and Sabnis (2016) asserted the design of professional development is important. The research reported that several variables must be considered when rolling out any new program. Direct training and job-embedded training that includes consistent coaching are models that should be considered (Castillo, et al., 2016, pp. 893-895). Professional development planning must also address staff

changes. New teachers may need a different approach and more intensive coaching in the first year of teaching regarding RTI implementation and Tier 1 instruction.

Vaughn and Fletcher (2012) stressed there are significant differences in Tier I secondary instruction when compared to Tier I elementary instruction (p. 45). For example, one significant difference is elementary teacher beliefs regarding reading instruction. Vaughn and Fletcher (2012) asserted, “Elementary teachers are confident that teaching reading is their responsibility and for many in the early elementary grades their most important responsibility” (p. 45). The research reported vocabulary and comprehension are intertwined with content instruction; however, secondary teachers do not view these areas as a primary responsibility. Covering content is the secondary teacher’s primary responsibility. Elementary teachers often have a wealth of resources addressing specific reading strategies. On the other hand, there are few similar resources available for secondary teachers since the resources are simply not developed (p. 45).

Robinson, Bursuck, and Sinclair (2013) cited Clarke and Wildy (2011) in the research of RTI implementation in rural areas. Effective implementation requires quality staff development. In some rural areas, this may be difficult to accomplish due to funding and hard-to-travel areas (p. 1). Staff development should also spend a great deal of effort in facilitating quality data reading and data management training that make data actionable in the classroom. While educators are involved in collecting and reviewing data, they may not always understand what to do with the data (Hall and Mahoney, 2013, p. 275).

Secondary Schools

Bartholomew and De Jong (2017) identified several issues with RTI in secondary schools. For example, secondary principals reported too little experience with RTI to feel

comfortable with its implementation. Principals reported a lack of interventions for Tier 2 and Tier 3 students (pp. 268-269). This seems to be a common theme in the literature. Lack of training and resources on the secondary level have made RTI implementation more difficult to achieve. The research asserted struggling high school students may require different methods to address complicated reading deficiencies (Fuchs, Fuchs, & Compton, 2010, p. 25-26; Preston, Wood & Stecker, 2016, p. 179; Faull, 2007, p. 166). Ness (2008) asserted comprehension is a significant challenge for students in grades 4-12 and cited The National Reading Panel's (2000) eight strategies educators can use to improve comprehension. Among these are comprehension monitoring, a strategy that encourages students to be aware of concerns and understanding of the text. Another strategy includes cooperative learning. Working with peers can also improve one's learning and is also practice for real world application. Peer work also links to Vygotsky's ZPD where a student works with a more capable peer as he or she receives scaffolding and monitoring until the student performs the task alone (Ness, 2008, p. 80; Armstrong, 2015, 135; Harmon, et al., 2016, p. 966). In addition, research indicated struggling adolescent readers need reading comprehension instruction. A study of successful reading programs in secondary schools emphasized several key attributes such as emphasis on high level thinking, assisting students to make connections between learning and real life, practicing assessments as part of the curriculum, providing instruction on specific strategies, and working to incorporate social interactions among students during instruction (Harmon, et al., 2016, p. 967).

Vaughn and Fletcher (2012) asserted Tier 1 RTI implementation is more challenging in secondary schools when compared to elementary schools. The components that make up a secondary school day inherently make RTI more challenging. Providing research-based strategies is daunting in English language arts classes, as well as all content subject areas simply

because there is a lack of research in secondary areas. Researchers studying reading and adolescents recommended schools provide time in the day for students to read and provide training in content area reading to content area teachers. If Tier 1 secondary instruction is to improve, research-based training and strategies must be provided (pp. 44-45; Harmon, et al., 2016, p. 966).

Experiences of Secondary Students Moving out of ELA RTI

Preston, Wood, and Stecker asserted there are many unanswered questions regarding students who remain in Tier 2 for an extended time. For secondary schools, moving students out of Tier 2 back into Tier 1 requires a great deal of observation and work to ensure students remain on track in Tier 1. Some researchers believe struggling secondary students may not need Tier 2 at all. In fact, Preston, et al., (2016, p. 179) have cited other researchers (Compton, et al., 2012; Fuchs et al., 2010; Vaughn et al., 2010) have pointed out that perhaps truly struggling secondary students should receive Tier 3 intense instruction and skip Tier 2 altogether. Given the fast-paced world of secondary schools and the increased rigor of coursework, this could be a solution that would provide entering freshmen with a pathway for accelerating learning and improving achievement. Rethinking the way classroom teachers provide instruction in English language arts may hold the key to increasing student achievement and closing literacy gaps. One educator argued the text discussed the cognitive aspect of literacy, not pedagogy, and this has strengthened her understanding of the way students develop as readers and writers (Preston, et al., 2016, p. 179; Faull, 2007, p. 166).

Adolescence can be a trying time for a young person, and educators are tasked with the job of guiding students through a maze of decisions. In addition, students participate in rigorous studies and community or extra-curricular events while navigating a host of personal, behavioral,

and biological changes. The challenge to educators is to keep students engaged and prepared to enter a new world following 12 years of growth from a child to a young adult. Ness (2008) asserted adolescents are facing a “literacy crisis” (p.6); however, other researchers have written that several schools in the U.S. are doing something about this problem. For example, Virginia created a “systemic Literacy project” (Snow, Sanger, Childers, Pankonin, & Wright, 2013, p. 468). Using research-based interventions, providing better staff development, developing greater collaboration between special education and general education departments, and recognizing literacy instruction is a building wide responsibility are ways secondary schools can do a better job of ensuring all adolescents are equipped to enter work force or postsecondary areas (Bartholomew & De Jong, 2017, p. 176; Pyle & Vaughn, 2010, p. 282; Snow, et al., 2013, p. 468).

Secondary Perspectives

The Uniqueness of Adolescents

Brozo (2010) asserted at some point all adolescents struggle with more complex text and rigorous academic expectations. Even seemingly successful students may struggle to comprehend the difficult and challenging text found in content subject areas (p. 279). Struggling adolescent readers may lack advanced comprehension strategies, and basic comprehension strategies no longer serve students who must learn to engage with more complex text (Harmon, et al., 2016, p. 965). In addition, secondary students inhabit a more complex world than previous generations. New technologies require students to ‘construct and disseminate information’ (Pilgrim & Martinez, 2013, p. 61). Researchers named the vast array of tools encompassing technology, the *New Literacy* (Pilgrim & Martinex, 2013, p. 63). Secondary students experience “multimodal texts, comprising written text, visual images, graphic elements, hyperlinks, video

clips, audio clips, and other modes of representation, require different strategies for navigating and comprehension” (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006 cited in Serafini, 2012, p. 27). The cost associated with the failure of equipping students with skills needed to navigate these types of literacy tools is significant. Serafini explained to navigate these new technologies, students are moving from the role of code-breaker to an understanding of the design and visual elements found within these different modes of texts. In addition, navigating between the print and digital worlds requires a different type of literacy. For this reason, Serafini (2012) asserted students must acquire the “dual identity” (p. 30) of a “*reader-viewer*” (p. 30). Students are navigating two worlds that require different sets of cognitive skills.

Another factor affecting adolescent learning is the amount of content area rigor students encounter. Again, Ness (2008) cited the importance of Vygotsky’s (1978) work in sociocultural theory when stressing that it matters how instruction is delivered to students. Ness (2008) asserted, “The sociocultural perspective places particular importance on how instruction is delivered, the social interactions that frame the instruction, and the focus of instruction (p. 81). The research also found it is important for content area teachers to provide instruction reflecting reading strategies that are effective for students in the classroom (Ness, 2008, p. 84).

Student Successes and Parent Perspectives

Another barrier to ELA RTI success is lack of parental involvement in adolescent education. In fact, there is little research detailing the effect of parental involvement in ELA RTI with adolescents; however, Hornby and Lafaele (2010) cited Eccles and Horold (1993) in asserting that parents of children with learning disabilities are more likely to be active in parent involvement. Hornby and Lafaele (2011) pointed out the belief that parental involvement is an important aspect of education has only been part of the landscape of education for around 40

years (p. 37). Educators understand parents involved in their children's education make a difference in their children's achievement. The research reported (Hornby & Lafaele, 2010) that as students become older, parental involvement dips (p. 42). Again, Hornby and Lafaele (2011) stressed, "...adolescents are still considered to desire and benefit from their parents being involved in other ways, such as helping them with homework and making subject choices" (p. 43). In fact, in a study of 14-year-old children throughout the country researchers found nearly three quarters of these teenagers wanted parental involvement in their education. The researchers stressed educators make a mistake in assuming adolescents do not want parents involved (Deslandes & Clouter, 2002, Edwards & Alldred, 2000 cited in Hornby & Lafaele, 2011, p. 43).

Researchers (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011) found four beliefs parents may adhere to in regard to involvement in their children's education. Some parents believe they only need to ensure their children get to school. Once children are left at the schoolhouse door, it is up to the adults in the building to educate. Parents adhering to this belief are less likely to be involved in other educational activities involving their children. The second belief system occurs when parents believe they have the ability to ensure their children are successful in school, and these are the parents who are more involved in their children's education. They are more likely to participate in school activities and learning extends outside of school and in to the home. The third belief encompasses parental views about their children's intelligence and ability to learn. Parents who fall into this particular category will believe their children's ability level is pre-determined and becoming involved in school activities or encouraging their children to extend their learning at home will yield little results. The final belief involving parent involvement is the way children are brought up at home impacts student learning. These parents will most likely welcome

parental involvement initiatives and be partners with the school system in their children's learning (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011, p. 39-40).

Rethinking ELA RTI Implementation Model

Vaughn and Fletcher (2012) reasoned by fourth grade preventing reading deficiencies is no longer applicable; therefore, ELA RTI Tier 2's elementary focus on prevention in secondary schools may not work; however, interventions provided in Tier 2 that are geared specifically for adolescent needs show promise. In a study of nearly 1,000 struggling readers in seven middle schools, researchers examined specific strategies to address reading deficits with at-risk students. In Tier 2, researchers planned added instruction for one 50-minute class period per day for one school year. The researchers organized instruction into three phases. Phase 1 consisted of 7 to 8 weeks of 25 advanced instructional lessons on decoding multisyllabic words. Scaffolding and teacher support in phase 1 reflect Vygotsky's zone of proximal development framework that emphasizes meeting students where they are and providing scaffolding and supports to raise student achievement. Improving reading fluency was also a focus during this phase. Again, scaffolding was provided in the form of partner readings and teacher modeling. Daily vocabulary and comprehension instruction were taught every day. Phase II took place during 17-18 weeks. Strategies taught during this phase included word study. Fluency and comprehension were taught in connection with class discussion and writing, and, it is important to emphasize, these skills were not taught in isolation. In addition, advanced comprehension strategies were implemented. In Phase III, instructors continued with comprehension and vocabulary instruction for nearly 8-10 weeks; however, students were given more time to practice independently the strategies learned in prior weeks of instruction. Students receiving high quality Tier 1 instruction

and Tier 2 instruction experienced “gains in decoding, reading fluency and comprehension” (Vaughn & Fletcher, 2012, p. 249).

Harmon, et al., (2016) identified three areas secondary schools can focus on improving. In the first area, schools should focus on providing a curriculum for struggling readers that meets the needs of students and is consistent and standard across grade bands and teachers. The curriculum must address the complex content area literacy needs of students. The second area involves the area of formative assessments. Teachers may need to perform more formative assessments and checks with struggling adolescent readers to assess student progress (pp. 987-988). In a study of reading teachers in five high schools, researchers reported, “In many cases, there were disconnects between what the teacher and student understood about reading” (p. 988). Finally, teachers in required reading classes must engage students and provide learning experiences that are comparable to the electives students prefer, while providing literacy skills that will improve students’ overall educational experience (pp. 989-990).

While the focus of RTI Tier 1 can be found in the English language arts classroom, research (Ness, 2008) supported the need for secondary content area teachers to provide support to students with reading comprehension strategies relating to the teacher’s content (p. 85). Researchers asserted (Brozo, 2010; Hart & Stebick, 2016; Pilgrim & Martinez, 2013) Tier 1 is the most valuable piece of the RTI plan for secondary schools and suggested teachers must first understand that all students need added instruction and classroom modeling of reading comprehensions strategies. Tier 1 must be implemented well if secondary schools are to increase literacy achievement. This requires a paradigm shift in the way content area teachers deliver instruction, and literacy instruction must be part of daily routines. If secondary content area teachers are to make this shift, supports must be provided and put into place for their respective

content area. This shift can only be successful if teachers have a greater understanding of the cognitive and neurological processes needed to break down complex text. In addition, teachers must also be equipped with strategies to assist students to navigate the new tools that make up the *New Literacy*. These strategies should include a blueprint students can follow to improve their understanding of complex texts (Brozo, 2010, 280; Hart & Stebick, 2016, pp. 43-44; Pilgrim & Martinez, 2013, p. 61).

Harmon, et al., (2016) emphasized the research supports schools with successful literacy programs send the message to students that literacy is important (p.967). The research supports the need to develop programs that focus on adolescent literacy; however, if these programs are to be successful, they must focus on research-based instructional practices appropriate for adolescent learners (p. 964-965).

Gaps in the Literature: ELA RTI in Secondary Schools

ELA RTI and Adolescents

A significant barrier to ELA RTI implementation is the availability of research available regarding ELA RTI and adolescents. Harmon, et al. (2016) asserted in a study of 21 secondary teachers and their methods for addressing struggling readers, there was a lack of research (Harmon, Hedrick, Wood, & Vintinner, 2011 cited in Harmon, et al. 2016, p. 990). Perhaps another reason why the research is limited is due to principals' perceptions of RTI and the role it plays in their respective buildings. In a study of U.S. secondary school principals, researchers reported principals recognized the importance of RTI; however, many viewed RTI as difficult to implement within a high school day (Sansosti, et al., 2010, pp. 288, 291). For example, principals acknowledged RTI as an important component to addressing the needs of struggling adolescents but cited the unavailability of time as a barrier to its successful implementation. The

research (Sansosti, et al., 2010) found major factors in successful RTI implementation included structural and scheduling (p. 292). Finally, principals reported teachers have little time to put interventions in place. The research supported the premise that education practitioners may need to think differently about the way schools deliver reading interventions to adolescents versus the way those interventions are delivered to elementary students.

The research pointed out (Prewett, Mellard, Deshler, Allen, Alexander, & Stern, 2010) adolescent development is different from that of primary age children. In fact, it may be necessary to direct intensive reading interventions for adolescents beginning in middle school and continuing throughout high school to address reading deficiencies, and this may require a building wide effort with a focus on content area vocabulary and comprehension. In a study of 40 middle schools, researchers found evidence failed to support the RTI framework as a prevention strategy for struggling content area readers (Prewett, et al., 2012, p. 139). Still and Flynt (2012) cited the research of Hook and Jones (2005), Rasinski et al. (2005), that examined the relationship between fluency and comprehension. While, research confirmed fluency and comprehension correlate; however, there are some questions as to how much the two skills correlate. Again, Still and Flynt (2012) cited another study in California by Applegate et al. (2009) conducted with 171 students in grades 2 through 10 that surmised nearly one third of students believed to be strong readers struggled with comprehension in their respective grade levels (p. 156).

Another barrier to ELA RTI success noted in the research is adolescents approach reading and learning differently than elementary students. Research emphasized good readers understand how to break down explicit and implicit meaning from text. Modeling comprehension strategies include helping students to develop the ability to use sensory images

when reading, and becoming aware of one's images improves student thinking, thus improving comprehension (Hart & Stebick, 2016, pp. 43-44). Modeling strategies that evoke sensory images for students is one way to scaffold student learning in this area. Secondary teachers often struggle to engage struggling adolescent readers. The research supported a connection between reading fluency and motivation. Paige (2011) cited decades of research supporting the link between student motivation and reading achievement (Baker & Wigfield, 1999; Gottfried, 1990; Wigfield & Guthrie, 1997; Paris, Carpenter, Paris & Hamilton, 2005, cited in Paige, 2011, p. 415). Again, the research made clear the need for quality staff development and training of content area teachers in instructional strategies that address student motivation. Paige (2011) echoed Vygotsky's zone of proximal development theory that called for instruction to meet students at their level and provide scaffolding that ultimately raises achievement (2011, p. 419; Miller, 2009 cited in Stover, O'Rear, Morris, 2015, p. 60). In this respect, RTI is its own barrier to success.

Fletcher and Nicholas (2016) reported struggling adolescents are often uncomfortable with reading aloud activities; however, classrooms that provide a safe and positive learning environment are more likely to witness student motivation and participation (p. 491). In order for fluency and comprehension to improve, student motivation must be addressed. The three Tiers of the framework simply may not work for middle and high school environments, and the general lack of knowledge about RTI and its purpose, including successes, general among administrators and staff is itself, a hindrance to effective RTI implementation that will address the needs of adolescents (Pyle & Vaughn, 2012, p. 273; Bartholomew & DeJong, 2017, p. 274).

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to identify the barriers to secondary RTI (Response to Intervention) success in the ELA (English language arts) classroom and find ways secondary educators can improve ELA RTI services. “It is difficult to dispute that literacy is the foundation for learning. The ability to read, write, speak, listen, view, and visually represent ideas permeates every facet of learning regardless of age or content and therefore has a strategic place in school classrooms” (Harmon, Wood, Zakaria, Ramadan, and Sykes, 2016, p. 962). Twenty-first century students require literacy skills vastly different from those needed in the 20th century. Students struggling with literacy deficits in ninth grade fall further behind in secondary school without appropriate interventions.

When Congress reauthorized the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA), Response to Intervention (RTI) became part of the public schools. RTI was fully implemented in 2006, and its purpose was to provide high- quality instruction to all students and reduce the number of special education referrals. RTI’s focus was on math and literacy skills, but for purposes of this study the focus was on literacy skills, or English Language Arts (ELA)

Research Questions

The qualitative study asked the following research questions:

1. How do educator perceptions and attitudes toward RTI implementation affect the success of ELA RTI?

2. How do adolescents approach reading and learning in secondary schools?
3. What strategies do successful educators use in ELA RTI?
4. What are the barriers to implementing a successful ELA RTI program in secondary schools?

Qualitative Research

A qualitative research study was utilized to gain a better perspective of the barriers affecting ELA RTI success in secondary schools. Surveys, classroom observations, interviews, and student artifacts were used in this study. Qualitative research provided the opportunity to analyze data through the lens of “cultural observations” (Saldaña, 2011, p. 4). The results presented in qualitative research offer researchers an opportunity to use data to create meaning and garner fresh insights into a complex issue (Saldaña, 2011, p. 4).

Surveys provide participants a chance to answer questions freely, while also choosing whether or not to be a volunteer participant. Classroom observations provide one way to gain insight into Tier 1 instruction. How do adolescents approach reading and learning in secondary schools? Student artifacts and classroom observations provide data that contributed to answering this question. Teachers in Tier 1 present instruction to students on a variety of ability levels. In particular, students moving from Tier 2 to Tier 1 interventions should continue to receive progress monitoring and scaffolding as they encounter complex text. If ELA RTI is to be successful, scaffolding and support must be provided for students struggling with complex text. Participant interviews also provide insight into administrator and teacher perspectives relating to ELA RTI.

Research Approach

The type of research used in this qualitative study is grounded theory. The use of multiple sets of data and the social perspective that is part of grounded theory provided a good fit for this study. Grounded theory looks at the data to present a theory

Research Setting and Participants

Research data were gathered in three high schools in a rural school district in East Tennessee. The school district serves nearly 5,600 students, including nearly 2,000 secondary students. More than 55% of the secondary students served receive free and reduced meals. Together, the three high schools offer five dual enrollment courses, eight statewide dual credit courses, and three dual credit courses. Two of the dual credit courses lead to an industry certification. One high school was chosen to participate in a postsecondary advising program that is funded by the state.

Data Collection Procedures

The focus of this qualitative research study centered on barriers to ELA (English Language Arts) RTI (Response to Intervention) in secondary schools. Data collection procedures included a survey, classroom observations, interviews, and artifacts. Data was gathered from three high schools in a rural county of East Tennessee. Classroom teachers participating in the interview process were volunteers. An anonymous survey was electronically emailed to all English teachers. Journaling was used to record survey responses. Classroom observations, interviews, and student artifacts were also used in data collection procedures. Field notes were used in classroom observations and student artifacts. Interviews were recorded; however, the researcher took field notes throughout the interview process to capture accuracy.

The researcher observed classrooms of Tier 1 and Tier 2 instruction. Data from field notes was coded using open coding, axial coding, and selective coding.

Data Analysis

Data analysis procedures included journaling of the survey. The survey provided participants an opportunity to freely answer questions and to volunteer for the study. Open coding, axial coding, and selective coding were used to put all of the data pieces together that provided a narrative for barriers to ELA RTI in secondary schools. Open coding, axial coding, and selective coding are rooted in grounded theory. The use of grounded theory to connect to Vygotsky's sociocultural theory and zone of proximal development (ZPD) was a good fit since these theories share several commonalities. First, the coding used in grounded theory invites researchers to look for common denominators and to connect those to themes that are present in the data. Vygotsky's sociocultural theory and ZPD also encourage educators to observe and pay attention to common themes surrounding student learning in order to adjust instruction. Sociocultural theory looks at the different facets that influence learning. In grounded theory facets become data points that can be coded to find commonalities. Vygotsky's ZPD underscores the need for educators to meet students at their level of attainment. Then, through scaffolding and supports, teachers are able to bring students to a higher place of achievement. This is done through building relationships and recognizing specific areas of student learning and achievement, and it requires the teacher to collect a variety of data or student work that can be used to inform instruction. Similarly, grounded theory allows for a variety of data that can be used to inform the researcher about a specific theory. Grounded theory and Vygotsky's social constructive theory and ZPD rely on the ability of users to connect the dots.

For this study, journaling was used to code survey responses. Then, interviews were recorded and open coding was used on field notes and recordings. Open coding provided a means to capture particular categories or ideas from the data. Then, open coding moved to axial coding to further define those ideas and categories. Classroom observations and student artifacts provided another opportunity to record field notes. Open coding was also used with these responses, and the data provided a transition into axial coding. Open coding procedures provided specific categories for the data collection, while axial coding provided a window into those categories and highlighted themes present in the data. As research parameters were refined, selective coding was used to connect the data. The decisions for coding reflected the language and descriptions of the conceptual frameworks found in the literature. Open coding, axial coding, and selective coding are interconnected with the data. An audit trail of the data established dependability of the documents used in the study.

Trustworthiness techniques are reflected through peer debriefing, triangulation, and member checks. Several methods provided checks on the data and added to the credibility and transferability of the study. Triangulation, providing three forms of data for each research question, was used to provide conformability and credibility. In addition, peer debriefing of volunteer participants added to this process and brought another layer of credibility. Interpretation of data was also shared with members. These member checks provided additional credibility to the study. Finally, sufficiently thick descriptions of interviews, observations, and student artifacts also added to the study's credibility and transferability.

Limitations

Limitations to the data are the researcher was the principal investigator. Other limitations include the study was conducted in a rural Tennessee district. Results may differ if the same study were conducted in a larger district and an urban setting.

Delimitation

The delimitation of the study was the use of one district and three high schools to keep the research manageable.

Ethical Considerations

The director of schools provided permission to conduct research in the school district, and each high school principal provided permission to conduct research in his or her respective schools. The names of participants, district, and high schools were not shared. The researcher secured permission from Carson Newman University's IRB prior to conducting any research. Participants were not provided incentives for participating in the research. All research findings, including surveys, interviews, observation notes, and data analysis were saved on a password protected computer and will be kept in a locked file for the required specified number of years.

Summary

Given the complexity of adolescent reading deficiencies, secondary schools will need to approach RTI in the ELA classroom differently than their elementary counterparts. The research supported skills needed to master beginning literacy skills in the primary grades are different than those needed for the adolescent learner (Feifer, 2008, 815; Wendt, 2010, p. 42). More research is needed to address the challenges of RTI implementation in secondary schools and to provide research-based strategies for addressing the unique needs of struggling adolescent readers.

Chapter 4

ANALYSIS OF DATA

This qualitative research study examined barriers to RTI (Response to Intervention) ELA (English Language Arts) success in secondary schools. The study was rooted in grounded theory research and Vygotsky's zone of proximal development. Data were collected from an initial survey, interviews with five high school teachers and the district RTI Coordinator, classroom observations, and student/teacher artifacts. A link to the survey was emailed to 22 ELA teachers in the district. This number represents teachers from all three high schools located in the district. Respondents were able to complete the survey at their convenience, and the survey remained open for approximately four weeks. Weekly reminders requesting teacher participation were sent to each of the 22 ELA teachers. Fourteen teachers, representing the three high schools, responded to the survey. This represents 63% of high school English teachers in the school district. In analyzing the collected data, a better understanding of the barriers secondary schools must overcome to ELA RTI programs that address student achievement has emerged. This qualitative study utilized the grounded theory approach; therefore, the use of classroom artifacts, observations, and one-on-one interviews with high school teachers and the RTI coordinator from three high schools represent the data that formed the researcher's analysis. Artifacts consisted of informational articles chosen by teachers, teacher-made materials, and student work. Classroom observations were varied and included ELA classes from grade 9-12. Semi-structured interview questions focused on participant knowledge of RTI, strategies used to engage students in literary work, and formative assessment and how it informed instruction to the types of literacy activities that scaffold learning for students.

Description of Participants

The six participants for this study work in a rural East TN public school district that serves over 5,000 students. Nearly 2200 of these students are enrolled in the district's three high schools. The researcher emailed a survey to all ELA (English Language Arts) teachers that explained the research study and requested a response if they were willing to participate in the study. Fourteen teachers responded and indicated their interest to participate. The researcher used her knowledge of ELA and chose respondents to represent all high school grade levels, and a variety of teaching styles.

Teachers 1, 2 and 4 are employed at School 1. With a population of nearly 1,000 students, School 1 is the largest school in the district. There are 10 English teachers in this school, an ELA RTI Tier 2 teacher, and two school counselors. The administration consists of one principal and three assistant principals. One of the assistant principals is also the administrator for the Freshman Academy and works closely with ninth grade ELA PLC's. School 1 was formed when two community schools merged to become one high school. The school's student population is made up of children and grandchildren from the two community schools; however, demographic changes in the community also include a transient population. Often students move between the high schools and neighboring district schools.

Teachers 3 and 5 are employed at School 2. School 2 is the second largest high school in the district and has a student population of approximately 650 students. While School 2 is part of a rural school district, its population and proximity to major highway outlets is more characteristic of an urban setting. School 2 experiences the largest transient population of the two schools. This characteristic is one of the many changes the high school and its town have experienced during the last twenty years. The high school has five English teachers and one

ELA RTI Tier 2 teacher. An English teacher and special education teacher work with the school's inclusion English classes. The school currently has two school counselors, a principal, and two assistant principals. School 2 also has a Freshman Academy, and an assistant principal is responsible for its management.

School 3, with a student population of approximately 450 students, is the smallest high school in the district. Several of the school's teachers are former high school students. School 3 has four full time English teachers, one full time English teacher who teaches a combination of English and other subjects, one ELA RTI teacher, a principal, and an assistant principal. The school is tied very closely with its community and enjoys community support.

Classroom observations, educator interviews, and teacher/student artifacts provided data for analysis. Six classroom observations were conducted in a variety of grade levels and secondary settings. Three observations were conducted at the largest high school in the county, two were conducted at the next largest in the county, and one observation was conducted with the district RTI Coordinator in a Tier 2 ELA RTI classroom.

Research Questions

Four research questions directed the qualitative study to identify the barriers to successful ELA RTI implementation:

1. How do educator perceptions and attitudes toward RTI implementation affect the success of ELA RTI?
2. How do adolescents approach reading and learning in secondary schools?
3. What strategies do successful educators use in ELA RTI?
4. What are the barriers to implementing a successful ELA RTI program in secondary schools?

Study participants were asked 14 questions from the interview guide (Appendix D). The guide addressed ELA RTI areas that were identified in the literature review as barriers to a successful high school ELA RTI program. Participants were asked the following questions in order to answer the first research question:

1. Describe your understanding of ELA RTI procedures in Tier 1 and Tier 2 classrooms.
2. What would you change about RTI in the ELA classroom if you could?
3. Explain how ELA RTI implementation has impacted your classroom.

Participants were asked the following questions in order to answer Research Question 2:

1. What are the shifts in the ELA content? How are students adapting, or not adapting, to the shifts?
2. How do your students break down explicit and implicit meaning from complex text?
3. Describe a best practice for motivating students in your classroom.

The following questions were asked in order to answer Research Question 3:

1. Describe a lesson you use in your classroom to address adolescent reading difficulties and its impact on student achievement.
2. What strategies do you use in your classroom to assist students in navigating the complexities of reading required for our technologies?
3. Describe the kinds of formative assessment you provide for struggling students in your classroom.
4. What are the results, and how are you building literacy through these results?
5. Tell me about a student for whom RTI worked and why it worked?

Finally, participants were asked the following questions in order to answer Research Question 4:

1. What is the greatest barrier to successful ELA RTI implementation in high schools?
2. How does RTI address reading deficiencies with adolescents?
3. Describe any training you have received to aid you in addressing literacy deficits.

Coding of the Data

Data coding began with journaling survey responses. Classroom interviews were recorded and open coding was used on field notes and recordings. With open coding particular categories or ideas were captured. Then, open coding moved to axial coding to further define those ideas and categories. Classroom observations and student artifacts were also used, and field notes recorded the data. Open coding was also used with these responses, and the data provided a transition into axial coding. Open coding procedures provided specific categories for the data collection, while axial coding provided a window into those categories and highlighted themes present in the data. Selective coding connected the data as research parameters were refined. Open coding, axial coding, and selective coding interconnected with the data (Appendix A).

Educator Perceptions

Basic ELA RTI Knowledge. Educator perceptions regarding ELA RTI Tier 1 and Tier 2 are varied. For example, of the 14 ELA teachers who responded to the survey, 64.29% agreed they were somewhat knowledgeable of ELA RTI; however, 21.43% felt they had just a basic knowledge, and 14.29% said they had a great deal of knowledge about the RTI framework. These numbers are consistent with the answers of the six educators who participated in the interviews and observation process. Participants demonstrated a vague understanding of the RTI framework, but only in connection with Tier 2 in RTI. Many reported unfamiliarity with the purpose of its framework for general education Tier 1 classrooms. In general, ELA teachers recognized the general purpose of ELA RTI Tier 2 is to address student gaps in literacy and work

to close those gaps. According to the Response to Intervention framework ELA RTI Tier 1 general education teachers use research based strategies and interventions to provide high quality instruction to all students. In ELA RTI Tier 2 data points and benchmarks are utilized to determine students needing Tier 2 interventions. It is in this tier that students receive more direct interventions in small group settings. Tier 3 is the final leg in the three-tier approach, and special education teachers provide more intensive interventions in this tier. This three-tier approach requires general and special education collaboration if students are to achieve academic growth (Erchul, 2011, p. 191; Fisher & Frey, 2011, p. 99; Isbell & Szabo, 2014, p. 11).

Recommended Changes from Participants

Staff Development. Educators identified the need for staff development that addresses ELA RTI Tier 1 instructional strategies and student motivation. Identified data indicated 57.14% of ELA teachers felt they needed staff development to explain how ELA RTI Tier 1 supports the RTI framework. Teachers also indicated they desired staff development in instructional strategies that address student motivation and increases student reading achievement. This is consistent with teacher interview responses. Teachers stated that ELA RTI Tier 1 addresses grade level instruction, while Tier 2 addresses the student's instructional ability and is data driven. Teacher 1 commented, and teacher 3 agreed, they had very little knowledge of ELA RTI Tier 1 and Tier 2 procedures. Nearly all teachers interviewed agreed staff development that leads to improved ELA RTI Tier 1 instructional strategies and a greater understanding of ELA RTI Tier 2 objectives would be helpful. Additionally, educators requested training that leads to increased student achievement in literacy and training that addresses student motivation.

Staffing and Scheduling. Increased resources are needed to provide staffing support and improve scheduling to allow for better teacher collaboration. ELA teachers expressed concern

over staffing needs in each of the high schools. For example, the RTI Coordinator pointed out that the ELA RTI teacher in School 3 is also the Math RTI teacher. In fact, the District RTI Coordinator said,

I have spoken with the principal and pointed out this is not an ideal situation. The RTI teacher is very good and works well with students. Not only does he work to increase student achievement, but he also provides homework help with students. School 3 needs two teachers to work in ELA RTI Tier 2 and Math RTI Tier 2.

Teacher 2 and 5 also raised concerns regarding adequate staffing that meets the needs of school growth and provides the support needed for students in ELA RTI Tier 2. Teacher 5 said, “One of my bigger concerns is that as the school is growing there’s a shortage of teachers to perform the duties, which puts a strain not only on them, but it’s going to put it on their program as well.”

ELA teachers 2 and 4 expressed concern with lack of time to collaborate with ELA RTI Tier 2 teachers. While elementary schools are able to arrange a common planning time for grade level teachers, this practice is not always possible in many high school settings. High school schedules are more difficult to manage since there are only a certain number of teachers who are certified to teach a specific subject, but students are required to fit a number of credits within a school year to graduate on time. This requires schools to create schedules where a grade level ELA teacher is available during every period during the school day. Professional Learning Communities (PLC’s) have created more opportunities for subject level collaboration; however, these may be held before or after school at different times of the month depending on the school’s PLC schedule. In addition to these changes, the RTI Coordinator asserted RTI Tier 2 should also focus more on life skills and high school success. While students may transition out

of Tier 2, many end up back in interventions due to lack of study skills and a basic understanding of the demands of high school.

ELA RTI Classroom Impact

Improved Student Achievement. Educators see a positive impact in the classroom when ELA RTI Tier 2 is supported and teacher collaboration occurs. Most educators agreed that teacher collaboration is beneficial to teachers and students. Teacher 2 was an ELA RTI Tier 2 teacher when School 1 piloted ELA RTI. Teacher 2 noted benefits when a teacher is able to call the RTI teacher and say, “I’m seeing some struggle with this child. How’s he doing in RTI?” Teacher 2 also noted she was not sure if all teachers were able to get updates about their students who may be in ELA RTI Tier 2. Educators agreed there is a positive impact in the classroom when ELA RTI Tier 2 is supported and teacher collaboration between Tier 1 and Tier 2 occurs. ELA RTI Tier 2 instruction improved student achievement in ELA RTI Tier 1 classrooms. Teachers expressed appreciation to Tier 2 educators for working to close literacy gaps with Tier 2 students. The district RTI Coordinator added when Tier 2 teachers focus on high school success in all subjects, struggling students are provided with a support system that works to improve achievement and holds students accountable for completing the practice and work needed to improve achievement. While ELA RTI Tier 2 students may not be on their high school instructional grade level in Tier 1, student literacy achievement is still possible.

ELA Shifts

Reading and Writing. The increased focus on informational and complex text requires resources that meet the demand of increased rigor. The shift for ELA teachers to focus on more informational text has put a strain on resources. Teacher 1 said that while she liked the emphasis on informational text, “It’s put the burden of finding good text on the teachers...because our

books are so outdated, and I spend, I'm sure other teachers, spend a lot of time looking for information that students would hopefully find interesting."

Teacher 1 and Teacher 2 reported lack of resources to address ELA shifts. The majority of resources for informational text are found through online resources or other avenues. Teachers also cited a greater emphasis on finding textual evidence and using it to support one's ideas. The ability to decode textual evidence is also needed in order to make inferences in the reading. Teachers agreed vocabulary instruction is viewed as especially important if students are to understand words associated with informational text. Teachers also discussed the increase in technology use to interact with reading. Teacher 3 said, about student reading, "If they read at all, it's on their cell phones or tablets." In two classroom observations, Teacher 3 and Teacher 5, students were reading classic literature such as Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and Hawthorne's *The Scarlett Letter*.

Another major shift in ELA state standards is the emphasis on writing that is supported with textual evidence. Teacher 3 explained:

I think one of the biggest shifts I've seen is an emphasis on writing and the ability to get thoughts on paper. I think that's a wonderful thing, and with the emphasis on the writing portion of the TN Ready test, I've seen a remarkable improvement in that. And that's even carrying over into college, you know, in the comp classes that I teach. Now again, most of the time the grammar is atrocious, with commas just literally sprinkled throughout the essay, but I do see an improvement in the cohesiveness.

Teacher 4 worried there is not enough time to teach solid writing skills, since she is responsible for teaching grade level standards and ACT standards. She spends the first part of the semester teaching grade level standards and the second part of the semester prepping students for the ACT

exam. She noted, “Kids can read the words aloud, but they cannot comprehend anything they’ve read...there’s nothing deep there. It’s all foundational.” She also emphasized students must be able to synthesize ideas in order to produce good writing.

Finally, students’ reaction to the ELA shifts manifest in a variety of ways. Teachers pointed to students’ general lack of interest in reading; however, it is unclear if this is due to ELA shifts or other factors. Teachers report the lack of outside reading results in unfamiliarity with basic literature classics and a background knowledge that can affect textual understanding. In addition, low vocabulary skills and a basic understanding of context clues strategies also make it difficult to comprehend explicit text meaning. On the other hand, participants familiar with RTI Tier 2 understood these interventions were bridging important gaps in student literacy.

Finding Textual Meaning

Explicit Meaning. ELA RTI Tier 1 teachers focus on finding resources relatable to students’ lives while also focusing on strategies like the use of context clues to build vocabulary and break down explicit text. In fact, teachers reported vocabulary instruction as crucial to breaking down explicit text. Teacher 3 modeled academic vocabulary to students throughout the lesson. In a variety of classroom instructional abilities and grade levels, educators continued to stress vocabulary skills throughout observations.

Educators agreed students are not reading. Educators are tasked with finding ways to motivate student-reading interest. Teacher 1 pointed to using context clues as a means to teach vocabulary. She detailed the struggle to teach vocabulary with an example of an activity that asked students to use context clues to determine the meaning of 37 words found in an article about Fortnite. To provide scaffolding for struggling readers, the teacher strategically placed students in groups to work with the reading. Teacher 1 explained, “...there was an obvious

context clue for the word ‘bagatelle.’ The definition was right after the word. And maybe I have a hundred and something kids. Maybe two or three got it.” Overall, the teachers in the study reported low vocabulary skills make it difficult for students to find explicit meaning in text. Explicit meaning leads to an understanding of implicit meaning. Students who do not understand explicit meaning of particular words and passages will be unable to make it to implicit meaning

Implicit Meaning. The lack of background knowledge also makes it difficult for students to find meaning in text. Teacher 4 stated, “They’re not finding enjoyment in reading...They can read the words aloud...and tell you kind of a surface idea or pull information from the text, but there’s nothing deep there. There’s nothing that’s truly foundational. Archetypes are not seen like they used to be.” Teacher 5 pointed out that, “...sometimes they don’t have the richness of experience to understand the context of what’s being said and how it might apply differently to people with different backgrounds.” Teachers must often create or pull in different resources to hook student interest and engagement.

Best Practices that Increase Student Achievement

Research Activities and Connections. Culminating writing activities that involve close reading and research assist students in making connections with their reading. The impact on student literacy achievement improves when student instruction requires students to predict, infer, and question. For example, in School 2, Teacher 5 uses a variety of research methods to help students make connections to the real world and their learning. Bell ringer activities set the stage for learning with writing activities that encourage critical thinking. Academic Talk is a best practice that frames a classroom discussion and teaches students how to pull apart complex text to discover themes and ideas. Carefully planned discussion questions create opportunities

for students to dissect their reading and pull it all together with culminating writing activities. In School 1, Teacher 1 created bell ringers that break down the writing in the informational articles students read. As students work through a variety of classroom group activities and close read, culminating research and writing activities scaffold the learning to produce the desired outcome.

Best Practices

Successful ELA RTI Strategies and Student Motivation. The academic talk strategy, creative, and kinesthetic activities motivated adolescents to participate in ELA RTI Tier 1 classrooms. Teacher 5 is a proponent of discussion activities that encourage student engagement and motivation. For example, the academic talk strategy and use of creative and kinesthetic activities motivate struggling readers to participate in her ELA RTI Tier 1 classroom. For example, in two classroom observations with Teacher 5, one an English 10 honors class, and the other an English 10 inclusion class, the teacher used a variety of activities to engage student readers. In both classroom observations, the academic talk strategy was incorporated as a means of engaging students in rich classroom discussion. Both classes were also provided with thoughtful bell ringers at the beginning of class to spur student thinking. Discussion questions were thoughtful and relatable to students while also digging deep into deeper textual themes. Teacher 5 developed the discussion questions as part of the planning for the novels students read.

Teacher 5 shared an example of an essential question to Hawthorne's *The Scarlett Letter*: "Who suffers the most in the Scarlett Letter?" Students were to answer this question as part of a culminating writing assignment; however, before answering the question, Teacher 5 developed a series of leading questions to assist students in forming their arguments for the essay. Academic talk strategy is a way of leading students into discussion. The following questions are examples of the discussion questions centered on the essential question and represent questions for the

discussion class: “How can you be redeemed from sin according to Hawthorne? Why do you think...? Is there any evidence for that? What is Hawthorne’s purpose for the book?”

Students respond to every question. Below are student responses to the questions

Teacher 5 raised in the Academic Talk discussion:

I think Hawthorne most relates to Pearl. She helped Hester to redeem herself.

Hawthorne is trying to redeem his family by writing the book.

Sometimes you see that justice is not always the right thing.

Dimsdale is living a lie.

Maybe mental illness is a big part of this book. It’s hard being confused all the time....

It takes more energy to be nice.

As the discussion continues, students begin to make connections to the themes in Hawthorne’s novel to a previous book read in in a history class and to an article read in an ACT prep class.

The students ask questions to clarify thinking. For example, there are several questions about the theme of justice. Students point to specific chapters and pages to provide evidence of their ideas.

Deeper insights bring the story of *The Scarlett Letter* to present day, as students understand ways the book is relatable to the stories in one’s own hometown.

Teacher 5 also uses the same techniques to work with reluctant readers in another English10 class. The teacher began the class with a bell ringer activity to hook student interest. Students were presented with four pictures: desert, forest, beach, and Antarctica. Students were asked to choose which setting would offer the best chance for survival if one were stranded. Students spent several minutes writing down ideas, and then a lively discussion ensued. The bell ringer activity was to spur thinking and discussion with chapter four in William Golding’s *The Lord of the Flies*. Since the characters in the novel are stranded on an island, an essential

question asked, “What is a more powerful motivator: Leadership or fear?” Teacher 5 and students read together chapter 4 in the novel. The teacher activated background knowledge when she reviewed the previous reading. While the teacher read specific passages aloud, she also chunked the text by stopping to check for understanding and asking questions about specific characters. There was a classroom discussion on the character of Jack and the theme of pride that connected to the themes of leadership and fear.

While all of the teacher participants pointed to student motivation as a factor in student learning, it did not deter them from finding ways to make the reading relatable. For example, Teacher 1 asked 9th grade students to work on an article about the rise in childhood measles. Teacher 2 asked students to work in groups on a research project connecting to Malala Yousafzai’s 2014 Nobel Peace Prize speech. Teachers 3 and 5 read classic literature in their classrooms and found a way to make the themes relatable to today’s students. Teacher 4 worked on vocabulary and prepared students for the ACT state testing.

Positive Relationships. Safe classroom environments and positive teacher-student relationships encourage student engagement. In all classrooms, clear procedures were established and classrooms were organized around those procedures. In School 3, the District RTI Coordinator pointed to the way the RTI teacher continued to ask student questions about their reading. If the student did not know the answer, the teacher rephrased the question and pointed to clues within the reading to assist students in coming to the answer. In other words, the teacher met students at their level and scaffolded the reading material in a way that students were engaged in productive learning. He did so by chunking the text and continuously checking for student understanding. Classrooms were well organized so that students understood class procedures. Classroom environment was especially helpful for motivating students. Organized

procedures, high expectations, and positive teacher student relationships contribute to student motivation.

Strategies that Impact Student Achievement

From Close Reads and Questioning to Writing. Student literacy achievement improves when instruction requires students to predict, infer, and questions; culminating writing activities assist students with making connections with their reading and pulls it all together. All six teachers used a variety of lesson activities to address adolescent reading difficulties. For example, vocabulary practice is interwoven throughout Teacher 3's instruction and made relevant to students' lives. Teachers relied most on the use of close reading activities to improve student learning.

Teacher 5 begins the year with an annotation activity. She provides students with a specific theme centering around two articles and asks students to compare and contrast how the theme is presented within the two articles. Students do a close read of both articles and make notes, or annotate their reading. The teacher models the activity, and students use inference skills as they look for similar or dissimilar treatments of a particular theme. Teacher 5 expressed this activity sets the stage for improved student achievement as students learn to use critical skills needed to succeed in upper level coursework, as well as college and career. Teacher 5 stated:

It's the single most important thing I do every year as far as their achievement on the test and within the classroom because it's the jumping point for everything we do. That's how we start out for writing. You can't write about something if you cannot read it and dissect it properly.

In classroom observations, Teacher 5 used bell ringers with writing activities and as a culminating activity with classroom reading. In School 1, Teacher 1 required close reads of research material as part of class presentations. The teacher provided questions to guide students in their research. Again, a culminating writing activity was planned as part of the lesson.

Teacher 2 also used close reading activities to teach students to predict and make inferences.

Teacher 1 in School 1 used groups to teach students how to collaborate and work together in close reads. Predictions, inferring, and questioning are part of the close read activities.

Teacher 2 in School 1 used a similar lesson with a kinesthetic activity that asks students to act as detectives. Students pulled objects from a paper bag and take notes about those objects. The teacher provided guidance and direction for students as she taught them about making predictions and inference skills. Teacher 2 used this activity to teach students to be detectives in reading. Teacher made checklists and forms to assist students in organizing reading information.

Finally, Teacher 4 used predictions, inference, and questioning to teach students ACT reading strategies. Students practice these skills in timed settings. As the class discussed the answers, the teacher modeled for students the questioning skills needed to eliminate wrong answers and choose the correct answers.

Literacy and Technology

The New Literacy

. Teachers reported students need guidance to appropriately use technology for literacy activities. Although teachers allow students to use phone technology for word definitions, pronunciation, and research activities, students fail to pay close attention to paragraphs and web links that may distract from actual text. Teacher 1 monitored student work while students worked on research projects and used phone, tablet, and computer technology to do preliminary

research about their topics. For example, Teacher 1 noted students prefer to use their phones for the majority of research tasks that must be done; however, reading text on one's phone can be problematic. Teacher 5 noted the formatting of text is often difficult for students to follow. Teacher 1 worked with students to teach them to discern important parts of the text on their screen.

Educators agreed ELA Tier 2 can and does improve student achievement; however, the increased technology use and ELA rigor in today's classrooms make it difficult for struggling adolescents to meet grade level literacy expectations. For example, in a classroom observation with Teacher 1 at School 1, students worked on group presentations and researched specific topics. All but two students preferred to use a cell phone to read informational text about their project. Teacher 1 explained to students the phone screen does not provide all of the pertinent information for their topic, and she worked with students to point out when and how to navigation the web page and the specific vocabulary. The RTI District Coordinator added there is little technology in ELA RTI Tier 2. The program focuses on teacher to student support.

The majority ELA district classrooms have Promethean boards and projectors. Teachers use the technology for bell ringers, video, and student instructions.

Assessment and Student Achievement

Formative Assessment. ELA RTI Tier 1 and Tier 2 instructional practices included the use of formative assessments that inform teacher instruction and contribute to student growth and achievement. Study participants reported using teacher observations, teacher monitoring, exit slips, questioning activities, and bell ringers to check for understanding in student learning. Classroom observations and questioning techniques were often used as a means of formative assessment. Teacher questioning was purposeful with attention paid to wait time during

questioning. Teacher 5 reported using a variety of questions to determine student knowledge about reading assignments. Questions such as, “How do you know?” “Where is your evidence?” are used to teach students to dig deep into the literature. Teacher 1 stated, “I don’t really think about it. It’s just something I do on the way to summative.” Teachers reported using a variety of question levels to check for understanding. For example, basic questions were asked about the reading related to vocabulary reading or the sequence of events. Then, students were expected to dig deeper into the text to find textual evidence that supported their answers. Teacher 2 in School 1 required 9th grade ELA Tier 1 students to read an article two to three times. Struggling adolescent readers are provided scaffolding questions. In other words, the teacher modified questions to raise the level of difficulty as student literacy improves. Teacher 5 in School 2 read specific chapters with her 10th grade ELA Tier 1 class, and students were expected to follow along with the reading. As the teacher read, she stopped often to check for understanding of vocabulary and to ask text dependent questions. Again, both teachers used questioning techniques to check for student understanding. Teacher participants also reported using strategies such as exit slips or surveys to check student understanding.

Teachers explained the results of their formative assessments aid in building student growth. For example, Teacher 3 stated, “Again, I just keep asking questions to lead them up to the answer, and sometimes I may have to ask it 15 different ways until I find a way that they understand it. And it goes back to making it relevant to them... if it’s relevant to them, they’ll get it.” Teacher 1 stated she allowed students to redo assignments. In a lesson with science reading, students worked in groups to complete questions about the reading. At least 15 groups did not master the assignments. She allowed students to continue working toward mastering, and

10 out of 15 groups increased their original score to mastery. Teachers agreed different students with different ability levels need different ways to build literacy.

ELA RTI Program Barriers

Perceptions. Student and administrator perceptions coupled with the lack of teacher training, collaboration, and resources present significant barriers to implementing a successful ELA RTI Tier 1 and Tier 2 program in secondary schools. Student and educator perceptions present significant barriers to implementing a successful ELA RTI Tier 1 and Tier 2 program in high schools. Teachers appeared to view RTI Tier 2 as the only component of RTI. There was also some confusion that RTI Tier 2 was a pull out group when, in reality, if a student qualifies for Tier 2 interventions, RTI Tier 2 is another class that is added to a student's schedule. In other words, ELA RTI Tier 2 students receive interventions during a scheduled class period and also attend regular English classes as part of their school schedule.

Of particular concern to educators are student perceptions toward RTI. Teachers reported high school students do not like to receive extra attention because of literacy deficits. In other words, students generally do not like to be singled out as needing extra help. Teachers believed students attending RTI Tier 2 classes are generally embarrassed to need extra help.

Administrator perceptions were also viewed as a barrier to successful ELA RTI implementation. The RTI Coordinator said most high school administrators do not believe RTI should be part of the high school landscape.

Teachers also pointed to a lack of training with the RTI framework as a barrier to successful RTI implementation. Teachers reported using a great deal of time to search for resources and develop materials. Teacher 2 in School 1 expressed the need for RTI Tier 2 collaboration with regular classroom teachers. Teacher collaboration, training, and resources

present the most significant barriers to implementing a successful ELA RTI Tier 1 and Tier 2 program in high schools.

RTI and Adolescent Reading Deficiencies. RTI Tier 2 focuses on strategies that increase student literacy and provides regular opportunities for students to practice those strategies. The majority of teachers agreed that RTI strategies address reading skill deficiencies. The district RTI Coordinator noted practice was an important component of RTI Tier 2, and Teacher 1 expressed RTI strategies provided students with a toolbox of literacy strategies that will follow them throughout high school. In addition, Teacher 1 noted, the importance of RTI assessments to pinpoint student literacy gaps so that teachers know more specifically how to help students. RTI Tier 2 works on building vocabulary strategies that address student reading deficits. In fact, Teachers 1-5 agreed vocabulary instruction was an important component of any classroom instruction that addresses student achievement gaps in reading. Teacher 2 discussed the continual importance of practice for students, “The more you do it, the better you become.”

The District RTI Coordinator explained the Dyslexia Bill in TN is also part of RTI, and it has been an important component of RTI in addressing adolescent reading deficiencies. In addition, Tier 2 looks for literacy skill gaps and provides the scaffolding students need.

Literacy Training. While teachers have a general knowledge of RTI Tier 2, many lack training in the RTI framework and the role Tier 1 plays in RTI. The majority of teachers reported a lack of training with RTI, specifically dealing with the teaching of reading. Teacher 4 pointed out her original degree focused on political science and history; however, she had an aptitude for grammar and enrolled in advanced grammar courses in college. In addition, additional courses in literary criticism, or British literature gave her the additional coursework needed to teach high school English. Teacher 3 admitted her teacher training provided little in

the way of how to help struggling readers, and the district RTI Coordinated reported, “Sadly, I’ve received more training since I left the classroom than I did in the classroom.

Interventionists receive more training than classroom teachers.”

Teacher 1 presented student artifacts demonstrating student literacy struggles. An activity focusing on vocabulary words and context clues yielded few correct answers. Teacher 1 stated out of nearly 100-10th grade students, most were unable to understand the specific context clues that pointed to the meaning of specific vocabulary words. Teacher 1 also agreed as a high school English teacher she had not received any literacy training for at risk adolescent readers. Teachers agreed literacy training that focuses on at-risk high school readers was scant. Any literacy training they received was the result of their own initiative to take coursework, attend trainings, or seek out other teachers and ask questions.

Research Questions

The data collected assisted in answering the four major research questions of the study. Educator perceptions and attitudes toward RTI implementation affect the success of ELA RTI. In part, negative perceptions and attitudes exist due to a disconnect between federal, state, and local levels regarding the needs of secondary schools and their students and teachers. Quality staff development that provides research based strategies to address student reading skill deficiencies would be a first step in improving educator perceptions and attitudes; however, quality staff development is not enough to correct the issues that exist. Access to resources and acknowledging secondary schools operate with strict scheduling requirements due to federal and state demands for high school graduation.

Adolescents approached reading and learning in secondary schools in a variety of ways. While teachers agreed their students do not enjoy reading, they acknowledged certain classroom

activities captured student interest. For example, activities centered on student discussions, creative, and kinesthetic activities engaged students in learning. Students also participated in activities where group collaboration and technology engagement were present. Finally, student centered classrooms where mutual respect and clear guidelines and procedures existed proved to be motivating factors in motivating students.

In this study, successful ELA RTI Tier 1 and Tier 2 teachers used strategies like academic talk and group collaboration to engage students in important literary work and scaffolded learning; however, before these strategies could be successful, teachers built student trust and respect with established procedures and expectations. Then, teachers were able to pursue more challenging work with students.

Once again, barriers to implementing a successful EL RTI program in secondary schools exists due to a lack of deep understanding about secondary teacher training, educator perceptions, staff development, and adequate resources. Secondary teachers need more education and training that addresses reading skills deficits and student motivation. In addition, secondary schools require adequate resources and funding if student needs are to be adequately addressed. Finally, students and parents must also work together to address reading skills deficits. Students can be taught to become advocates for their own education and learning

Summary

This qualitative study has looked at the barriers to a successful ELA RTI program in secondary schools. To support grounded theory research, the data consisted of a survey, interview questions, classroom observations, and artifacts. In addition, Vygotsky's zone of proximal development theory was used as the theoretical framework that argues students achieve growth when educators meet students at their place of learning and provide scaffolding support

with more difficult tasks. Teacher participants discussed freely and honestly the frustrations felt when faced with the daunting task of raising adolescent literacy achievement to the rigorous levels expected in high school programs; however, they also discussed the sense of accomplishment felt when students achieved above expectations.

Throughout this study a number of themes have emerged that contribute to the barriers that impede a successful secondary ELA RTI program. The first theme centers on teacher training and staff development. All ELA classroom teachers need training in the RTI framework and how Tier 1 fits in to their class instruction. In the interviews educators voiced a vague knowledge of the RTI framework. Many were somewhat familiar with the Tier 2 leg of RTI; however, few seem to recognize that Tier 1 is part of the RTI framework and affects all secondary ELA classrooms. Teachers also confused RTI Tier 1 with inclusion. There seemed to be confusion that RTI Tier 1 addresses all classroom ability levels. Ironically, teachers are providing the supports and assessments needed to raise student achievement, but greater student outcomes would result if educators had a thorough understanding of how RTI fits into their classrooms.

The second theme that emerged throughout the research is the need to address student motivation. Again, all teachers agreed student motivation contributed to a lack of student literacy achievement. While, several teachers have found ways to address student motivation with strategies such as academic talk and creative projects, others struggle to create more engaging lessons. Teachers cited a lack of resources makes it difficult to provide engaging material. Throughout the interviews, teachers agreed most of their students do not like to read; however, in spite of these challenges, teachers worked to find ways to create interesting lessons

and engage students. Participants linked the reluctance of students to read to literacy gaps and endured round-robin that began in elementary school.

The third theme that emerged is the need for better technology training with teachers and students. Today's students participate in what researchers call a *New Literacy* that requires a different thinking process in order for students to be digitally literate. While more teachers are working to find ways to work with technology, it was clear there are challenges to implementing technology in classrooms. For example, the use of cell phones or tablets to deliver reading content present a variety of reading challenges. Students may miss important content or links that are near the edges of margins, or embedded in content headings. As technology continues to advance, educators will be tasked with teaching students how to read and interpret several areas of content found within web pages, news feeds, or social media.

Finally, the last theme that emerged in the data is one cannot underestimate the power of a classroom with clear expectations and procedures and where students and teacher mutually respect one another. In the classrooms observed, teachers moved seamlessly between different student groups, activities, and procedures. Teachers asked students to push through difficult reading material but provided strategies to scaffold their learning. For example, before writing an essay on Hawthorne's *Scarlett Letter*, students participated in a series of discussions that centered on the theme of the essay. Teachers and students examined textual evidence together to support ideas. Consequently, the same strategies were used for a class reading *The Lord of the Flies*. In another class, students working through ACT material pushed through difficult vocabulary and practiced the art of pacing with a timed test. Finally, in an ELA RTI Tier 2 class, students worked with the RTI teacher to answer reading comprehension questions. If a student was unclear of an answer, the teacher asked the question in a different way. In every instance,

students demonstrated a willingness to push through the material and respect for the teacher.

Chapter Five will examine the findings of this study, the implications, and recommendations for additional study.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this qualitative study was to identify the barriers to secondary English Language Arts Response to Intervention (ELA RTI) success. The collected and analyzed data from this study acknowledged the complex issues surrounding adolescent literacy struggles and identifies ways educators can improve ELA RTI in secondary schools. The collected data from this study were comprised from a survey of 14 ELA (English Language Arts) respondents, interviews, artifacts, and classroom observations. Participants included five high school English teachers and the district RTI Coordinator.

Chapter 5 provides a summary of the major findings, implications, and recommendations for future research areas. There is a lack of research available that highlights the barriers to secondary ELA RTI with adolescents and how educators can implement the components of the RTI framework within a secondary setting. In addition, adolescents approach reading and learning differently than elementary students. There is little research-based staff development available that addresses some of these issues. This study contributes to the available research by identifying barriers to secondary ELA RTI success. This study also points out the complex issues surrounding adolescent literacy struggles and provides strategies that address the literacy gaps.

Findings

Below are the four research questions this qualitative study examined:

1. How do educator perceptions and attitudes toward RTI implementation affect the success of ELA RTI?
2. How do adolescents approach reading and learning in secondary schools?
3. What strategies do successful educators use in ELA RTI?
4. What are the barriers to implementing a successful ELA RTI program in secondary schools?

Educator Perceptions

The study found while teachers seemed to be somewhat knowledgeable concerning RTI, many admitted unfamiliarity with the tenants of the RTI framework, consequently, teachers reported a positive classroom impact when ELARTI Tier 1 and Tier 2 can collaborate, and the majority of teachers expressed a desire for greater staff development and increased resources to create a successful ELA RTI program in secondary schools. It is important to note participants demonstrated a vague understanding of the RTI framework as is relates to ELA Tier 2 instruction, and many were unfamiliar with the purpose of the ELA RTI framework for general education Tier 1 classrooms. In some cases, teachers confused inclusion students, or SPED students in inclusion classes as also RTI students. Although special education students may be in RTI Tier 3 intervention, such students require simultaneous access to effective Tier I instruction, a general education class. In addition, RTI Tier 2 students will also be found in general education classes.

Educators expressed students are positively impacted when teacher collaboration between Tier 1 and Tier 2 instructors occurs. Teachers also reported on the importance of ELA Tier 2

instructors in closing literacy gaps. Educators expressed the desire to work together to improve their own teaching and ultimately student learning. Many teachers expressed a strong desire for training and strategies that will allow them to more fully support their students. Educators also asserted for an ELA RTI program in secondary schools to be successful, the resources of time and staffing are needed to fully implement RTI.

Adolescent Reading and Learning in Secondary Schools

Teachers reported adolescents do not read for pleasure; therefore, reading rigorous text for explicit and implicit meaning is difficult for students who struggle to connect to their reading and experience literacy gaps. Shifts in English language arts standards especially focus on informational text such as science, technology, or social studies topics. Much of these types of texts require knowledge of subject specific vocabulary before comprehension and understanding can take place. Students lacking vocabulary skills and a basic understanding of context strategies struggle to find meaning from text. In addition to literary shifts, the added emphasis on writing means students must be able to synthesize different types of literary texts and produce academic writing that can discern explicit and implicit meaning in rigorous text. Adolescents struggling with literacy gaps often appear unmotivated to participate in this type of academic writing.

Students coping with literacy struggles require instruction that will meet them at their instructional level and provide scaffolding with the appropriate supports needed to raise students to a higher achievement level. Classrooms where positive student-teacher relationships exist and teachers employ a variety of strategies to scaffold learning provide students opportunities to participate in positive literacy experiences. This study found that adolescents thrive in classrooms with caring and engaging teachers.

Successful ELA RTI Strategies

Successful ELA RTI strategies that impact student motivation include building positive teacher-student relationships, employing the use of academic talk strategies, and scaffolding rigorous reading material with close reads, group work, and thoughtful questioning. It is part science and part art to manage these elements in an ELA secondary classroom that serves 100 to 150 students per day. Teacher 5 begins the school year instructing students in annotation, a practice that involves note taking, highlighting, circling vocabulary words, and writing notes or questions in the margins of text. This work sets the stage for the reading and writing that will take place throughout the school year. Teacher 1 and 2 establish groups and instruct students in peer collaboration. Teacher 4 instructs students in making predictions and how to ask the right questions in order to find the answers, and Teacher 3 uses vocabulary instruction that is interwoven throughout the classroom. It becomes relevant to students' lives as it is practiced everyday throughout the entire length of the course.

Formative and summative assessments also serve as strategies that can improve student achievement. Educators agreed the use of questioning, exit slips, and checking for understanding are all ways to use formative assessment. Formative assessment should be used to inform instruction, and, if needed, successful educators adjust instruction for those students needing extra supports.

Barriers to Successful ELA RTI Implementation in Secondary Schools

Educator perceptions, lack of training and resources, and issues surrounding student motivation present barriers to establishing a successful ELA RTI in secondary schools. It is interesting to note that teachers also reported student perceptions to ELA RTI Tier 2 are a barrier to successful implementation. Adolescent students do not like to be singled out as needing extra

help. While efforts are made to schedule RTI Tier 2 within a student's schedule, students quickly learn the purpose of the class. Again, the RTI Coordinator stressed most high school administrators do not believe RTI should be part of the high school landscape. This seems to be consistent with the literature. Again, secondary educators are trained to provide content area classes that will lead to graduation and a diploma. High schools have four years to meet federal and state requirements for graduation, and students must accrue a specific number of credits in state specified courses. This leaves little room in a student's schedule for intervention classes

Changing educator perceptions will require a change in the way ELA RTI is presented. In other words, teachers and administrators need quality staff development that addresses the competencies in content area teachers to provide effective interventions. This staff development should also acknowledge the role the New Literacy has in students' literacy achievement. Teachers also stressed a desire for more collaboration with ELA RTI Tier 2 instructors. This should be an easy adjustment, but high school scheduling often makes it difficult for teacher collaboration to occur within the school day. Creative scheduling and planning must be part of the high school landscape in order for educators to feel supported. In addition, teacher resources must also become a priority. Many of the classrooms visited for this study used a variety of resources that took time to locate. Teachers who used classroom resources such as classroom novels or textbooks created activities to match state standards and increased rigor; however, the goal of RTI is address skill deficits and not to teach standards as prescribed by the state.

Finally, teachers found most discouraging the lack of motivation students seem to exhibit for their own learning. Most secondary English teachers become English teachers due to a love of language and literature. It can be disheartening to learn others may not share those same feelings; however, adolescents who daily struggle with vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension

will find ways to avoid reading. The study found the most successful teachers find a way to push through student fears and the lack of motivation. Most importantly, creating a safe classroom with structures and procedures in place helped to establish positive student-teacher relationships.

Implications

The purpose of this study was to determine the barriers to a successful ELA RTI implementation in secondary schools. Response to Intervention (RTI) was implemented in public schools in 2006, and secondary schools have struggled with its implementation. The structure of the secondary high school setting, secondary teacher training, and the manner in which adolescents approach reading and learning are aspects of secondary schooling that require a different lens from which to view how to address the needs of adolescents. There are several implications for school leaders that could be implemented to improve ELA RTI in secondary schools, and thus improve student literacy achievement.

First, quality staff development that addresses adolescent reading gaps and identifies how Tier 1 of the RTI framework fits into the ELA classroom should be part of the district staff development plan. While, districts may have provided the training in the past, new teachers to the district and to teaching need this support. Training should also address adolescent literacy deficits and provide teachers with strategies to use in their classrooms. It must be noted that providing training is simply not enough. Teachers also need time to collaborate and review RTI data. Follow-through with any district initiative is important if the initiative is to be successful.

The next implication centers on the issue of addressing student motivation. Today's students are bombarded with an array of choices competing for their attention. From technology and social media to extra-curricular activities and part-time jobs, students have a variety of activities vying for their time and attention. Students struggling with literacy gaps will most

likely continue to fall behind without the supports needed to close those gaps. The added rigor of ELA standards and the emphasis on informational text require teachers to adapt strategies to more fully engage students. Content area teachers must have input into a district's literacy plan. ELA teachers and content area teachers must carve out time to collaborate and work together to address complex vocabulary that is specific to content area reading. This also requires the assistance of school leaders to facilitate these interactions.

Finally, the last implication is to address the *New Literacy* students encounter in their everyday lives. This New Literacy, the dual worlds of print and digital text, will be part of their school and work lives. Educators are tasked with the difficult task of understanding the different cognitive skills required to navigate this *New Literacy*. Districts can support teachers with technology training and initiatives that address the literacy skills students will need to be successful for years to come.

In February 2018, Tennessee released a report listing the results of their 2014 statewide initiative to “determine how to better support RTI” (“Assessing Progress: Four Years of Learning from RTI² in Tennessee,” 2018). One important initiative is the plan to establish a Communities of Practice for high schools that will address professional learning, secondary school challenges, and motivating students in Tier 2 and Tier 3 to be advocates of their own learning by “tying interventions to post-secondary goals” (2018).

Recommendations for Further Research

The purpose of this qualitative study was to identify the barriers to RTI success in secondary schools. The initial survey, participant interviews, classroom observations, and teacher and student artifacts provided the data that contributed to the study's findings. This study adds to the existing research of Paige (2011) and Stover, O'Rear, Morris (2015) which

pointed to Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) theory that said instruction must meet students at their learning level and provide scaffolding that raises student achievement.

Recommendations for further research would be to further examine the cognitive skills needed to access the New Literacy. What skills will students need to participate in advanced postsecondary learning of online content and workplace digital content? How should students navigate the world of print and digital media? How do ELA teachers address these challenges? Another area of interest in this area is to research the impact digital online testing may have on student achievement versus print testing. Adolescents with decoding and comprehension gaps may find it particularly difficult to navigate both digital and print media; however, the world will demand that students be able to navigate both literacy worlds. Research is needed to address these challenges and the unique needs of adolescent students.

Limitations

Limitations to this study include the study was conducted in a rural Tennessee district and included a small sample of six voluntary participants. The study may have different results if replicated in a larger district or urban setting.

Summary

This study examined the barriers to ELA RTI success in secondary schools. Four conclusions resulted from the analysis of the data. While teachers appear to be knowledgeable with RTI, many admitted unfamiliarity with the tenants of the RTI framework; consequently, teachers expressed a desire for staff development and increased resources while recognizing a positive classroom impact Tier 1 and Tier 2 collaborate. Teachers reported adolescents do not read for pleasure; therefore, reading rigorous text for explicit and implicit meaning is difficult for students who experience literacy gaps and struggle to connect to the reading. Successful ELA

RTI strategies that affect student motivation include building positive teacher-student relationships, employing the use of academic talk strategies, and scaffolding rigorous reading material with close reads, group work, and thoughtful questioning. Finally, the study found that educator perceptions, a lack of training and resources, and issues surrounding student motivation present barriers to establishing a successful ELA RTI in secondary schools.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A
Coding Table

Table 4.1
 Research Question 1 Coding (Interview Questions 1 and 2)

Open Coding	Axial Coding	Selective Coding
<p>Doesn't know. Not too familiar.</p> <p>Tier 1 is standards based grade level instruction/some scaffolding</p> <p>Tier 2 is student instructional ability.</p> <p>Tier 2 incorporates student data.</p> <p>64.29% respondents have basic knowledge of RTI.</p> <p>57.14% survey respondents said need staff development to explain how Tier 1 instruction supports the RTI framework.</p> <p>Staff development in instructional strategies to increase reading achievement for students.</p> <p>Staff development to addresses student motivation.</p> <p>Provide proper staffing resources to accommodate growth, provide adequate resources, and allow for greater collaboration.</p> <p>More time for small group Practice</p> <p>Tier 2 focus on high school success</p> <p>Generational issues impact learning</p> <p>Staffing may not be able to keep up with Tier 2 demands</p> <p>Collaboration between teachers</p> <p>Focus on HS success</p> <p>Few HS students move out of RTI Tier 2</p>	<p>Majority of teachers have a vague understanding of Tier 1 and Tier 2; several remained unclear altogether.</p> <p>Survey consistent with interview data.</p> <p>Staff development needed in ELA RTI Tier 1 instructional strategies and to provide improved understanding of Tier 2 objectives/purpose.</p> <p>Student Motivation</p> <p>Student Reading Achievement</p> <p>Lack of adequate staffing resources creates stress and Makes RTI difficult to fully Implement.</p> <p>Need time to collaborate, time and staffing to keep up with RTI Tier 2 demands.</p> <p>More time</p> <p>Collaboration</p> <p>Teacher Collaboration</p> <p>Staffing issues</p> <p>Student success</p>	<p>Educator Perceptions regarding ELA RTI Tier 1 and Tier 2 are varied.</p> <p>Educators need staff development addressing ELA RTI Tier 1 instructional strategies and student motivation.</p> <p>Increased resources are needed to provide increased staffing support and scheduling opportunities that allow for better teacher collaboration</p>

Appendix B
Informed Consent Form

Informed Consent Form

Dear Research Participant,

Please read this consent form carefully before you decide to participate in the research study.

Carson-Newman University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) has approved the research.

Title

Barriers to ELA RTI Success in Secondary Schools

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research study is to determine the barriers the successful implementation of English Language Arts (ELA) Response to Intervention (RTI) successful implementation in secondary schools.

What You Will be Asked to Do

You will be asked to participate in a 13-question interview, provide student artifacts, and contribute instructional strategies that increase student achievement.

Time Required

One to two hours will be allotted for each interview. Classroom observations will last for the duration of the scheduled class and will depend on the specific schedule of the school.

Risks and Benefits

There will be minimal to no risks involved with the research study.

Confidentiality

The interviews will be audio-recorded, and all participant data will be confidential. The transcriptions, field notes, recorded interviews, and other related materials will be secured in a locked filing cabinet and a password protected computer. The researcher is the only individual with the key and password. School names will not be shared, and a pseudonym will be assigned

to participants throughout the study. All participants will remain anonymous. Student artifacts will also be confidential and used only as a means to evaluate Tier 1 and Tier 2 interventions in English Language Arts secondary classrooms.

Benefits

Participation in this research study is considered completely voluntary. Incentives will not be offered to you for your participation; however, it is my hope the information in this study will contribute to a better understanding of the interventions needed for struggling adolescent ELA students.

Right to Withdraw

It is your right to withdraw from this research study at any time during its duration.

Questions about the Study

Please contact the researcher, Janie Evans, at any time if you have questions about this research study.

Agreement

I have read the research procedures described above. I also voluntarily agree to participate in the research study. I have been given a copy of this informed consent form.

Participant: (print name) _____ Date: _____

Participant's Signature: _____

Appendix C
ELA RTI Survey

ELA RTI Survey

The purpose of this survey is to ask English teachers for voluntary participation in a research study that examines the barriers to the successful implementation of ELA RTI in secondary schools. All participant responses and names will be kept strictly confidential.

1. Yes, I want to participate in the study with Ms. Evans _____
 Grade Level Taught _____
 School _____
 Name _____

2. Choose the answer that best fits the number of years of experience you have as an English teacher:
 - a. Less than 5 years _____
 - b. 5-10 years _____
 - c. 11 – 20 years _____
 - d. More than 20 years _____

3. Choose the word that best describes your knowledge of RTI and its purpose.
 - a. Very knowledgeable of the RTI Framework _____
 - b. Somewhat knowledgeable with the RTI framework _____
 - c. I have a basic knowledge of the RTI framework, but do not fully understand its purpose _____

4. Choose the staff development option that best fits your needs:
 - a. Staff development to explain how Tier 1 instruction supports the RTI framework _____

- b. Staff development in instructional strategies that increase reading achievement for students _____
- c. Staff development that addresses student motivation _____

Appendix D
Interview Guide

Interview Guide

Research Questions

1. How do educator perceptions and attitudes toward RTI implementation affect the success of ELA RTI?
2. How do adolescents approach reading and learning in secondary schools?
3. What strategies do successful educators use in ELA RTI?
4. What are the barriers to implementing a successful ELA RTI program in secondary schools?

Participants were asked the following questions in order to answer the first research question:

1. Describe your understanding of ELA RTI procedures in Tier 1 and Tier 2 classrooms.
2. What would you change about RTI in the ELA classroom if you could?
3. Explain how ELA RTI implementation has impacted your classroom.

These questions were asked for research question two:

1. Describe the different ways students engage with complex text.
2. How do your students break down explicit and implicit meaning from complex text?
3. Describe a best practice for motivating students in your classroom.

The following questions were asked in order to answer research question three:

1. Describe a lesson you use in your classroom to address adolescent reading difficulties and its impact on student achievement.
2. What strategies do you use in your classroom to assist students in navigating the complexities of reading required for our technologies?
3. Describe the kinds of formative assessment you provide for struggling students in your classroom

4. What are the results?

In order to answer research question 4, the following questions were asked:

1. What is the greatest barrier to successful ELA RTI implementation in high schools?
2. How does RTI address reading deficiencies with adolescents?
3. Describe any training you have received to aid you in addressing literacy deficits.