

St. John's University

St. John's Scholar

Theses and Dissertations

2023

**AN ANALYSIS OF TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE RESPONSE
TO INTERVENTION (RTI) PROGRAM IN ONE NORTH EAST
SUBURBAN SCHOOL**

Ann Marie Kenny-Chapur

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholar.stjohns.edu/theses_dissertations



Part of the [Educational Leadership Commons](#)

AN ANALYSIS OF TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE RESPONSE TO
INTERVENTION (RTI) PROGRAM IN ONE NORTH EAST SUBURBAN SCHOOL

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

to the faculty of the

DEPARTMENT OF ADMINISTRATIVE AND INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

of

THE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

at

ST. JOHN'S UNIVERSITY

New York

by

Ann Marie Kenny-Chapur

Submitted Date January 27, 2023

Date Approved May 19, 2023

Ann Marie Kenny-Chapur

Dr. Anthony Annunziato

© Copyright by Ann Marie Kenny-Chapur 2023

All Rights Reserved

ABSTRACT

AN ANALYSIS OF TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION (RTI) PROGRAM IN ONE NORTH EAST SUBURBAN SCHOOL

Ann Marie Kenny-Chapur

The response to intervention (RTI) program has been implemented throughout the United States as a response to the federal law known as the Individuals with Disabilities Improvement Act (IDEA), which requires struggling students to receive a series of intense instructional modifications that are monitored on a continuous basis (Cowan & Maxwell, 2015). (a) The purpose of this study is to explore the perceptions teachers in one middle-sized suburban school have of RTI. This will expand our understanding of the perceived benefits, limitations, and changes needed to increase the fidelity and effectiveness of the program. A singular qualitative case study design was utilized to gather perceptions of a purposeful sample consisting of classroom teachers and interventionists charged with implementing the RTI program within a classroom and/or office setting. (b) All participants were NYS certified teachers with a Masters level degree, who have been teaching for over 10 years. (c) Individual in-person interviews were conducted to gain an understanding of the teachers' perceptions of RTI and were audio recorded and transcribed. Data was also collected via classroom observations, during which field notes were collected. Data was triangulated and coded to identify emergent themes to develop a thick descriptive narrative of the findings. (d) This research addressed the shortcoming of existing studies on teachers' perceptions of the benefits,

limitations, and changes warranted for the RTI program to successfully meet the needs of all students. The information gathered in this study provides new insights into what teachers deem as necessary to successfully implement RTI with fidelity. It also identified valuable information to inform practice and improve the National and State level goals and standards for the effective implementation of the RTI program.

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my incredible family and friends for all their love and support, for which I am truly blessed! I thank my parents, Michael and Nuala, for instilling in me an appreciation for how the power of education can always be relied on and is something no one can take away. Although my mother passed in 2015, I know that she has taken this academic journey with me, providing me with encouragement, calm, and support throughout the process. To my father and best friend, I am beyond grateful for your support, love, and encouragement during this and everything else in life! To my sister, Eileen, thank you for always believing in me and for being so encouraging no matter what I am working toward.

To my boys, Michael and Preston, you are the reason I decided to go back for my doctoral degree because you should never let go of a goal. You can achieve anything you set your mind to, regardless of what obstacles you perceive as in front of you. Both of you have been my greatest supporters and my inspiration every day. Your notes telling me I am doing a “great job” or how proud you are of me meant the world to me. To my husband Fabian, thank you for all your support through these uncharted waters of completing a dissertation during a pandemic with two little ones at home. Thank you for your love and support and for being my constant sounding board.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My immense gratitude goes to Dr. Annunziato for his unwavering support, guidance, and reassurance throughout the completion of all phases of this dissertation. I appreciate the time you gave to continuously meet with me and work through the chapters making each step seem less daunting and achievable. I also wish to thank my committee members, Dr. Bernato and Dr. Kotok, for their constructive and positive feedback. This process of completing my dissertation has been such a positive learning experience and I am so grateful for the committee I had, who truly wanted to see me succeed.

Finally, I would like to thank the teachers who generously gave their time to participate in this study. I know how little time there is in the day and I appreciate how interested you were in this study. The commitment you have to your students and to their education, so they can meet with success, is immeasurable.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION	ii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	iii
LIST OF TABLES	vii
LIST OF FIGURES	viii
CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION	1
Problem Statement	1
Purpose of the Study	2
Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks	2
Significance of Study	4
Connection With Social Justice and Vincentian Mission in Education.....	5
Research Questions	6
Definition of Terms.....	6
CHAPTER 2 REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE.....	8
Introduction.....	8
Theoretical Framework.....	9
Response To Intervention	11
Review of Related Research	17
Teachers’ Perceptions of Benefits and Limitations	17
Social and Cultural Impacts on RTI.....	21
Program Factors that Impact the Effectiveness of RTI.....	23
Conclusions.....	27

Relationship Between Prior Research and Present Study.....	29
CHAPTER 3 METHODS AND PROCEDURES	30
Research Questions.....	30
Rationale for Research Approach.....	30
Setting.....	31
Participants and Data Sources.....	32
Data Collection	33
Data Analysis Approach.....	34
Trustworthiness of the Design	37
Research Ethics.....	38
Researcher’s Role	39
Conclusions.....	39
CHAPTER 4 RESULTS.....	40
Research Questions.....	41
RTI Model.....	43
Research Question 1	45
Research Question 2	53
Research Question 3	59
CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION.....	64
Interpretation of Results.....	64
Research Question 1	64
Research Question 2	66

Research Questions 3	69
Connection to the Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks of this Study	71
Relationship Between Results and Prior Research	73
Limitations	75
Implications for Future Research.....	76
Implications for Future Practice.....	77
Conclusion	77
Epilogue	79
Appendix A Interview Protocol	80
Appendix B Observation Form.....	83
REFERENCES	84

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1 Description of Participants.....	32
Table 2 Research Matrix.....	35
Table 3 Influencers on Teachers Perceptions of RTI.....	42

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1 Conceptual Framework	3
Figure 2 Tiered RTI Model.....	44

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

The issue of struggling students has long been a topic of conversation in the field of education. In a study conducted by the U.S. Department of Education, 19 percent of high school graduates in the United States are functionally illiterate, which means they cannot read well enough to manage their daily living (Lattier, 2016). As a response to this issue, under the federal law known as the Individuals with Disabilities Improvement Act (IDEA), struggling students are required to receive a series of intense instructional modifications that are continuously monitored (Cowan & Maxwell, 2015). This is further supported by the No Child Left Behind law of 2001, which advanced the use of the response to intervention (RTI) program specific to public law implemented in each state to properly support struggling students. As mandated by the New York State Education Department (2010), students are to be provided with the opportunity to gain skills through a tiered intervention approach. Research and literature support and encourage teachers to embrace the RTI movement to answer this mandate.

Problem Statement

A significant amount of past research on school reform has focused on RTI (Shepherd & Salembier, 2017). However, further clarification of teachers' perceptions of the RTI program is necessary to strengthen the efficacy of implementation to ensure struggling students can receive the supports they need. Buffum et al. (2010) noted that few students would fail if given access to a rigorous curriculum and personalized intensive support by highly trained teachers. Yet, as found in a study by Regan et al. (2015), overall, teachers feel they do not have the understanding, skills, or leadership support to properly implement the RTI program.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this present singular qualitative case study is to explore teachers' perceptions of the components of RTI to expand our understanding of the benefits, limitations, and warranted changes of the program. This will provide us with information on practices that should be continued and will identify areas that need to be modified so RTI can be implemented with fidelity and effectively.

This information will strengthen the educational system of support provided to students to ensure all learners receive appropriate services to achieve academic success. Furthermore, this information can be utilized to inform the National and State level standards for the effective implementation of RTI. A combined framework influenced by the social constructivist theory and educational change theory informed the research questions and will support the inquiry, analysis, and interpretation of data.

Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks

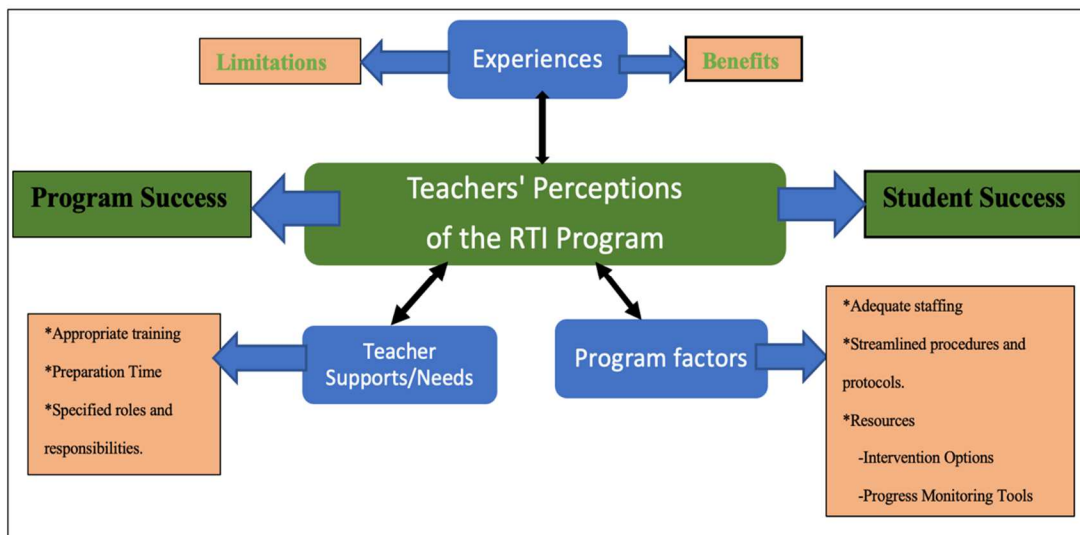
This study was influenced by the theories of social constructivism and educational change. Social constructivism is primarily based on Vygotsky's theory, which stresses that learning is a process socially mediated by tools such as language, symbols, and signs acquired during social interactions (Skunk, 2020). Narayan et al. (2013), noted, "learners are not blank slates, they bring prior cultural knowledge and/or experiences to learning situations that impact new knowledge they will construct or modify. If the new knowledge emerging is not in agreement with their current schema, the learner can evaluate both and modify their knowledge and schema" (p.169). These factors underpin the RTI system and support the restructuring of the education system to rectify the

misalignment between students’ abilities and needs, and the supports and instruction they receive.

The educational change theory is based on the belief that change processes, practices, and initiatives will alter teaching and learning within our schools (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2008). As Morrison (1998) noted, “change can be regarded as a dynamic and continuous process of development and growth that involves a reorganization in response to ‘felt needs’ ”(p. 13). Throughout the RTI research reviewed, there is a focus on the methods and changes considered necessary to effectively support our ever-evolving student population. The educational theory has guided the history of changes made within our education system and continues to guide current reforms surrounding RTI. Therefore, both theories will be utilized to guide the analysis and interpretation of the findings.

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework



The conceptual framework for this study illustrates that teachers' perceptions of the RTI program are directly linked to the program and student success. These perceptions have a bidirectional relationship with teachers' experiences, supports and needs, and program factors. Therefore, the design of this study will focus on gathering data specific to those components. This will allow for a deeper understanding of what is necessary to strengthen the efficacy of implementing RTI.

Significance of Study

Expanding the understanding of teachers' perceptions of RTI will provide information to improve the support provided to struggling students to achieve academic success. This is imperative given that according to a study by the U.S. Department of Education, 19 percent of high school graduates in the United States are functionally illiterate, meaning they cannot read well enough to manage their daily living (Lattier, 2016).

Under the federal law known as the Individuals with Disabilities Improvement Act (IDEA), struggling students are required to receive a series of intense instructional modifications that are monitored on a continuous basis (Cowan & Maxwell, 2015). Most states, including New York, have chosen to implement the RTI program to meet this mandate. As per the New York State Education Department (2010), students must be provided with the opportunity to gain skills through a tiered intervention approach.

The RTI process is based on the belief that every child can learn, so it is up to teachers to assist with the instruction choices, curricular decisions, and evaluation of learning (National Association of School Psychologists, 2006). Although teachers are charged with the task of implementing RTI to support struggling students, there is limited

research on their perceptions of the main components of RTI and the implementation of the tiered support provided to struggling students. This is especially important given the impact teachers have on students' learning.

Much of past research on school reform has focused on the overall RTI program (Shepherd & Salembier, 2017). However, further clarification of teachers' perceptions of the components and tiers of the RTI program is necessary to strengthen the efficacy of implementation for struggling students to receive appropriate support. Buffum et al. (2010) noted that few students would fail if given access to a rigorous curriculum and personalized intensive support by highly trained teachers. For teachers to be highly trained, we must identify the most impactful components for student learning and ensure they are trained to identify and respond to them.

There is also a plethora of research on the efficacy of various models of RTI and teachers' perceptions of the overall program. However, what is impacting teachers' perceptions of the specific components of the program are often overlooked. This study targeted the shortcoming of existing studies by focusing on what teachers perceive as the specific benefits, limitations, and warranted changes of the program. The findings provide information on what needs to be restructured so RTI is implemented with fidelity to meet the needs of all students. Finally, it provides information to inform practice and improve the National and State level goals and standards for effectively implementing the RTI program.

Connection With Social Justice and Vincentian Mission in Education

This research is related to the mission of St. John's, as it identified limitations within the RTI program that are barriers to students' receiving an adequate level of

academic support. It also provided information on how to improve the structures within the RTI program, so all struggling students can meet with academic success.

Research Questions

The purpose of the present singular qualitative case study was to explore teachers' perceptions of the RTI program to understand viewed benefits, limitations, and areas in need of restructuring. The specific research questions investigated were:

1. What factors do teachers perceive as benefits of implementing the response to intervention program?
2. What factors do teachers perceive as limitations to the effective implementation of the response to intervention program?
3. What changes do teachers perceive as necessary to increase the fidelity and effectiveness of implementing the response to intervention program?

Definition of Terms

Fidelity is defined for the purpose of this study as the degree to which interventions are provided to students as intended per an intervention protocol (McKenna & Parenti, 2017).

RTI Interventionist, for the purpose of this research, was defined as a teacher who provides Tier 2 or Tier 3 support to students who have been identified as in need of academic support through the RTI process.

Response to Intervention for this study was defined as the practice of providing high-quality instruction and interventions matched to a student's needs, frequently monitored for warranted adjustments, and based on response data (RTI Action Network, n.d.a).

Progress Monitoring is a scientifically based practice of assessing the academic performance of students, the effectiveness of provided instruction, and the implementation of specific interventions (RTI Action Network, n.d.a).

TIERs are levels that increase in instructional support intensity with specific, research based interventions that match a student's needs (RTI Action Network, n.d.a).

CHAPTER 2 REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Introduction

Chapter one of this study provides details on the research problem, research questions, and presents a brief overview of the conceptual and theoretical frameworks underpinning the RTI program. This chapter begins with a detailed discussion of the theoretical framework that influenced this study, followed by a description of RTI and a review of the legal history of the program. Next, there is a review of previous literature specific to the examination of teachers' perceptions of the benefits, limitations, and warranted changes of RTI, as well as program factors that impact the level of fidelity and effectiveness of implementation.

To acquire these studies, there was an exhaustive search conducted of current literature using peer-reviewed journals accessed through St. Johns University's databases: SAGE®, EBSCO®, and ERIC®. Websites were also utilized, including RTI Action Network, the U.S. Department of Education, the National Center on Response to Intervention, the National Association of School Psychologists, the National Center for Learning Disabilities, and the National Center for Education Statistics. The key criterion words used for my search were response to intervention, RTI, teachers' perceptions, perceived benefits to RTI, limitations to RTI, IDEA, tiered instruction, equity of RTI services, as well as the names of known researchers of RTI. Findings were analyzed using Boolean operators including and, or, not, and or not to create a more focused result list, which assisted in eliminating results that did not fit well with the topic of this study.

Theoretical Framework

Many theories have been connected to understanding education, learning, and struggling students. Therefore, RTI has been investigated through the lens of multiple theories considered to underpin the constructs of the program. However, the current study and research questions were most strongly influenced by the theories of social constructivism and educational change.

Social constructivism is primarily based on Vygotsky's theory, which stresses the idea that learning is a process socially mediated by tools such as language, symbols, and signs acquired during social interactions with others (Skunk, 2020). Narayan et al. (2013), noted, "learners are not blank slates, they bring prior cultural knowledge and/or experiences to learning situations that impact new knowledge they will construct or modify. If new knowledge emerging is not in agreement with their current schema, the learner can evaluate both and modify their knowledge and schema" (p.169).

The educational change theory is based on the belief that change processes, practices, and initiatives will alter teaching and learning within our schools (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2008). As Morrison (1998) noted, "change can be regarded as a dynamic and continuous process of development and growth that involves a reorganization in response to 'felt needs'" (p. 13).

Both the social constructivist and educational change theories are relevant to RTI in terms of current guidelines and practices within schools and school reforms. Significant changes have taken place over the past few decades that have utilized both as constructs. As a result, elements of both theories are embedded within many new ideologies, which have changed the way we teach our general and special education

students. As noted by Elliott (2008), we see an increase in the diversity and needs of our student population, from English language learners to gifted students, to special and general education students, yet with scarce resources from fiscal to human capital; hence, we need to align our education system to meet everyone's needs. Therefore, a significant change must be made in how students are assessed and taught, which includes implementing various means to meet diverse student needs.

The APA created learner-centered principles to assist with guiding school reforms. The principles are grouped into four major categories: cognitive and metacognitive factors, motivational and affective factors, developmental and social factors, and individual differences (Skunk, 2020). According to Dudley-Marling (2004), an alternative to the ideology of individualism and the belief that success and failure are based within one's mind is the perspective of social constructivism, which locates learning and learning problems in the context of human relations and activity. According to (Hein, 1991, as cited in Adams, 2006) “implicit within the social constructivist position, therefore, is the need to focus on the learner and not the subject matter to be taught, whilst simultaneously recognizing that there is no knowledge independent to the meaning attributed to experience by the learning with the learning community” (p. 246). According to Adams (2006), by providing support during lessons that are assessment opportunities, teachers not only teach but also gain insight into what the student knows and how this knowledge might be extended and modified. Hence, social constructivism supports the framework of RTI as reflected in its main premise, which according to Skunk (2020), social interactions and related factors are critical for cognitive development.

Overall, while social constructivism underpins RTI, we must also acknowledge the guidance of the educational change theory on how we respond to and meet students' needs. As noted by Mesmer and Mesmer (2008), "RTI is a new approach to identifying students with specific learning disabilities and represents a major change in special education law, the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA)" (p. 280). Therefore, implementing the RTI model shifted the focus to prevention and early intervention, which directly affects the roles and responsibilities of teachers, specifically special education teachers (Swanson et al., 2012). It is useful to look through the lens of both the social constructivism theory and educational change theory to explore teachers' perceptions of implementing the essential components of RTI, and the challenges of the practice behind the program. The aim of this review was fourfold: (1) to identify factors teachers perceive as benefits to implementing RTI, (2) to identify factors teachers perceive as limitations to implementing RTI, (3) to identify changes perceived as necessary, and (4) to inform the design of the study.

Response To Intervention

RTI is a multi-tiered system that provides screening and early intervention to students who are struggling academically through research-based educational practices and assessments (Regan et al., 2015). The core components of RTI must be implemented with fidelity and rigor and include high-quality, scientifically based classroom instruction, ongoing student assessment including universal screening for all general education students, ongoing progress monitoring of rate and level of achievement for decision making, use of a multi-tier approach to instruction that is differentiated in intensity to match student needs, and parental involvement (RTI Action Network, n.d.b).

For the RTI process to be utilized for prevention and identification, schools must decide on the following six components; how many tiers of intervention to include, how to target students for preventative interventions beyond the universal core program, the approach for preventative intervention, the process to classify students' response to RTI, and the multidisciplinary evaluation for placement in special education required by federal law, and the blueprint for special education (L. S. Fuchs & Fuchs, 2007).

Although various models of RTI are implemented, a three-tier model is most frequently employed in schools (Berkeley et al., 2009). Tier 1 is commonly referred to as the preventive tier and encompasses whole-group instruction and universal screening, and provides core instructional interventions and more specific interventions by a general education teacher within the general education classroom (L. S. Fuchs & Fuchs, 2007). The duration of this Tier is typically no longer than eight weeks and includes periodic screening to establish a baseline, identify if further supports are warranted, and finally decide if the student should return to the general education program or move to Tier 2 (RTI Action Network, n.d.b).

Tier 2 encompasses secondary prevention provided as research based small-group tutoring for 15-20 weeks in addition to general education instruction (L. S. Fuchs & Fuchs, 2007). Tier 2 instruction increases in intensity in terms of smaller group size, frequency and length of interventions, and provider expertise to match a student's rate of progress (RTI Action Network, n.d.). Furthermore, if a student demonstrates limited progress, they move to Tier 3, which provides individualized, intense interventions matched to the student's area of skill deficit (RTI Action Network, n.d.b). If the student's progress is not age-appropriate or adequate to meet state-approved grade level standards

at the end of Tier 3, a referral for a comprehensive evaluation for special education can be initiated, which can include but not be limited to, the components of RTI data-based documentation (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, n.d.).

The RTI program developed from the 2004 reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), but is strongly grounded in the history of learning disabilities (Preston et al., 2016). The methodologies of RTI originated in the 1980s and 1990s when students struggling with literacy skills were provided interventions and had targeted instruction plans developed by problem-solving school teams that often-utilized curriculum-based measurements (Vanderheyden et al., 2014). However, the underpinnings of the program stretch even further back when looking through the lens of federal law.

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) was established to increase the federal responsibility for holding schools accountable for student achievement, and in 2002, it was reauthorized as the No Child Left Behind law (Klein, 2015). ESEA primarily focused on improving the achievement of the nation's poor and disadvantaged students in grades pre-kindergarten through high school (Cortiella, 2006). However, NCLB aimed to raise academic achievement for all students and close the achievement gap between low and higher-performing students. As per Cortiella (2006), NCLB provisions expanded parental involvement, local control and flexibility, and held school districts and states accountable for student achievement. This was accomplished by requiring states to develop academically challenging standards and annual academic assessments for all students to determine if adequate yearly progress (AYP) has been met

and emphasized implementing teaching based on scientific research by highly qualified teachers.

Predicated on NCLB, Congress enacted the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (Public Law 94-142) (EHA) in 1975 to open public schools to students with disabilities and to commit to providing them access to free appropriate public education (FAPE) across the country (IDEA, 2020). A 1990 reauthorization of EHA renamed it the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act or IDEA.

In 2004, IDEA was reauthorized as the Individuals with disabilities education improvement Act (IDEIA). This was Congress' response to the concern with the increasing number of students requiring special education, and the notion that instructional support and interventions provided early in students' education may have prevented many students from being classified with a specific learning disability (SLD), and receiving special education (Martin, n.d.). With this reauthorization, it became the duty of public schools to identify students who may have a disability and need special education services, also known as Child-find (Martin, n.d.).

At that time, a student was classified according to an ability-achievement discrepancy described by Frey (2018) as a statistically significant difference between a child's measured intellectual ability and scores on achievement in one or more academic domains. However, according to Vaughn and Fuchs (2003), establishing an acceptable criterion for identifying LD has historically been the single most controversial issue due to the tradition of students only being referred by a teacher for an evaluation of their IQ and academic levels when there was a significant issue with learning. Vaughn and Fuchs (2003) noted that this was "often referred to as a "wait to fail" model, and several

disadvantages included relatively late identification for students who have special needs; imprecise screening through teacher observation; false negatives (i.e., unidentified students) who are not provided necessary services or provided services too late; and use of identification measures that are not linked to instruction” (p. 139).

There were also wide variations among state definitions for a student with a learning disability to qualify for services which led to much controversy (Preston et al., 2016). This resulted in criticism about the subjectivity of the process for determining LD eligibility (Fuchs et al., 2003). These concerns about the definition and identification process of (LD), paired with the efforts in Washington DC to eliminate the IQ-achievement discrepancy as an LD marker, led to discussions about alternative methods of identification, and RTI was the consistent choice among the alternatives (Fuchs et al., 2003).

Congress's most recent amendment to IDEA was in December of 2015 through Public Law 114-95, Every Student Succeeds Act, which according to IDEA, (n.d.), states: “Disability is a natural part of the human experience and in no way diminishes the right of individuals to participate in or contribute to society. Improving educational results for children with disabilities is an essential element of our national policy of ensuring equality of opportunity, full participation, independent living, and economic self-sufficiency for individuals with disabilities.” (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). This reauthorization made it a requirement for all students to be instructed with high academic standards to prepare them for future success.

Schools are held accountable for the teaching and learning of all students, including those with disabilities, by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB, 2006)

and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (Cho & Kingston, 2011). Specifically, under IDEA, struggling students are required to receive a series of intense instructional modifications that are continuously monitored (Cowan & Maxwell, 2015). IDEA put into place the Child find requirement for public school districts to identify students who may have a disability and need special education services (Martin, n.d.) RTI is an alternative system for identifying students with learning disabilities (Regan et al., 2015). Therefore, RTI provides an answer to this call being that the key components of the program include screening for all students to identify those at most risk for experiencing academic difficulty without necessary intervention; it is a multi-tiered system of support and requires conducting ongoing progress monitoring of student's response to instruction (Fuchs & Vaughn, 2012).

The use of RTI to identify students with learning disabilities has significant benefits. According to Fuchs et al. (2003), the “potential benefits include identification of students based on risk rather than deficit, early identification and instruction, reduction of identification bias, and linkage of identification assessment with instructional planning” (p. 137). Although these benefits are important, the program has inherent flaws. As noted by Fuchs et al. (2003), RTI has become the program of choice for identifying students with learning disabilities, but there is a need for refinement of key conceptual issues, and the methodological approaches to RTI need to be further researched and specified: A significant concern is the assumption that a student's lack of response to instruction indicates he or she has a learning deficit and that more intensive intervention is needed; however, it may be due to various underlying issues the student has or an issue with the instruction provided.

As noted by Vaughn and Fuchs (2003), concerns also arise when considering the “integrity of the LD concept, the need for validated interventions and assessment methods, the adequacy of response to instruction as the endpoint in identification, the appropriate instruction intensity, the need for adequately trained personnel, and due process” (p. 137). The variability with which RTI has been implemented in schools and if best practices have been used also need to be addressed. Specifically, there have been concerns with the implementation and proper use of data for decision-making, strategies used for differentiating instruction in the general education classroom, and the validity of interventions (Fuchs & Vaughn, 2012). Overall, while most states have chosen to implement a three-tier model of RTI, these tiers are often not implemented in the same manner (Berkeley et al., 2009). This variability in implementation needs to be rectified so that a streamlined system can be properly implemented and assessed for effectiveness.

Review of Related Research

In 2004, there was a reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA). As a response, education communities focused on the RTI program as the main support system for schools and districts to reduce the number of students struggling academically (Brozo, 2010). Given the impact that teachers have on students’ achievement, it is essential to understand their perceptions of the benefits and limitations of the RTI program, as well as perceived areas that warrant changes to support the efficacy and fidelity of program implementation.

Teachers’ Perceptions of Benefits and Limitations

A study conducted by Regan et al. (2015) explored teachers’ perceptions of their school district’s RTI initiative to identify program factors contributing to implementation

success and professional development needs. The researchers used a mixed-methods design and collected data from four schools in a suburban school district in the Northeast. Most elementary and middle school participants perceived selected practices as feasible and effectively implemented; and felt they understood the purpose, role, and tiers of RTI (Regan et al., 2015). However, participants, especially at the high school level, felt they did not fully understand the RTI program and needed additional guidance on specifics for implementation. Overall, teachers' perceptions of the RTI program were found to vary across grade levels taught and specific areas considered. However, teachers consistently felt improvements are necessary for RTI to be successfully implemented in their school district.

A qualitative case study conducted by Cowan and Maxwell (2015) explored teachers' perceptions about the implementation and success of the RTI program in their schools. The purpose of the study was to determine teachers' thoughts about the RTI program and what changes were perceived to be necessary to create a more streamlined process to further benefit the needs of students and teachers. The researchers interviewed three purposefully selected Hispanic female certified teachers from one south Texas high needs school district. These participants were chosen based on their overall knowledge of the RTI program and experience. To triangulate data, the researcher utilized interviews, observations, audio recordings, and reflective journaling. Data were analyzed for themes that were organized into categories for further analysis.

Findings indicated that the RTI program was viewed as a positive step toward supporting student achievement and learning. However, there was a considerable level of frustration with the amount of paperwork and responsibility placed on the teacher, and

most felt a need for additional training on the framework of RTI. The overall theme was that teachers want to be positive about the program but feel frustrated and overwhelmed. Results from the study indicated a need for a more streamlined process for RTI and additional support for those who implement it. A limitation of this study was the small sample size, which impacted the generalizability of the results.

In a quantitative quasi-experimental study, Hall and Mahoney (2013) investigated the relationship between the RTI plan and self-reported implementation practices. The sample included 54 general education elementary teachers from 11 schools in one Florida school district. The schools included selected demonstration schools that received extensive staff development training and comparative schools that did not. An RTI self-reporting checklist-style survey on PD and implementation of the RTI district plan was provided to participants. Results were analyzed through an ANOVA and findings indicated no significant difference between selected demonstration schools and comparable schools in reported practices, implementation rate, or data collection responsibilities. However, further investigation found that the results represented the middle range of choices and were lower than expected, indicating a lack of confidence in reported skills. Therefore, professional development opportunities are necessary to further develop teachers' abilities and confidence. A limitation of this study is that the type of professional development provided was not described, which impedes replication; however, the information gathered supports the need for additional training.

A qualitative study by Castro et al. (2014) explored teachers' perceptions, knowledge, and attitudes about RTI using qualitative methodology and a computer-based text search program. The researchers focused on urban city teachers in predominately

Hispanic serving schools. The sample of 100 included 55 teachers who attended a university-sponsored teacher institute and had teaching experience and 45 graduate students with teaching experience. An instrument with 32 Likert scale items and six open-ended items was used to collect data. The items were developed based on a comprehensive review of literature on RTI, were subjected to a systematic process of review, and were reflective of knowledge and understanding of RTI, training in RTI, resources and supports, the time needed, perceptions of RTI, and likeability of personnel involved in RTI. Data were analyzed through a thematic examination of open-ended responses through the QSR NVivo 8.0 computer-based text search software and constant comparison analysis. In addition, each response was coded for overall understanding of RTI by two raters for inter-rater reliability and rendered a Kappa coefficient of 1.0.

Results from survey data were categorized and combined based on emergent themes, which included 1) overall understanding of RTI, 2) teachers' perceptions of barriers to an effective RTI program, 3) teachers' suggestions to improve RTI, and 4) teachers' suggestions for making RTI paperwork more efficient. Overall, most teachers did not demonstrate comprehensive knowledge of RTI components, and several were unsure of the purpose of RTI. Specific barriers to effective implementation included lack of training, limited time and resources, and issues with the system practices, processes, and amount of paperwork. To strengthen the program, teachers suggested an increase in training, resources, and communication, as well as stronger collaboration between teachers, administrators, and specialists. A limitation of this study was that participants were from a large urban city in the Southwest United States, which negatively impacted the generalizability of results to other areas.

As in the previous research studies discussed, Stuart et al. (2011) investigated teachers' perceptions of the RTI program. They implemented a two-year professional development procedure as a guide for the RTI and to gain a comprehensive and long-term understanding of teachers' perceptions of the program. This qualitative study included eight female teachers, four of whom were general education teachers, one reading specialist, and three special education teachers. Data were collected through two 90-minute focus groups, follow-up individual interviews two to three weeks later, and questionnaires between two and four weeks after the interviews. The researchers coded focus group data to create interview questions and identified themes from interviews to create the written questionnaires. This took place over 12 months, with one focus group in the fall of the second year and the other at the end of the year.

It was found that teachers' perceptions of RTI became more positive between the first and second years. Participants reported that the RTI model improved their ability to monitor student progress and implement the program, strengthened the collaborative planning structures to develop and deliver instruction, and strengthened the referral process for special education. A limitation of this study was the small sample size, which impacts the representation of all teachers and weakens the generalizability of findings. However, the perceptions reported lent pertinent information about how to strengthen the implementation of RTI.

Social and Cultural Impacts on RTI

The use of RTI for social justice and with diverse student populations has also been explored in the research. As noted by Avant (2016), "as more diverse students are entering the school system, different backgrounds and learning styles must be taken into

consideration” (p. 507). A survey research study by Avant (2016) explored the use of the RTI/ multitiered system of supports (MTSS) to promote social justice in schools. Approximately 200 school social workers completed a 32-item questionnaire with a Likert-scale format. Findings indicated that the use of the RTI/MTSS is seen as promoting a sense of fairness: Students are evaluated the same way, given an equal opportunity for improvement, and it is an alternative to special education, which improves their chances for success. It was also noted that the collaborative team approach enables a heightened awareness of each student on a personal level that creates a more positive school culture and atmosphere for success. However, respondents reported a lack of sufficient training to address the various needs of diverse students and a need for an increased commitment to social justice.

A longitudinal case study by López and Mendoza (2013) examined the implementation of the RTI program with Emergent bilingual students. The study included 15 purposely selected participants, with ten teachers of emergent bilingual students and five district administrators. Administrators included three from the office for English language learners, one from English language assessment, and one from the special education department. Field notes, interviews, and artifacts were collected and analyzed for themes to chunk, code, and categorize findings. The researchers also worked with participants to confirm their interpretations of the data.

Findings showed that the special education department was responsible for the RTI implementation and training. This caused most teachers to view RTI as a special education program for students with disabilities. Teachers noted feelings of inadequacy in their understanding and ability to implement RTI effectively for all students, including

emergent bilinguals. Specific challenges were noted in the implementation process of RTI due to the complexity of programming and the diverse backgrounds of their students. Participants also noted that it is inappropriate to assess, instruct, and intervene using just one method. Furthermore, there was a concern about the mismatch between the student's language and the language of the instruction. Although this study has the limitation of a small sample of emergent bilingual teachers, the findings are relevant, and further research on the issues noted is necessary, especially as our student population continues to increase in diversity.

Program Factors that Impact the Effectiveness of RTI

Although data on teachers' perceptions of RTI are essential, there are also program-specific factors that must be investigated to understand how to increase the effectiveness of the program. These factors include the group sizes for intervention sessions, the level of professional development provided before implementation, resources and supports available, and demographic influences. Therefore, administrators and teachers should consider the success of a specific model in a comparable district before adopting it into practice.

In a randomized experimental study, Schwartz et al. (2012) explored the relationship between teacher-student ratios and literacy learning outcomes. Data were selected from 85 teachers using the reading recovery program, with 170 first-grade students considered to be most at risk for failure. The students were taught using teacher-student ratio formats of 1:1 instruction as well as small-group instruction of 1:2, 1:2, 1:3, or 1:5. There were two test periods, a pretest and a posttest at the end of the 20-week intervention period of daily, 30-minute lessons. The assessment included six subtests of

the Observation Survey of Early Literacy Achievement Test and the Slosson Oral Reading Test-Revised (SORT-R). This study utilized 2 (group) x 2 (test period) repeated-measures analyses of variance (ANOVA) to examine the data.

The results indicated that the 1:1 instruction resulted in significantly higher literacy learning outcomes than the combined small-group conditions. In terms of the small-group conditions, the outcomes did not differ significantly between any of the group sizes. However, the trend analysis did indicate that there was a reduction in literacy gains as the group size increased. Results indicate that a small instructional format is most successful for teaching struggling beginner readers.

As in the study by Schwartz et al. (2012), where group size was found to impact the success of the RTI program, other elements were also explored. In a quasi-experimental study, Bouton et al. (2018) investigated the impact of inverting Tier 2 and Tier 3 for the most at-risk first-grade students receiving reading interventions. Participants included two groups of 24 students across culturally diverse schools who were matched using propensity scores. One group received reading interventions with Tier 2 and Tier 3 services inverted, while the other group received interventions using the traditional progression of tiers. Other than the inversion of services, the interventions provided were identical. Findings indicated that differences in decoding were not significant; however, a significant difference was found for word reading, indicating that inverting the tiers had a positive effect on word identification. The limitations of this study were the small sample size and the lack of control over confounding variables due to participants attending various schools. However, it does show that changes in

implementation should be considered so that interventions are matched to the various needs and learning modes of students.

Overall, the research reviewed exhibited a theme of focusing on the perceived benefits and limitations of implementing RTI and identifying changes to increase the effectiveness of the essential components of the program. The findings provided the identification of areas warranting additional professional development as well as changes to the program to increase the fidelity of implementation and student success. However, there are noted gaps in information on what teachers specifically view as the benefits, limitations, and areas warranting changes, as well as specific program factors that could impact outcomes. Therefore, this study will explore these areas further, so detailed information can be obtained to assist in strengthening the fidelity of implementation and the success of RTI and the students supported by it. Hence, these areas are the basis of the conceptual framework for this study.

The conceptual framework for this study illustrates that teachers' perceptions of RTI are directly linked to the success of the program and the students receiving services through it. Teachers' perceptions have a bidirectional relationship with teachers' experiences, teachers' supports and needs, and program factors. As noted by Werts et al. (2009), teachers play an integral role in RTI. This is why examining their attitudes, beliefs, perceptions, and limitations is essential for the identification of appropriate actions, interventions, and supports for the fidelity of implementation and program sustainability. Therefore, the design of this study will focus on gathering data specific to these elements for a deeper understanding of how to successfully implement RTI to meet the needs of our ever-evolving population of struggling students. Just as there are many

facets to RTI, there are many theorists who have explored educating struggling students. While many theories underpin RTI, the current study and research questions are most strongly influenced by the theories of social constructivism and educational change.

Social constructivism is primarily based on Vygotsky's theory, which stresses the idea that learning is a process socially mediated by tools such as language, symbols, and signs acquired during social interactions with others (Skunk, 2020). Narayan et al. (2013) noted, "learners are not blank slates, they bring prior cultural knowledge and/or experiences to learning situations that impact new knowledge they will construct or modify. If the new knowledge emerging is not in agreement with their current schema, the learner can evaluate both and modify their knowledge and schema" (p.169).

The main elements of RTI are continuous evaluations and modifications of tiered instruction to meet students' needs. The continuous progress monitoring and tiered approach mimic the belief that knowledge is constructed throughout the learning process. As noted by Adams (2006), "from a theoretical perspective, divergent assessment is social constructivist in its orientation, accomplished as it is jointly from an intention to illuminate that which can be done with support" (p.253).

RTI is also supported by the educational change theory, which asserts the belief that change processes, practices, and initiatives will alter teaching and learning within our schools (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2008). As Morrison (1998) noted, "change can be regarded as a dynamic and continuous process of development and growth that involves a reorganization in response to 'felt needs' "(p. 13). RTI is fundamentally a program that requires teachers to respond to the needs of struggling students at all levels. Due to the underlying elements of the social constructivist and educational change theories, both are

relevant to RTI in terms of current guidelines and practices within schools and school reform. Therefore, it is beneficial to look through the lens of both theories when exploring teachers' perceptions of the RTI program.

Conclusions

The current research study aims to identify teachers' perceptions of the benefits and limitations of implementing RTI and the areas warranting changes to increase the fidelity of implementation and overall effectiveness of the program. This information will be utilized to guide decisions to improve outcomes for students in need of academic support. It has been found that factors such as teacher expertise and teacher-student ratio contribute to optimizing instruction for students at risk for developing difficulties in literacy learning (McEneaney et al., 2006). As noted by Fuchs and Vaughn (2012) the necessary instruction at the classroom level is often beyond the skill set of even those considered most proficient. Therefore, teachers must be provided with the necessary professional development and resources to gain the understanding, skills, and confidence to provide an appropriate education to all students.

As reported by Regan et al. (2015) teachers varied in their perception of how feasible and effective RTI is, but most noted areas for improvement. Findings from Cowan and Maxwell (2015) revealed teachers view RTI as a positive step toward supporting student achievement and learning, but they are frustrated with many aspects of the processes and procedures. Findings from Hall and Mahoney (2013) indicated teachers feel a lack of confidence in their RTI skills, which makes the need for professional development opportunities necessary. As reported by Castro-Villarreal et al. (2004), factors including teacher training, motivation, knowledge, efficacy, resources, supports,

and willingness to engage in the process might have a substantial effect on the success of RTI. Castro-Villarreal et al. (2004) further noted that “their perceptions, understanding, and attitudes about RTI are critical to addressing buy-in, fidelity concerns, directions and emphases for professional development, and barriers and facilitators from the teacher perspective” (p. 106).

Furthermore, Artiles et al. (2010) found that although RTI is viewed by many teachers to promise a response to long-standing injustices for underserved students, there are inherent issues that lead back to inequity. In a study by Avant (2016), school social workers reported that RTI promotes a sense of fairness in terms of evaluation processes, equal opportunity for improvement, and serves as an alternative to special education. However, without proper training to address the various needs of diverse students and an increased commitment to social justice, the program will not be successful. As noted in a study by López and Mendoza (2013) teachers feel there are specific challenges they face when attempting to implement RTI due to the complexity of the program, as well as the diverse backgrounds of their students. Therefore, it is pivotal for teachers to understand how to support our diverse student population so that all learners are provided with an appropriate, individualized, and supportive education.

There were also program-specific elements found to impact the success of RTI. The relationship between the teacher-student ratio and literacy learning reported by Schwartz (2012) indicated that a smaller instructional format resulted in a more positive outcome in literacy. Furthermore, as seen in the study by Bouton et al. (2018), inverting Tier 2 and Tier 3 did not significantly impact word decoding skills for struggling readers,

but it did positively affect word reading skills. It is important to identify these types of program elements to strengthen the implementation of RTI.

Overall, due to teachers' integral role in the RTI process, it is imperative to gain an understanding of their perceptions of the main aspects of RTI and what changes they feel are necessary to increase student success. This information can guide decisions related to professional development, resources and supports, program processes and procedures, and changes necessary for RTI to be successful. Finally, program-specific data provides another facet for strengthening RTI for all struggling students to receive the supports they need to achieve academic success.

Relationship Between Prior Research and Present Study

The present study aims to extend the current research on RTI and improve the fidelity of implementation and overall effectiveness of the program. Research has noted changes in processes and procedures, and increases in areas such as training and support are warranted. However, there has been a lack of details identifying the specific limitations that exist, requiring changes or professional development. Furthermore, as noted by Castro-Villarreal et al. (2014), there are limited qualitative studies within the literature on RTI. Therefore, this study seeks to provide more specific details on teachers' perceptions of RTI, so that further analysis and understanding can be gained. As noted by Hall and Mahoney (2013), "the RTI process will continue to be refined as educational leaders learn more about best practices in meeting the needs of struggling students" (p. 276). Therefore, it is pertinent that we continue this research to effect change in program training and implementation as well as educational policies and procedures.

CHAPTER 3 METHODS AND PROCEDURES

Research Questions

1. What factors do teachers perceive as the benefits of implementing the RTI program?
2. What factors do teachers perceive as the limitations to effective implementation of the RTI program?
3. What changes do teachers perceive as necessary to increase the fidelity and effectiveness of implementing the RTI program?

Rationale for Research Approach

A qualitative singular case study approach was used for this within-site study to allow for the collection of data necessary to answer the research questions. Participants included teachers who implement the RTI program in the district where the study took place. This fits with the case study approach which, according to Creswell and Poth (2018), “is defined as a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a real-life, contemporary bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (e.g., observations, interviews, audiovisual material, and documents and reports), and reports a case description and case themes” (p. 97). Furthermore, as noted by Yim (1994) the definition of the unit of analysis (and therefore of the case) is generally related to how the initial research questions were defined.

For this study, the single case is the school, which is the contemporary bounded system within the school district where RTI was examined. Therefore, this approach matched the data collection and analysis plan to answer the research question, which

entailed utilizing interviews and observations. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed, and all data were analyzed for themes about RTI implementation at this school.

Setting

The setting of this research study was a suburban school district located near a large metropolitan city in the northeastern part of the United States. It consists of two elementary schools that have pre-kindergarten to 6th grade students, and one middle/high school. One of the two elementary schools was used for this study, which has about 325-350 students. Teachers of kindergarten through 6th grade were invited to participate, being that RTI is provided in all grades at this elementary school. Interventions are provided in all classroom types (general education, inclusion, and self-contained) by the classroom teachers for TIER 1. TIER 2 small group interventions are provided as push-in (within the classroom) or pull-out (in a separate office) services by a special education teacher referred to as an interventionist, with a group not larger than five students. TIER 3 interventions are provided individually or with a group of no more than two students as a pull-out service in a separate location by an interventionist.

Permission to approach the elementary school principal about the study was obtained from the Superintendent. Once granted, the principal was asked to allow the researcher to contact teachers to explain the purpose of the study. Once permission was granted, the researcher sent an email to all teachers who implement RTI, asking them to participate in the study. Participants included teachers who implement Tier 1 of the RTI program within their classroom and interventionists who implement Tier 2 and Tier 3 in a

separate location. The teachers varied in years of teaching experience and grade level(s) taught.

Participants and Data Sources

The participants in this study were purposely selected, which is a procedure used to best facilitate the researcher’s understanding of the problem at hand and the research questions (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The study included 8 teachers ($n=8$) from one elementary school who currently teach students in kindergarten through 6th grade. These are teachers who currently implement the RTI program within their grade-level classrooms at the Tier 1 level, and those who work with students in small groups and or individually at the Tiers 2 and 3 levels. They are NYS certified teachers with a Master’s level degree in Education with teaching experience ranging from 9 to over 20 years. The names used in the study are pseudonyms to protect the identity of the school district, elementary school research site, and teacher participants. Pseudonyms were selected at random; however, to assist the reader in the identification of teacher participants throughout the study, the researcher intentionally assigned pseudonyms and provided pertinent information for each participant, see table 1.

Table 1

Description of Participants

Name	Highest Level of Education	Current Title	Years Teaching
Julie	Master’s in Elementary Education	Classroom Teacher	15
Anne	Master’s in Special Education	Classroom Teacher	9
Mandy	Master’s in Special Education	Classroom Teacher	12
Lisa	Master in Elementary Education	Tier 2 Interventionist	10

Nuala	Master in Elementary Education	Tier 2 Interventionist	20 plus
Dara	Master's in Literacy	Tier 3 Interventionist	12

Each participant received an email with a full description of the study. The description indicated the nature of the study, why the information was being collected, and how it will help improve the current implementation of the RTI program. It also documented how the data collected will be utilized and kept confidential and that at any point, a participant can opt to discontinue their participation for any reason.

Data Collection

Data were collected in a natural setting, which entailed the researcher having face-to-face interactions directly with the participants and observing them behave and act within their context (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Data was collected over a 2-week period, which included the completion of individual interviews and classroom observations. Individual interviews were approximately 30-minutes in duration and took place in the school psychologist's office or classroom during a lunch or prep period convenient for the teacher. The interviews followed the researcher-developed interview protocol of open-ended questions that focused on the participant's background in education, perception of the benefits and limitations of RTI, as well as the changes deemed necessary for the program to be successful (See Appendix A). During the interviews, simultaneous procedures were used, which entailed analyzing a previous interview while conducting interviews, writing notes to include as narrative information, and organizing the structure for the final write-up (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Furthermore, interviews were audio recorded and transcribed using the REV application.

Classroom observations took place in the teachers' or interventionists' classroom, during which field notes were collected. As suggested by Creswell and Creswell (2018), an observational protocol for recording information was utilized, with identifying information such as date and location and a dividing line to separate descriptive notes from reflexive notes (See Appendix B). Observational data focused on areas including teachers' implementation of interventions, what processes and procedures discussed during the interviews were followed and those that were not, what resources (i.e., wipe boards, mapping forms) and supports (i.e., teaching assistant) they utilize/have, and what were the benefits and limitations of the process.

Data Analysis Approach

This study was informed through the framework of narrative analysis. This approach is typical for qualitative research and included multiple sources of open-ended data, with participants sharing their ideas unconstrained by predetermined scales or instruments, followed by a review of data to understand and organize into codes and themes that link the data sources (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Triangulation of data sources, including notes from interviews, observational data, audio recordings, transcriptions, reflective journaling, and field notes, were employed. This method entailed obtaining data from various sources to build a logical justification of themes identified within the data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). These data sources were qualitatively analyzed through a coding process that included deductive, inductive, and abductive reasoning. Deduction is what was concluded from factual evidence, induction is what was surmised as rational to transfer from specific to general based on our examination of evidence and found knowledge, and abduction is the conclusion of

what was likely based on evidence and hunches (Saldana, 2011). The data sources and related research have been aligned with the research questions to ensure the analysis process is consistent between questions, articles, and sources. See the table below.

Table 2

Research Matrix

Research Questions	Articles that aligned with the question	Data Source Pertinent to Question:
What factors do teachers perceive as benefits of implementing the essential components of the response to intervention program?	Avant, D. W. (2016). Using response to intervention/multi-tiered systems of supports to promote social justice in schools. <i>Journal for Multicultural Education</i> , 10(4), 507–520.	Interview protocol -Questions 3 a, b & c
	Cowan, C., & Maxwell, G. (2015). Educators’ perceptions of response to intervention implementation and impact of student learning. <i>Journal of Instructional Pedagogies</i> , 16, 1-11.	Observation Form -Areas 1,2,4,5 & 6 -Reflective notes.
	Regan, K.S., Berkeley, S.L., Hughes, M., & Brady, K.K. (2015). Understanding practitioner perceptions of responsiveness to intervention. <i>Learning Disability Quarterly</i> , 38(4), 234-247. https://doi.org/10.1177/0731948715580437	Audio recording transcripts
	Stuart, S., Rinaldi, C., & Higgins-Averill, O. (2011). Agents of change: Voices of teachers on response to intervention. <i>International Journal of Whole Schooling</i> , 7(2), 53–73.	Field notes
What factors do teachers perceive as limitations to the effective implementation of the response to intervention program?	Avant, D. W. (2016). Using response to intervention/multi-tiered systems of supports to promote social justice in schools. <i>Journal for Multicultural Education</i> , 10(4), 507–520.	Interview protocol: -Questions 4 a, b, c & d
	Castro-Villarreal, F., Rodriguez, B. J., & Moore, S. (2014). Teachers’ perceptions and attitudes about Response to Intervention (RTI) in their schools: A qualitative analysis. <i>Teaching and Teacher Education</i> , 40, 104–112. https://doi-org.jerome.stjohns.edu/10.1016/j.tate.2014.02.004	Observation Form -Areas 3 & 7
		Audio recording transcripts
		Field notes

	<p>Cowan, C., & Maxwell, G. (2015). Educators' perceptions of response to intervention implementation and impact of student learning. <i>Journal of Instructional Pedagogies</i>, 16, 1-11.</p> <p>López, M. M., & Mendoza, M. A. (2013). We need to “catch them before they fall”: Response to intervention and elementary emergent bilinguals. <i>Multicultural Perspectives</i>, 15(4), 194–201.</p> <p>Regan, K.S., Berkeley, S.L., Hughes, M., & Brady, K.K. (2015). Understanding practitioner perceptions of responsiveness to intervention. <i>Learning Disability Quarterly</i>, 38(4), 234-247. https://doi.org/10.1177/0731948715580437</p>	
<p>What changes do teachers perceive as necessary to increase the effectiveness and fidelity of implementing RTI with all students?</p>	<p>Avant, D. W. (2016). Using response to intervention/multi-tiered systems of supports to promote social justice in schools. <i>Journal for Multicultural Education</i>, 10(4), 507–520.</p> <p>Castro-Villarreal, F., Rodriguez, B. J., & Moore, S. (2014). Teachers' perceptions and attitudes about Response to Intervention (RTI) in their schools: A qualitative analysis. <i>Teaching and Teacher Education</i>, 40, 104–112. https://doi-org.jerome.stjohns.edu/10.1016/j.tate.2014.02.004</p> <p>Cowan, C., & Maxwell, G. (2015). Educators' perceptions of response to intervention implementation and impact of student learning. <i>Journal of Instructional Pedagogies</i>, 16, 1-11.</p> <p>Hall, C., & Mahoney, J. (2013). Response to intervention: Research and practice. <i>Contemporary issues in education Research</i>, 6(3), 273.</p> <p>Regan, K.S., Berkeley, S.L., Hughes, M., & Brady, K.K. (2015). Understanding practitioner perceptions of responsiveness to intervention. <i>Learning Disability Quarterly</i>, 38(4), 234-247. https://doi.org/10.1177/0731948715580437.</p>	<p>Interview protocol- -Questions 5a,b,c & d; 6a,b & c.</p> <p>Observation Form- -Areas 3 and 7.</p> <p>Audio recording transcripts</p> <p>Field notes</p>

The research analysis followed the steps suggested by Creswell and Creswell (2018), in which the researcher organized and prepared data for analysis (i.e., transcribed interviews), read and looked at data for a general sense of overall meaning, started coding it, generated a description and themes, and finally identified a specific description and themes. During coding, data was segmented into categories related to the research questions and labeled in vivo terms, which means based on the language used by the participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Once data was coded, it was clustered into similar smaller categories and reorganized to identify connections between more specific categories and themes. To build descriptions and themes, the process discussed by Creswell and Guetterman (2019) of layering from minor to major and then broader themes was utilized: Levels of themes were interconnected, with a progression from data, description, and themes, to broad perspectives of abstraction. During data analysis, interviews were recorded and transcribed using the REV application. Next, Dedoose, which is a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) program, was utilized, which facilitates the storage, analysis, sorting, and representation or visualization of qualitative data (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019).

Trustworthiness of the Design

For qualitative research to be accepted as trustworthy, the researchers must demonstrate that data analysis was conducted in a precise, consistent, and exhaustive manner through recording, systematizing, and disclosing the methods of analysis with details to enable the reader to decide whether the process is credible (Nowell et al., 2017).

To ensure trustworthiness, the criteria of credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability were utilized. To support credibility, comprehensive field notes,

reflexive journaling, audio recording, and verbatim translation were used. The information gathered was used to identify the codes and code categories most relevant to the research question, as well as the themes that arose. Dependability and confirmability were ensured by using an audit trail with specific notes on steps and decisions made throughout the study. In addition, triangulation of data from interviews, observations, audio recordings, transcriptions, reflective journaling, and field notes was used to obtain a robust understanding of how the RTI program is implemented in the school. This process enabled the researcher to answer the research questions as well as test for validity and reliability and ensure findings are trustworthy. Dependability was ensured through member checking, whereby participants were given the opportunity to review findings and confirm information. Finally, transferability was ensured through comprehensive field notes and thick, vivid descriptions of the research and findings.

Research Ethics

To ensure voluntary participation, a consent form was sent to each teacher before the start of the study. This provided them with a full description of the study. It detailed the nature of the study, why the information was being collected, and how the data would be utilized and kept confidential. Furthermore, it informed them that member checking would be utilized so they would have the opportunity to review findings and confirm information before publication to clarify any misinterpretations that may have been made. A description of the coding process and use of pseudonyms was explained so they understood how the information would be kept private and confidential. Finally, it informed them that at any time, they could have chosen to discontinue their participation in the study.

Researcher's Role

I am the facilitator of the RTI program, which entails setting up the meetings, collecting the proper paperwork, assisting in developing the plan, supporting teachers as they implement interventions, monitoring student progress, and determining proper steps if a student does/does not meet expectations. I am also the chairperson of the committee on special education. If a student does not meet expectations after Tier 3 services, they are referred to the CSE for an evaluation to determine if the student qualifies for special education services. However, I do not supervise teachers in either role, so no concerns exist with my roles impacting teachers' responses. Furthermore, to increase the likelihood of true findings, the transcription application REV was used to transcribe the interviews and the CAQDAS program Dedoose was utilized to assist in identifying themes and categorizing all data. In addition, member checking was used, which provided participants the opportunity to review findings and confirm information.

Conclusions

The present study aimed to extend the current research and further enhance the fidelity of implementation and overall effectiveness of RTI to meet the needs of all students. As noted by Hall and Mahoney (2013), "the RTI process will continue to be refined as educational leaders learn more about best practices for meeting the needs of struggling students" (p. 276). Therefore, it is pertinent that we continue to research this topic to effect change in program training and implementation as well as educational policies and procedures.

CHAPTER 4 RESULTS

The purpose of this present singular qualitative case study was to explore teachers' perceptions of the components of RTI to expand our understanding of the perceived benefits, limitations, and warranted changes of the program. This study was influenced by the theories of social constructivism and educational change. Social constructivism is primarily based on Vygotsky's theory, which stresses the idea that learning is a process socially mediated by tools such as language, symbols, and signs acquired during social interactions with others (Skunk, 2020).

Social constructivism is reflected in the RTI program by the use of small group instruction for math and reading, individualized interventions using various tools for instruction, and tiered academic support that intensifies with need. The intensity increases through a smaller group interaction between the teacher and the student. Various tools, such as specific programs and resources, are utilized to appropriately provide the support a student needs.

The educational change theory is based on the belief that change processes, practices, and initiatives will alter teaching and learning within our schools (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2008). As Morrison (1998) noted, "change can be regarded as a dynamic and continuous process of development and growth that involves a reorganization in response to 'felt needs'" (p. 13). This study focused on the benefits, limitations, and changes teachers perceive as necessary to effectively support our ever-evolving student population. The educational theory has guided the history of changes that have been made within our education system and continues to guide current reforms surrounding RTI.

Overall, factors from both theories underpin the RTI system and support the restructuring of the education system to rectify the misalignment between students' abilities and needs, and the supports and instruction they receive. Therefore, both theories were utilized to guide the analysis and interpretation of the findings.

In reference to the conceptual framework of this study, it illustrates that teachers' perceptions of the RTI program are directly linked to program and student success. These perceptions have a bidirectional relationship with teachers' experiences, teachers' supports and needs, and program factors. Therefore, the design of this study focused on gathering data specific to those components to allow for a deeper understanding of what is necessary to strengthen the efficacy of implementing RTI.

In this chapter, the findings generated through the data analysis methods described in chapter three are presented and arranged to answer the research questions of this study. In chapter five, the implications of the findings in this chapter will be linked to prior research and the limitations of this study, as well as recommendations for future research and practice.

Research Questions

1. What factors do teachers perceive as benefits of implementing RTI?
2. What factors do teachers perceive as limitations to the effective implementation of RTI?
3. What changes do teachers perceive as necessary to increase the fidelity and effectiveness of implementing RTI?

The data analysis followed the steps suggested by Creswell and Creswell (2018), in which the researcher organized and prepared the data for analysis (i.e., transcribed

interviews), read and looked for a general sense of overall meaning, started coding data, generated descriptions and themes, and finally represented the descriptions and themes. During data collection, the REV application was utilized to collect and transcribe interviews. During coding, interview data were segmented into categories related to the research questions and labeled in vivo terms, which means based on the language used by the participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Observations were also coded and segmented into categories related to the categories used for interview data that related to each research question.

Once all data were coded, they were clustered into similar smaller categories and reorganized to identify connections between more specific categories and themes. To build descriptions and themes, the process discussed by Creswell and Guetterman (2019) of layering from minor to major and then broader themes was utilized: Levels of themes were interconnected, with a progression from data, description, and themes, to broad perspectives of abstraction. During data analysis the CAQDAS program Dedoose was utilized, which facilitated the storage, analysis, sorting, and representation or visualization of qualitative data (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019).

Table 3

Influencers on Teachers' Perceptions of RTI

Area of Investigation	Categories	Subcategories
Benefits	Overall program.	Tier 1, Tier 2, and Tier 3
Limitations	Consistency, fidelity, staffing, scheduling, and training	
Changes deemed necessary	Consistency, staffing, scheduling, and training.	

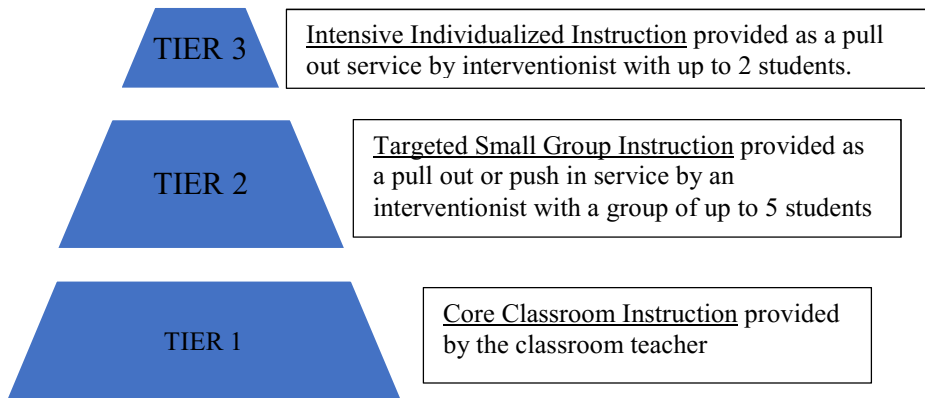
In this chapter, there is a specific focus on the benefits and limitations of RTI as well as the changes deemed necessary to increase the implementation fidelity and effectiveness of the program. Questions from the interview protocol as well as information collected during observations, were included to provide an association between the data and resulting concepts.

RTI Model

At the school where this study took place, a three-tiered RTI model is utilized, which meets the mandate of the New York State Education Department (2010), in that students are provided the opportunity to gain skills through a Tiered intervention approach. It also meets the requirements of the Individuals with Disabilities Improvement Act (IDEA), which requires struggling students to receive a series of intense instructional modifications that are monitored on a continuous basis (Cowan & Maxwell, 2015). According to the school RTI handbook, RTI is “a multi-tiered, problem-solving approach that identifies general education students struggling in academic and behavioral areas early and provides them with systematically applied strategies and targeted instruction at varying levels of intervention” see Figure 2.

Figure 2

Tiered RTI Model



Eileen, a Tier 3 interventionist who works with students individually or in a small group as a pull-out service, stated that RTI means,

The classroom teacher provides your tier one and then if your students have a little confusion, like you would pull a small group in the classroom. If they're still struggling, they would receive tier two support, which would be another provider...with an additional small group, with a strategically planned lesson for that student and then tier three support would then be a pullout provider.

In terms of the services of Tier 3 that she provides, she explained,

I am a tier three reading interventionist, so that means that I pull students from their classroom and I'm the third dose of reading support that they get. And most of my groups at this point are one or more students in a group and I have to work closely with them and their classroom teachers to find their strengths and deficits and work to plan lessons designed to help them make steady growth and to close the gap. End goal being that they then graduate and move to tier two and back into the classroom.

Dara, another reading teacher, explained how she understands the process of RTI,

Students start as tier one, which is the intervention strategies in the classroom.

Then um, if they're not making progress in the classroom they'll move to two tier two, where they'll get an intervention service from an interventionist for a certain number of time. And then, if they're not making progress from that, then they'll get a more, intensive service.

She further reported that interventionists conduct assessments,

Throughout the year, beginning of the year, middle of the year, and end of the year, which focuses on universal assessments that are given to every child. And based on these scores, we, you know, provide services to students, as getting tier two or tier three, uh, services, whether that be in the classroom through an interventionist or through a tier three service provider like myself...

Observational data was also collected to further explore the implementation of RTI. Information gathered on tier implementation was consistent with the data from interviews. Tier 1 was provided within the classroom by the general education teacher. Tier 2 was provided as a targeted small group service either within the general education classroom or as a pull-out service in a separate location. Finally, Tier 3 was provided as an intensive individualized service with a group of one or two students. This information provided a guide for data collection to answer the following research questions.

Research Question 1

What factors do teachers perceive as benefits of implementing the RTI program?

Data analysis revealed that all interviewees perceived benefits to the program as a whole and benefits specific to individual tiers. In reference to the overall program, Anne,

a classroom teacher, noted that when a student meets with success, “they are so happy like to know that they graduated.” She further noted, “we provided intervention for them and it worked like it actually worked. So, like the success stories make it worth it. You can have that conversation with the parents at parent-teacher conferences. It's really nice.” Nuala reported, “I feel that it is excellent and that we can help so many children because we are taking them in their small group, whether inside or outside of the classroom and we are working on what they need.”

Mandy, another classroom teacher, stated, “I've had a lot of students who, over the years, if we can kind of catch them early and provide them with the support they need before it's too late, they are able to make a lot of growth and exit out.” Dara, a Tier 3 provider noted, “they're getting what they need. Um, so, you know, we want to support every child in every way that we can, but some of them need more support than others. So RTI allows for that.” As a Tier 3 provider, Dara is the last level of intervention and if a student does not show progress, they are typically referred to the Committee on special education for evaluation. She noted that “if it does come to like recommending a kid for testing, I'm always able to give quality information about the child because of the process that they have been through.”

Eileen, a Tier 3 provider, discussed how the program is also a benefit to the classroom teachers because with Tier 2 and 3, “it's not all on the classroom teacher.” Julie, a classroom teacher, spoke about the importance of the overall program, especially small group instruction, which is provided at varying intensities at all tiers. She stated in reference to how teachers can support the students, “they are able to address their individual needs when they're in their small groups.” She also noted, “they're able to

utilize different programs with those students to meet their needs.” In reference to students, she noted, “they are provided more immediate feedback from the teacher because it is a small group setting.”

All participants also noted many benefits in terms of specific Tiers. Lisa, one of the interventionists for Tier 2, reflected on RTI, stating, “It's huge, especially in kindergarten, first grade, second grade, where that may be all they need for that one year or two years, and then they can, you know, graduate out of it.” Shane, a Tier 3 provider, explained,

It's nice to hear, you know, parent feedback that, wow, you know, my child is doing X, Y, and Z and they've never done that before...or just seeing the actual progress being made or those little moments where they're like, I remember we did this yesterday. You know, so those little victories are, are everything in my world.

The Tier 2 and 3 interventions are often the most impactful because students benefit more from the smaller group support versus the whole class support of Tier 1. Anne, a classroom teacher explained,

Sometimes, you could have a class of 24 and you're not hitting all your kids in your reading group every day, you're not seeing those kids. Maybe you're seeing them once a week. So, when they're pulled out for small group tier two instruction, they're seen every day, every other day.”

She elaborated further,

I've definitely seen success stories where students are placed in tier two services, and they get the level of support that they need and then they're able to graduate. I

do think our school does a great job with taking a look at each child and I have to say like the reading teachers, they know the students from year to year, so they see the growth. So, most of our students are working with the same teachers over and over again. Yeah, then they can have those success stories.

Mandy, a classroom teacher, explained that she perceives Tier 2 to be a benefit, especially in terms of identifying students' needs. She noted that the Tier 2 providers now use a program called IReady and explained, "we have an assessment piece that comes along with it, and you could see specifically where they're struggling."

Lisa, who is a Tier 2 provider, described what she perceives as the benefits of providing this level of service. Among the benefits noted was

the ability to connect with students on, you know, like a per more personal level for sure. So many like aha moments of, you know, them getting it, you see it, you know, right then and there... the one-on-one instructional time... It's just so different being able to teach the small group as opposed to teaching the whole group...you can really take the time to see what they know and what they don't know and what they need more help with. And that's, to me, so tremendous.

She further explained that Tier 2 has many benefits due to how students experience it and how it affects them beyond the academic piece. She explained,

They absolutely love to be in that small group and to have that, you know, that that extra attention and that, you know, that ability to, to open up. And whereas they might not do that in a whole group, they feel comfortable...they learn more and they, you know, there's just so many benefits of it. They, feel more comfortable with their peers. It's just a whole different learning experience.

Shane, a Tier 2 and 3 provider depending on grade, discussed how differently the students present when they are working in her room in a small group with peers at the same skill level versus how she sees them in their classroom. She explained that,

When they're with their peers that they automatically know are like them, they ask me questions, they raise their hands, they have me pause and wait, I need to catch up, or just all these different things that I see in a group of five or six I don't see in the classroom. So, I think it provides them like a safe space. It provides them, I'm not alone. I'm not the only one who doesn't understand. Yeah. Um, I think it gives them a lot of confidence when they do understand something because we celebrate it so much...I just think that they definitely make a lot of progress that they wouldn't otherwise make.

She further explained that this level of intervention makes such an impact because the students have the opportunity to learn a skill and bring it back to the classroom. She noted, "I work with their teachers, so it's there, what they're learning in here then translates to their classroom." What they do with her is also different than the classroom in terms of resources. She noted, "I can provide them with different manipulatives. I can provide them with different procedures." She elaborated, "it's not only getting the support when they're with me, but also when they're in the classrooms now, they're getting what they need."

Nuala, a Tier 3 provider, discussed her level of service and her perception of the main benefits as, "I feel like I'm meeting the students where they are. Okay. I'm giving what they need." She explained, "the longer you are in RTI and helping those students,

you're, you gain more knowledge in how you can best support them.” For her, Tier 3 is such an impactful level of intervention because,

They're getting it here, whether they're just working in a group with me on, um, a topic or a concept or on iReady and they get it, just that excitement that they feel like they've owned it and they know it. I also share the data with them, so they know that they are improving or they know what they need to work on.

Mandy, a Tier 3 provider, also reflected on the benefit of the interventions provided at this Tier, “I think that consistent support from a reading specialist has been really helpful. Um, because a lot of those students make more progress than they had previously.” Eileen, also a Tier 3 provider, perceives the success of students as a result of the support allotted to them at this level because it is not within a whole classroom of students. She noted, “kids open up a little bit more and can recognize mistakes. Not as like a number grade, but as more like, oh, I can do this.” She noted that their success is directly linked to the implementation process of the RTI services and is due to the students “getting instruction at their level, finding more success, helping them build confidence.” She detailed that,

I feel like this is where they find opportunities...You're in a group so the teachers are more aware of your needs, can answer questions, can, you know, provide that structure in like just a really small tight setting and progress monitor more regularly...I feel like there are benefits to being in a small center where you can talk more openly about struggles and you can talk more openly about success and making gains.

Observation data supported these findings on the benefits of RTI, especially for Tier 2 and Tier 3. During the three Tier 1 observations of math lessons within the general education classrooms, the teachers consistently started with whole group instruction and used a smart board so that information was provided orally and visually. Students were asked throughout the lesson if they had questions. Once the lesson was complete, students were instructed to work on the related assignment in their workbooks. During this time, the teacher pulled small groups to a back table to work on the assignment with them. The groups included the Tier 1 students and those who raised their hand for support or who the teacher recognized were struggling. During each observation, it was noted that students did not always raise their hands if they needed support during whole group instruction. Students asked more questions while in the small groups, but follow-up and additional checks for understanding were not always possible due to time constraints.

There was some variation in the benefits noted during observations of Tier 2 when provided within the classroom versus as a pull-out service. The observation of Tier 2 within the classroom was with kindergarten students working on letter word recognition skills. A large wipe board, flashcards, and worksheets that varied in level of difficulty were utilized. The interventionist was able to provide support to those struggling with the content and provided them with a worksheet at their level to complete. The students asked questions throughout the time in a small group. Although the instruction was more individualized than at Tier 1, being in the classroom lent itself to many classroom interruptions.

The second Tier 2 observation was of an older group of students who had their own computers with the program being used on it. The interventionist was able to review

the content, answer questions, and then start the students at their level. While students worked on their computers, the interventionist was able to support other students individually or on another task. Toward the end of the session, the interventionist went around to each student to check for understanding, provide additional support, and note if something needed to be followed up on again.

Finally, during Tier 3 observations, students were provided with the most intense level of support. During the first observation, the interventionist utilized a smart board to review the math concept being focused on. She was able to review the concept in detail, stopping whenever there was a question or request for reaching/reexplanation of information, and then moved on to individualized support. During individualized support, the interventionist provided each student with a problem and helped them work it through in a game format, which increased the level of interest. The students picked a math problem card and then had to match it to the correct algebraic expression card. By the end of the observation, all of the students were able to complete additional problems independently. The other two Tier 3 observations were during reading support.

During the first observation of a reading support service, the interventionist used a large wipe board, a die with words to read, spell, and give the definition of a story with corresponding words, and a word wall. There were two students in this group who were working on the same level of word reading. The students took turns with the die, asked questions when they needed to, and were provided with immediate feedback. During the second observation, the interventionist worked with one student on identifying the problems and solutions in a story. A large wipe board, story reader, and mapping sheet for information were utilized. The interventionist was able to seesaw read with the

student and support him through identifying the problem and solutions. She was also able to assist him with breaking down information to understand the important details. He asked questions throughout the process and received immediate feedback. At the end of both Tier 3 observations, the students were able to complete a follow-up activity independently.

Overall, there were noted benefits of interventions on all Tier levels for students. The most significant benefits were noted to occur as a response to the more intense levels of Tier 2 and Tier 3. Benefits of the program were also noted for classroom teachers and interventionists. Primarily, classroom teachers benefit when interventionists work with their students allowing them to focus on whole class instruction. For interventionists the main benefit is the ability to work more intensely with students, which often leads to experiencing the excitement of a student succeeding and graduating from a services.

Research Question 2

What factors do teachers perceive as limitations to the effective implementation of RTI?

Data collection and analysis revealed several recurring themes within the area of limitations. Themes for which limitations fell include (1) consistency, (2) staffing, (3) training, and (4) scheduling. These areas are not separate and apart, but instead, all impact each other and how students are supported.

Consistency

Participants perceived consistency as an issue in terms of how RTI is interpreted and interventions are provided, as well as how RTI implementation is prioritized among other tasks. Mandy noted,

I think some of the language of the RTI model is a, is a little bit vague. So, the way people interpret it might be a little bit different...like sometimes, some kids will receive 20 minutes versus others who are receiving 40 or 30. And I think that is a little confusing...then it's inconsistent with what the kids receive.

Eileen also referred to the consistency of how services are provided to a student. She noted that, “everyone's there to be supporting them for the same reason, but it's just like we don't have the time to connect it.” She further explained that “we're missing like that piece where all parties included, that support the kid, are on the same page.”

Julie similarly spoke to consistency, stating that,

There are a lot of interruptions and again, it's, you know, by no fault of the service providers, it's what they're told to do. But doing middle of the year assessments takes a very long time...and again, these are happening at key times in the year...It's just they need to be consistent, more consistent throughout the school year.

There is also an issue with consistency in terms of priority level given to RTI. As noted by Lisa, “tier two is just as important as anything. And it can't just be, you know, back shelved because of, you know, what may or may not be happening that day.” Eileen concurred in speaking about service providers being “pulled to do other things and then kids lose the service that they need.”

Staffing

Participants perceived staffing as a limitation that impacts many other areas. They referred to the process of securing support for students to be an issue in terms of timeline and appropriateness of interventions due to staffing. Mandy reported, “it's tough when

staffing is already set up, yet you want to incorporate additional support throughout the year.” She further noted that, “if something's not working, make a change because there needs to be more consistent changes, and maybe they need to hire additional support so that things like that can happen.” Shane discussed how the limited staff impacts the overall process of RTI,

We need to like, follow the actual process of that, but in actually following that process, it takes a long time and you need a lot of personnel to make that work, and we don't have that. And we do the best we can with the staff we have and we offer as much help as we can.

She also discussed staffing becoming an issue with the needs and number of students increasing. She noted, “if our caseloads are increasing, then the number of people who service them needs to increase because a group of seven or eight is not a small group anymore.”

With regard to expectations of classroom teachers without enough support, Anne reported, “there are some years where academically you just have a needy class and yeah, it's a lot to take data notes on the kids.” Mandy similarly discussed how difficult it can be for a classroom teacher when expected to implement Tier 1, especially “when you have a large class and there's no assistant or aid to support them throughout the day.” Nuala similarly stated, “it's a lot to do in the classroom, balancing that out.” Eileen noted, “sometimes, for classroom teachers, it becomes overwhelming.”

Training

Participants also reported RTI training to be a factor that limits the success of the program. Although there was some level of training, additional and more formal training

is perceived as warranted. According to Eileen, “there was not like a full-on training for what RTI is and how to implement it. We had like different consultants come in to discuss it...” She further stated, “I think that there was a really good amount of pd. Um, but I also think ongoing PD sometimes provides a different perspective.” Lisa also noted, “we've never been formally trained.” Shane concurred and reported,

I don't really feel like I've ever been trained on RTI specifically, that it's like we have, you know, our three big meetings a year to discuss the kids and where their placement is. But I don't think there's specific training on the RTI model.

Julie reported,

I know what they look like at each level from talking about them during faculty meetings and other sessions and meeting. We have meetings, you know, several times a year to talk about our tiered services and where we're at with them and the students that are receiving them. But I think more formal training beforehand...I would say in like the new teacher training that we have, that tiered services need to be addressed. I also think that it should be reviewed annually.

Scheduling

Scheduling was another aspect discussed by participants to be a limitation because of the impact it has on the commencement of services as well as the provision of services. According to Nuala, “when we're collecting the data in the beginning, the middle, the end of the year, when we are deciding where they're going to be placed, we are wasting a lot of valuable learning time on all that testing.” Mandy pointed out that scheduling takes a great deal of time at the beginning of the year and services tend to not start for a number of weeks. When discussing a specific student she noted, “if she had

started receiving her tier two service in the middle of September, we could have reevaluated her tier three placement then by November versus February.” Julie concurred, “with the inconsistent scheduling and the delays, it's hard to provide the services to the students who need because of those issues that keep coming up.” This is also due to RTI being scheduled after mandated services. As noted by Dara, “a lot of the kids that get reading get a lot of other services, so scheduling is definitely an issue as well.”

Participants also spoke about the impact of scheduling on the way services are provided. As noted by Mandy,

When they are pulled out and what they're missing or where it overlaps with something else. Um, that's been, I want to say, the biggest issue because as we add on things they want us to work on, what are they losing out on right? Or what are we taking out of our schedule? So, I think that the schedule is really the most challenging part of it.

Participants also talked about the impact of scheduling on teachers' ability to consult with each other to communicate which services are being provided, what is/is not working, and for consistency and efficiency with interventions between providers. As noted by Eileen, “everyone's there to be supporting them for the same reason, but it's just like we don't have the time to connect it.” Participants also referred to the lack of common planning time as an issue at the beginning of the year when service providers are determining the supports the classroom teachers may need for their students. Nuala reported, “it was very overwhelming because you have to figure out who needed what,

because we weren't given a lot of time to meet with the teachers and find out what they needed." Eileen concurred, "there's not enough time that people get to meet as a team."

Data from observations also indicated scheduling as an issue that negatively impacted implementation at all Tier levels. During Tier 1 observations, teachers provided instruction to the whole class, followed by small group instruction. Throughout these observations, limitations were noted due to time constraints and interruptions that impeded the small group time. During all three observations, the teachers had to stop to answer questions or redirect students who were not in the small group. Furthermore, there was not enough time in the schedule to meet with all students in small groups and those who were in these groups did not always have an opportunity to ask all of their questions.

During the observation of Tier 2 as a push-in service, scheduling limitations were also noted. The interventionist was interrupted by classroom activities and time for her to work with each group was limited due to her schedule. She also did not have a specific program to use with students, which made planning more difficult. During the observation of Tier 2 as a pull-out service, students were provided a program that was more individualized to work on while the interventionist supported the other students. The interventionist had 40 minutes to work with the group by putting two 20-minute sessions together. This allowed for time to review the lesson in its entirety and provide support as necessary. However, it was reported that this is not always possible due to scheduling and limited planning time as well as limited staff. During Tier 3 observations, the students received the most individualized support of all tiers. During two of the observations, students arrived late and due to scheduling and staff limitations, the time could not be extended.

Overall, limitations were identified for the overall program as well as at each Tier level. The limitations were consistently noted throughout the interview and observational data. Although these limitations were organized into the areas of consistency, staffing, training, and scheduling, there is a significant link between them in that a limitation in one is a catalyst for a limitation in others.

Research Question 3

What changes do teachers perceive as necessary to increase the fidelity and effective and of implementing the RTI program?

The participants noted that there are many benefits to implementing the RTI program, especially in terms of how students receive support to succeed, with many graduating out of services. These benefits were noted to have recently increased due to support provided through the adoption of a Tier 2 program called IReady. As noted by Julie, “IReady has made it more consistent, but that's brand new. And so, before then, it was very inconsistent in what actually was being done during that tier two service.”

Although benefits were reported, a theme of limitations also emerged, which led to the changes that participants perceived as being necessary for RTI to be implemented with fidelity and effectively. These changes fell into the categories of consistency, staffing, scheduling, and training, which are consistent with those discussed under limitations.

Consistency

In the area of consistency, changes perceived as necessary focused on the discrepancies between people’s interpretations of the program’s processes and procedures and how services are provided. Anne stated, “I think it's important that every teacher is

following the same steps.” Julie noted, “the students need to be receiving consistent support services throughout the school year, there are a lot of interruptions.” The issue of interruptions and inconsistency of services, as previously discussed, is mainly due to the beginning, mid, and end-of-the-year assessments. When discussing service provision, Julie explained,

So, in an ideal situation, it would be from September when the students first come back into school, they would hit the ground running with their support services.

Um, I keep saying the same thing over and over again, but it would be consistent.

She also noted that there needs to be consistency in how services are provided by various staff from teachers to interventionists providing Tier 2 and 3 services. She explained, “I think you need to know and have everything set up and have your staff on the same page about it. So, everyone's working together in a consistent way as the students go through the grades.”

Staffing

Many of the changes perceived as warranted would require additional staff. As per Mandy, “...there needs to be more consistent changes and maybe they need to hire additional support so that things like that can happen.” More staff was also discussed in reference to the fidelity with which Tier 2 and 3 are implemented. For RTI to work effectively, Shane stated the need for,

More staff to make that work...tier two is a group of four or five or six, and tier three should really be capped at two or three kids... because if you're really tailoring instruction to their needs, needs vary.

When discussing the beginning, middle, and end of year assessments that impede on service provision, Julie suggested “having additional support providers who are able to maybe more so like divide and conquer. Like some, some could be more in charge of doing the assessments, while others are still working with the students and seeing their groups.”

Training

Changes in the area of training were also consistently discussed by participants. As detailed previously, although participants noted that they had received some training at PDs and other meetings, they consistently reported a need for training to be formal and more often. As noted by Julie, “staff needs clear focused training on what we should do, how we should do it, when we should do it, what it should look like in the classroom, what it should look like outside of the classroom,” She further noted,

I think that it needs to be something that's made a priority that's addressed to all the teachers at the same time. So that, you know, sometimes questions come up that you don't think about, but someone else did, and then they get an answer and know how to do something and you didn't get that answer because you didn't ask and might be doing it differently.

Scheduling

Scheduling was discussed in detail as a limitation and was also indicated as a main issue for consistency with which RTI is implemented. As noted by Shane,

If the classes were offset by 20 minutes, we always say that because then one group is always in the middle of their math block, or one group is always at the end of the math block. The end of the math block is ideal because that's when

they're in their independent practice and that's when they need the support. So, it's just I think that flexibility would offer a great deal of difference for both tier two and tier three.

Nuala similarly spoke to the need for scheduling to be more flexible. She related it to the twenty minutes that Tier 2 is provided reporting,

I put mine together. I see them for forty, so that really is a big help. I worked with the teachers and that really worked very well last year. And I can see them for that longer period of time and get them on IReady. Twenty minutes by itself isn't going to do anything, especially with the upper grades, twenty minutes is not enough. It might be enough for K and one.

In terms of time for providers to meet, Nuala noted that for the RTI program to be more effective, there needs to be “planning time with teachers to collaborate.” Eileen similarly stated, “time spent with all providers for students is helpful. So, then everyone’s on the same page. I think that that's super key because everyone's doing something different.”

The perceived necessary changes that emerged from the interview data were also evident during observations. During Tier 1 observations, classroom teachers consistently paused their small groups to answer questions or redirect students who were not in the small group. For them to implement Tier 1, there would need to be an additional staff member to assist in the classroom.

During the observation of Tier 2 as a push-in service, the interventionist was interrupted by classroom activities, her time to work with each group was limited, and she did not have a specific program to use with the students. Additional staff, scheduling

flexibility, and training on a program would be necessary to change this. The observation of Tier 2 as a pull-out service was 40 minutes in duration because the interventionist was able to put two 20-minute sessions together. This is not always possible unless there is a change in staffing, training, and a flexible schedule. During two of the Tier 3 observations, students arrived late and the time could not be extended. For this to be rectified, there would need to be additional staff and a flexible schedule.

Overall, it was found that teachers perceived changes in the areas of consistency, staffing, training, and scheduling as necessary for the RTI program to be implemented with fidelity and effectively. These changes were found to have a bidirectional relationship in that a change in one area impacts the other areas. As such, positive change in one area is viewed as the catalyst to positive changes in all areas.

CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION

The first section of this chapter will present an interpretation of the results found in the data reviewed in chapter 4. The second section discusses the findings in relation to the theoretical and conceptual frameworks presented in Chapter 2, as well as the previous research reviewed. How the findings from this study support and extend prior research is also discussed. This chapter concludes with a discussion on limitations, followed by implications for future research and future practice, and ends with a conclusion and epilogue.

Interpretation of Results

This section provides a discussion of the results of this study as they relate to and answer the research questions. The findings from interviews generated information on teachers' perceived benefits and limitations of RTI as well as their perception of the warranted changes for the program to be implemented with fidelity and effectively. Observational data also provided findings about the benefits, limitations, and changes necessary to increase the fidelity and effectiveness of RTI. Overall, the observational data substantiated the findings of the interview data.

Research Question 1

What factors do teachers perceive as benefits of implementing RTI?

Participants consistently reported there are numerous benefits of the RTI program. The reported benefits ranged from Tier 1 through Tier 3 and were consistent with the benefits noted during the observations of this study. Participants perceived the main benefit of Tier 1 to be the additional support of small group instruction due to the immediate feedback given to students struggling to learn a concept. Although participants

noted this as a benefit at Tier 1, they also acknowledged the limitations it posed when a teacher has a whole class of students to also support.

Findings indicated that participants perceived the level of student progress resulting from Tiers 2 and especially 3 to far exceed the progress from Tier 1. This was a result of the more individualized interventions and attention, as well as a smaller group makeup. These tiers offered the opportunity for a higher level of focus on individual needs that are matched to interventions. The benefit of interventions was perceived to be most significant at Tier 2 as a pull-out service and Tier 3.

Observation data supported these findings, especially in terms of the benefits of Tier 2 and Tier 3. When observing Tier 1 within the general education classrooms, it was evident that students who struggled with the concept being taught typically waited for the small group to ask most questions and inform the teacher of their struggle. When observing Tier 2 within the classroom versus as a pull-out service, benefits were evident for both levels. However, there was a difference in both the level of individualization of the content as well as the student's approach to receiving support between Tier 2 and Tier 3. Within the classroom, students were provided with reteaching of the concept and the assignment provided was matched to their level of understanding. However, when receiving the support as a pull-out service, the interventions were further individualized, and students were observed as more comfortable in a small uninterrupted setting. They asked many more questions than when in the classroom and were more forthcoming about their level of difficulty and/or understanding. Furthermore, at Tier 3, the most benefit was observed in terms of students' level of advocating for themselves and asking for what they needed. At this level, the interventions were highly individualized, and the

students were open to asking additional questions and reporting when they still did not understand a concept.

Overall, it was found that there are significant benefits to every Tier level, especially during small group instruction. However, the small group instructional format is most successful for supporting struggling learners when provided in a separate location with the least interruptions and when highly individualized. It was also reported and observed that in small groups, students seemed more comfortable, likely to ask questions and ask for further support, as well as show excitement when a concept was learned.

Research Question 2

What factors do teachers perceive as limitations to the effective implementation of RTI?

Participants identified limitations in the areas of consistency, staffing, training, and scheduling. They perceived these limitations to negatively impact the fidelity and effectiveness of RTI implementation. These areas are not perceived as separate from one another, but instead as having bidirectional relationships in that, each area is viewed as having an impact on the others.

Consistency

Findings indicated that teachers viewed the consistency of service provision as a limitation at all Tiers. At Tier 1, it was reported to be difficult for classroom teachers to provide students with small group instruction, especially within a large class or one with numerous higher need students. This was evidenced during observations when small group instruction was frequently interrupted by students not in the group.

Finding indicated that At Tier 2 and 3, consistency is limited due to providers having various responsibilities, such as completing assessments. This requires a

substantial amount of time and impedes services being initiated at the beginning of the year and subsequent services at the middle and end of the year. It was also found that providers are often tasked with other responsibilities, such as providing coverage, which impedes and/or interrupts service delivery throughout the year. Finally, the manner in which RTI is provided was noted to be inconsistent due to the various interpretations of how to implement the program, as well as a lack of common planning time to collaborate on the implementation process.

Staffing

Findings indicated that a limited staff also significantly impacts the fidelity of the RTI program. As noted earlier, consistency is a limitation of the fidelity and effectiveness of RTI. A major contributor to this is the lack of sufficient staff. Additional staff members would allow classroom teachers to receive the support for Tier 1 they feel necessary. It would also permit Tier 2 and 3 services to be provided at every grade level, with the appropriate grouping, coverage when required, and the addition of services when necessary, throughout the year, even during assessment periods.

Training

Finding indicated training was also emphasized as a limitation in terms of the level and amount provided. It was found that training has been provided, but typically during meetings that are not formally dedicated to RTI. There is a perceived need for an all-staff formal training that is descriptive of all Tiers, procedures and protocols, and expectations so that it is implemented consistently between providers. There is also a perceived need for training to be provided throughout the year, so there are updates as needed and ongoing dialogue about the program.

Scheduling

Scheduling was another limitation perceived to impact the fidelity and effectiveness of RTI. Due to scheduling conflicts (i.e., assessments and need for coverage), there is often a delay in the commencement of services at the beginning of the year and initiation of new services throughout the year. At the beginning of the year, RTI services are scheduled after mandated services within an already inflexible schedule. This limits Tier 2 and 3 providers' ability to provide services in a flexible manner in terms of time, such as in a 40-minute block as opposed to two 20-minute blocks. It also inhibits providers' ability to instruct students on the same material being covered in class at a particular time, which impedes students' ability to then transition back without missing content from other areas. Finally, scheduling was found to impact communication between staff. It was found that when there is a lack of scheduled common planning time for staff to consult with each other, they are not abreast of what is being provided and what is/is not working, so that they can be efficient with interventions between providers.

During observations, limitations were also noted in consistency, staffing, training, and scheduling throughout the Tiers. At Tier 1, classroom teachers struggled to provide small group instruction, while supporting the rest of their class. This was due to a lack of additional staff to assist with the class and the limited time scheduled to provide sufficient support to each group. At Tier 2, when observed as a push-in service, similar limitations were noted including interruptions and time constraints. At this tier there was also a lack of training on specific Tier 2 programs. During the observation of Tier 2 as a pull-out service, students were provided a program that was further individualized, but again scheduling and lack of additional staff to assist were noted. During Tier 3

observations, the students received the most individualized support. However, during two of the observations at this tier, students arrived late and due to scheduling and staff limitations, the time could not be extended.

Overall, findings that emerged from the interview and observational data noted limitations in the areas of (1) consistency, (2) staffing, (3) training, and (4) scheduling. These areas were found to have a bidirectional relationship in that each one impacts the others.

Research Questions 3

What changes do teachers perceive as necessary to increase the effectiveness and fidelity of implementing the RTI program?

This research question emerges from the previous two questions and links teachers perceived benefits and limitations of RTI to the changes they believe will increase the fidelity and effectiveness of the program. Findings indicated that teachers perceived the adoption of the Tier 2 program IReady as a significant benefit and feel that this change needs to be extended to Tier 1 and Tier 3, and that additional programs should be added to bolster all Tiered services even further. Changes deemed necessary also resulted from limitations identified in the findings, specifically in the areas of consistency, staffing, scheduling, and training. These changes deemed necessary were supported by observational data.

For consistency, findings indicated a perceived need for a specific framework of processes and procedures to be implemented throughout the Tiers and grades. This extended to staffing in that additional staff would be necessary for RTI services to be consistently provided at all Tiers, in all grade levels, without interruption. Linked to an

increase in staff was the need for additional training for all teachers. Findings indicated teachers perceive the current training to lack the level necessary to implement RTI successfully. It was reported that changes need to be made in terms of the breadth and depth of the training, which needs to be more formal and descriptive of all Tiers, procedures and protocols, and expectations so that it is implemented consistently between providers. There is also a perceived need for training to be provided throughout the year, so there is an ongoing dialogue about the program to keep everyone abreast of updates. Observational data also indicated that an increase in trained staff would alleviate many of the situations that impact the implementation of RTI from Tier 1 to Tier 3. This would also provide necessary support and coverage for classroom teachers and interventionists.

The final area of changes deemed necessary is scheduling, which was also linked to the other areas of limitations. Teachers perceived a need for scheduling to be more flexible and to prioritize RTI. With flexibility, they indicated that services could be provided within a timeframe that best meets a student's needs. In regard to prioritization of RTI, teachers feel the need for time to meet and collaborate on what is/is not working with RTI specifically. They also reported RTI needs to be a priority among other responsibilities so services can be provided consistently and without interruption. Observational data also indicated a need for flexibility in how and when services are provided to students, so there is fidelity, consistency, and efficiency in delivery.

Results from this qualitative singular case study indicated that the RTI program is perceived by the participants to have numerous benefits and limitations and that with specific changes, the fidelity and effectiveness of the program could be increased. Overall, they view the program positively and feel that it is a beneficial approach to

support struggling students. However, they perceive limitations in the areas of consistency, staffing, training, and scheduling to impede the level of effectiveness in fully supporting struggling learners. These findings were supported by observation data which also found that although RTI has the benefit of supporting students, it also has limitations in the areas of consistency, staffing, training, and scheduling.

Furthermore, findings indicate that there are changes deemed necessary to increase the benefits and rectify the limitations. These changes are perceived to have a bidirectional relationship in that they all will have an equal impact on each other. A positive change in one particular limitation is viewed as able to result in an equally positive change in another. Overall, changes in the implementation of RTI are perceived as necessary for it to be effective and meet the constantly changing and evolving needs of students and those providing services.

Connection to the Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks of this Study

The findings from this study align with the social constructivist theory as well as the educational change theory. The social constructivist theory stresses the idea that learning is a process socially mediated by tools such as language, symbols, and signs acquired during social interactions with others (Skunk, 2020). The educational change theory is based on the belief that change processes, practices, and initiatives will alter teaching and learning within our schools (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2008). As Morrison (1998) noted, “change can be regarded as a dynamic and continuous process of development and growth that involves a reorganization in response to 'felt needs'” (p. 13). Throughout the findings of this study, the theme of a felt need for change emerged. Benefits were reported about Tiered supports, as was the need for the supports to be

extended and more consistent. Findings in the area of limitations were discussed in detail and linked to the changes needed to rectify them. These changes were noted to be warranted in the areas of consistency, staffing, training and scheduling, which is reflective of the educational change theory.

The social constructivist theory is aligned with the findings that teachers perceived a smaller group with more interactions between a teacher and students as the most effective way to support students. During smaller group instruction students are provided individualized tools, making it more likely for learning to occur. The social aspect of this theory is also reflected in the findings that staffing is of utmost importance. Without the appropriate number of staff, the tools to meet the needs of all students can not be provided. Furthermore, staff must be given time to plan together to decide on the language, programs, and processes that would best meet students' needs. This is essential during the implementation phase so that interventions are provided with consistency and at appropriate times.

The findings also align with the conceptual framework of this study. It was found that teachers' perceptions of the RTI program have a strong bidirectional relationship with their experiences, the support provided, felt needs, and specific program factors. In terms of their experiences, findings showed that both the limitations and benefits they experienced impacted their perception of RTI. These experiences were influenced by the level of teacher support, how their needs were met, and program factors. More specifically, training, staffing, resources, and scheduling were found to impact implementation, consistency, and fidelity of RTI implementation, which directly affects the success of the program and the students it supports.

Relationship Between Results and Prior Research

The findings of this study indicate that participants perceive RTI as a significant benefit due to the support it provides to struggling students. This aligns with the study by Stuart et al. (2011), which found that teachers' perceptions of RTI became more positive after the first year of implementation. Participants reported that the RTI model improved their ability to monitor student progress and implement the program, strengthened the collaborative planning structures to develop and deliver instruction, and strengthened the referral process for special education.

Although benefits were noted, teachers also perceived limitations in the RTI program at their school, such as the level of training and support provided, consistency, scheduling, and staffing. This aligns with the study by Cowan and Maxwell (2015), which found the RTI program was viewed as a positive step toward supporting student achievement and learning. However, a considerable level of frustration existed with the amount of paperwork and responsibility placed on the teacher; and most felt a need for additional training on the framework of RTI.

The current study also found a slight difference in the perceived level of need for training and support between participants, with the classroom teachers reporting more of a need than interventionists, especially those implementing Tier 3. However, overall, the limitations were consistently presented by participants. This is similar to the study by Regan et al. (2015), which found teachers' perceptions of RTI varied across grade levels taught and specific areas considered; however, teachers consistently felt improvements were necessary for RTI to be successfully implemented in their school district.

This study also found teachers perceived the limitations of implementation to impede their ability to meet the various ever-evolving needs of their students. This aligns with the study by López and Mendoza (2013), which found there are challenges in the implementation process of RTI due to the complexity of programming and the diverse backgrounds of their students.

In addition to limitations found, changes that teachers perceive as necessary emerged in the areas of consistency, staffing, training, and scheduling. This is similar to a study by Castro et al. (2014), which found specific barriers to effective implementation included lack of training, limited time and resources, and issues with the system practices, processes, and amount of paperwork. To strengthen RTI, teachers in this study suggested an increase in training, resources, and communication, as well as stronger collaboration between teachers, administrators, and specialists. Similarly, Hall and Mahoney (2013) found that teachers perceived professional development opportunities as necessary to further develop teachers' abilities and confidence in implementing RTI.

Furthermore, perceptions of best practices were found to align with past research. It was found that teachers perceived Tier 2, especially as a pull-out service, and Tier 3 to be the best way to support struggling learners. This aligns with a study by Schwartz et al. (2012), that indicated a small instructional format is the most successful for teaching struggling beginner readers. In addition, Bouton et al. (2018) found that inverting the tiers had a positive effect on word identification which also indicates a more intense level of support has the most benefits.

Overall, the findings from this study aligned with findings from previous research in terms of the perceived benefits and limitations of implementing RTI, as well as the changes perceived as necessary to increase the fidelity and effectiveness of the program.

Limitations

In this qualitative singular case study, techniques were utilized to establish the trustworthiness of findings based on the criteria of credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. For qualitative research to be accepted as trustworthy, the researchers must demonstrate that data analysis was conducted in a precise, consistent, and exhaustive manner through recording, systematizing, and disclosing the methods of analysis with details to enable the reader to decide whether the process is credible (Nowell et al., 2017). The techniques used to meet these requirements were reflexive journaling, comprehensive field notes, audio recording, verbatim translation, triangulation of data sources, member checking, and thick, vivid descriptions of the research and findings.

Although these techniques were utilized, limitations still exist in this study. First, the individuals interviewed and observed only represented a small group of teachers who provide RTI services at one school in the North East. Therefore, external validity may be limited, making it difficult to generalize findings outside the context of this school/district. Thus, the scope of participants should be enlarged to accommodate different perspectives related to RTI.

Another study limitation was the absence of standardized interview and observation protocols. The researcher developed questions for the interview protocol and data collection areas for the observation protocol using existing research as a guide (see

Appendix A and B). To establish content validity, both protocols were used in mock interviews and observations with teachers who implement the RTI program and were then reviewed with the researcher's mentor. Appropriate revisions were made to the instruments prior to completing the study. Researcher bias is another limitation in which the researcher's initial preconceptions about the study may have inadvertently influenced the research design, data collection process, or interpretations. Therefore, triangulation of multiple data sources and collection methods were used to reduce bias and strengthen the credibility and validity of data, interpretations, and findings.

Implications for Future Research

There are numerous areas of RTI that continue to warrant investigation from an educational leadership perspective. Future researchers may consider investigating multiple schools in a larger, more diverse district. This may provide a deeper understanding of how to implement RTI with fidelity and effectively to meet the diverse needs of our ever-evolving student population. Future research may also compare how other districts with ongoing professional development schedule the school year to allow for training. This may offer options on how to schedule and provide teachers with the training they need to implement RTI successfully.

Finally, future researchers may compare the number of students who are referred to the committee on special education with those who graduate from services, between various school districts. This may provide an understanding of best practices for providing appropriate support to struggling learners who may otherwise be referred for special education services. This may also provide correlational data to indicate the RTI processes and procedures that result in the best outcome for students.

Implications for Future Practice

RTI is a program that benefits struggling students through interventions provided to them within their general education curriculum. This Tiered system of supports provides individualized, evidence-based interventions at increasingly intense levels. The perceptions of those charged with implementing RTI will ultimately impact the success of the program as well as the students it serves. For teachers to perceive the program as valuable and effective, their experiences have to support this. Furthermore, when staff feels the program and students will be successful, they are more likely to put forth their best effort to implement the program with fidelity and effectively.

For this to take place, there needs to be formal training provided throughout the year to providers as well as new staff to increase their understanding of the overall program as well as specifics for each TIER. Another core area to ensure teachers perceive the program positively is ensuring there is an appropriate number of staff to implement the Tiers with fidelity and consistency. There must be enough providers put in place before the start of the year so that services, both existing and new, can be scheduled and provided consistently. Time needs to also be scheduled for teachers to meet and discuss the needs of their students and plan accordingly. Overall, perceptions of the program by those tasked to provide it is of utmost importance. Therefore, staffing, training, scheduling, consistency, and overall program success must be made a priority for teachers to view it positively and to set it up for success.

Conclusion

The results from this singular case study demonstrate that teachers typically view the RTI program as a means to provide struggling students with support on many levels.

At the school where this study took place, a three-tiered RTI model is utilized, which meets the mandate of the New York State Education Department (2010), for students to be provided with the opportunity to gain skills through a Tiered intervention approach. It is also designed to meet the mandate of the Individuals with Disabilities Improvement Act (IDEA), which requires struggling students to receive a series of intense instructional modifications that are monitored on a continuous basis (Cowan & Maxwell, 2015).

It was found that teachers perceive the benefits of this program to be evident at all levels and are committed to supporting their students to the best of their abilities. However, there are numerous limitations that hinder the fidelity and sustainability of the program. Until school leadership recognizes these limitations and makes necessary changes, the RTI program will not function as a truly beneficial support system for struggling students.

Overall, there is a lack of proper staffing, training, consistency, and scheduling, which teachers feel negatively impacts the fidelity and effectiveness of the program. To address this issue, we must circle back to school leadership. School leaders need to acknowledge that if those charged with implementing RTI lack a positive perception of the program, it will eventually fail. Therefore, it is imperative for administrators to make RTI a priority and provide teachers with the supports and resources they need to feel confident about their skills and the effectiveness and sustainability of the program. This entails providing them with formal and ongoing professional development, time to collaborate and schedule services, and enough staff support to provide services consistently. Once this is established, we can begin to meet the expectation of supporting all students so they can access their education and meet with academic success.

Epilogue

I chose this study with the belief that the RTI framework had the potential to provide struggling learners with the opportunity to receive the necessary supports for academic success. Even when considering that RTI may not be intense enough for all students and some may ultimately be referred for special education services, I believed that this process would still provide data to assist with appropriate recommendations. My beliefs in this regard have not changed throughout this dissertation process. However, I have been enlightened to the many factors that limit the effective implementation of RTI and thus impede upon the potential success of the program and the students it serves. Understanding these limitations and the impact they have on RTI is information I value due to its potential to guide changes that can be made to rectify these issues. It was found that staffing, professional development, consistency, and scheduling have a detrimental impact on how interventions are provided at every tier and ultimately lead to the success or failure of students. This information allows me to work with school leadership on making changes, such as creating district committees to decide on how to rectify these issues. These findings inspired me to look deeper into the process, beyond the interventions being used and how they are implemented, to the root of what needs to be done to better the program from the ground up. Although this study illuminated many of the complexities of implementing RTI at one school, the education field needs to further explore the deeper reasons for how it is implemented and what changes will make it a fully functioning program that meets the needs of all students.

Appendix A Interview Protocol

Interview protocol for individual interviews with participants during phase one of data collection.

Background

Introduction: My name is Ann Marie Kenny-Chapur and I am working on my dissertation for the Ed. D. program at St. John's University. The purpose of this study is to explore the perceptions of teachers in one north east suburban school on RTI, to expand our understanding of the perceived benefits, limitations, and changes needed to increase the fidelity and effectiveness of implementing the program. Your position and experience implementing interventions for the RTI program will offer a particularly useful perspective on the aspects of the program.

1. Participant Background

Transition statement: To begin I would like to gather background information specific to you:

- a. Can you tell me about your teaching career (i.e., education, credentials, years teaching, years in this role, and years at this school, grade level/subject(s) taught?), and has it impacted your implementation of RTI?
- b. Describe your current role and responsibilities in terms of the RTI program.
- c. What was your background or understanding of RTI before implementing it? In other words, did you have any prior knowledge or training with the RTI model?

2. Implementation of RTI

Transition statement: I would like to discuss the process of initiating and implementing RTI within your school.

- a. Can you tell me about how the program was introduced to staff and what training/professional development was provided prior to implementation?
- b. How could that process be improved?

- c. What was your general feeling about the program when first implemented and has that changed (i.e., buy-in then, is there buy-in now)? What suggestions do you have that you feel would improve teacher's perceptions of the program?
- d. Is there ongoing training and can you describe how it is provided (i.e., times per year, in-house or consultant based, etc.)?
- e. What are your feelings about the level of training and support teachers receive and why? What changes would you make in terms of training?

3. Perceived benefits of implementing the essential components of RTI

Transition statement: Teachers often have different perceptions of the RTI program so I would like to spend some time focusing first on the benefits you see with the program.

- a. Tell me the positive benefits students experience because of RTI.
- b. What positive experiences have you had as a teacher with RTI?
- c. What are some positive changes in how struggling students are supported due to RTI?
- d. What changes would increase the benefit to students?

4. Perceived limitations to effectively implementing RTI

Transition statement: Teachers also have different perceptions of the limitations of the RTI program so let's spend some time focusing on this.

- a. Tell me about issues that arise during implementation from the initial meeting through the TIERS. (i.e., consistency, time constraints, resources, support etc.) and what changes would alleviate this?
- b. Tell me about aspects of the program that hinder the implementation of RTI (i.e., intervention requirements, time to consistently monitor and evaluate student achievement, etc.) and how that can be changed.
- c. Are roles and expectations clearly delineated and are they feasible for teachers to achieve?
- d. What changes would help teachers better meet the needs of all students through RTI?

5. Perceived changes necessary to increase the effectiveness and fidelity of RTI

Transition statement: Now, I would like to discuss/revisit changes that you feel may increase the effectiveness and fidelity of how RTI is implemented.

- a. Describe any changes you feel would increase the fidelity with which RTI is implemented (i.e., would additional planning time/flexibility with scheduling make a difference).

- b. Describe to me additional supports and or resources you feel could increase the fidelity of implementing RTI? (i.e., are there enough intervention options, PD, is guidance clear).
- c. What specific factors need to be changed because they hinder teachers from providing interventions to all students (i.e., group sizes are too large for differentiation)?

6. Final comments and notations

Transition statement: I would like to move on to a few other questions.

- a. If you could go back to before RTI was implemented, what changes would you have made to prepare the staff for the program?
- b. In an ideal situation, what would RTI look like in your school and what changes would you make?
- c. What are the three most important requirements for RTI to be implemented with fidelity and effectively (i.e., planning time, PD etc.)?
- d. Overall, do you perceive the benefits of RTI to outweigh the limitations and do you think it is a program that will continue to be implemented? Why or why not?

**This protocol was created with the guidance of Dr. Annunziato and mock interviews will be conducted to confirm information collected will answer the research questions of this dissertation.*

Appendix B Observation Form

This form will be used during phase two of the data collection.

Descriptive Notes

Reflective notes

<i>Area 1 -Interventions being implemented-</i>	<i>-Interventions being implemented-</i>
<i>Area 2-Processes and procedures utilized</i>	<i>-Processes and procedures utilized</i>
<i>Area 3- Processes and procedures not utilized</i>	<i>-Processes and procedures not utilized</i>
<i>Area 4 -Resources utilized</i>	<i>-Resources utilized</i>
<i>Area 5 -Supports utilized</i>	<i>-Supports utilized</i>
<i>Area 6-Benefits of implementation</i>	<i>-Benefits of Implementation</i>
<i>Area 7-Limitations of implementation</i>	<i>-Limitations of Implementation</i>

This protocol was created with the guidance of Dr. Annunziato and mock observations conducted to confirm information collected would answer the research questions of this dissertation.

REFERENCES

- Adams, P. (2006). Exploring Social Constructivism: Theories and Practicalities. *Education 3-13*, 34(3), 243–257.
- Artiles, A., Bal, A., & Thorius, K. K. (2010). Back to the future: A critique of response to intervention's social justice views. *Theory Into Practice*, 49(4), 250–257.
<https://doi-org.jerome.stjohns.edu/10.1080/00405841.2010.510447>
- Avant, D. W. (2016). Using response to intervention/multi-tiered systems of supports to promote social justice in schools. *Journal for Multicultural Education*, 10(4), 507–520.
- Berkeley, S., Bender, W. N., Gregg Peaster, L., & Saunders, L. (2009). Implementation of response to intervention: A snapshot of progress. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 42(1), 85-95. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0022219408326214>
- Bouton, B., McConnell, J. R., Barquero, L. A., Gilbert, J. K., & Compton, D. L. (2018). Upside-down response to intervention: A quasi-experimental study. *Learning Disabilities Research & Practice*, 33(4), 229–236. <https://doi-org.jerome.stjohns.edu/10.1111/ldrp.12171>
- Brozo, W. (2010). Response to intervention or responsive instruction? Challenges and possibilities of response to intervention for adolescent literacy. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy* 53(4.1), 277-28. doi:10.159/JAAL.53.4.1.
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/30250068>
- Buffum, A., Mattos, M., & Weber, C. (2010). The why behind RTI. *Educational Leadership*, 16(1), 10-16. <http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/oct10/vol68/num02/The-Why-Behind-RTI.aspx>

- Castro-Villarreal, F., Rodriguez, B. J., & Moore, S. (2014). Teachers' perceptions and attitudes about Response to Intervention (RTI) in their schools: A qualitative analysis. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 40*, 104–112. <https://doi-org.jerome.stjohns.edu/10.1016/j.tate.2014.02.004>
- Cho, H.-J., & Kingston, N. (2011). Capturing implicit policy from NCLB test type assignments of students with disabilities. *Exceptional Children, 78*(1), 58–72. <https://doi-org.jerome.stjohns.edu/10.1177/001440291107800104>
- Cortiella, C. (2006, August). NCLB and IDEA: What parents of students with disabilities need to know & do. *National Center on Educational Outcomes*. <https://nceo.umn.edu/docs/onlinepubs/parents.pdf>
- Cowan, C., & Maxwell, G. (2015). Educators' perceptions of response to intervention implementation and impact of student learning. *Journal of Instructional Pedagogies, 16*, 1-11.
- Creswell, J. W. & Creswell, J. D. (2018). *Research design qualitative, quantitative, and mixed method approaches* (5th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Creswell, J. W., & Guetterman, T. C. (2019). *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research* (6th ed.). Pearson.
- Creswell, J.W. & Poth, C.N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry research design: Choosing among five approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Dudley-Marling, C. (2004). The Social Construction of Learning Disabilities. *Journal of Learning Disabilities, 37*(6), 482–489. <https://doi-org.jerome.stjohns.edu/10.1177/00222194040370060201>

- Elliott, J. (2008). Response to intervention: What & why? *School Administrator*, 65 (8), 10-18. <https://stjohnsuniversitylibraries.on.worldcat.org/oclc/424736214>
- Frey, B. (2018). *The SAGE encyclopedia of educational research, measurement, and evaluation* (Vols. 1-4). Thousand Oaks, SAGE Publications.
<https://doi:10.4135/9781506326139>
- Fuchs, L. S., & Fuchs, D. (2007). A model for implementing responsiveness to intervention. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 39(5), 14–20.
<https://doi.org.jerome.stjohns.edu/10.1177/004005990703900503>
- Fuchs, D., Mock, D., Morgan, P. L., & Young, C. L. (2003). Responsiveness-to-intervention: Definitions, evidence, and implications for the learning disabilities construct. *Learning Disabilities Research & Practice*, 18, 157–171.
- Fuchs, L. S., & Vaughn, S. (2012). Responsiveness-to-intervention: A decade later. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 45, 195-203. doi:10.1177/002221941244 2150
- Hall, C., & Mahoney, J. (2013). Response to intervention: Research and practice. *Contemporary Issues in Education Research*, 6(3), 273.
- Hargreaves, A., & Shirley, D. (2008). The Fourth Way of Change. *Educational Leadership*, 66(2), 56–61.
- Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (November, 2020). *A History of the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act*. <https://sites.ed.gov/idea/IDEA-History#1975>
- Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (n.d.). *About IDEA*.
<https://sites.ed.gov/idea/about-idea/#IDEA-History>

- Klein, A. (2015, April 10). *No child left behind: An overview*.
<https://www.edweek.org/policy-politics/no-child-left-behind-an-overview/2015/04>
- Lattier, D. (2016). Did public schools really improve American literacy? *Foundation for Economic Education*. <https://fee.org/articles/did-public-schools-really-improve-american-literacy/>
- López, M. M., & Mendoza, M. A. (2013). We need to “catch them before they fall”: Response to intervention and elementary emergent bilinguals. *Multicultural Perspectives* 15(4), 194–201.
- Martin J. L. (n.d.). Legal implications of response to intervention and special education identification. *RTI Action Network*.
<http://www.rtinetwork.org/learn/ld/legalimplications-of-response-to-intervention-and-special-education-identification>
- McEneaney, J.E., Lose, M. K., & Schwartz, R. M. (2006). A transactional perspective on reading difficulties and response to intervention. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 41, 117-128.
- McKenna, J., & Parenti, M. (2017). Fidelity assessment to improve teacher instruction and school decision making. *Journal of Applied School Psychology*, 33(4), 331.
- Mesmer, E. M., & Mesmer, H. A. E. (2008). Response to intervention (RTI): What teachers of reading need to know. *Reading Teacher*, 62(4), 280–290.
<https://doi.org.jerome.stjohns.edu/10.1598/RT.62.4.1>
- Morrison, K. (1998). *Management Theories for Educational Change*. SAGE

Publications.

Narayan, R., Rodriguez, C., Araujo, J., Shaqlaih, A., & Moss, G. (2013).

Constructivism-Constructivist learning theory. In B. J. Irby, G. Brown, R. Lara-Alecio, & S. Jackson (Eds.), *The handbook of educational theories* (pp. 169–183). IAP Information Age Publishing.

National Association of School Psychologist (2006). New roles in response to intervention: Creating success for schools and children.

<https://www.asha.org/siteassets/uploadedFiles/slp/schools/prof-consult/rtiroledefinitions.pdf>

Nowell, L. S., Norris, J. M., White, D. E., & Moules, N. J. (2017). Thematic analysis:

Striving to meet the trustworthiness criteria. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 16(1), 1. <https://doi-org.jerome.stjohns.edu/10.1177/1609406917733847>

Preston, A. I., Wood, C. L., & Stecker, P. M. (2016). Response to intervention: Where it came from and where it's going. *Preventing School Failure*, 60(3), 173–182.

<https://doi-org.jerome.stjohns.edu/10.1080/1045988X.2015.1065399>

Regan, K.S., Berkeley, S.L., Hughes, M., & Brady, K.K. (2015). Understanding practitioner perceptions of responsiveness to intervention. *Learning Disability Quarterly*, 38(4), 234-247. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0731948715580437>.

RTI Action Network. (n.d.a). *Glossary of terms*. <http://www.rtinetwork.org/glossary>

RTI Action Network. (n.d.b). *What is RTI?*.

<http://www.rtinetwork.org/learn/what/whatisrti>

Saldana, J. (2011). *Fundamentals of qualitative research*. Oxford University Press.

- Schwartz, R. M., Schmitt, M. C., & Lose, M. K. (2012). Effects of teacher-student ratio in response to intervention approaches. *The Elementary School Journal*, 112(4), 547-567. <https://doi.org/10.1086/664490>
- Shepherd, D., & Salembier, G. (2017). Improving schools through a response to intervention approach: A cross-case analysis of three rural schools. *Rural Special Education Quarterly*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/875687051103000302>
- Skunk, D. (2020). *Learning theories: An educational perspective* (8th ed.). Pearson, Inc.
- Stuart, S., Rinaldi, C., & Higgins-Averill, O. (2011). Agents of change: Voices of teachers on response to intervention. *International Journal of Whole Schooling*, 7(2), 53–73.
- Swanson, E., Solis, M., Ciullo, S., & McKenna, J. W. (2012). Special education teachers' perceptions and instructional practices in response to intervention implementation. *Learning Disability Quarterly*, 35(2), 115–126.
- The New York State Education Department. (2010). *Response to intervention. Guidance for New York state school districts*. <https://www.p12.nysed.gov/specialed/RTI/guidance-oct10.pdf>
- U.S. Department of Education. (n.d.). *Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)*. <https://www.ed.gov/essa?src=rn>
- U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs. (n.d.). *Response to intervention and early intervening services*. https://sites.ed.gov/idea/files/RTI-EIS_3-29-07.pdf

- Vanderheyden, A. M., Kovaleski, J. E., Shapiro, E. S., & Painter, D. T. (2014). Scientifically supported identification of SLD using RTI: A response to Colker. *Journal of Law & Education*, 43(2), 229–247.
- Vaughn, S., & Fuchs, L. S. (2003). Redefining learning disabilities as inadequate response to instruction: The promise and potential problems. *Learning Disabilities Research & Practice*, 18(3), 137–146. <https://doi-org.jerome.stjohns.edu/10.1111/1540-5826.00070>
- Yim, R. K. (1994). *Case study research design and methods* (2nd ed.). Sage Publishing.
- Werts, M. G., Lambert, M., & Carpenter, E. (2009). What special education directors say about RTI. *Learning Disability Quarterly*, 32, 245- 254.

VITA

Name	<i>Ann Marie Kenny-Chapur</i>
Baccalaureate Degree	<i>Bachelor of Arts, St. John's University, New York Major: Psychology</i>
Date Graduated	<i>September 1998</i>
Master's Degree	<i>Master's of Science in Education, City University of New York, Queens College, Flushing Major: School Psychology</i>
Date Graduated	<i>May 2003</i>
Professional Certificate	<i>Professional Certificate in School Psychology, University of New York, Queens College, Flushing</i>
Date Graduated	<i>May 2003</i>
Specialist Diploma	<i>Specialist Diploma in Educational Leadership, University of New York, Queens College, Flushing</i>
Date Graduated	<i>September 2010</i>