TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION

FOR ENGLISH LEARNERS

by

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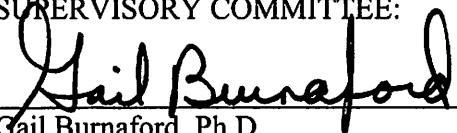
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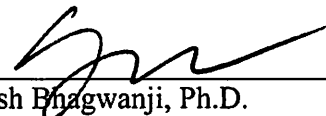
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This dissertation was prepared under the direction of the candidate's dissertation advisor, Dr. Gail Burnaford, Department of Curriculum, Culture, and Educational Inquiry and has been approved by the members of her supervisory committee. It was submitted to the faculty of the College of Education and was accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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ABSTRACT

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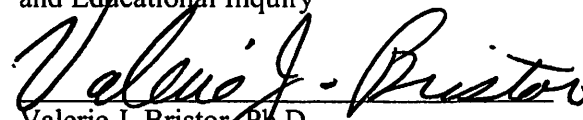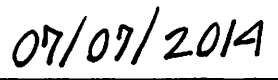   Learners

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The current qualitative study focuses on how teachers perceive the Response to

Intervention (RtI) framework for English learners, specifically assessments and the

instructional decision-making process. RtI serves as a framework to help "close the gap"

and create a more equitable environment for struggling English learners (Florida

Department of Education, 2008). The current study explored elementary school general

education teachers' perceptions and understanding of the RtI process for English learners.

Eight elementary general education teachers participated in two interview sessions each

to address what general education teachers know about the RtI process for English

learners, how teachers report their interpretation of policies and procedures with respect

to instruction and assessment of English learners, how teachers feel about their

understanding of RtI, and how teachers feel about their understanding of instruction and

assessment for English learners.

Teacher participants shared their knowledge of the importance of progress monitoring and data collection during the RtI process. Participants reported that progress monitoring and data collection were used to inform instructional decisions for English learners. Participants also provided insight into a shift in teacher accountability related to data collection and progress monitoring.

Teacher participants addressed elements of the RtI process: three tiers of RtI, evidence-based interventions, data and data collection, and progress monitoring. Based on teacher responses, teachers monitor student progress, but find some elements of progress monitoring unclear. Participants expressed concern about measuring student progress and the means used to demonstrate growth and to compare struggling students to the performance of peers in the same grade level.

The RtI framework includes targeted interventions for struggling students, and participants perceive that RtI helps to identify students with disabilities earlier. Participants reported benefits and drawbacks related to RtI. The participants specifically focused on the collaborative problem solving team as a beneficial support system for teachers navigating the RtI process.

Teachers reported perceptions on language acquisition and learning disabilities, adjustment time for English learners, assessments for English learners, parental involvement and experiences, instruction for English learners, and professional development and support for the instruction of English learners.

TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION

FOR ENGLISH LEARNERS

LIST OF TABLES

CHAPTER ONE. INTRODUCTION

For decades, minority students have been disproportionately placed in special education programs (Artiles, Rueda, Salazar, & Higareda, 2005; Klingner et al., 2005). While many believe that placement in a special education program is a benefit for struggling students, such placement may not provide an advantage to students involved. Inappropriate placement, no matter the supports and accommodations available, never benefits a student. Students placed in special education programs may not receive appropriate instruction or may not be provided access to the appropriate general education curriculum (Klingner et al., 2005).

The Florida Consent Decree states that English learners, or students who are labeled as limited English proficient (LEP), are "entitled to equal access to programming which is appropriate to his or her level of English proficiency, academic achievement and special needs" (*League of United Latin American Citizens [LULAC] v. Florida Board of Education,* 1990). The disproportionate representation of minorities, especially language minorities, gives rise to some questions about the placement of English learners in special education programs. In order to address issues with placement of English learners in special education programs, one must take a closer look at the special education placement process and the instructional practices that take place before the special education process occurs. The current study focused on how teachers perceive the Response to Intervention framework for English learners, specifically assessments and the instructional decision-making process.

Special Education Placement Process

The special education placement process is used to identify, evaluate, and place students who are having difficulties in school; a student may have difficulties with academics, social emotional skills, independent functioning, or communication (Klingner & Harry, 2006; Ysseldyke, 2001). The special education placement process was instituted to help identify students with difficulties in any of these domains and provide them with services and accommodations to aid in their success (Klingner & Harry, 2006; Ysseldyke, 2001; Ysseldyke, Christenson, Pianta, & Algozzine, 1983).

In most districts, the main stakeholders in the special education placement process are elementary general education teachers, administrators, parents, the exceptional student education (ESE) specialist, and the school psychologist (Klingner & Harry, 2006; Ysseldyke, 2001). While any of these stakeholders may initiate a referral, general education teachers make the most referrals (Klingner & Harry, 2006; Ysseldyke, 2001). The special education placement process in the United States often starts with an initial referral by an education professional (e.g., teacher, administrator), but a parent also can initiate a referral (Klingner & Harry, 2006; Ysseldyke, 2001). The referral is initiated out of concern for a student's progress in one of the domains mentioned previously (Lyon et al., 2010). In the past, standardized assessments were conducted; if a student did not achieve a certain predetermined score, the multidisciplinary team recommended special education services.

Many educators take issue with special education placement relying heavily on standardized scores for signaling the potential of a learning disability (Abedi, 2006; Artiles, Kozleski, Trent, Osher, & Ortiz, 2010). The use of standardized scores for such

purposes could pose an issue of validity and reliability for many students, but it poses an even greater concern for assessing the academic needs of English learners (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006; Klingner & Edwards, 2006). There is a need to provide interventions, services, and evaluations for English learners with special education concerns that do not rely so heavily on standardized scores (Florida Department of Education [FLDOE], 2008). With the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) in 2004, states were given the opportunity to move away from standardized scores and discrepancy models for special education identification. Instead, state departments of education were provided with decision-making models such as Response to Intervention (RtI) (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006; Klingner & Edwards, 2006). RtI provides educators with a model for implementing research-based interventions to students with the intent that the proper instruction would decrease incidences of struggling students (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006).

While the Response to Intervention model was intended to be a general education initiative, schools started implementing this model not only to address student concerns, but also to help guide the special education placement process (Gallego, Duran, & Reyes, 2006). RtI serves as an additional way to help "close the gap" and create a more equitable environment for students with difficulties, especially culturally and linguistically diverse students (FLDOE, 2008). The current study explored elementary school general education teachers' perceptions and understanding of the RtI process for English learners.

Response to Intervention (RtI)

According to the National Center on Response to Intervention (2012), Response to Intervention (RtI) "integrates assessment and intervention with a multi-level

prevention system to maximize student achievement and reduce behavior problems" (p. 1). When implemented, RtI gives schools a framework to help "identify students at risk for poor learning outcomes, monitor student progress, provide evidence-based interventions and adjust the intensity and nature of those interventions depending on a student's responsiveness, and identify students with learning disabilities" (National Center on Response to Intervention, 2012, p. 1). RtI is a problem-solving model for all students and, while not originally intended for special education identification, is an important part of the special education placement process due to the leveled structure of supports and progress monitoring (Shinn, 2007).

When the RtI program has been implemented adequately and assessments demonstrate minimal to no growth or improvement, the multidisciplinary team initiates the special education referral process, and the psychologist performs a battery of evaluations in an attempt to get a better idea of the student's present level of performance in the domains of concern. According to the Florida Consent Decree, each school district must implement procedures for special education identification, assessment, and evaluation while carefully considering the validity of instruments used and providing evaluation tools that use the "language or other mode of communication commonly used by the child or student" (*LULAC v. Florida Board of Education,* 1990). The intention of such a policy is to provide fair evaluation results for English learners; however, it may contribute to inaccurate results. Specifically, when a psychological evaluation is translated, often there are issues with validity (Gargiulo, 2009).

Statement of the Problem

The U.S. government estimates that there are more than 10 million school-aged children whose primary language is not English (National Center for Education Statistics, 2007). According to the 2000 census, 20% of Florida residents were born outside of the United States and 25% of school-aged children speak a language other than English at home (United States Census Bureau, 2000).

Students with limited English proficiency may not be able to get the full benefit from instruction in English (Gargiulo, 2009). With the use of the RtI model, educators are expected to use appropriate, evidence-based assessments and instruction to meet the needs of students. The RtI model presents as a data-driven, decision-making process to adjust instruction for struggling students. One of the purported benefits of RtI is to provide struggling students, specifically English learners, with appropriate instruction in the general education classroom before it may be necessary to begin special education placement proceedings, thereby reducing the number of special education referrals for English learners (Donovan & Cross, 2002; Klingner & Harry, 2006; Vaughn & Fuchs, 2003). If student assessment results do not show a favorable response to interventions and instruction through RtI, the special education placement process then is considered (Klingner & Edwards, 2006). It is not appropriate for a student to be referred for special education if the difficulties that a student is having are the result primarily of limited English proficiency, resulting in ineffective instructional support for these students (Klingner et al., 2005; Klingner & Edwards, 2006).

Many educators find it difficult to make appropriate instructional and placement decisions about English learners. English learners may be disproportionately placed in

special education programs or perhaps are not provided with appropriate instruction (Artiles et al., 2005). One of the intended benefits of Response to Intervention (RtI) is to avoid unnecessary special education referrals (Klingner & Edwards, 2006). RtI is part of a multi-tier system of supports put into place to ensure that all students are receiving the most appropriate instruction (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006). RtI helps provide a systematic approach to instruction, progress monitoring, data analysis, and, if necessary, academic interventions (FLDOE, 2008; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006; Klingner & Edwards, 2006; Shinn, 2007). RtI is a problem-solving model that provides a framework to address the instructional needs of all students. The Response to Intervention framework is an important element of the special education placement process though it was not originally intended for special education identification (Shinn, 2007).

Classroom teachers are an important part of the multidisciplinary team. Classroom teachers usually are the first to bring up a concern, teachers administer a majority of assessments, and teachers implement instruction. RtI provides support to educators when planning instruction. The process provides guidelines to help educators gather data on achievement and performance. The data that are collected and analyzed drive instruction for all students, including the most fragile students. One of the benefits of RtI is to provide struggling students with the most effective instruction, making special education placement unnecessary.

Often times, educators find it difficult to determine whether an English learner is struggling due to limited English proficiency or lack of instructional support (Klingner & Harry, 2006; Ortiz, 1997). Educators must use assessments to monitor student progress; however, there often are issues of reliability, validity, and effectiveness with current

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instruments like the home language survey, English-language proficiency tests, and standardized tests (Abedi, 2006; Abedi, Hofstetter, & Lord, 2004). Issues with these assessments may render unfair results, lead to inappropriate and inadequate instruction, impact educator accountability, and lead to disproportionate placement of English learners in intensive interventions and special education programs (Abedi, 2006; Abedi et al., 2004). Through the current study, the researcher aimed to gain understanding of teachers' perceptions of assessments and instruction through RtI for the purposes of providing appropriate education to English learners.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to describe teachers' knowledge and feelings about their understanding of instructional elements and assessment of the Response to Intervention framework in one South Florida school. The researcher intended to learn more about teachers' understanding of the RtI framework through perceptions, with specific focus on assessment and instructional elements. Teachers' feelings about their understanding and perceptions about a method or framework impact their willingness to implement the practices and continue to use them when faced with difficulties or challenges (Klingner et al., 2005). The current study contributes to the body of knowledge related to connecting student assessment, instructional practices, and the decision-making process. The researcher collected data through interviews with classroom teachers and through analyzing documents related to the RtI process. The findings of this study suggest trends and themes in selected elementary general education teachers' knowledge of instructional processes for English learners. The study also provides feedback on how general education teachers interpret the instructional processes

and assessments related to the education of English learners. The current study has the potential to impact professional development, instructional planning, development of assessments, and progress monitoring plans.

Research Questions

The research questions that were addressed in the current study were:

1. What do elementary general education teachers know about the Response to Intervention (RtI) process for English learners?

2. How do elementary general education teachers report their interpretation of policies and procedures with respect to instruction and assessment of English learners, specifically relating to the Response to Intervention model?

3. How do elementary general education teachers feel about their understanding of Response to Intervention?

4. How do elementary general education teachers feel about their understanding of instruction and assessment for English learners?

Theoretical Framework

The study was informed by the work of Klingner on the referral process for diverse learners (Klingner & Edwards, 2006; Klingner & Harry, 2006; Orosco & Klingner, 2010). Klingner studied the unique needs of diverse learners, including the special education placement process, the referral and pre referral process, and the trouble with disproportionate placement of cultural-linguistically diverse learners.

Klingner and Harry (2006) studied the referral decision-making process used by multidisciplinary teams to make instructional and placement decisions about English learners struggling in academics. Klingner and Harry (2006) shared several findings from

this study. Inadequate attention was placed on instructional strategies to help prevent

failure and struggle for English learners, and members of the multidisciplinary team at

the school were not knowledgeable enough about language acquisition. The researchers

also found a lack of continuity during the multidisciplinary team meetings.

Klingner and Edwards (2006) provided recommendations and rationale for the use

of Response to Intervention to improve effective instruction of English learners in order

to defer special education placement for struggling students. Through the use of multi-

tiered system of supports like RtI and UDL, educators can provide culturally responsive

instruction with consideration of context. RtI also provides a framework for the use of

evidence-based instruction.

Orosco and Klingner (2010) conducted a case study to examine how the RtI

process was implemented for Latino English learners in an urban school. The researchers

looked at how teacher understanding, training, and beliefs impacted implementation.

Some interesting findings were reported in the study. Orosco and Klingner (2010)

reported that teachers were not prepared adequately to instruct Latino English learners.

The perceptions of teachers provided insight into the belief system at the school; the

researchers reported a negative school culture. Teachers were faced not only with the

challenge of educating diverse, complex learners, but were provided with limited

resources. Researchers also found a disconnect between assessments and instruction.

Orosco and Klingner (2010) deduced that the RtI framework was not meeting the

students' needs considering the characteristics of implementation described in the study.

Definition of Terms

Some of the terms used throughout the study may be unfamiliar to the reader, or have more than one definition. The terms are defined as they relate to the current study.

Disproportionate representation: "the degree of disproportionate representation is the extent to which membership in a given ethnic group affects the probability of being placed in a specific special education disability category" (Oswald, Coutinho, Best, & Singh, 1999, p. 198).

General education teacher: For the purposes of the study, general education teachers are teachers in a "mainstream" classroom (Agaliotis & Kalyva, 2011, p. 545). General education teachers provide instruction of the general curriculum based on state content standards (Basham, Israel, Graden, Poth, & Winston, 2010).

English learner, limited English proficiency, or limited English proficient (LEP): Identification of an individual as defined by the Florida Consent Decree as:

- Individuals who were not born in the United States and whose native language is a language other than English; or

- Individuals who come from home environments where a language other than English is spoken in the home; or

- Individuals who are American Indian or Alaskan natives and who come from environments where a language other than English has had a significant impact on their level of English language proficiency; or

- Individuals who, by reason thereof, have sufficient difficulty speaking, reading, writing, or listening to the English language to deny such individuals the opportunity to learn successfully in classrooms where the

language of instruction is English (*LULAC v. Florida Board of Education,* 1990).

Perception: The study looked at the RtI process through teacher perceptions. In studies focusing on teacher perceptions, researchers have centered on feelings, attitudes, beliefs (Klingner et al., 2005). Teacher perceptions related to referrals were described as "subjective" (Knotek, 2003, p. 3).

Response to Intervention (RtI): "Response to intervention integrates assessment and intervention within a multi-level prevention system to maximize student achievement and reduce behavior problems. With RTI, schools identify students at risk for poor learning outcomes, monitor student progress, provide evidence-based interventions and adjust the intensity and nature of those interventions depending on a student's responsiveness, and identify students with learning disabilities" (National Center on Response to Intervention, 2012, p. 1).

Special Education: For the purpose of this study, special education is considered as involving students with disabilities. Special education provides students with free, appropriate education and offers students services that meet their individualized needs (Gallego, Cole, & The Laboratory of Comparative Human Cognition, 2001).

Role of the Researcher

The researcher is employed at the site and has held different positions at the school, including general education teacher and special education teacher; currently she serves as the ESE specialist at the school site. The sample was selected from the researcher's workplace, although, according to Creswell (2007), conducting research in one's own workplace can be risky. Participants may feel intimidated about revealing

information that they feel may impact negatively their standing in the workplace (Creswell, 2007). There also may be negative implications for the researcher in cases where unfavorable findings are reported (Creswell, 2007).

Considering the risk of conducting a study in the workplace, the researcher employed validation strategies in order to identify the most accurate and valid findings possible. Member checking is one validation strategy that the researcher used. Member checking is a highly credible technique to use when collecting and analyzing qualitative data (Creswell, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). It is beneficial to incorporate participants in all aspects of a case study, including data collection, analysis, interpretation, and reporting (Creswell, 2007; Stake, 1995). Rich, thick description is another validation measure to minimize researcher bias. This strategy provides considerable, specific information to allow readers of study findings to make their own judgments about the analysis process (Creswell, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Rich, thick description also provides an opportunity for readers to apply information from the study to other settings by finding commonalities in the study (Creswell, 2007).

Significance of the Study

The mishandling of students during the special education placement process can result in many disadvantages (Artiles et al., 2010; De Valenzuela, Copeland, Qi, & Park, 2006; Gargiulo, 2009). A special education label may lead to stereotyping and can carry a stigma (Artiles et al., 2010; De Valenzuela et al., 2006; Gargiulo, 2009). When a person is told that he or she has limited ability, or is not as able as one's peers, it can put the focus on disabilities, and not on abilities (Gargiulo, 2009). The labels also may be used as an excuse for poor performance in academics or behavior (Gargiulo, 2009). Students who

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are language minorities may not feel like they fit in because of their cultural linguistic differences from their peers; compounding those differences with a special education label may lead to a diminished self-concept, lower expectations, and poor self-esteem (De Valenzuela et al., 2006; Gargiulo, 2009; Klingner et al., 2005). It is important to study the instructional decision-making process used by elementary classroom teachers for English learners in order to ensure that educators are providing the most appropriate instruction to these fragile students. The current study focused on the instructional and assessment process involved in Response to Intervention through the perceptions of general education teachers entrusted with the important job of educating English learners properly.

CHAPTER TWO. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

English Language and Education

History of Language in the United States

The United States is a country with an extensive history of cultural and linguistic diversity, beginning with the inception of our nation. Culture and language are powerful elements that have the ability to connect as well as to divide citizens. Many of the forefathers of the United States saw English as a uniting language, but also as an element connecting them to Britain (Crawford, 2004). Members of government considered changing the common language from English to German to distinguish America as a nation independent from Britain, but ultimately decided to modify the English language and make it their own (Crawford, 2004).

Benjamin Rush, a signatory of the Declaration of Independence, wanted to assimilate the Pennsylvania Germans to the common American culture (Crawford, 2004). The assimilation would be facilitated through the acquisition of the common English language spoken by most countrymen (Crawford, 2004). The founders of the nation felt that it was important for citizens to speak English; however, English acquisition would be voluntary (Crawford, 2004). Schools were developed to teach the fundamentals of the new nation; lessons were conducted primarily in German (Crawford, 2004).

Throughout the 1800s, trends in immigration to the United States impacted practices in education. Many bilingual schools conducted lessons in students' native

language (Crawford, 2004). Late in the nineteenth century, the United States saw a decline in bilingual education. Organizations like the American Protective Association (APA) fueled a nativist movement aimed at limiting parochial schools (Crawford, 2004). While limiting schools with religious affiliations, an indirect result was the limitation of bilingual schools since most parochial schools conducted lessons in both English and native languages of immigrant students (Crawford, 2004). These limitations created conflict throughout the nation, especially in the midwestern states (Crawford, 2004). Proponents of English-only sentiments believed that it was a "duty" and "right" for students in the United States to be instructed in the language of the majority (Crawford, 2004, p. 86). Citizens who supported parochial and bilingual schools defended their educational rights, but ultimately did increase the amount of English used during instruction (Crawford, 2004).

The Mexican-American War brought acquisition of the Southwest and many Spanish-speakers in the mid-1800s. Spanish-speaking citizens were assured implicitly that their native language rights would be upheld; but in practice, this was not the case. In 1849, the constitution of California required all documents be printed in English and Spanish; this practice did not continue for long. The influx of European-Americans to the Southwest during the Gold Rush diminished the use of Spanish in the region (Crawford, 2004).

In the 1900s, Americanism sentiments spread throughout the nation. Many Americans believed that respectable Americans spoke English. The Americanism outlook spread to many aspects of society, including education. The superintendent of schools in New York City declared that English acquisition and Americanism would help citizens to

appreciate the United States and forget obligations to other countries, solidifying allegiance to the nation. Americanism impacted educational practices, and the number of bilingual education programs dwindled by the late 1930s. English learners were not provided with supports in their native language, resulting in a decline in student achievement (Crawford, 2004). Underachievement of minority students was connected to "genetic" explanations in the 1950s; this phenomenon was coined "cultural deprivation theory" (Crawford, 2004, p. 98).

The start of a shift in the United Stated occurred with education professionals like Professor George Sánchez, psychologist at the University of Texas. Professor Sánchez initiated the consideration of bilingual education once again as a practice that best met the needs of English learners. Sánchez stated that it was not beneficial for English learners to dismiss native culture and language for the sake of English acquisition and that it was more appropriate to build on native culture and language. Some educators followed suit but some still expected students to adapt to the American school environment and expectations; these educators viewed English acquisition as a "language disability" (Crawford, 2004, p. 98). During this time in education, cultural deprivation theory was discounted. The underachievement of minority students was attributed to environmental factors; these factors included limited English proficiency, the perceived lack of educational valued held by immigrant families, and limited literacy levels of families (Crawford, 2004). While current researchers would agree that educators should consider environmental factors when measuring the academic achievement of English learners, the focus would be more on the academic environment and less on the values of the students'

families. The current study included educational environmental factors for English learners through the implementation of the Response to Intervention framework.

Programs for learners of English as a second language gained popularity in the mid-1900s. These English as a Second Language (ESL) programs originally were designed for children of foreign diplomats in the 1930s; the program was reintroduced for instruction of English learners in the United States. Often times, the ESL programs of that time followed a pullout instructional format where the English learner would be removed from the general education classroom to be remediated in English skills. Many educators felt that students were not acquiring English quickly enough because of the increase in the dropout rate among English learners. Often, language status was not considered properly when developing instruction and many students were labeled as learning disabled when they were unable to demonstrate mastery of academics. Struggling students were administered IQ tests in English then placed in special education programs (Crawford, 2004).

In the 1960s, Cuban exiles who came to the United States inspired "Spanish-for-Spanish-speakers" classes in Miami schools (Crawford, 2004, p. 100). In 1963, Coral Way Elementary School in Miami reinitiated bilingual education programs in the United States (Crawford, 2004). Spanish-speaking children went to school with native English speakers (Crawford, 2004). Spanish speakers had classes in Spanish in the morning and classes in English in the afternoon and native English speakers had the opposite schedule; both groups of students had electives, lunch, and recess together (Crawford, 2004). Both groups excelled in academics and language acquisition, but the Spanish-speakers saw the largest gains; researchers believed this was due to the extended exposure the Spanish-

speakers had to English both in and out of the classroom (Crawford, 2004). The bilingual education program at Coral Way Elementary School inspired many other schools across the country to induct bilingual programs at their schools (Crawford, 2004). Over time, however, bilingual education programs declined, possibly due to political and social conflicts such as the civil rights movement of the 1960s and the Cold War (Crawford, 2004). The challenges of educating English learners, compounded with the political opposition that cultural and linguistic diversity is met with often, can make the development of adequate education programs for English learners even more complicated (Lesaux, 2006).

Educating English Learners

Instructional practices for English learners must be held to a high standard, equal to the high expectations for native English speakers. However, schools currently are not meeting this standard while the population of cultural and linguistically diverse students increases (Garcia & Cuèllar, 2006). The current study aimed to learn more about the assessments and instruction used for educating English learners through the perceptions of the classroom teacher. Teachers are not trained adequately and provided with information on how to educate struggling English learners effectively (Lesaux, 2006). Classroom teachers would benefit from knowledge of instructional practices specifically designed for English learners to help prevent academic difficulties or failure (Lesaux, 2006). One of the benefits of Response to Intervention (RtI) is to help prevent failure by providing support and appropriate instruction to struggling students (Donovan & Cross, 2002; Klingner & Harry, 2006; Vaughn & Fuchs, 2003).

Oftentimes, educators confuse oral English proficiency with the required English proficiency to be successful academically since students may appear to be proficient in English before they really are (Klingner & Harry, 2006). Studies have shown that students may be proficient in social English in two years or less; however, it takes students five to eight years or more to attain proficiency in academic and cognitive English skills (Cummins, 1981, 2005; Hardin, Mereoiu, Hung, & Roach-Scott, 2009; Hardin, Roach-Scott, & Peisner-Fienberg, 2007; Lake & Pappamihiel, 2003; Tabors, 1997). After years of English instruction, English learners still may learn at a slower rate than native English speakers due to differences in learning and teaching styles and language deficits (Barrera, Corso, & MacPherson, 2003; Grossman, 1998; Hardin et al., 2007; Lock & Layton, 2002).

There appears to be a need for more research on the achievement level and language acquisition process for English learners; further research will help educators develop normative profiles for development of English learners (Lesaux, 2006). When educators have a better understanding of the development of English learners, teachers will be able to identify more accurately the difficulties related to academics and the challenges students may expect to experience during the English acquisition process (Lesaux, 2006).

In the past, educators relied on IQ results and did not consider environmental factors enough when assessing English learners (Klingner & Harry, 2006). IQ tests often were administered in English if assessors misinterpreted the student's English proficiency level, providing invalid results (Klingner & Harry, 2006). Even students who demonstrate proficiency in English will have large discrepancies in verbal and performance IQ scores

(Figueroa, 1990; Klingner & Harry, 2006). The administration of IQ tests often provides inaccurate information on ability for English learners (Klingner & Harry, 2006).

The reauthorization of Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004) gave states the choice to use RtI criteria for the identification process instead of using IQ scores to determine a discrepancy between ability and performance (Klingner & Harry, 2006). Ideally, educators will consider environmental factors and monitor student progress over time through the implementation of the RtI framework (Klingner & Harry, 2006). One of the benefits of RtI implementation is the reduction of special education referrals, specifically for English learners (Artiles, Trent, & Palmer, 2004; Klingner & Harry, 2006).

Klingner and Harry (2006) conducted a 3-year qualitative ethnographic study focused on the decision-making process for special education placement of English learners. The researchers considered the process as a contributing factor in the disproportionate representation of culturally and linguistically diverse students (Klingner & Harry, 2006). The researchers set out to gather the perspectives of school personnel in the referral process; Klingner and Harry (2006) wanted to understand how and why English learners were being referred for special education. The purposeful selection of 12 schools in a southern state in the United States resulted in data collected from 9 of those selected schools; this was due to the absence of English learners in the referral process in the 3 omitted schools (Klingner & Harry, 2006). The schools all had varying language supports for students: one school had a dual immersion program, the rest of the schools implemented pullout programs or supports within the classroom (Klingner & Harry, 2006). The primary data source was observations; however, interviews were conducted

and documents were analyzed as well (Klingner & Harry, 2006). The researchers analyzed data through grounded theory and ethnographic techniques, found similar patterns in data, created categories, then developed descriptive codes (Klingner & Harry, 2006). The researchers' findings suggested that educators were confused about when to assess English learners in English and when to refer English learners for special education, and were unsure about the misinterpretation of language acquisition for a learning disability. Deficits in skills and behavior were assumed to be the cause of academic difficulties; these assumptions took precedence over the pre-referral strategies, often leading to special education referrals (Klingner & Harry, 2006). Researchers also found a discrepancy between the documented events of a team meeting and what actually occurred during the meeting (Klingner & Harry, 2006).

Klingner and Harry (2006) recommended improvements to the pre-referral process. One of the recommendations was to limit the pre-referral team to include only the general education teachers and parents since they should have the most input on what interventions are implemented for struggling English learners. More attention needs to be paid to language issues; a member of the pre-referral team should be knowledgeable about the language acquisition process and language issues (Klingner & Harry, 2006). Klingner and Harry (2006) also recommended the development of professional development related to the pre-referral process and English learners to enhance knowledge of language acquisition and development.

English Learners and Special Education

The disproportionate placement of English learners is, and has been, a serious problem for decades (Crawford, 2004; Klingner & Harry, 2006). The disproportionate

placement of English learners in special education initiated the researcher to develop the current study. The special education placement process has some adverse effects on English learners. Many times, young English learners are placed in under-demanding learning environments and students are not exposed to curriculum that will help strengthen their English skills (Bernhard et al., 2006). Disproportionate placement has been attributed to biases in standardized tests as well as limited programs shown to advance English learners through the English acquisition process effectively (Artiles et al., 2004; Garcia & Cuèllar, 2006; Ortiz, 1997).

According to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, a child can be eligible for a learning disability only when the student has had adequate opportunities to learn in a language that the student can understand (Bernhard et al., 2006; Hehir, 2002). If an English learner has not been provided with adequate opportunities to learn in a language that he or she can understand, then it would be improper to proceed with the special education placement process. Many educators have difficulty deciphering between characteristics of the language acquisition process and academic difficulties impacted by a learning disability (Bernhard et al., 2006; Klingner & Harry, 2006; Stanovich, 1988). English learners truly may have difficulties with acquiring language or with academic skills; these difficulties then would be compounded with conflicts in the sociocultural contexts in the classroom (Bernhard et al., 2006).

A study conducted by Hardin et al. (2007) focused on the special education placement process for English learners in pre-kindergarten programs. The researchers concluded that observational methods are used widely to determine language proficiency and that there is a lack of uniformity in the determination of language proficiency; the

research suggests that school staff be trained in more appropriate and methodical measures for determining language proficiency (Hardin et al., 2007). Educators reported confusion related to the use of assessments; the researchers believe this confusion may contribute to the misidentification of English learners as learning disabled (Hardin et al., 2007). Hardin et al. (2007) recommended that more attention needs to be placed on translating and adapting assessments for use with English learners in order to assure optimal reliability and validity. Professional development is needed to train educators to increase accurate determinations of English learners with learning difficulties from those students who are progressing through the language acquisition process (Hardin et al., 2007).

Policies Impacting English Learners and Students with Disabilities

English Language Policies

Practitioners in education benefit from a familiarity with English language policies in the United States and the historical and political implications that impact the way English learners are taught today. The researcher intended to gain understanding of teacher perceptions and knowledge of policies and procedures related to instructing English learners. English language policies have impacted society and schools since the inception of the nation. When the United States was first colonized and policies were being created, founding members considered mandating policy on an official language. In Pthe late 1700s, founders were considering languages other than English to break ties with Britain; they considered German, but ultimately decided to keep English as the common language of the nation (Crawford, 2004). It was the founders' intention to not have a policy on language for the benefit of political liberty. Many people at that time

held the belief that speaking a common language was important, but the governing body wanted citizens to acquire English on a voluntary basis. In order to demonstrate severance from Britain but keep English as the common language used by citizens, Noah Webster developed a dictionary and speller to help separate British English from "Federal English" (Crawford, 2004, p. 84).

In the 1800s, the Louisiana Purchase posed a challenge to English as a common language in the United States. The majority of citizens in the newly acquired land spoke French; Congress insisted that business be conducted in English before entrance into the union would be granted. With no laws to stop citizens from speaking French, much of the business was conducted in their native language; Governor Villerè spoke French during government business because he did not speak English (Crawford, 2004).

Throughout the 1800s, trends in immigration to the United States impacted trends in education. Many bilingual schools conducted lessons in the native language of attending students. However, by the end of the century, there was a marked decline in bilingual education fueled by nativist groups (Crawford, 2004).

The entrance of "new immigrants" from southern and eastern Europe further inspired the nativist movement and the proposal of new policies (Crawford, 2004, p. 87). The Immigration Restriction League (IRL) wanted to create a policy making it mandatory for immigrants to pass a literacy test in order to enter the United States and in 1906, Congress passed a law requiring English for naturalization (Crawford, 2004).

Many Americans felt that speaking English was synonymous with being a respectable and loyal American. President Theodore Roosevelt was a proponent of English acquisition for immigrants because speaking English demonstrated loyalty to the

nation; the president promoted English lessons and the deportation of people who did not

acquire English within five years (Crawford, 2004).

When the United States entered World War I, the citizens found themselves

participating in "language restrictionism" (Crawford, 2004, p. 90). The German language

was not to be used in public areas, specifically schools; some citizens were fined if found

speaking German (Crawford, 2004). German language teachers lost their jobs; these

teachers often times transitioned to teaching "Americanism" (Crawford, 2004, p. 90).

While the language restrictionism movement relaxed into the twentieth century,

instructional practices already had changed and the trend was to instruct in English only

(Crawford, 2004).

Current language policies protect the rights of students with limited English

proficiency and ensure access to appropriate curriculum and assessment measures. The

Equal Educational Opportunities Act of 1974 states that all public school districts must

make accommodations to allow English learners to overcome language barriers that may

impede their equal participation in curriculum (Collier & Thomas, 2009). *Lau v. Nichols*

(1974) is one of the most influential U.S. Supreme Court decisions impacting educational

practices for English learners (Collier & Thomas, 2009). Lau defines the legal

responsibilities of schools to educate English learners appropriately; schools must

provide meaningful education, not just access to mainstream curriculum (Collier &

Thomas, 2009). A federal Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals decision in Texas, *Castañeda v.*

Pickard (1981), is used to provide compliance measures for Lauby the Office for Civil

Rights (Collier & Thomas, 2009). Castañeda provides evaluation guidelines for programs

for English learners; the focus of the guidelines are that the programs must be based on

educational theory and supported by experts in the field, programs must have adequate resources and be implemented effectively, and the English learner programs must teach English effectively and provide access to the entire curriculum (Collier & Thomas, 2009).

Special Education Policies

The inclusionary environment prevalent in present day education is very different from the environment students with disabilities faced in the past. Students with disabilities often were excluded from attending school in the late 1800s and early 1900s (Gargiulo, 2009). A landmark civil rights case in 1954, *Brown v. Board of Education*, laid the groundwork for entitlements for all students to equal educational opportunity (Gargiulo, 2009). *Diana v. State Board of Education* was an important case in 1970 impacting placement for special education students (Garcia & Cuèllar, 2006; Gargiulo, 2009); some of the important components of the ruling state that English learners need to be tested in their primary language and in English, and English learners cannot be placed in special education based on culturally biased IQ tests (Gargiulo, 2009).

Prior to the 1970s, there were no major federal laws dedicated to the rights of Americans with disabilities (Aron & Loprest, 2012; Gargiulo, 2009). In the 1950s and 1960s, some legislation was enacted to protect the rights of people with disabilities, but the focus was on groups with specific disabilities and not disabled people as a whole (Gargiulo, 2009). A pivotal event related to the rights of Americans with disabilities was the passage of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, specifically Section 504 (Aron & Loprest, 2012; Gargiulo, 2009). The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 was a federal law declaring that the exclusion or segregation of a person with a disability was discrimination (Aron & Loprest, 2012). This federal law, specifically Section 504, impacted institutions receiving

federal funds, including schools; the law entitles students with disabilities to an appropriate education comparable to students without disabilities (Aron & Loprest, 2012).

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1975, or Public Law 94-142, declared that students with disabilities must receive appropriate education that best meets their needs, free of charge, alongside non-disabled students when possible. IDEA provides one of the most important tenets for teachers of students with disabilities: "free, appropriate, public education in the least restrictive environment" or FAPE (Aron & Loprest, 2012, p. 99). The primary responsibility to adhere to FAPE lies with the school district; however, teachers need to be familiar with IDEA, more specifically FAPE, because they are the school personnel most often charged with implementing a student's individualized education program (IEP) and providing accommodations based the IEP (Patterson, 2005). The student's IEP assures the *appropriate* portion of FAPE in that the plan is developed with consideration of the unique needs of the student (Gargiulo, 2009).

Public Law 105-17, or the 1997 Amendments to IDEA, brought many changes to IDEA; but most notably the amendments changed initial identification and reevaluation procedures (Gargiulo, 2009). Initial identification and reevaluation data do not have to be based on formal, standardized tests and can be based on other measures like observations, student work portfolios, and parental input (Gargiulo, 2009). Public Law 105-17 also states that students cannot be made eligible for special education programs if academic difficulties are a primary result of limited English proficiency or inadequate instruction (Gargiulo, 2009). This aspect of Public Law 105-17 strongly connects to the current

study as limited English proficiency and inadequate instruction are some of the barriers

educators face when implementing multi-tiered systems of supports like RtI before

initiating special education referrals. The reauthorization of the Individuals with

Disabilities Education Act, named Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement

Act of 2004 (PL 108-446), or IDEA 2004, brought additional changes to special

education, with a focus on aligning programs for students with disabilities with school

improvement efforts intended for all students (Gargiulo, 2009).

<div align="center">**Multi-tiered System of Supports**</div>

Response to Intervention (RtI)

Response to Intervention, or RtI, came about as an alternative eligibility

framework to use for the identification of students with learning disabilities (Ardoin,

Witt, Connell, & Koenig, 2005; Shinn, 2007; Vaughn & Fuchs, 2003; Vaughn &

Klingner, 2007; Wanzek & Cavanaugh, 2010). The RtI model was developed over time

and derived from a critique made by Heller, Holtzman, and Messick (1982) of the

discrepancy model (Ardoin et al., 2005). Instead of the use of psychometric measures to

identify learning disabilities, with RtI, instruction becomes the test; "instruction is the test

stimulus and the student's level or rate of performance is her response" (Fuchs, Fuchs, &

Compton, 2007, p. 58). RtI shifts educators' focus from the identification of students with

deficits to identification of students at risk (Ardoin et al., 2005; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006).

Through the use of the RtI model, educators can provide appropriate instruction based on

student needs and research based interventions (Hoover & Patton, 2008; Reeves, Bishop,

& Filce, 2010; Wanzek & Cavanaugh, 2010). The RtI model gives educators a complete

picture of a student through the response to targeted instruction, instead of through the

results from a solitary administration of psychological assessments (Ardoin et al., 2005).

The focus with the RtI model is on the prevention of failure (Ardoin et al., 2005; Denton, 2012; Donovan & Cross, 2002; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006; Klingner & Edwards, 2006; Orosco & Klingner, 2010; Reeves et al., 2010). The RtI model impacts instruction for general education students and special education students alike (Burns & Ysseldyke, 2005; Burns & Senesac, 2005; Fuchs, Fuchs, & Vaughn, 2008; Reeves et al., 2010).

Response to Intervention is an accepted model with positive and negative attributes. Researchers have credited the model with helping educators decrease special education referrals and differentiate between students with learning disabilities and a lack of appropriate instruction (Ardoin et al., 2005; Barnett, Daly, Jones, & Lentz, 2004; Council for Exceptional Children, 2007; Fuchs 2003; Fuchs et al., 2007; Fuchs, Mock, Morgan, & Young 2003; Gresham, 2002; Reeves et al., 2010; VanDerHeyden, Witt, & Barnett, 2005). The reduction of special education referrals and more well informed instruction specifically benefits students in cultural and linguistic minority groups (Reeves et al., 2010; VanDerHeyden et al., 2005). Educators implementing the RtI model also are met with challenges. As with any program based in research, it may be difficult for schools to put RtI into practice in the way that it is intended to be implemented for paramount results; schools usually have limits on time, resources, and staff (Ardoin et al., 2005).

Educators implementing the RtI framework utilize data to drive implementation and interventions in order to provide the greatest results for student achievement (Abbott & Wills, 2012; Kovaleski & Pedersen, 2008; Stringfield & Wayman, 2006). Multidisciplinary team members should define criteria to determine who needs

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interventions and devise a plan for screening students who may need interventions (Petscher, Kim, & Foorman, 2011; Wanzek & Cavanaugh, 2010). The team taking part in planning and implementing the interventions may include teachers and administrators (Stringfield & Wayman, 2006). The multidisciplinary team may consider the goals of RtI instruction and plan accordingly; perhaps the plan could include a monitoring component taking care that instruction is implemented with fidelity (Hilton, 2007; Shinn, 2007; Stringfield & Wayman, 2006). As a member of the team, classroom teachers play a significant role in planning and implementation throughout the RtI process (Hilton, 2007; Klingner & Edwards, 2006; Stringfield & Wayman, 2006). The current study examined the RtI process through the perceptions of general education teachers.

Response to Intervention has three tiers of intervention referred to IT1, IT2, and IT3 by the state of Florida (FLDOE, 2006). Tier 1 intervention, or IT1, is the instruction that all students receive in the general education classroom; instruction that a teacher would give if they followed a best practices approach (FLDOE, 2006). Tier 1 instruction or intervention should be provided by the general education teacher (Reeves et al., 2010; Stringfield & Wayman, 2006). Tier 2 instruction, or IT2, is instruction with the use of supplemental interventions that are provided in addition to general instruction (IT1). Tier 2 instruction can be provided by the general education teacher in the classroom or by a reading specialist or trained paraprofessional within or outside of the general education classroom (Stringfield & Wayman, 2006). Tier 3 instruction, or IT3, involves the same supplemental interventions as IT2 with the addition of more intensive interventions. Students would be involved in IT 2 and IT3 prior to any referral for special education,

since these tiers are intended for students who have demonstrated difficulties in academics.

The RtI model is used for the appropriate instruction of all students, including English learners. Usually, early interventions target phonics and phonemic awareness, not vocabulary and comprehension, which are main areas of concern in reading for English learners (Gersten et al., 2008; Stringfield & Wayman, 2006). Early reading interventions focus on preliminary reading skills, leaving a gap in reading skills for English learners. Interventionists can bridge the gap in reading skills by using interventions that focus on word attack skills as well as text-level skills (Stringfield & Wayman, 2006). There is a paucity of research on the impact of early interventions on English learners with limited oral language development (Stringfield & Wayman, 2006). Stringfield and Wayman (2006) reviewed one urban school's use of a modified Response to Intervention framework. The researchers found that many schools were challenged by limits on resources such as time, materials, and personnel for the effective implementation of RtI (Stringfield & Wayman, 2006). The study focused on a school that reorganized the use of resources in order to better meet the needs of struggling students, with a specific focus on personnel and alternative intervention methods (Stringfield & Wayman, 2006). One of the intended benefits of the current study was to gain some understanding of the impact of RtI on English learners through the perceptions of general education teachers.

The implementation of RtI poses some unique challenges when involving the instruction of English learners. As with native English speakers, the RtI model provides educators with a framework for instructing students based on student needs and research-based interventions (Fuchs et al., 2007). However, with appropriate instruction comes the

necessity of the opportunity to learn; there is no existing opportunity to learn if instruction is not culturally and linguistically appropriate (Klingner & Edwards, 2006). Many educators are not adequately prepared to instruct English learners (Menken & Antunez, 2001; Orosco & Klingner, 2010). Often times, educators are not adept to the process of second language acquisition and have difficulty determining the difference between language deficits and learning disabilities (Orosco & Klingner, 2010). Teachers also have some difficulty employing proper assessments and instructional techniques for English learners (Au, 2005; Baca & Cervantes, 2004; Orosco & Klingner, 2010). Ultimately, if these students are not provided with a sufficient opportunity to learn, special education eligibility cannot be determined through unresponsiveness to the RtI process (Klingner & Edwards, 2006).

A study conducted by Orosco and Klingner (2010) provided pertinent findings related to RtI and English learners. The researchers conducted a qualitative case study examining the Response to Intervention process and the impact on Latino students with learning difficulties in urban schools. The researchers employed the social constructivist framework based on Vygotsky's (1962) theories related to sociocultural constructs and education. Orosco and Klingner (2010) conducted observations to view the assessments and instruction related to the RtI framework; interviews were conducted with staff members about their experiences with instruction before the implementation of RtI and reflections on the current implementation of RtI.

The study explored the connection between teachers' reported perceptions and interpretation of RtI and the relationship to educating English learners. When a student, especially an English learner, is struggling, educators may consider whether the student is

receiving appropriate instruction and the context of the instruction before considering the presence of a deficit or learning disability (Harry & Klingner, 2006; Klingner & Edwards, 2006; VanDerHeyden et al., 2005). Factors like classroom instruction, context, and fidelity of RtI implementation are not considered carefully enough before multidisciplinary teams contemplate special education referrals and determine eligibilities (Fuchs et al., 2003; Harry & Klingner, 2006; Klingner & Edwards, 2006; Orosco & Klingner, 2010; Vaughn & Fuchs, 2003). Many educators focus more on possible student deficits and factors at home, and rely less on classroom observations (Harry & Klingner, 2006; Klingner & Edwards, 2006). In current practice, there seems to be a lack of focus on classroom teachers and the role they play in implementing RtI with English learners (Klingner & Edwards, 2006).

Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is an education framework derived from the field of architecture and the accessibility concerns challenging people with disabilities (Harris, Kaff, Anderson, & Knackendoffel, 2007; Lopes-Murphy, 2012). The UDL framework addresses accessibility in the classroom with a focus on learning variables and providing students with "multiple means of representation, multiple means of action and expression, and multiple means of engagement" (Chita-Tegmark, Gravel, Serpa, Domings, & Rose, 2012, p. 17). The framework is based in the understanding of the different ways that the brain processes information (Chita-Tegmark et al., 2012; Coyne, Pisha, Dalton, Zeph, & Smith, 2012; Rose & Meyer, 2002). Educators implementing the UDL framework focus on the what, how, and why of learning (Coyne et al., 2012; Rose & Meyer, 2002).

UDL was designed through the analysis and application of research looking at the needs of students and noticing where the learning skills of students vary the most (Chita-Tegmark et al., 2012). The focal point of UDL is meeting the needs of the exceptional student, or the "atypical learner" (Chita-Tegmark et al., 2012, p. 17). The implementation of UDL helps educators accommodate students with different cultural constructs. UDL facilitates culturally informed learning and helps educators to understand the unique needs of diverse learners (Chita-Tegmark et al., 2012). Educators can make appropriate accommodations to instruction by understanding that students have different constructs and thought processes based on culture, then introducing concepts through different lenses and addressing the differences in construct (Chita-Tegmark et al., 2012; Nisbett, Peng, Choi, & Norenzayan, 2001).

UDL builds on the Response to Intervention (RtI) framework. The UDL framework is an appropriate addition to RtI to address the needs of diverse learners (Basham et al., 2010; Rose & Meyer, 2002). Purposeful instructional design and technology are important elements of UDL as these elements provide educators with a framework for using technology to help students access curriculum on their functional level (Basham et al., 2010; Harris et al., 2007). Technology can provide support to exceptional students as a scaffold; assistive technology equipment can help model the active thought process used by good readers, provide feedback throughout the reading process, and provide appropriate supports; then fade supports when these supports are no longer necessary (Coyne et al., 2012). Scaffolds are an important element of UDL, but educators must ensure that the supports are appropriate and well defined so as not to interfere with student learning, and the supports provide students with adequately

challenging instruction (Hitchcock, Meyer, Rose, & Jackson, 2002). English learners may be provided with curricular challenges, but instruction needs to be tailored to their level of English proficiency (Lopes-Murphy, 2012). Through both RtI and UDL frameworks, educators gather information about student progress through ongoing progress monitoring and adapt instruction as necessary; an important tenet of UDL is flexibility in instruction based on the needs of students (Basham et al., 2010).

Through both the RtI and UDL frameworks, educators focus on meaningful education, aim to prevent curricular failure, and gather information on students through ongoing assessments and progress monitoring; the UDL framework aims to meet curricular goals, not overcome curricular barriers (Basham et al., 2010; Hitchcock et al., 2002). Both frameworks employ decision-making and problem-solving processes based in science, research, and evidence (Basham et al., 2010). There appears to be a need for research on a broader approach to RtI that considers the effectiveness of instructional strategies and design to meet the needs of a diverse student population; the research on the UDL framework appears to address the need more completely (Basham et al., 2010). The combination of RtI, UDL, and assistive technology can help schools provide diverse learners with more "accessible, meaningful, and engaging learning environments" (Basham et al., 2010, p. 244).

For purposes of implementation, researchers have recommended using RtI and UDL as a hybrid approach; both frameworks have comparable fundamentals, while the UDL framework includes flexibility of instruction and an ecological approach to best meet the needs of diverse, exceptional learners (Basham et al., 2010). Professional development may be provided to educators to help them effectively implement RtI and

UDL frameworks. The current study gathered the perspectives general education teachers

have about the implementation of multi-tiered systems of supports, specifically RtI, with

the intention of adding to the knowledge base of preparing teachers for such

implementation. Educators would benefit from professional development that helps them

understand how cultural constructs impact learning and that approaching instruction with

attention to cultural constructs is important (Chita-Tegmark et al., 2012).

The Special Education Placement Process

History of the Special Education Placement Process

The discrepancy model was one of the first models used for identification of

learning disabilities (Benson & Newman, 2010; Dombrowski, Kamphaus, & Reynolds,

2004); this model looks at the gap between intelligence and achievement. This concept

was presented in the literature in the 1800s (Gallego et al., 2006). Discrepancy started

with doctors in Europe researching "word-blindness" regarding "patients that could not

read but were otherwise intelligent" (Gallego et al., 2006, p. 2200). In the 1920s,

researchers in the United States drew on the European practice of employing IQ tests to

measure discrepancy between ability and achievement in order to identify learning

disabilities (Gallego et al., 2006). These procedures provided the background for

contemporary practice not only for the discrepancy model used for identifying learning

disabilities, but for the practice of using assessment results to inform instruction (Gallego

et al., 2006; Hallahan & Mercer, 2002).

The discrepancy model was used throughout the 1950s and 1960s for the

identification of learning disabilities for all students, including the increasing number of

students identified as English learners (Gallego et al., 2006). It is believed during this

time period that the achievement and ability gap found through the discrepancy model may have been due to limited English proficiency, not learning disabilities (Gallego et al., 2006). IDEA 2004 gave states the choice to move away from discrepancy models for special education identification; many state departments of education started to use models such as Response to Intervention (RtI) (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006; Klingner & Edwards, 2006). RtI provides educators with a model for implementing research-based interventions with students with the intent that the proper instruction would decrease incidences of struggling students (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006). The current study examined assessments and instruction and the possible challenges that face educators during the special education placement and pre-referral intervention process for English learners.

The 1960s and 1970s brought movements for civil rights and social unrest; this new outlook on society impacted educational practices. The new societal outlook on educational practices brought focus to the complexities of educating cultural and linguistically diverse students (Gallego et al., 2006). The IQ achievement discrepancy model for identification of learning disabilities still was being used, but changes were coming (Donovan & Cross, 2002; Gallego et al., 2006; Kavale, 2002). Congress amended the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), clearly outlining the definition of learning disabled in the Children with Specific Learning Disabilities Act (LD Act) of 1969 (Benson & Newman, 2010; Gallego et al., 2006; Mercer, Jordan, Allsopp, & Mercer, 1996; Shepherd, 2001). This defining policy has persisted throughout the different phases of special education law such as the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA) of 1965 and Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) of 1990, 1997, and 2004.

Teaching methods of the 1960s and 1970s focused on perceptual training methods; these methods were recommended for teaching students whom educators deemed difficult to teach, such as English learners and students with disabilities (Gallego et al., 2006). At the time, there was limited research to endorse the perceptual method and it did not provide widespread learning gains (Gallego et al., 2006). The lackluster results often were blamed on student intelligence and ability (Gallego et al., 2006).

As language diversity increased in the schools throughout the twentieth century, national anti-diversity movements gained popularity (Gallego et al., 2006). Some organizations attempted to establish English as the official language of the United States (Gallego et al., 2006). All types of diversity, including intellectual and cultural-linguistic diversity, were the focus of query in society and in schools. Some educators and policy makers were under the impression that too much money was being allotted to special education (Gallego et al., 2006). Schools had high expectations for student performance, but there was limited support for these expectations (Gallego et al., 2006). Schools had to find ways to work efficiently due to limited support. One of the resourceful ways schools attempted to meet the needs of their diverse students was to include ESOL strategies with individualized education plans for special education (Baca, 2002; Gallego et al., 2006). This practice may have helped to perpetuate inappropriate identification of students with disabilities (Gallego et al., 2006). This is particularly significant as part of the context for the current study in that the rationale for examining the assessment and instructional practices used by teachers for English learners is to facilitate appropriate instruction and to help curtail inappropriate special education placement.

Late in the twentieth century, there was a movement in the United States to investigate more appropriate definitions and methods of identification for special education, including more accurate identification of learning disabilities for English learners (Gallego et al., 2006). The importance of finding appropriate instruction of English learners was becoming increasingly important in the United States because schools were seeing a growing English learner population (Gallego et al., 2006). Gallego et al. (2006) provided their perspectives on identification of students with learning disabilities through different eras in modern education; the perspectives provide insight into how context plays an important role in the identification of students with learning disabilities (Gallego et al., 2006).

Scribner and Cole (1978) found several implications for assessments used in identifying English learners for special education programs. Cultural relevancy for the test taker resulted in inflation of scores, and the conditions of the test impacted the outcomes of intelligence tests (Gallego et al., 2006; Scribner & Cole, 1978). The conditions that influenced the outcomes of the test were the testing situation, content, personnel administering the test, and the interpretation of the results (Gallego et al., 2006; Scribner & Cole, 1978).

In the late 1980s, educators saw an increase in the English learners identified as learning disabled (Gallego et al., 2006). Educators were concerned and researchers looked into more assessment and instruction for the purposes of appropriately instructing English learners and identifying students with learning disabilities (Fradd & Hudson, 1987; Gallego et al., 2006; Ortiz & Wilkinson, 1986). One of the main concerns for researchers was the multidisciplinary team charged with making decisions about

instruction and placement of students (Gallego et al., 2006). The intention of team

meetings was to make decisions about struggling students, but often times the meetings

turned into "capitulation conferences" (Echevarria, Powers, & Elliot, 2004, pg. 23). Often

times, members of the multidisciplinary team concede to teacher recommendations for

struggling students, resulting in a vast majority of student referred being placed in special

education programs (Algozzine, Christenson, & Ysseldyke, 1982; Foster, Ysseldyke,

Casey, & Thurlow, 1984). Ysseldyke, Algozzine, Richey, and Graden (1982) found that

there was little connection between the data reviewed at multidisciplinary team meetings

and placement decisions

Assessments and evaluative information gathered over time is a preferable

method for data collection regarding a student rather than using a result from a test given

at a single point in time (Figueroa, 2002; Figueroa & Garcia, 1994; Gallego et al., 2006;

Ortiz & Yates, 2001). Researchers have attempted to incorporate context when making

special education placement decisions and to use other ecological data in addition to

more traditional psychometric assessments (Figueroa, 2002; Figueroa & Garcia, 1994;

Gallego et al., 2006; Ortiz & Yates, 2001). With the reauthorization of the Individuals

with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) in 2004, states were given the

opportunity to move away from standardized scores and discrepancy models for special

education identification. Instead, state departments of education were provided with

decision-making models like Response to Intervention (RtI) (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006;

Klingner & Edwards, 2006). Since the reauthorization of IDEA in 2004, Response to

Intervention (RtI) has become a popular alternative to discrepancy models and single

instance psychometric assessments. RtI captures student performance in the classroom in

a more natural setting (Figueroa, 2002; Gallego et al., 2006). The proper assessment for

English learners and the identification of learning disabilities still is a challenge and the

effectiveness of RtI for all students, especially English learners, still is unclear (Gallego

et al., 2006; Klingner & Edwards, 2006). The current study focused on RtI as an

instructional decision-making process specifically for English learners. Participants

shared perceptions of RtI and the ambiguity of identifying learning disabilities for

English learners.

Special Education Procedures

The multidisciplinary team is a group of educational professionals brought

together to discuss student performance, monitor progress, and plan for instruction

(Foster et al., 1984). The theory behind the creation of such a team is that decisions made

by a group of professionals would be less biased than decisions made by just one person

(Fuchs & Fuchs, 1989; Knotek, 2003; Weatherly & Lipsky, 1977; Ysseldyke &

Algozzine, 1983). Ideally, a group of educational professionals making well-informed,

unbiased decisions on instruction for struggling students would help reduce inappropriate

special education referrals (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1989; Fuchs et al., 2003; Knotek, 2003;

Santangelo, 2009; Weatherly & Lipsky, 1977; Ysseldyke & Algozzine, 1983). In contrast

to this rationale for group decision-making, this approach does not necessarily guarantee

avoidance of inappropriate special education referrals (Foster et al., 1984). Often, there is

little connection between data presented at multidisciplinary team meetings and decisions

made about special education eligibility (Foster et al., 1984). Researchers also believe

that the most influential members of the multidisciplinary team may not be the most

knowledgeable about special education identification (Benson & Newman, 2010;

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Reynolds, 2003). The current study gained teachers' perspectives on the Response to Intervention approach through interviews. Some goals of the interview process were to examine how teachers are involved in the referral process and their experiences with multidisciplinary teams.

There are several different members of the multidisciplinary team, but one of the most important members is the general education teacher (Kaderavek, 2009). The classroom teacher plays an important role in the decision-making process for students because the classroom teacher spends the most time with the students (Kaderavek, 2009). There is a strong connection between the initial special education referrals made by classroom teachers and final placement (Foster et al., 1984; Knotek, 2003). This correlation could be due to a teacher's deep understanding of the needs of students or because the classroom teacher's referrals are accommodated simply due to a lack of objectivity in multidisciplinary team decisions (Knotek, 2003). The social response of multidisciplinary teams seems to balance an evaluation of the teacher with corroboration of the teacher's rationale for the referral (Knotek, 2003; Santangelo, 2009). The current study explored how classroom teachers perceive their role in multidisciplinary team decision-making.

Teacher Preparation and Cultural-linguistic Diversity

"What is understood about the conduct of an activity may apply to the conduct of many others, but is unlikely to apply to all" (Goodenough, 1994, p. 267). Several factors impact learning in the classroom; an important factor to consider is culture. Differences in culture between student and teacher are inherent (Gallego et al., 2001). Classrooms are impacted by cultural differences as simple as adults organizing a learning environment

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for children, thus creating a basic culture gap based on age; cultural gaps also can be created through ethnic and linguistic differences (Gallego et al., 2001). Misunderstandings connected to cultural context are expected when such differences in culture are present; commonalities in context and understanding cannot be expected to be generalized easily, making general transfer of information across cultural contexts in a classroom difficult (Gallego et al., 2001).

The field of educational psychology and Piaget's constructive process set important groundwork for cultural awareness in education (Gallego et al., 2001). Piaget's theory that teachers are responsible for arranging the classroom environment and conditions to facilitate learning eventually led to an awareness of the connection between the classroom culture and student learning; however, this connection was not apparent to educators immediately (Gallego et al., 2001). Historically, educators did not see the connection between learning and culture, leaving a gap between cultural constructs of the classroom developed by educators and the cultural constructs of learners (Gallego et al., 2001). In the late 1900s, Vygotsky's "general law of cultural development" was an important theory considering the connection between classroom culture and student learning (Gallego et al., 2001, p. 959). Vygotsky's theory led educators to the realization that in order for a student to internalize information, they must connect with it; students experience content in a social sense, then make it their own (Gallego et al., 2001).

The consideration of social and cultural issues and the impact on education has been a point of contention for some (Cochran-Smith & Demers, 2008). The area of social justice in teacher preparation programs has a reputation for being heavy on happiness and self-esteem and light on knowledge and rigor (Cochran-Smith & Demers, 2008).

Proponents of social justice in teacher preparation programs feel that it is necessary to help diverse students successfully access curriculum (Cochran-Smith & Demers, 2008). Knowledge cannot be devoid of culture; knowledge is deeply connected with humanity and experiences, and reflects social and cultural elements of society (Banks, 1997; Cochran-Smith & Demers, 2008; Sleeter, 2004). Teachers may have strengths in general pedagogy and subject matter; however, they need to be able to incorporate culture and context into instruction in order to maximize benefits for learners (Banks et al., 2005). The content and tone of teacher preparation programs and professional development is always changing and being debated; content usually comes down to current authority figures and their ideologies about the role of teachers and schools (Cochran-Smith & Demers, 2008).

Researchers do not always perceive willingness on the part of teachers to take part in different aspects of professional development, such as taking part in a training session, having input on development of professional development, and implementing the concepts presented during professional development sessions (Zionts, Shellady, & Zionts, 2006). Many teachers report that there is a disconnect between professional development, educational research, and classroom practices (Zionts et al., 2006). A recommendation for researchers and developers of professional development is to keep the realities of a classroom in mind; this will help trainers develop professional development that will best be able to be implemented practically in the classroom (Zionts et al., 2006).

Shippen, Curtis, and Miller (2009) recommended professional development to help teachers understand the appropriate use of evaluation and assessment measures to inform their instruction; training would help teachers understand how to complete

evaluations appropriately as well as understand how to implement interventions with fidelity. Hardin et al. (2009) recommended professional development on evaluations and assessments and the connection to effective instruction for English learners. With training, educators could learn strategies to improve implementation of progress monitoring and the special education referral and placement process (Hardin et al., 2009). Educators of English learners would benefit from an awareness of the language acquisition process and how culture impacts learning (Hardin et al., 2009). When teachers are more familiar with the language acquisition process, they may be less likely to confuse characteristics related to language acquisition and a learning disability (Rodriguez, 2009). The researcher hoped to add to the current body of knowledge on effective instructional implementation and progress monitoring for English learners in order to inform professional development for classroom teachers.

Teacher Perceptions and Cultural-linguistic Diversity

The perceptions that general education teachers have related to educating diverse students varies; some teachers feel more intimidated than others about educating diverse learners, especially linguistically diverse students (Collier & Thomas, 2009). The English learner population is expanding rapidly; if English learners are not properly educated, the United States will find itself with an undereducated society and unable to maximize the productivity of its citizens (Collier & Thomas, 2009). The United States also has made a commitment to educate all of its children properly and in order to do so, educators must find the most effective way to teach the nation's English learners (Collier & Thomas, 2009).

Shippen et al. (2009) conducted a qualitative study focusing on teacher perceptions of the overrepresentation of African American students in special education programs within a school district. Based on the study, the researchers indicated that educators believe that overrepresentation of minorities in special education is present in their school system but did not cite a specific reason (Shippen et al., 2009). The educators involved in the study reported that they were confused about appropriate assessments, the referral process, and the impact on overrepresentation (Shippen et al., 2009). Special education teachers involved in the study felt that there was a need to develop assessments that considered cultural constructs, while general education teachers reported that the referral process was ineffective and did not prevent failure for struggling students (Shippen et al., 2009). The researchers recommended professional development focusing on assessments and the special education referral process (Shippen et al., 2009).

In the Shippen et al. (2009) study, teachers were unsure of the most effective instructional strategies to implement for English learners, making the efforts more intimidating and less efficient. When students are struggling academically, teachers implement interventions and eventually may initiate the special education referral process. The current study focused on the knowledge and perceptions of assessments and instruction for struggling English learners held by classroom teachers. In the Shippen et al. (2009) study, classroom teachers found that current practices for interventions and referrals are not effective. For one, teachers felt that interventions take too long; by the time academic difficulties were identified and assessed, interventions were prescribed, and a progress monitoring model implemented to see if the intervention was appropriate, students were failing and important instructional time was wasted (Shippen et al., 2009).

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If a student continued to struggle, teachers were not sure of when to refer them to special education programs. They were concerned about referring too early or too late; they even felt pressure about initiating referrals at all (Shippen et al., 2009).

Teachers had similar concerns when it came to assessments. If a teacher administered an assessment too early, a multidisciplinary team may be dismissive of the results because the assessment was administered prematurely and the student now was precluded from the assessment in the near future (Shippen et al., 2009). Teachers had a concern about waiting too long to administer assessments because students were falling behind and their needs may not have been addressed appropriately without the information from the assessment (Shippen et al., 2009).

The current study asked teachers to share their perceptions of the Response to Intervention process, with some specific focus on assessments for English learners in the RtI process. Some participants in the current study shared some confusion related to assessing English learners and the connection between student assessments and special education referral and placement. Teacher participants found it difficult to use the assessment data to determine whether English learners were demonstrating academic difficulties due to a learning disability or whether the academic difficulties were a natural part of the language acquisition process. Teacher participants in the Shippen et al. (2009) study felt that interventions took too long and, often times, when students went through the necessary RtI procedures, teachers felt that instructional time was wasted and students were falling behind. Teacher participants in the current study also reported that it took a substantial amount of time for students to "go through" the RtI process and for concerns to be addressed.

Teachers' feelings about their understanding and perceptions about a method or framework impact their willingness implement the practices (Klingner et al., 2005). Teachers in the current study described their knowledge of the Response to Intervention process and feelings about their understanding of the RtI process. The current study helps to gain teacher perceptions of the Response to Intervention process for English learners.

Conclusion

The review of literature for the current study focused on English learners and the Response to Intervention framework. The history of English in education and educating English learners provides context for modern teachers of culturally and linguistically diverse students. The literature on policies for English learners and students with disabilities provides the current study with the literature on multi-tiered system of supports like RtI, while UDL provides guidelines for effective implementation of decision-making, progress monitoring, research-based instruction. The sections of literature on teacher preparation and teacher perceptions provide context. The review of literature included sections on special education throughout time, providing historical context of the transformation of special education in the United States.

CHAPTER THREE. METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Qualitative inquiry helps to provide understanding of participants' experiences and how each participant interprets his or her own experiences (Merriam, 2009). Qualitative inquiry also lends a naturalistic approach to research; the researcher is able to gather information where the phenomenon occurs (Creswell, 2007). A qualitative approach allows the researcher to gain insight derived from the participants, whereas a researcher usually prescribes meaning to a study through hypotheses (Creswell, 2007; Locke, Spirduso, & Silverman, 2007).

The researcher employed a case study approach incorporating qualitative methodology; specifically, a case bounded by qualitative research methods provides guidelines for conducting research but affords flexibility for the researcher to study the natural experiences of participants (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Santangelo, 2009). A case study design is a preferred approach for studying reported implementation of an instructional framework like RtI because the researcher has the flexibility to study any aspects of the case that may arise throughout the process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Santangelo, 2009). A case study design also enables the researcher to report descriptions and themes related to the specific unit of analysis of the case (Creswell, 2007; Yin, 2003). Multiple forms of data are collected in a case study; in this study, the researcher conducted interviews and analyzed applicable documents (Creswell, 2007). The researcher collected data through interactions with participants, then focused

on developing themes; this approach helped the researcher gain a deeper understanding of the specific case (Creswell, 2007). Generalizability is not the intent of many qualitative studies; instead the researcher often times is more interested in gaining a more in-depth understanding of a particular case (Creswell, 2007).

Prior to undertaking the current study, the researcher obtained approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the university and school district in which the study took place (Appendix A, Appendix B, and Appendix C). The researcher also obtained approval for any changes made during the course of the study (Appendix D, Appendix E).

Research Questions

The research questions addressed in the current study were:

1. What do elementary general education teachers know about the Response to Intervention (RtI) process for English learners?

2. How do elementary general education teachers report their interpretation of policies and procedures with respect to instruction and assessment of English learners, specifically relating to the Response to Intervention model?

3. How do elementary general education teachers feel about their understanding of Response to Intervention?

4. How do elementary general education teachers feel about their understanding of instruction and assessment for English learners?

Participants

The participants in the current study were general education teachers in a public elementary school in southeast Florida. Florida serves as an important setting for the

study because of its cultural and linguistic diversity. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2013), 27% of students ages 5and above in Florida speak languages other than English, compared to 20.3% in the United States. The Florida county in which the study took place has a English learner student population higher than the average in the state; 37.2% of students ages 5 and above speak languages other than English at home (United States Census Bureau, 2013). The county also has a higher than average foreign-born student population; the county has 31% while the state of Florida has an average of 19% of foreign-born students overall (United States Census Bureau, 2013).

The site houses classes for students in prekindergarten through grade five; including four sections of special programs for students with intellectual disabilities and six sections of special programs for prekindergarten students. The current study involved general education teachers of grades kindergarten through five through the use of criterion sampling (Miles & Huberman, 1994). There are 15 general education, kindergarten through grade five classes at the site: three sections of kindergarten, three sections of first grade, two sections of second grade, three sections of third grade, two sections of fourth grade, and two sections of fifth grade. The target sample size was 8 to 10 teachers. The researcher made initial contact with potential participants through a telephone conversation, in-person, or through electronic mail using a recruitment script (Appendix F). The researcher used criterion sampling to determine the 10 out of 15 teachers of grades kindergarten through five to participate in the study. The 10 teachers approached to participate in the study were chosen based on their past experiences with the Response to Intervention process and participation in collaborative problem solving team meetings, or CPST. Of these 10, 8 teachers agreed to participate in the study.

General education teachers were referred to by pseudonyms, and gender of the teachers was not evident by the pseudonym used. The researcher used a typical case sampling; teachers in average situations were chosen for the study (Creswell, 2007). Tarter and Hoy (2004) used a typical sample of elementary schools to conduct a study examining the effectiveness of schools through an open social systems frame focusing on environmental elements including socioeconomic status. Beard and Hoy (2010) also employed a typical sample when conducting research about teacher practices in elementary schools in Ohio; the researchers found that the study sample closely matched the typical demographics of teachers in the area. Since the current study took place in the researcher's workplace, the sample can be considered to be a sample of convenience (Creswell, 2007).

Data Collection Procedures

Data collection included interviews and document analysis. The researcher conducted two, semi-structured, open-ended, face-to-face interviews with each participant; each interview lasted 40 minutes to 1 hour and 5 minutes. Initial contact was conducted in person, through a telephone conversation, or through electronic mail using the first recruitment script. The researcher gained consent at the start of the first interview session with the use of a consent form (Appendix G). An interview protocol (Appendix H) was developed and implemented during the first interview session. After the first interviews were transcribed and analyzed, the researcher conducted a second round of interviews. The additional interviews were conducted in order to gain more in depth information about practices and implementation of policies and procedures. The researcher made contact with study participants through electronic mail or through contact in-person using the second recruitment script (Appendix I). The additional

interview questions addressed tools used during the RtI process. The researcher presented to the teacher participants copies of district policy relating to teaching English learners to gain reactions to the policy. The additional questions added to the information gathered during the initial interview sessions. A second consent form (Appendix J) and recruitment script were used for the second interview session; a second interview protocol (Appendix K) was developed and implemented during the second interview session. The second interview session was necessary as insufficient data was gathered during the first session and the researcher sought more in depth information. The participants were notified of the changes through an email or in-person communication using the recruitment script.

Interviews were audiotaped and transcribed in order to facilitate appropriate analysis. The interviews were audiotaped using an application on a mobile device. The interviews were saved on the mobile device and transferred to an external memory device. While face-to-face interviews are preferred, such interviews may present the researcher with a challenge if the participant is reticent (Creswell, 2007). The researcher established rapport with each participant and conducted interviews in the most comfortable setting possible; this helped the participant feel comfortable and assisted in accurate sharing of information throughout the interview process. Fourteen of the interviews were conducted in teachers' classroom. Two of the interviews were conducted at participants' homes.

When conducting interviews, the researcher used interview protocols, which included the interview questions and space to record answers to the questions (Creswell, 2007). Fraenkel, Wallen, and Hyun (2012) stated that an interview protocol with

standardized, open-ended questions facilitates organization and analysis of data because all participants answer the same questions, thereby increasing the comparability of responses.

Roulston and Misawa (2011) conducted in-depth interviews in order to learn about the connections music teachers made between their gender constructs and connections to their careers. Each interview lasted 45 to 60 minutes and was conducted during a time that was convenient for each teacher (Roulston & Misawa, 2011). Each interview in the current study lasted anywhere from 40minutes to 1hour and 5minutes and took place before the start of school, after students were dismissed, evenings, and weekends; i.e., any time that was convenient for the participant. Prior to conducting the interview, the researcher obtained consent from the participant. The researcher gained consent to audiotape the interviews through the use of the interview protocols. Current research and information from related organizations informed the development of the items on the interview protocol. The interview protocols contained a script explicitly requesting permission to audiotape the interviews to help facilitate data analysis. It is important for the researcher to review some information related to the study before conducting the interview, including a review of the purpose of the study, allotted time for the interview, and proposed use of the findings of the study (Creswell, 2007).

A study conducted by Conway (2012) sought to learn about teacher perceptions of preservice music teacher preparation programs. Conway (2012) conducted interviews in order to gain teacher perceptions for the study; the interview protocol asked teachers about what they felt worked and did not work in preservice music teacher preparation programs. The interview questions in the current study that focused on teacher

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perceptions followed a similar format; specifically in interview questions 2, 4, and 5 from the first interview session protocol.

Orosco and Klingner (2010) conducted a case study on the teachers' perceptions of RtI implementation for Latino English learners, using interviews, observations, and document analysis. The researchers used an interview protocol with predetermined questions; questions were modified during the interview if necessary. Participants were asked to reconstruct their experiences with RtI and related events; the reconstruction of the events facilitated a detailed description of their experiences while making meaning of the process. Participants in the current were asked to describe experiences with the RtI framework and events related to RtI, such as multidisciplinary team meetings.

The current study collected data on what teachers know about the Response to Intervention framework. The researcher collected data on teacher knowledge during interviews. Orosco and Klingner (2010) also analyzed documents related to the RtI process, such as curricular artifacts, assessments, and teacher referral forms. The researchers used the documents as a connection to the information gathered through the interviews. The current study also involved the collection of documents related to the RtI process. Participant responses determined the specific documents collected and analyzed in the current study. Participants were asked to discuss the chosen documents during the interview.

According to the Collaborative Problem Solving and Response to Intervention (CPS/RtI) manual created by the district in which the current study was conducted, various documents are used throughout the RtI process (Lyon et al., 2010). The CPS/RtI manual states that intervention records and progress monitoring graphs should be retained

by the CPS team in order to effectively monitor student progress (Lyon et al., 2010).

While there are no specific recommendations for which members of the team may be

responsible for retaining the documents, a sample case provided in the district's manual

notes that the teacher maintains written records (e.g., an intervention record and progress

monitoring graphs) (Lyon et al., 2010). The district's website for the Office of

Exceptional Student Education and Support Services provides links to forms and

graphing resources for educators to use during the RtI process. These forms include

records for academic and behavior interventions as well as graphs to facilitate progress

monitoring related to both tier 2 and tier 3 interventions.

A request was noted in the recruitment script for both interview sessions that the

participants bring documents they use during the RtI process, providing the specific

examples of intervention records and progress monitoring graphs. The researcher also

requested in the recruitment script that teachers remove names from all documents

brought to the interview session. Participants determined how many documents they

brought to the interview sessions; however, the researcher provided examples for what

documents might be helpful. Not all participants brought documents to the interview

session. When a participant did not bring documents to the first interview session, the

researcher did not address the section on the interview protocol that addressed the

participant's documents. The absence of documents during the interview session had an

impact during the data analysis process.

During the first interview session, documents were reviewed but were not

collected by the researcher. In preparation for the second interview session, participants

were asked to bring documents they deemed useful during the Response to Intervention

process. Based on the responses from the first interview session, the researcher brought documents for participant review to the interview session to gain reactions to the RtI documents. These documents included a student rating form and a teacher intervention record form.

During the second interview session, participants also were asked to review sections of the school district's ESOL handbook. Participants were asked to review the comprehensive program requirements and student instruction section as well as the statewide assessments and accommodations section of the ESOL handbook and to provide reactions on the documents and to make connections between the contents of the handbook and their instructional practices for English learners.

The purpose of the current study was to analyze teacher perceptions of the Response to Intervention process for English learners. A researcher can gain information about behaviors and practices through content analysis while avoiding the obtrusive nature of a physical observation (Fraenkel et al., 2012). The current study employed content analysis for documents provided by participants.

Data Analysis Procedures

Data analysis for qualitative research consists of different stages: organizing and managing the data, finding themes through codes, then reporting the data (Creswell, 2007). Researchers can use different approaches to organizing and managing data, including filing data in hard copy files or electronic files (Creswell, 2007). Qualitative research yields copious amounts of data and researchers must be prepared to organize the data in an effective way; many researchers use software to aid in the organization of data

(Creswell, 2007). The researcher organized any electronic data in electronic files. Any data kept in hard copy were filed in appropriately labeled binders, organized by subject.

The researcher employed document analysis as a secondary source of data collection. Documents offered additional information about procedures and practices revealed during teacher interviews. Documents were organized based on content and relevance to interview protocol questions and research questions. A document guide and table (Appendix L) were used to organize documents and to facilitate analysis.

Content analysis of the documents provided by the participants helped the researcher obtain information about the Response to Intervention process. The main objective for conducting content analysis was to gain information about teacher perceptions of the Response to Intervention process and to formulate themes (Fraenkel et al., 2012). The documents were organized into three categories prior to the analysis of the data: curricular materials/resources, teacher referral forms, and progress monitoring documents. Teachers brought general RtI documents and were asked to address how the documents were used specifically for English learners in their classrooms. The information gathered through content analysis facilitated the creation of themes and organization of data (Fraenkel et al., 2012). Participants were asked to bring any documents that they use during the Response to Intervention process. Depending on the type of document and content of the specific documents provided, the researcher focused on the manifest or latent content of each document (Fraenkel et al., 2012).

The interviews were audiotaped, with participant consent, using an application on a mobile device. The interviews were saved on the mobile device and transferred to an external memory device. The recording was saved and used for transcription. The

researcher transcribed all interviews in order to gain an in-depth perspective of information gained through each interview. The researcher transcribed and analyzed interviews soon after each interview was conducted; the researcher did not wait to complete all interviews before transcribing and analyzing. According to Seidman (2006), researchers may want to avoid in-depth analysis until after all interviews are conducted so as not to impart the thoughts of previous participants during later interviews; however, researchers tend to integrate data collection and analysis during the interview phase. Leedy and Ormrod (2005) noted that researchers conducting case studies often begin analyzing data during the data collection process. Analyzing data during the data collection process often impacts the data that researchers look to collect later in the study (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). The researcher engaged in basic analysis during the general interview process. Once the interviews were transcribed, the researcher reviewed the transcripts several times; repeated review of transcripts helped the researcher to conceptualize the data before formulating themes (Creswell, 2007). The transcribed interview was returned to participants for member checking to ensure accuracy (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Creswell (2007) addressed the coding process and issues that arise when analyzing qualitative data. Some researchers count codes to determine the rate of frequency of themes; calculating the rate of occurrence tends to lend itself to a quantitative approach (Creswell, 2007; Huberman & Miles, 1994). Another decision that qualitative researchers must make is to determine how codes will be developed. Some researchers prescribe *a priori* codes prior to analysis while others develop codes as they naturally occur through the analysis process (Creswell, 2007). The researcher read

through transcribed interviews and developed codes and themes that naturally evolved through discovering trends in data and categorizing like trends. An interview question guide and table (Appendix M) and a document guide and table were used to help organize codes and relate the data to each research question.

Limitations

The research was conducted at a single site; a relatively small elementary school with just under 400 students. A single site was chosen in order to facilitate a concentrated look at teachers' perceptions of the Response to Intervention process and the relation to instructing English learners. Data collection took place during one academic year, limiting the time span and participants in the study. A convenience sample was used in the current study; the researcher is an employee of the school that was the site of the case study.

Delimitations

Klingner and Harry (2006) conducted a 3-year study on the special education pre-referral and decision-making process for English learners. The focus of this study was on the entire multidisciplinary team; specific attention was placed on team meetings and conferences conducted to make decisions about placement for English learners (Klingner & Harry, 2006). Klingner and Harry (2006) used an ethnographic approach utilizing observations as the primary data source; the researchers observed meetings and focused on perspectives of the entire multidisciplinary team. The current case study looked at the instructional decision-making process for English learners using interviews as the primary data source to gain the perspective of teachers. The timeline for the study was confined to one academic year.

CHAPTER FOUR. FINDINGS

The current study was conducted to describe teachers' understanding and

perceptions of instructional elements and assessment of the Response to Intervention

framework in one south Florida school. The research questions that were addressed in the

current study were:

1. What do elementary general education teachers know about the Response to

   Intervention (RtI) process for English learners?

2. How do elementary general education teachers report their interpretation of

   policies and procedures with respect to instruction and assessment of English

   learners, specifically relating to the Response to Intervention model?

3. How do elementary general education teachers feel about their understanding

   of Response to Intervention?

4. How do elementary general education teachers feel about their understanding

   of instruction and assessment for English learners?

Methodology

The current study took place in a south Florida school district, referred to as the

Wise School District (WSD). The study used a qualitative case study approach to

describe teachers' understanding and perceptions of instructional elements and

assessment of the Response to Intervention framework related to English learners during

the 2013-2014 academic year. Eight elementary school teachers of grades kindergarten

through five participated in two semi-structured, open-ended, face-to-face interview

sessions and provided information about their perceptions of the Response to Intervention process specifically for English learners. During the two interview sessions, which lasted from 40 minutes to 1 hour and 5 minutes, participants shared their knowledge of the Response to Intervention process, how they felt about the process, and their understanding of the process. Participants also shared experiences related to referrals for evaluation for struggling English learners as well as their experiences as a member of a multidisciplinary team. Participants also were asked to discuss policies and procedures used to dictate instruction of English learners and assessment and instructional practices related to English learners.

Data to address the research questions were gathered using teacher interviews. Early codes were developed after the first three interviews were conducted and transcribed; these codes were noted in the researcher's journal. After reading through all interview transcripts twice, the researcher looked for words, phrases, and ideas that were repeated throughout the transcripts and then developed a preliminary list of codes. Miles and Huberman (1994) defined codes as "tags or labels for assigning units of meaning to the descriptive or inferential information complied during a study" (p. 6). The researcher listed 65 codes for the first set of codes; after the codes were refined and subsumed, a list of 50 codes and 15 categories were developed. Appendix N, Appendix O, Appendix P, and Appendix Q provide tables outlining categories, codes, and connections to data provided by teacher participants. Appendix R provides lists of codes organized by research question. The categories were created by clustering codes after finding similarities and patterns in the codes. The codes created were "in vivo" codes, taken from the words used by the study participants (Saldana, 2012). The list of codes was organized

by research question and categories were developed with clusters of codes under each research question. The categories and codes were organized into tables; the categories served as subcategory headings.

After the first round of interviews were conducted, transcribed, and analyzed, the researcher conducted a second round of interviews with the eight teacher participants. The additional interviews were conducted in order to gain more in depth information about practices and implementation of policies and procedures. The additional interview questions addressed tools used during the RtI process. The researcher presented copies of district policy relating to teaching English learners to teacher participants to gain reactions to policy. The additional questions added to the information gathered during the initial interview sessions. An amended consent form and recruitment script were used for the second interview session. The second interview session was necessary as insufficient data were gathered during the first session and the researcher sought more in depth information. The participants were notified of the changes through an email or in-person communication.

Survey Participants

The current study involved general education teachers of grades kindergarten through five through the use of criterion sampling (Miles & Huberman, 1994). At the time research was conducted during the 2013-2014 academic year, there were 15 general education, kindergarten through grade five classes at the site: three sections of kindergarten, three sections of first grade, two sections of second grade, three sections of third grade, two sections of fourth grade, and two sections of fifth grade. The target sample size was 8 to 10 teachers. Ten teachers of grades kindergarten through five were

asked to participate in the study using a recruitment script. Eight of the 10 teachers

agreed to participate in the study and signed an adult consent form approved by the

Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the university and school district in which the study

took place. The teacher participants represented both primary and intermediate grade

levels: one kindergarten teacher, two first grade teachers, two second grade teachers, and

three third grade teachers. The experiences of the teacher participants varied. All

participants have been teaching for many years, with five of the eight participants

teaching for over 20 years, two participants teaching over 10 years, and one participant

teaching over 5 years. Table 1 outlines teacher participants' years of experience in the

Wise School District and grade level that each participant taught. Participant One is a

teacher in a primary grade level. The participant has taught for over 20 years in the Wise

School District and has experience teaching different elementary grade levels and subject

areas. Participant Two is a teacher in a primary grade level who has taught for over 10

years in the district. Participant Three is a teacher in an intermediate grade level who has

experience teaching in the Wise School District for over five years as well as one year of

teaching in another district within the state of Florida. Participant Four is a teacher in an

intermediate grade level who has taught in the Wise School District for over 20 years.

Participant Five is a teacher in a primary grade level who has taught in the Wise School

District for over 20 years. Participant Six is a teacher in a primary grade level who has

taught in the school district for over 10 years. Participant Seven is a teacher of an

intermediate grade level who has taught in the school district for over 20 years.

Participant Eight is a teacher of a primary grade level who has taught in the Wise School

District for over 20 years. Information about participants' years of teaching experience

and grade level taught was provided in ranges rather than specific numbers to protect the anonymity and confidentiality of teacher participants. The potential identification of teacher participants was increased due to small sample size and small school size.

Table 1

Participant Information

Participant	Years of Experience in District	Grade Level Taught
One	>20	Primary
Two	>10	Primary
Three	>5	Intermediate
Four	>20	Intermediate
Five	>20	Primary
Six	>10	Primary
Seven	>20	Intermediate
Eight	>20	Primary

Teachers each participated in two interview sessions. The first interview session was conducted within the first six weeks of the academic year. The second interview session was conducted the two weeks prior to spring break. Each interview session lasted from 40 minutes to 1 hour and 5 minutes.

Research Question 1

This question focused on what elementary general education teachers know about the Response to Intervention (RtI) process for English learners. Three categories were developed from the list of codes: documents, RtI framework, and teacher practices, as outlined in Table 2. The interview protocol contained eight questions; responses to

questions one and three were used to address research question one. The second interview

protocol contained six questions; responses to questions one, two, and three were used to

address research question one. Each category was used as a subsection heading. The

researcher summarizes findings and addresses research question one at the end of the

section.

Table 2

Research Question 1 Categories and Codes

Documents	RtI Framework	Teacher Practices
Paperwork/Documents	3 Tiers of RtI	Accommodations for ESOL Students
Teacher Record Form	Interventions	Assessments
Hypothesis for Student-Difficulty	Data and Data Collection	Evaluation and Testing
Observation Form	Progress Monitoring	
Student Rating Form		

Documents

The use of documents developed as a pattern throughout the interview sessions; as

a result, the term *documents* developed as a category to address the first research question

asking what elementary general education teachers know about the Response to

Intervention process for English learners. The teachers' responses related to RtI

documents provided an insight into what teachers know about the Response to

Intervention process. Documents are a significant part of the RtI process and serve

different purposes during the process. Documents help a teacher organize progress

monitoring data, ask probing questions about student instruction, and demonstrate student progress with the use of document tools such as graphs.

Each participant used terms to describe documents in their response to the first interview question about one's knowledge of the Response to Intervention process. Participants described strong connections between paperwork and documents and the Response to Intervention process. The participants mentioned "documents" and "paperwork" throughout the responses. Participant Five stated that RtI required "a lot of paperwork…seems to make a lot more sense if you follow the guidelines like you should." Five participants specifically named documents used in the Response to Intervention process; two of those participants brought the documents to the first interview session. The remaining participants used the terms "documents" and "paperwork" to make mention of artifacts used during the Response to Intervention process.

The two participants who brought documents to the first interview session discussed the teacher record form, student rating form, observation form, and anecdotal form. Teacher participants who brought documents to the first interview session were able to share their knowledge about the Response to Intervention process for English learners by describing the documents during the session and addressing research question one. These participants were asked to divide the documents into categories: curricular materials/resources, teacher referral forms, and progress monitoring documents. Both participants categorized the teacher record form as a teacher referral form. Participant One stated that the teacher record form was the document that "was the actual RtI form

that you fill out when you want to initiate a referral for a student concern." Participant Two went into more detail about the contents of the teacher record form:

> You would say the area of concern, whether it is reading or math, what strategies you're using already, so if I was differentiating instruction already, if I have small group instruction…these forms we would talk about the information, records, and interviews that we might have talking with the parents and things like that and where we're collecting the data.

Both participants who mentioned the teacher record form specifically or just made mention to the document spoke about one specific aspect of the completing the document that they found to be difficult. One of the items on the document asks teachers to develop a hypothesis as to what is causing the student's difficulty. Participant One explained her understanding of the hypothesis item on the teacher record form: "You have to try to determine the hypothesis, you try to find what you think the possible problem might be, then you brainstorm, when you bring a child to the RtI process, you're trying to find a possible solution for the hypothesis and you meet with the team."

Participant One mentioned the hypothesis and perceived difficulty later in the interview session, describing it as "the big problem with the form" and provided a rationale for why the hypothesis needs to be developed and why it is important to create a hypothesis:

> I think a lot of teachers, when we first started, they were writing the hypothesis incorrectly and I know our school psychologist was very friendly with it and just helped each group reword it…I think that a lot of people in the beginning were

having a hard time pinpointing what is the problem. So that problem needs to be

corrected first so that we can see what needs to happen.

Participant Eight expressed "frustration" with developing a hypothesis on the

teacher record form as well: "If I knew what was causing the problem, I would hope that,

as the teacher, I'd be able to address the problem myself. I have a question about why

they are struggling because I don't know what's causing it. How should I know what the

hypothesis is?" Gaining teacher perspectives on the use of RtI documents helped to

address the first research question, or what elementary general education teachers know

about the Response to Intervention process for English learners.

The observation form is another document used for the Response to Intervention

process. Participant One considered the observation form under the category of teacher

referral forms. The participant stated, "Teacher referral forms would be actual RtI forms

that you fill out. The observation form is used when you have to observe a student in

class for a thirty minute period and document the observation on that form." Participant

Two agreed, and categorized the observation document under teacher referral forms.

Participant Eight determined that the observation form was helpful, specifically because

it calls for another school staff member in addition to the teacher to conduct an

observation and report it on the observation form: "You get to have someone else's view

of what's going on in your class. Someone else to help validate your concerns and give

feedback by actually seeing the child in the classroom, not just giving advice from a

distance." Participant Four reported on the role that observations play in the RtI process:

"The process is a lot of observation and taking down data…taking from test results,

standardized tests, quizzes I give, observations…that's how I determine if they need an intervention."

The student rating form is a comprehensive document where teachers are asked to provide more in-depth information about a student as compared to the teacher record form. It was important to gain teacher understanding of these RtI documents in order to address research question one, which asks what teachers know about the Response to Intervention process for English learners. During the first interview session Participant Two debated what category he/she would consider the student rating form to fall under: "I would put it under teacher referral form, but, I guess I would also put it under…but it could also fall under curricular materials/resources just because it does talk about different curriculum that I'm using and how the child is doing and, with that program…but it's also something that I use for the referral."

Participant One categorized the student rating form as "more of a teacher referral form." The participant went on to describe the student rating form as "the [document] that you would say the area of concern, whether it is reading or math, what strategies you're using already…test scores…information, records, and interviews that we might have like talking with the parents…and where we're collecting data."

Participant Seven provided the details for how the student rating form was provided to him/her and the assistance that the participant was provided in completing the form:

So if I said, there was a kid in my class that's not a fluent reader [the reading coach] would provide me with resources or help me figure out the interventions, help me to fill out that paper…the packet that you have to fill out…the rating

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form…I got help with that form from her. Then we would meet to make sure that the paperwork was complete. So I think that helped.

Participants reported that documents are a significant part of the Response to Intervention process for everything from referring students to the collaborative problem solving team, documenting student progress, capturing student observations, and developing plans for struggling students. Document analysis provides information about what general education teachers know about the Response to Intervention process for English learners. The participants discussed their use of documents in the Response to Intervention process, referring to specific documents during interview sessions. Two of the teacher participants brought documents to the first interview session and discussed how each document fits into the Response to Intervention process. Research question one asks what elementary general education teachers know about the Response to Intervention process for English learners. Based on participant responses, documents are a significant part of the RtI process and are used for different purposes from demonstrating student progress to planning student instruction.

Data from the first interview session were analyzed, leading to a need for further investigation into document use during the Response to Intervention process for English learners. A second interview protocol included questions developed as a direct result of the data gained from the first interview sessions. The second interview protocol included documents that many participants mentioned during the first interview session. The researcher provided blank copies of the student rating form and teacher record form for the teacher participants to review and react to during the interview sessions. The researcher also provided copies of two sections of the district's ESOL Department

Handbook for participants to review and discuss; specifically the Comprehensive

Program Requirements and Student Instruction section, including the ESOL Instructional

Strategies Matrix, and the Statewide Assessments and Accommodations section. Each

teacher participant reviewed the Comprehensive Program Requirements and Student

Instruction section of the ESOL Department Handbook, including the ESOL Instructional

Strategies Matrix, during the interview session. Teachers were asked to describe how the

requirements outlined in the section are implemented for English learners in their

classrooms. Teachers were asked to provide specific examples of the implementation of

any requirements outlined in the section. Teachers also were asked to review the ESOL

Instructional Strategies Matrix and describe how the strategies outlined in the matrix are

implemented for English learners in their classrooms, as well as specific examples of the

implementation of any strategies they felt comfortable speaking about more specifically.

Teacher responses to these interview questions provided insight into their knowledge

about the Response to Intervention process for English learners. Instructional strategies

and accommodations that address academic difficulties are part of the RtI framework.

Teachers shared their knowledge of the RtI process for English learners and addressed

research question one by sharing knowledge of strategies targeted for instruction of

English learners.

      Student rating form. Participant Seven described personal experiences with the

documents provided during the interview session. The student rating form "was

always…given to the teacher… maybe this was used previous to the teacher record."

Participant Seven stated "I don't remember. I am forgetting this document. This might

have been used before the teacher record form." Once the teacher participant took some

more time reviewing the document, the participant was able to speak more on the document and experiences with it. "I think that this came as a result of now not making progress." Participant Seven reported that the document came from the ESE specialist, was completed and returned to the ESE specialist, and "used with the school psychologist, I guess, to test." Participant Seven reported feeling "comfortable" with the student rating form.

Participant Four reported that the student rating form is "the one that I've done the most of." The participant likes that the document has "all of the information, the IRI levels…all of the information is together. Answering the questions makes you think about some specific things about the child you're writing this on." Participant Four receives the student rating form in the teacher mailbox to complete "for students that are not performing as they should." Participant Four uses the student rating form when the participant sees that "something's not quite right with this student so that's when we need to have a meeting about this child." The participant reported returning the student rating form to the ESE specialist after it is completed and before any meetings are held to discuss the student. Participant Four reported that "I like [the student rating form] better because it is check offs." Participant Four continued, "There is another one that there is a lot more writing on it, this is a little easier because it gives you ideas too. It prompts you." When asked for more description on the other document to which the participant referred, the participant mentioned a previous version of the teacher record form and expanded on the subject: "It's a lot of writing and if you don't really know what you're looking at, or what you are looking for…it's not helpful. To me, as the teacher, this is more helpful because I can pinpoint some things." Participant Four continued that the

student rating form was a preferred document used during the RtI process because "It gets you thinking about other things and you write them down as comments."

Participant One reported the use of the student rating form as a "more intense" document to complete for student concerns because of the "behavior checklist" portion of the document. "I wouldn't really do a behavior checklist unless I was going to consider pushing forward with a tier 3." Participant One explained, "The ESE specialist would provide me with this [form]…if we meet with the team and we find that…more information needs to be gathered and we do a formal child study." Participant One perceives that the student rating form was a more "formal form" than some of the other forms used during the RtI process, such as forms developed by the participant or the teacher record form.

Participant Three reported having used the student rating form before: "Before we start CPST with this person, I would fill this out to look at behaviors, how often behaviors occur and this helps us to see where they need their help and then during the CPST process we might revisit this again later."

Participant Three was unsure of how the student rating form was acquired. "I would assume the ESE specialist gives it to me…somebody puts it in my box." Participant Three continued to explain, "I complete it on my own…then I turn it in before a meeting is ever conducted…I give it to the ESE specialist." The participant shared how completing the student rating form impacts insight into any student concerns:

> Whenever we work on specific behaviors and adapting anything to their behaviors, this form is used to target where they need the most help. What we need to focus on ….I like this form….It helps me as I'm going through here, it

helps me target before I even turn it in...oh wow, maybe it's something you didn't realize but once you see it on paper it's like, oh definitely, this is where these problems are occurring.

Participant Two reported that the student rating form is acquired "when I have submitted a name for a child that I feel might have a learning disability and I would like them to further test to see if that is the case." The participant described the student rating form: "This form is extremely specific as to where the child is in all academic areas….It is also very specific about behavior because you can write specific comments that follows the checklist that they have." Participant Two "personally like[s] this form because it is so specific to the child." The student rating form "really lays out where the child is so someone who is not familiar with them can really see where they're at and what they're struggling with and what their strengths are." Participant Two reported that "I am much more comfortable with the student rating" than the teacher record form.

Participant Six reported that the student rating form is acquired "from the ESE specialist" and "we'll usually fill out based on what the child is doing in the class at that time." Participant Six continued, "I use it to not only talk about the major area of concern of the child, but also if they have any strengths." Participant Six discussed the perception of what happens to the student rating form after it is completed on a struggling student. "From what I know is that they are evaluated and they do with it whatever with the psychologist that also looks at it." Participant Six explained that the student rating form is "just an easy way to see how severe [the concern] is. Sometimes I guess [the student rating form] helps expedite [the evaluation]…depending on how drastic it is."

Participant Eight reported that the student rating form is acquired from the ESE specialist. "I had concerns about a student not being on grade level or…having trouble in a certain academic area then I would contact the ESE specialist and this would be the first round, I guess, of evaluation." Participant Eight uses data collected on the student from sources such as work samples, Florida Assessments in Reading (FAIR) results, informal assessments in reading and math, and observations to complete the student rating form. "Most of this particular [form] is observation. As you go through the scales, it's teacher observation…what you are seeing in the classroom." The student rating form is returned to the ESE specialist "typically before a meeting." Participant Eight reported perception of the purpose behind completing the student rating form: "It's my understanding that this is…the beginning of, I guess, flagging that student for lack of a better word." The participant continued, "This is just showing that there are concerns. This is the initial start of any type of paperwork."

Teacher participants reported similar methods and reasons for acquiring the student rating form. All teacher participants reported that the ESE specialist provided them with the student rating form when the participant expressed concern about a student. The student rating form addresses both academic and behavior concerns. Participant One stated, "I would use that if I had an initial concern and I would bring that to the team. Then the ESE specialist would provide me with the form." Participant Three reported, "Before we start CPST with this person I would fill this out to look at behaviors, how often behaviors occur and this helps us to see where they need their help." Participant Two made a connection between acquiring the student rating form and special education evaluation: "I usually get this particular one when I have submitted a name for a child

that I feel might have a learning disability and I would like them to further test to see if that is the case." Participant Eight connected the student rating form with the beginning of the process for "flagging" a student; the "initial start of any type of paperwork." Participant Six stated that the student rating form is for students who are evaluated, and the school psychologist reviews the document. Teacher participants provided their knowledge about how and why the RtI documents are acquired. The knowledge of the process helped to address the first research question on what elementary general education teachers know about the Response to Intervention process for English learners.

All eight teacher participants reported that they felt "comfortable" overall with the student rating form. Five participants specifically mentioned positive elements of the student rating form. Participant Four mentioned that the student rating form made it easy to collect information on a student: "The part that I like about it is that you have all of the information…together." Participants also noted that the student rating form addressed specific information targeting student concerns: "This form is used to target where they need the most help" (Participant Three). Participant Eight felt that the student rating form helps teachers to focus on concerns, which helps the teacher to communicate the concerns to others, specifically, the other members of the CPST. Participant One agreed. "I personally like this form because it is so specific to the child. It really lays out where the child is so someone who is not familiar with them can really see where they're at and what they're struggling with."

Two participants also reported a reflective benefit to completing the student rating form. Participant Four stated, "Answering the questions makes you think about some specific things about the child you're writing this on." Participant Three also reported that

the student rating form "helps me see as I'm going through here, it helps me target before I even turn it in, oh wow, maybe it's something you didn't realize but once you see it on paper it's like oh definitely, this is where these problems are occurring."

Teachers also reported that the student rating form is easier to complete than some other documents that teachers are asked to complete. Participants One and Four appreciated the ease of completing a comprehensive document that requires check marks for completion. Participant One also reported that he/she preferred the student rating form because "the information that they are asking me is something that is more second nature for me to give." Participant Four did mention that sometimes the checked items cannot address fully the student concern so the participant "usually writes little notes on the side" to help address concerns on the form accurately.

The teachers' responses related to RtI documents provided data addressing research question one, or what teachers know about the Response to Intervention process. Documents are a significant part of the RtI process and serve different purposes during the process. Teachers use RtI documents to help organize progress monitoring data, address student instruction, and demonstrate student progress. The structure and supports provided by the RtI framework is intended to address the needs of struggling students and avoid unnecessary special education referrals and to provide the most appropriate interventions (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006). Educators often find it difficult to determine whether an English learner is struggling in school due to limited English proficiency or to lack of instructional support; this difficulty may be a key element in the disproportionate placement of culturally and linguistically diverse students in special education (Klingner & Harry, 2006; Ortiz, 1997).

Teacher record form. All teacher participants also were provided with a blank copy of the teacher record form to aid in discussion of documents used during the Response to Intervention process. Four of the participants reported that they have used the teacher record form during the Response to Intervention process, and the participants' experiences varied. Participants Two, Four, Six, and Seven reported that they use the teacher record form during the RtI process. Participant Seven reported that an earlier version of the teacher record form was used and that they do not have any experience with the new version of the teacher record form. Participant Seven explained, "I've gotten this document from the ESE specialist when I've had concerns about a child's academic progress." Participant Seven continued:

> So I filled this out, had a conference to tell the parent that they are on tier 2…documented the conference….said this is what we're doing to help your child progress to the next level. I will be taking data and using graphs to document everything like that, had a conference, so any time I changed the intervention, I had a conference with the parent to tell them that I was changing the intervention.

Participant Four also reported using the previous version of the teacher record form. The participant reported that "there is a lot more writing on it" than the student rating form. Participant Four explained that he/she finds the teacher record form difficult to complete because "there's sometimes I don't know what to write." Participant Four continued, "It's a lot of writing and if you don't really know what you're looking at, or what you are looking for, it doesn't…it's not helpful." Participant Two reported that the teacher record form was not as familiar and "I haven't used it as often" as the student rating form. "This one I've done on a couple of occasions and, again, this was for

response to the different interventions that I was using and who was providing the interventions and any kind of data that came from the observation, or the interventions that were used."

Participant Two stated: "I believe [the teacher record form] is to be completed in order to move on to tier 3." The participant continued, "Not as specific…Because it's just more the intervention." Participant Two reported that the teacher record form "is just, ok, this is what you were doing for this particular area of weakness and this is what it was, this is who was doing it, how frequently you were doing it, and where they're at." Participant Two shared that "I am much more comfortable with the student rating." When speculating about why the participant felt more comfortable with the student rating form than with the teacher rating form, Participant Two stated,

I think maybe because I've used it often, but, I find the level of the questions…the way that the…the information that they are asking me is something that is more second nature for me to give, whereas this, I feel like is more of a scientific method, you know what I'm saying. You know, like I don't know, it just seems very theoretical and very scientific and not so much where, you know…what program are you using, things that I do every single day. And this is more, I guess I'm looking at it more as a study kind of mentality.

Participant Two also mentioned the previous version of the teacher record form. "There's the other one, the initial one, that you use for RtI. It has different questions…like why are you going to put them through the RtI process. The one with the hypothesis." Participant Two shared that the previous version of the teacher record form is the one that "I don't like" because "I feel like I'm in college again…Can you say it in

plain English so that I can understand?" Participant Six reported, "I have used [the teacher record form] in the past" but that "I don't recall using them recently." The participant explained that the teacher record form is "usually a way to see if the intervention that you are given, how are they responding to it and…whether or not it was successful." The remaining participants reported that they have not used the teacher record form and do not have any experience with the form.

Responses related to the teacher record form were not as favorable as the responses related to the student rating form. Participant Two finds that the document is not teacher friendly to complete: "I feel like this is more of a scientific method…like I don't know it just seems very theoretical and very scientific and not so much…things that I do every single day." Participant Two shared unfavorable sentiments about the teacher record form, citing that the verbiage was overtly technical. Participant Two also shared that the section of the teacher record form requiring a hypothesis for why the student was struggling is difficult. The participant found it difficult to determine what the cause was for all students, but especially for English learners, since it was unclear whether the primary cause of the student's academic struggle is English acquisition. Participant One does not use the teacher record form that was provided during the interview session; instead, the participant uses his/her own document that is "similar" to the document developed by the district. Participant One stated that he/she would use the document "if I had an initial concern and I would bring that to the team." Participant Six reported that he/she had not used the teacher record form "recently" but that the document was "usually a way to see if the intervention that you are given…how are they responding to it…and whether or not it was successful."

In response to the first research question, what do elementary general education teachers know about the Response to Intervention process for English learners, RtI documents serve different purposes for the teacher participants related to their knowledge of the process. Based on teacher responses, RtI documents are used as a data analysis tool, to monitor student progress, to demonstrate student need, and to organize student data.

RtI Framework

In order to determine a focus for analysis of the interviews, the researcher referred to the literature on Response to Intervention and the key elements of the RtI framework. As a result, *RtI framework* was developed as a category. The researcher took key elements of the RtI framework and looked for those key elements in the interview transcripts. The data gathered related to the RtI framework addressed the first research question, which asks what elementary general education teachers know about the Response to Intervention process for English learners. Through the use of the RtI model, educators can provide appropriate instruction based on student needs and research based interventions (Hoover & Patton, 2008; Reeves et al., 2010; Wanzek & Cavanaugh, 2010). Educators implementing the RtI framework utilize data to drive implementation and interventions in order to provide the greatest results for student achievement (Abbott & Wills, 2012; Kovaleski & Pedersen, 2008; Stringfield & Wayman, 2006).

According to the National Center on Response to Intervention (2012), RtI "integrates assessment and intervention with a multi-level prevention system to maximize student achievement and reduce behavior problems" (p. 1). When implemented, RtI gives schools a framework to help "identify students at risk for poor learning outcomes,

monitor student progress, provide evidence-based interventions and adjust the intensity and nature of those interventions depending on a student's responsiveness (National Center on Response to Intervention, 2012, p. 1). RtI has three tiers of intervention referred to as IT1, IT2, and IT3 by the state of Florida (FLDOE, 2006).

Multi-tiered framework. Several participants mentioned the multi-tiered aspect of the Response to Intervention process during the first interview session. Participant Five recalled before RtI was a part of her instructional practices. "Now the whole school system follows RtI and makes it a lot better. There are guidelines. You have tier 1, 2, and 3…there are different stages. Before you didn't have any of that." Participant Two noted that the different tiers determined the intensity of the intervention used: "[We] look over the data to see if the intervention is working or not and if it's not we have to try a different one, a more intensive one, go from a tier two to a tier three." Participant Two noted that when RtI was first introduced to them, they were "confused" about "when you start tier two as opposed to…or what tier one is as opposed to tier two, how long do you do each one." Participant Eight reported confusion about the process for moving through the different tiers of RtI as well. "I got confused with the whole leveling system" and that students "have to progress through the levels." The participant continued: "I thought right off the bat that they could already be in tier 3." Participant Seven also noted a difference between the different tiers, and through progress monitoring the team should be able to see if the students were having "ups and downs" and if the student "needed a tier three intervention, which would be if the tier two intervention is not working, their three interventions would be a Phonics for Reading or a stronger intervention based on their remediation needs." Participant Seven continued: "Everyone in your class is really in RtI

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because everyone in your class is tier one, at first…If their needs are not being met, you go on to the next tier."

Evidence-based interventions. All participants mentioned interventions during the first interview session. Participant One credited the use of targeted interventions for improving a struggling English learner's reading skills: "I thought this child was going to be retained…or I thought he may have a potential learning problem but he showed lots of positive response to the intervention through the RtI process. The interventions worked, so he got caught up…everything just blossomed."

Participant Seven noted that many of the interventions that are recommended for use for struggling English learners are also beneficial for struggling students who are native English speakers: "For students who are English learners, you're really using a lot of the same strategies for the rest of the students who are struggling."

Participant Six provided an overview of his/her general knowledge of the RtI process as it relates to interventions: "Overall, if a child is not responding to what's going on in the classroom they need an intervention." Participant Two reported that when an "area of weakness" is identified, the teacher participant uses data and, along with a team, "determines what intervention would best suit that area and again we start collecting data." Participant Two meets again with the team to "look over the data to see if the intervention is working or not…if it's not we have to try a different one, a more intensive one." Teachers determine which intervention is used based on assessments and diagnostic tools. Participant Seven expressed that a school psychologist noted to the teaching staff at school that using assessments and diagnostic tools to determine which intervention is used for all students in RtI is important. A school psychologist provided Participant

Seven with information that "if [the students'] needs aren't being met…it's the teacher's responsibility to provide the interventions where it used to be the teacher saying 'This kid needs to be tested'…now we have to provide interventions." A school psychologist, along with other members of the collaborative problem solving team (CPST), helped Participant Five determine the level of need for struggling students as well as develop intervention plans for struggling students. Participant Four provided more specific information about how they determined which students receive an intervention: "Taking from test results, standardized tests, quizzes I give, observations…that's how I determine if they need an intervention."

During the second interview session, the participants were asked to discuss *evidence-based* interventions as part of the list of important elements of RtI compiled from participant responses in the first interview and from information from the National Center on Response to Intervention. During the second interview session, Participant Eight reported using interventions such as the evidence-based interventions Fundations, Touch Math, and Handwriting Without Tears. During the second interview session, Participant Two reported using interventions like Fundations, but spoke about providing interventions to students "whether or not other people are saying that is what they need" because "I know, as the teacher and as someone who is working with a child every single day, that that is what they need." Participant One reported using the Write In Reader program, which is part of the basal reading series to help address the needs of English learners in the classroom. Participant One also spoke about using other programs that may not be evidence-based to address language deficits. "I've also done other things like that we don't really have that have to do with the English language like idioms so that

they understand multiple meaning words and using those picture clues and doing that vocabulary with pictures." Often times, educators identify a connection between RtI and special education. Participant Three stated that RtI is "a way for us to track [student] progress and see what specific interventions may for that specific student without just giving them a label right away…it's tracking what interventions are being used for different students and which ones may be working and which ones may not be working."

All participants reported on their knowledge of the intervention element of the Response to Intervention process, which addressed the first research question inquiring about what elementary general education teachers know about the Response to Intervention process for English learners.

Progress monitoring and data collection. Based on statements from the National Center on Response to Intervention (2012), progress monitoring is an important element of the RtI process. Progress monitoring was mentioned in the majority of the interview sessions with the teacher participants. Participant Seven noted that he/she determines which interventions to use for struggling students and "monitors their progress" through "charting" and sees if students need to have more intensive interventions based on the progress monitoring information. Participant Three cited the RtI process as "a way for us to track [student] progress and see what specific interventions may work for that specific student without just giving them a label right away." Participant Seven also made a connection between student progress and special education "labeling." "Now we have to make accommodations for the kids, monitor their progress, and if they are making progress…then testing is not needed."

Educators use data collection as a key component for progress monitoring throughout the RtI process. Data collection is an important element of the Response to Intervention process and teacher responses involving data collection addressed research question one, or what teachers know about the RtI process for English learners. The teacher participants identified data and data collection as a key element of the RtI framework. Participant Two identified data collection as one of the first steps in the RtI process to help identify struggling students. "The Response to Intervention process is what we use to identify students that are struggling in an academic area and we begin by collecting data and using the data to determine an area of weakness." Participant One viewed data collection similarly. "You bring a child to the RtI process, you're trying to find a possible solution…you meet with the team, they bounce ideas…I bring a data chart with me so I collect data before I even come."

Participant One elaborated on the type of data that he/she may use during the RtI process: "Depending on the area, it might be comprehension, it might be fluency documentation…we look at the struggling reader's chart for interventions…and that's how we determine what program to go to next." Participant Two indicated that data collection was a part of monitoring progress for students in RtI. "We start by determining which intervention would best suit that area and again we start collecting data. We meet again after a certain amount of time and look over the data to see if the intervention is working or not."

In response to the first research question, what do elementary general education teachers know about the Response to Intervention process for English

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learners, teacher participants discussed how the progress monitoring component

of the RtI process shaped the decisions made about instruction for struggling

English learners. Participant One spoke about a specific struggling English

learner:

> He was retained and we collected a lot of data on him. He made some academic
>
> gains but he did not make enough academic gains even though he was showing
>
> some signs of success with the RtI process. They did further evaluate him so I felt
>
> that it was worthwhile for that because he is an English language learner, he was
>
> retained, so, obviously there was something wrong…he wasn't making enough
>
> gains to be caught up.

> Participant One also mentioned another struggling English learner and

how the progress monitoring information impacted instructional decisions made

about the student:

> She was a level four DRA [Developmental Reading Assessment] at the beginning
>
> of the year all the way to the middle of the year, the last of the year I think she
>
> jumped to a six…she just lacked the comprehension but before we could help her
>
> with the comprehension we had to help her with the language…to be able to
>
> decode the words…She was a good cause promotion…due to her language.

> Based on information gathered through progress monitoring tools,

Participant Six had a specific concern about a struggling English learner:

> I was concerned about this student…I knew something wasn't right…then at the
>
> end of the year when the child failed the end of the year test they said he'll go
>
> on…mom chose to retain him…I saw something going wrong and requested [an

evaluation] but there wasn't enough information there. Like when DRA levels are flat lining for three months I see that as a red flag regardless of ESOL status.

Some participants shared their feelings about data collection. Participant Two stated, "Data collection is easy for me, I can give you ten scores, but I have a hard time using the data to determine what data suggests is the likely cause of the problem." The data collection element of RtI may be connected to accountability. Participant Three made this statement about data collection:

[Data collection] wasn't so necessary maybe a few years ago…they weren't having to show that they were doing RtI. They would maybe say, yeah, we're doing this, we do this, and maybe they weren't having to graph or show it on paper. I think…I get the feeling that the district is forcing us to prove it on paper that we are doing the process before we can label or place.

Participant Seven had a similar outlook on data collection and why it was a focus of the RtI process:

I think what was happening was teachers were coming to these meetings not prepared, they didn't have data. And you need data to support…you can't just say this kid isn't a good reader, you have to show, ok, I put this kid on Triumphs and he's still getting 20s and 30s and you have to graph it on that graph, you know, I think people were coming to the meetings without data, you can't say to the parents that their kid is struggling without showing them this and, legally, you can't go to a court of law and defend a teacher and say, well, she did everything she was supposed to do, when she doesn't have data to prove that she was teaching from the interventions on the chart…it can't be, oh, I used word cards

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that I made up…it has to be Phonics for Reading, Wilson, whatever the actual

intervention was on the struggling reader chart.

Graphing was one progress monitoring practice that was repeated by three of the

participants during the interview sessions. Participant Three said that he/she "liked to see

the graphs. When you see the graphs you understand what may be working and what may

not be working." Participant One also cited graphs as a way that he/she monitored

progress and charted "ongoing assessments" on the graphs. Participant One valued

"training and support for schools with modeling how to make the charts…they make data

collection very easy." Participant Two noted that he/she used specific assessments to

monitor progress for classroom purposes, but he/she would "use oral fluency…I did

graphs that went along with that…that's strictly for RtI. I would not necessarily do an

oral fluency graph for my own purposes." Teacher participants reported the use of graphs

to help demonstrate student progress. Participant responses related to graphs and progress

monitoring addressed research question one, which asks what do general education

teachers know about the Response to Intervention process for English learners.

Important elements of RtI. Based on responses from the initial interview session

and information from the National Center on Response to Intervention (2012), a list of

important elements of the Response to Intervention process was developed and shared

with the participants during the second interview session through the use of the second

interview protocol. The important elements are three tiers of RtI, evidence-based

interventions, data and data collection, and progress monitoring. Participants were asked

to make connections between these important RtI elements and their instructional

practices for English learners in order to address the first research question, which asks

what elementary general education teachers know about the Response to Intervention process for English learners.

Participants were asked to discuss connections with the three tiers of RtI. Participant Seven stated, "Every student is a tier one student. If the student is having trouble with tier one curriculum, then you go to a tier two by using the struggling reading chart to see…what interventions are, based on research, helping tier two students." Participant Seven explained further about tier 2: "Those students are double-dosed so they're in a regular reading group and then pulled for their tier two intervention… and seeing if it's helping in their tier one curriculum." Participant Seven continued, "If it's not…then you go to a tier three intervention after you've met with the parents and told them that this is what we're doing to help your child." Participant Seven made a connection between all of the important elements of the Response to Intervention process: "Whenever you speak on one element you are speaking on all of them."

Participant One reported that "my ELL students are on totally different levels." The participant shared that "I find because they are ELL I use more than probably three tiers of RtI." Participant One shared that the language status of some students was overemphasized, considering that the participant did not perceive that these students spoke another language as their primary language. The participant shared that "I definitely have some students that are behind due to the language but some that use that language as a crutch…because they don't really speak that so much." Participant One continued, "I have one student that…started at a preprimer at the beginning of the year and is on level now...I find that was part of the RtI process."

Participant Eight shared that the three tiers of RtI and general instruction for English learners "kind of go hand in hand." Participant Eight reported that, "I would have to say that 75% of my RtI children are ESOL." Participant Eight continued to discuss perceptions of RtI for English learners:

I have one student who came in with absolutely no English at all. And I don't think that he's going to have a problem….I think that the students that are in RtI, ESOL and…I'm also seeing evidence of ESE. It's harder for them, for sure, I mean…it's two strikes against them and I think that's…the RtI is going to help them…but I feel like they kind of go straight to the third level.

Participant Eight stated that, "In order to do the RtI properly, it's a tough balance to get to every single student…But I think with the right classroom management you can do it and you can see changes." Participant Eight continued:

I got confused with the whole leveling system…If they had to be…tier one…you have to progress through even though…I thought right off the bat that they were already tier 3. So that, for me, was, I guess, a little wake up call. But I've learned to maneuver that. And to make it work, though, and to honestly still be reaching what it is that they need for each individual student and have it be different.

Participant Three reported that "I definitely give them tier one, which is…all of the English language learners that I've had that came in not knowing any English or knowing very little English." Participant Three continued: "Would bring [English learners] in as tier one with the on-level reading group so that they were getting that on-level instruction in the English language." Participant Three moved to tier two: "As a tier two, I would also provide them…these language readers…there is some language support

in them." Participant Three finds that the language readers that come with the basal reading series are beneficial for English learners. "I can give everyone else in the group the on-level readers and then my ELL student, I can give him the language supported reader which is the same exact story but with some language support." Participant Three continued to discuss the program; "It helps. It has pictures that are labeled, some of the words are a little different in the story but it's the same story basically." Participant Three did mention that the English learner was getting "tier two" by "getting pulled out of the classroom with some extra reading intervention." The participant elaborated on the pull out intervention: "I think…it is Florida Ready…FCAT prep….He's getting some extra small group help here." When asked specifically about tier three, Participant Three reported, "I haven't had to go to tier three, I guess. Well, actually, I do have an ELL who is getting, well, what would tier three be? It would be like with the ESE teacher, right?" After a discussion on tier elements of tier three, Participant Three reported that "I don't have any ELLs that are getting tier three."

Participant Two shared perceptions of the three tiers of RtI: "Well I guess, for me, the three tiers of RtI are, you know, the different levels of intervention programs that I would use for the child." Participant Two also reported that the "frequency of use for each intervention" was a factor in determining the different level of RtI determined for a struggling student. Participant Two explained: "The constant data collection for each tier to see whether or not you can kind of back off or they've leveled out…or…they're actually doing so poorly in that intervention that it's time to go on to the next one."

Participant Six reported that different tiers of intervention are implemented in the classroom for "instruction with English learners." Participant Four reported, "Tier one is

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what you, this is just my interpretation…is information that you give all of your students." Then Participant Four continued: "Tier two would be vocabulary words or more specific, to say, science and social studies, and you give that…you may not give as much to tier two students as you would to the rest of your class that are on-level."

Participant Four stated, "And then by the time it's tier three, those are the students that are a year and a half, almost two years below level." Participant Four continued, "So you're vocabulary is going to be geared towards that level…That's how I see it." Participant Four also mentioned, "I know you're supposed to service them, but most of the time they are get pulled out for…well, we used to get pulled out so that they could get that extra… the tier three kids."

Participants also were asked to make connections between evidence-based interventions and their instruction of English learners in order to answer research question one, asking what general education teachers know about the RtI process for English learners. Participant Seven shared information on evidence-based interventions used in the classroom: "I've used Quick Reads, I've used Kaleidoscope, which was big that one year." Participant Seven went on to describe a specific intervention: "I got trained in Kaleidoscope…that lasted for a day. It was Kaleidoscope A and Kaleidoscope B and A was really your tier three kids and B was tier two kids." Participant Seven shared that Kaleidoscope is no longer used in the classroom because the school does not have the materials and "it's not on the struggling reader chart" so the school told teachers "we couldn't use it because it wasn't an approved intervention even though it has research behind it." Participant Seven reported the use of another intervention: "QAR, I use. And we had a whole study on those. But if you can't use every piece of it because you don't

have every piece of it because the school doesn't have all the materials, it's hard."

Participant Seven uses QAR "with all of the kids" because "the strategies are good."

Participant One reported using "the Write In Reader" as an "evidence-based intervention" and the participant finds that "the gains are being met" using this intervention. Participant One shared that "I've also done other things that we don't really have that have to do with the English language like idioms…multiple meaning words…using those picture cues and doing that vocabulary with pictures. Also…I should find out if it's evidence-based, I use preprimer sight words for some of them that need that sight word building." Participant One reported, "I'm using Phonics for Reading…and that's sort of working but I have to go back and revisit that because I'm starting to not get as much gains as I want." Participant One shared that, "I started to implement my own implementation of sight words and making it a fun game for them…They love it."

Participant Eight reported using "Fundations" as an intervention for struggling English learners and that the intervention depends "on the tier level…the number of days that they are getting with Fundations" as well as "the growth that I'm seeing, the growth potential as well." Participant Eight also "get[s] them on the computer a little bit more as well" because the participant finds that students working on the computer "are a little more engaged" and the teacher can "put them on things that are at their level….I can cater that to the letters and sounds that we are currently working on." The participant also implements "Handwriting without Tears," which is an intervention that students use to address "fine motor" and "letter recognition." Participant Eight also uses "Touch Math" because it is "kinesthetic" and it helps "actually teach the numbers." Participant Eight

continued, "I'm going to try to have in the classroom all modalities, try to cover visual, auditory, kinesthetic, everything...to try to reach what type of learner they are."

Participant Three reported that, "I do use the basal" and that, "I am using an intervention that came with the basal called Write In Reader with one of my ELLs." Participant Three explained further about the Write In Reader: "Basically, it has them stop after short reading passages and they have to think and write…just a little bit of writing…kind of chunks the reading down." Participant Three stated that struggling students were receiving "FCAT prep" delivered in a small group setting outside of the classroom as well.

Participant Six reported that, "Especially with the evidence-based interventions, it has to be something that is researched and proven that this is going to be an intervention…that it's going to be successful." Participant Six elaborated: "Well, with my struggling ones I use…Jan Richardson, but I also incorporate tactile things and photographs and pictures and things geared towards English language learners."

Participant Four reported that, "I do more whole group, but then I do pull them during the reading and I might even during whole group to ask if everybody understands." Participant Four shared that "I do Phonics for Reading" and "spelling." Participant Four explained individualization: "The whole group has whatever I'm doing with spelling…but I may give less for the other students who think twenty words are too much…I'll cut it down to ten. I have them do a little more word work where they're making flash cards, writing in a stair step…making sentences." Participant Four also reported using "Phonics for Reading" for struggling students. "Those are actually tier two, almost, tier three. And even some tier three are in there."

Participant Two reported using Fundations as an intervention for struggling English learners for letter sounds and letter names, "although, I've issues with the program myself." Participant Two has reservations about the program because "it's very limited as to what [the students] can do with that knowledge. It's just basically a regurgitation." Participant Two reported that students used to receive the Phonics for Reading intervention in the past "because we usually…would have a pull out and the support staff was doing that so I've never used it myself." Participant Two continued: "I always did Triumphs with my ESOL kids, always. And I find that the pace is better for them. It's a lot more pictorial, a lot more vocabulary building, which is good." Participant Two shared, "I just feel like it's kind of sad how far they can go with it. So I kind of just incorporate some other things." When asked about specific interventions that the participant uses, Participant Two shared, "Jan Richardson" and stated that "there is some research behind it but it's not on our list of things to use." When asked to elaborate on the list, Participant Two answered, "the district list for struggling readers" and "so, I do it on my own…and my ESOL kids are in that one as well." Participant Two went on to discuss the program in more detail: "They respond better to that because it is more literacy based and it's not so phonics based. So they're actually reading books…yes…they might be a level A pre-reading book, but, nonetheless, they are getting exposure to concepts of print and what to do with the book."

During the second interview session, teacher participants were asked to make connections between important elements of RtI and their instruction of English learners in order to address the first research question asking what elementary general education teachers know about the Response to Intervention process for English learners. Teacher

participants spoke about connections between data and data collection, progress

monitoring, and their instruction of English learners.

Participant Seven reported that while students are involved in different levels of

interventions, "The teacher's keeping track of how they're doing in that intervention and

seeing if it's helping in their tier one curriculum…All the time keeping records of their

results on the progress monitoring piece. In tier one, you're obviously keeping track of

the progress monitoring because you are giving them tests based on the curriculum

you're teaching." Participant Seven expressed that, "I think that it gets more complicated

as you're doing tier two and three because they're aren't very good monitoring tools…or

not everyone's using the same tools to monitor the student's progress." Participant Seven

elaborated on some unclear progress monitoring practices that impact instruction:

> So, if I'm doing Quick Reads with my tier two group, there hasn't been one piece
>
> that everybody is using to monitor that and so it's…some people have said, ok,
>
> give them a Quick Reads test on the level that you're teaching then and then
>
> others say do it on the grade level because you're supposed to be comparing it to
>
> other students in their grade. But if everyone's not using the same thing than we
>
> are not really, I don't know…I just don't think it's…And the tier three too,
>
> because the reading coach, she was like, oh you can do this, but then I was
>
> looking at other things and other people were doing different things to, you know,
>
> show progress or not progress, you know, I think there needs to be more of a
>
> standard for that.

Participant Seven continued to share ambiguities in progress monitoring for

students in Response to Intervention, "If you're teaching the child on a first grade level,

because they're on a tier three intervention, and you're saying they're making progress…ok, they're making progress but they're still in third grade." Participant Seven also mentioned, "And then, if you have a third grade student who's been held back twice, and they're really supposed to be in fifth grade, and they're making progress, are they really making progress?" Participant Seven suggested "prescribed guidelines" for progress monitoring for students who are involved in tier two and three interventions.

Participant One stated that, "I am constantly revising the data that I collect and I keep my portfolio." The participant continued, "I collect different data depending on what it is. Like I'll do the DRA assessment…I try to do it monthly or bimonthly depending on the child." When asked to elaborate on the frequency of data collection and progress monitoring, Participant One stated, "I do them more frequently on children that I'm more concerned with…it happens to be the ELLs in my class that happen to be…fitting this mold." When collecting data, Participant One uses "portfolio assessment…charts…creates graphs." When asked to elaborate on the determination for the different data collection types, Participant One shared: "I collect data based on how they are doing on different interventions. I also create graphs that show the growth so that I can have a quick view of it." When asked what information was used on a graph, Participant One replied, "Scores. On the DRA I am showing what level they are at. I'm graphing. And other little assessments…I have a comprehension one…I have different checklists."

Participant Eight addressed practices related to data collection and progress monitoring: "I do a lot of anecdotals when I have them at the table when I have them in

small group…so I'll make notes of anything that I have concerns on...I keep work samples to show any progress that's been made or lack thereof."

Participant Eight continued, "They have notebooks for each of their subject areas, journals that they have so I can actually go back and reflect on that as well." Participant Eight also uses "checklists…going through letters or numbers that we are working on...It's really informal…it's all my stuff that I made." While collecting data and monitoring student progress, Participant Eight considers "all of the different things that students have difficulties with, along with expectations for students."

Participant Three collects data by administering "weekly reading assessments" and notes that "I don't use the same assessment every week…sometimes I use mini BATs, sometimes I use vocabulary and comprehension assessments that come with the basal and I look at those. I look at that data to see how they are progressing." When asked to expand on progress monitoring practices, Participant Three shared: "Well, we use the BAT scores throughout the year to look at their progress. How did they do in September? Have they made any progress by January after learning some of the skills? We are getting ready to take the FCAT so that would be a big progress monitor to see how they've done throughout the year."

Participant Six reported the use of "DRAs and work samples" as data that were collected to monitor student progress. Participant Six favored the DRA as a progress monitoring tool because the assessment is "specific." Participant Six expanded on the use of the DRA: "They say if this child is having a problem with it they have to stop at each word and sound it out; they obviously are having decoding issues." Participant Six continued, "If they are able to decode but they are missing high frequency words, you

know that is something that you need to do." Participant Six also monitors progress by observing students during independent work time, "When they are in read-to-self I go and have them read to me just casually and, again, not in a testing setting but they just feel like they are reading to me." Participant Six asks students to solve a problem or read a selection "and if they are just doing it by rote or if they are unable to explain it to me, I know that they don't truly understand." Participant Six also noted that "We do weekly spelling tests and we do mid-chapter and end of chapter math tests."

Participant Four reported using "weekly check ups" from the Phonics for Reading program to monitor student progress. The participant also provides students with "a minute and a half quiz where they have to know their multiplication tables." When asked what happens if a student seems to be struggling, Participant Four replied, "They do it in their free time. I have flash cards. They do flash cards…they work with a buddy…or on a program on the computer."

Participant Two stated that, "data collection…I do it all the time." The participant continued, "I do my DRAs every eight to ten weeks…I do the letter sounds…I do that about every four weeks. Especially with my ESOL or my ESE, or just my struggling kids." Participant Two reported that the data always is readily available for review: "I always have it here, it's always listed so that I can see their gains. So that I can see what letters they need to work on, what letters they do not need to spend any more time with." Table 3 lists progress monitoring tools used by teacher participants as reported during interview sessions.

Table 3

Progress Monitoring Tools

Progress Monitoring Tool	Participant(s)
Classroom tests and work samples (derived from basal reading series, etc.)	3, 4, 6, 7
Intervention-based progress monitoring (Quick Reads, Phonics for Reading)	1, 4, 7
Observations and anecdotes	6, 8
Portfolio, student work samples	1, 6, 8
State/district assessments (Benchmark Assessment Test, Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test, etc.)	3
Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) (monthly, bi-monthly)	1, 2, 6
Teacher developed assessments (checklists, etc.)	1, 2, 4, 8

Teacher Practices

Throughout the interview process, teacher participants provided insight into their practices relating to the Response to Intervention process and English learners. *Teacher practices* developed as a category to address the descriptive patterns that were found throughout the interview sessions with all participants. The data gathered and organized under this category addressed the first research question on what elementary general education teachers know about the Response to Intervention process for English learners. Themes that were found throughout the interview sessions related to teacher practices were accommodations, assessments, and testing and evaluation.

Many of the teacher participants noted that accommodations were used for struggling English learners. Participant Two uses accommodations that involve being "repetitive," "very pictorial" with a focus on "building English vocabulary." Participant Five uses "a lot of physical cues" as accommodations for English learners. Participant Seven stated, "For students who are English learners…you're using visuals, you are using all the different kinds of accommodations, maybe one-on-one, maybe small group, cooperative learning, maybe buddy partnering them." Participant Six seemed to use the terms *accommodations* and *intervention* synonymously. For example, "If a child is not responding to what's going on in the classroom they need an intervention. It's basically that we're documenting how the child is responding to what they are getting with the new methods, the new accommodations." Participant Three made similar connections: "It's a process to try to find ways to help students who may have special needs or learning disabilities, or may need accommodations…see what specific interventions may work for that specific student."

One teacher, Participant Three, discussed accommodations as part of the assessment process for English learners. Participant Three mentioned that he/she brought a student up to the CPST because, "my whole thing was I was trying to get him whatever accommodations he needed for FCAT…I just thought, ok, I'll bring him up and he'll have accommodations by FCAT. My fear was that he wasn't going to pass the FCAT."

Participant Seven uses assessments to determine student need: "Whatever your assessments are…if [students'] needs are not being met, you go on to the next tier." Participant Two provided more detail about the role of assessments in his/her practice:

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We assess the students, see what they are having weaknesses with, for example, they are having weaknesses with letters and sounds, or just sounds…then we determine what program we are going to use like something like Fundations where there are a lot of pictures that the students can use to identify the sound with the corresponding letter…and it's very visual which is actually very good for a student who is learning the English language, then we give them a certain amount of time using that program and to see if it can help them get better with their letters and recognition.

Participant One stated that they used "ongoing assessments" to determine whether they will bring a struggling student up at a CPST meeting. Participant Four noted similar teacher practices related to assessments; they use "test results, standardized tests, quizzes" to "determine if they need an intervention." Participant Six mentioned the use of the DRA as an assessment to determine whether the student required an intervention or needed to be part of a discussion at a CPST meeting. Participant Seven used classroom assessments to monitor a student's progress in order to determine whether the student would "make a program."

Three teacher participants connected the RtI process with evaluation and testing. Participant Eight expressed frustration with comparing student performance in the classroom to the evaluation results from a school psychologist:

I got no results on any kind of test, I mean, he would fail everything that he took, then he was tested by the psychologist…I don't know what he was giving…the psychologist said to me that his comprehension is great…and…I almost fell over

on the floor because I wanted to see greatness in the classroom with all of the work that I was putting forth there, so, we were not meeting his needs.

Participant Seven stated, "You know, now we have to make the accommodations for the kids, monitor their progress, and if they are making progress, then there's…then testing is not needed." Participant Two reported that he/she requests a copy of the student rating form "when I have submitted a name for a child that I feel might have a learning disability." It is notable that all of the teacher participants mentioned that RtI documents such as the student rating form or the teacher record form were acquired through contact with the ESE specialist. Response to Intervention is a general education initiative, but there is an undertone of special education when one considers that the ESE specialist is connected so closely with the process; three out of eight teacher participants made direct connections between the RtI process and special education during their interviews.

Participant Seven made a connection between the progress made during the RtI process and testing or evaluating a struggling student: "It's the teacher's responsibility to provide the interventions…and if they are making progress, then testing is not needed." Participant Seven had an experience with a student who was performing below grade level in reading. The participant monitored the student's progress using assessments. Participant Seven said that "it was a slow process, it took a really long time… [The student] was tested and she did make a program." Participant Seven noted that the school psychologist would come to CPST meetings and "be involved in your next step…do a tier two intervention, chart it, we'll meet back in six weeks if this isn't working then we'll go to tier three and if that's not working we'll put [the student] in for testing." Participant

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One finds the RtI process to be "a good process for identifying potential students who have a potential learning disability."

In response to the first research question, what do elementary general education teachers know about the Response to Intervention process for English learners, teacher participants involved in the current study reported their knowledge of the Response to Intervention process when specifically related to English learners. Participants reported that documents are a significant part of the RtI process. Many participants described the use of different documents and two out of eight participants brought documents to the interview sessions. Some of the participants described issues with the documents, including frustration with completing portions of the documents as well as the perceived volume of documents used for the RtI process. All eight teacher participants were able to describe key elements of the RtI process, using the language of such resources as the National Center on Response to Intervention. Participants noted that the RtI framework included multiple tiers and progression through the tiers indicated more intensive interventions for students. Two participants expressed uncertainty about when students should proceed to the next tier, or more intensive intervention, while one participant, Participant Seven, shared confidence with the tiered levels of the RtI process.

All participants used the term *document* when responding to interview questions; five of the eight participants named specific documents used during their RtI practices. Two of the eight participants brought examples of the RtI documents that they felt were important in the RtI process. The two participants who mentioned a specific RtI document, the teacher record form, reported difficulties or "frustration" related to completing the form, specifically developing the hypothesis for student difficulty. During

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the first interview session, three teacher participants described the student rating form as an important document involved in the RtI process. Teacher participants were asked to provide more detailed descriptions of the teacher record form and student rating form during the second interview session. Teachers reported that the documents were provided to them when they brought a student concern to a member of the CPST. Participants reported that the student rating form provided information about "where the child is so someone who is not familiar with them can really see where they're at and what they're struggling with," and that the document helps to demonstrate the "major area of concern." Teacher participants also reported that completing the student rating form assisted them in reflecting on their instructional practices for struggling English learners.

Teacher participants shared their knowledge of the importance of progress monitoring and data collection during the RtI process, in accordance with statements from the National Center on Response to Intervention. Participants reported that progress monitoring and data collection were used to inform instructional decisions for English learners; the impact included classroom instruction, potential special education referrals, and promotion and retention decisions. Participants provided insight into a shift in teacher accountability related to data collection and progress monitoring.

Teacher participants were asked to react to important elements of the Response to Intervention process in order to address research question one. The list of elements was developed using data from teacher responses and the National Center on Response to Intervention: three tiers of RtI, evidence-based interventions, data and data collection, and progress monitoring. Participants shared their knowledge of the tiered format of the RtI process. Teacher participants reported that the tiers indicate varying levels of

intensity for student intervention and supports. Participants reported the use of interventions that are recognized as evidence-based while some of the teacher participants reported the use of teacher developed instructional tools. Based on teacher responses, teachers monitor student progress, but find some elements of progress monitoring unclear. Participants are concerned about measuring student progress and the means used to demonstrate growth and to compare struggling students to peers in the same grade level.

Research Question 2

This question asked how elementary general education teachers report their interpretation of policies and procedures with respect to instruction and assessment of English learners, specifically relating to the Response to Intervention model. Two categories were developed from the list of codes: instructional policies/procedures and assessment policies/procedures, as highlighted in Table 4. The interview protocol contained eight questions; responses to questions six and seven were used to address research question two. The second interview protocol contained six questions; responses to questions four, five, and six were used to address research question two. Each category was used as a subsection heading. The researcher summarizes the findings and addresses the research question at the conclusion of the section.

Table 4

Research Question 2 Categories and Codes

Instructional Policies/Procedures	Assessment Policies/Procedures
Technology	Assessments Impact Instruction
Descriptions of ESOL Strategies	Assessments for ESOL
Materials for ESOL Students	
ELs need opportunities/experiences	

Instructional Policies/Procedures

During the first interview session, in order to address research question two,

teacher participants were asked to describe policies and procedures that would dictate

their instruction of English learners. Five out of eight participants felt unsure about how

to answer the question and asked for clarification. As a follow up, the researcher asked

the participants to describe what their instruction would look like for English learners in

their classrooms. Three of those five teacher participants named the ESOL Instructional

Strategies Matrix provided by the school district. Six out of eight teachers went on to

describe instructional strategies for English learners that they use in their classrooms.

During the second interview session, teacher participants were provided with copies of

two sections of the district's ESOL Department Handbook: the Comprehensive Program

Requirements and Student Instruction section, including the ESOL Instructional

Strategies Matrix, and the Statewide Assessments and Accommodations section, and

were asked to react to the documents.

Participant Three said that they did "a lot of cooperative groups" and that this was

"important for them so that they are not just…listening to the teacher all day long."

Participant Three felt that it was important to give the English learner students opportunities to speak with native English speaking peers because "children have a way of communicating with each other and understanding each other better because they're on each other's level." Participant Two also reported group work as an element of his/her instructional practices for English learners: "Having them paired up with another child that may speak their language kind of helps them ease into it, explain things around the classroom, where we are going, what we are doing."

Participant Four expressed the difficulty in teaching English learners specific subjects, like reading and spelling: "For speakers of other languages, it's difficult for them because the English language is probably one of the most difficult languages because for every rule there is a rule that's broken." Participant Three considered some practices that he/she would like to try during the current school year:

One thing that I wanted to do this year is the acting out thing…they could act something out…they and a partner or they in a group act out in front of the class. I think another thing I'll work on this year is less me, more student. I want to stand back and give them some control of their learning and less of me talking and more of them talking and group projects.

Participant Six felt that consistency was an important part of his/her instructional strategies for English learners. Participant Six stated, "I make sure that what happens on day one is what happens on day two and day three…there's not much change involved and if there's change there's a lot of preparation." Some of the teacher participants focused on modeling and cueing as part of their instructional practices for English learners. Participant Six said that, "if it's something that's going to be multi-step, I try to

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have repeated instructions or, depending on the child, I actually go over and model it." Participant Two also reported "using a lot of gesture…a lot of physical movements to explain what I'm saying to them in English." Participant One reported that he/she acts things out to help demonstrate ideas to English learners.

Participant Two reported that he/she used "a lot of pictures and a lot of repetition" to instruct English learners. Participant Seven reported that he/she looked at the ESOL matrix and used "all of those things because I think that kids learn in many different ways…they have to hear things, they have to see things, they have to move, everything is visual." Participant One reported using "preferential seating" as well as "label[ing] things." Participant Four also expressed ways that he/she tried to be creative with instruction of English learners: "You almost have to make it a game in order to get students to follow along…struggling students…make it a game to follow along."

Technology was an important resource that teacher participants mentioned in their descriptions of instructional practices for English learners. Participant Three reported using "technology like interactive websites to help students understand things with pictures." Participant Two reported using computer programs and letting English learners listen to stories read aloud on the computer. Participant One reported using "books on tape, Tumblebooks…different computer programs" to help instruct English learners.

During the second interview session, teacher participants were asked to review the county's ESOL Handbook and to discuss the policies and procedures for English learners. Teachers were asked to review the Comprehensive Program Requirements and Student Instruction section of the handbook and discuss how the requirements outlined in the section are implemented in their classrooms in order to address the research question

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asking how elementary general education teachers report their interpretation of policies and procedures with respect to instruction and assessment of English learners, specifically relating to the Response to Intervention model.

All participants were asked to review two sections of the district's ESOL handbook. One of the teacher participants had seen the actual document before, but had not reviewed the document in many years. The remaining participants reported limited familiarity with the handbook. All participants, except for Participant Four, had never seen a copy of the entire district ESOL handbook, but all participants, with the exception of two, had experience with a portion of the handbook, the ESOL Instructional Strategies Matrix. Teacher participants reported greater familiarity with the ESOL Instructional Strategies Matrix, a single-paged portion of the Comprehensive Program Requirements and Student Instruction section. The ESOL Instructional Strategies Matrix lists strategies for teachers to implement when instructing English learners in the classroom. Participant Seven highlighted ESOL instructional strategies used weekly in lesson plans. Participant One has a copy of the ESOL Instructional Strategies Matrix and reported use of the document for years. Participant Two reported use of the ESOL Instructional Strategies Matrix "all the time" and that the participant was "super familiar" with the matrix; a copy of the matrix has been in the lesson plan book for over 10 years. Two of the participants, Participants Three and Six, do not have copies of the ESOL Instructional Strategies Matrix but reported being familiar with the strategies. Participant Six stated that the matrix looked "familiar" and that the strategies listed on the document were "automatically" built into lessons.

All of the teacher participants mentioned the use of a Heritage language dictionary as a well-known and widely recommended strategy from the matrix. The responses related to the Heritage language dictionary were mixed. Participant Four shared some perceived benefits of using the Heritage language dictionary for English learners in class: the students are "learning English words" while also "teaching them the dictionary skill." Participant One also reported a positive aspect to using the Heritage language dictionary for English learners; the dictionary provides a "sense of comfort" because the student gets the "opportunity" to see words in his or her heritage language. Participant Seven questioned the value of the Heritage language dictionary as an instructional strategy: "You know what's funny about the dictionary? The kids don't even read or write in their own language, they only speak it because they've only been to school in the United States…it's dumb. The dictionary doesn't help…They've never been schooled in their language so they can't look the words up."

Participant Six also commented on the Heritage language dictionary, stating that the young students "are not even proficient in how to appropriately use a dictionary." Participant Six continued, "It's not a realistic resource…They are not grade appropriate. If I do use a dictionary in class, it's a picture dictionary. But because it's not approved, I can't let them use it for [testing]."Participant Eight explained that the students do not use the Heritage language dictionary because, "Quite honestly, I'm trying to teach them the English language and they are not reading….I didn't see the benefit of the dictionary at this stage."

Teacher participants shared perceptions of accommodation policies and procedures for English learners. Accommodations are techniques or strategies used to

help address difficulties that are connected with limited English proficiency. RtI is a framework that is implemented to help address the needs of struggling students by providing appropriate supports and interventions to address the specific needs of each student.

Assessment Policies/Procedures

Five of the participants reported on the policies and procedures implemented throughout the district for assessing English learners. The teacher responses related to the policies and procedures implemented for assessing English learners addressed research question two, which asks how elementary general education teachers report their interpretation of policies and procedures with respect to instruction and assessment of English learners, specifically relating to the RtI model. As outlined in the ESOL Handbook in the Statewide Assessments and Accommodations section, English learners are provided with select testing accommodations. Participant Three did not think that English learners "got what they needed for accommodations as far as dictionaries." Participant Three noted that "from what I understand, I was supposed to be provided by the district a foreign language dictionary or something that he was able to use throughout the school year and then on the test and that never happened." Participant Three continued to expand on the implementation of the assessment policy in their classroom: "I don't know where the breakdown happened but I tried to get [a dictionary] and it was not provided to me so this kid took the FCAT with a dictionary that I just picked up at Barnes and Noble. It may not have been the correct format to use on FCAT…I was a little disappointed by that."

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The Statewide Assessments and Accommodations section states that English learners are allowed to use a Heritage language dictionary during state and district testing sessions. The use of Heritage language dictionaries is listed on the ESOL Instructional Strategies Matrix. The RtI framework provides for the use of instructional strategies to help address specific academic difficulties.

Participant Seven reported that he/she uses the Florida Assessment in Reading (FAIR) to help assess all of their students, including English learners. Participant Seven did note that the results of the FAIR are not used appropriately, since many teachers never see the results. "What good is it to give an assessment…aren't you supposed to use that to drive your instruction?" Participant Four explained that he/she plans on using more projects and group work to assess students, due to the implementation of Common Core State Standards. Participant Four stated that these assessment practices would benefit English learners because "it's all about experience and [English learners] don't have it." Project-based assessments are a good change, according to Participant Four, when compared to "teaching to the test." Participant Six shared assessment procedures that he/she has used for English learners, "If you really want to know if a child knows what a noun and a verb is, have them draw a picture of somebody doing something as a verb." Participant Six continued, "Using a lot more portfolio assessments and project-based learning, it's going to be more helpful." According to Participant Six, portfolio assessments and project-based learning are more appropriate for assessing English learners than "pen or pencil test" or the FCAT. Participant Six would like to see a change in assessments for English learners; for example, students can be tested "in their own language or they're tested in English doing something…not bubbling words."

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In order to address research question two, elementary general education teacher participants were asked to report their interpretation of the policies and procedures with respect to instruction and assessment of English learners with a specific focus on English learners. During interview sessions, a majority of teachers requested clarification when asked to share the policies and procedures that would dictate their instruction of English learners. Once teachers were asked to describe their instructional practices for English learners, they were able to describe instructional strategies that are outlined in the ESOL Instructional Strategies Matrix. The researcher aimed to get more detailed information on how elementary general education teachers reported their interpretation of policies and procedures with respect to instruction and assessment of English learners, specifically relating to the Response to Intervention model.

The researcher provided each participant with a copy of the Comprehensive Program Requirements and Student Instruction section of the ESOL Handbook for review during the second interview session. This section of the handbook also includes the ESOL Instructional Strategies Matrix. All teacher participants were able to list examples of instructional strategies that they implement when instructing English learners. Six of the eight participants were familiar with the ESOL Instructional Strategies Matrix document.

Four of the teacher participants provided information about assessment accommodations for English learners and testing practices implemented in the classroom. Participant Six reported assessment procedures used for the English learners in the classroom, "If you really want to know if a child knows what a noun and a verb is, have them draw a picture of somebody doing something as a verb." Participant Six also shared

hopes for a change in assessments for English learner; for example, students can be tested

"in their own language or they're tested in English doing something…not bubbling

words." Teacher participant responses to first interview protocol questions six and seven,

and responses to second interview protocol questions four, five, and six addressed the

second research question inquiring about how elementary general education teachers

report their interpretation of policies and procedures with respect to instruction and

assessment of English learners, specifically relating to the Response to Intervention

model.

During the interview sessions, teacher participants were asked to react to policies

and procedures with respect to instruction and assessment of English learners, in order to

address the second research question. Teacher participants reported the use of

instructional strategies and accommodations prescribed by the school district on the

ESOL Instructional Strategies Matrix in order to meet the needs of their English learners

through the RtI process. All teacher participants reacted to the matrix and provided

examples of instructional strategies outlined on the district-developed document;

however, only one of the teachers had seen the entire section of the department handbook

while six of the teachers reported great familiarity and ownership of the ESOL

Instructional Strategies Matrix document.

Research Question 3

How elementary general education teachers feel about their understanding of

Response to Intervention was the focus of research question 3.Three categories were

developed from the list of codes: benefits of RtI, drawbacks of RtI, and level of

professional development and support for RtI, as illustrated in Table 5. The interview

protocol contained eight questions; responses to questions four and five were used to address research question three. The second interview protocol contained six questions; responses to questions one, two, and three were used to address research question three. Each category was used as a subsection heading. The researcher summarizes findings that address research question three, answering how elementary general education teachers feel about their understanding of RtI. The researcher developed Table 6 in order to focus on the teacher responses related to how participants feel about their understanding of Response to Intervention; the table organizes the specific teacher feelings and the evidence of feelings as demonstrated through the use of teacher responses.

Table 5

Research Question 3 Categories and Codes

Benefits-RtI	Drawbacks-RtI	Level of PD and Support for RtI
Beneficial	RtI takes too much time	Collaborative Problem Solving Team (CPST)
Interventions	Too many acronyms, confusion	Training available
Helps students to be screened for disabilities earlier	Unsure of one's own knowledge	Teachers learned RtI by going through the process and doing it
Teachers have improved understanding of the process	Too much paperwork	
	Students fall behind because it takes too long to identify students	

Table 6

Teacher Participants' Feelings Related to Their Understanding of Response to Intervention

Teacher Feelings	Evidence From Teacher Responses
Insecurity	Power differential/reliance on members of CPST: • "You get to have someone else's view of what's going on in your class. Someone else to help validate your concerns and give feedback by actually seeing the child in the classroom, not just giving advice from a distance." (Participant Eight) • "It really lays out where the child is so someone who is not familiar with them can really see where they're at and what they're struggling with." (Participant One) • "As a teacher, I have instincts that I rely on in the classroom and I think, at this point, that I can say which of those ESOL students will be a concern...outside of the ESOL aspect….ESOL constraints…make it more difficult for them to get the services that they need early on." (Participant Eight) • Participant Six reported that English learners may be overlooked because of their language status: "I've heard comments…oh, he's just an ESOL kid…he's ESOL, and so…he's pushed through, he'll get it…pushed through like not taken seriously as an English speaker. I think that they are overlooked because of the ELL status, that's just my opinion."
Concerns	• Participant Eight reported, "I think it takes way too long for a child to get through RtI." The participant continued, "They get further and further behind in the two years it takes you to get through the process where you find out what kind of extra help they need because they are not responding to RtI."
Discomfort	• Discussion of completing the student rating form: "I like [the student rating form] better because it is check offs." Participant Four continued, "There is another one that there is a lot more writing on it, this is a little easier because it gives you ideas too. It prompts you." "It's a lot of writing and if you don't really know what you're looking at, or what you are looking for…it's not helpful."
Confusion	• Discussion of RtI document/student rating form: "I don't remember. I am forgetting this document. This might have been used before the teacher record form." (Participant Seven) • Participant Two noted that when RtI was first introduced to them, they were "confused" about "when you start tier two as opposed to…or what tier one is as opposed to tier two, how long do you do each one." • "I got confused with the whole leveling system…If they had to be…tier one…you have to progress through even though…I thought right off the bat that they were already tier 3." (Participant Eight) • Participant Seven continued to share ambiguities in progress monitoring for students in Response to Intervention, "If you're teaching the child on a first grade level, because they're on a tier three intervention, and you're saying they're making progress…ok, they're making progress but they're still in third grade." • Participant Six expressed confusion when addressing concerns with English learners through RtI: "It's a case by case basis…you have to know exactly what information you have on the child but, to me, every time is different. It's not, to me, not every time is that consistent…I get confused sometimes."

Table 6 *continued*

Teacher Feelings	Evidence From Teacher Responses
Frustration	• Addressing questions on documents: "If I knew what was causing the problem, I would hope that, as the teacher, I'd be able to address the problem myself. I have a question about why they are struggling because I don't know what's causing it. How should I know what the hypothesis is?" (Participant Eight) • Participant Eight expressed frustration with comparing student performance in the classroom to the evaluation results from a school psychologist: "I got no results on any kind of test…he would fail everything that he took…he was tested by the psychologist…the psychologist said to me that his comprehension is great…I almost fell over on the floor because I wanted to see greatness in the classroom with all of the work that I was putting forth there." • Participant Seven expressed frustration with limited resources because during interventions, one must use "the actual intervention on the struggling reader chart." This caused frustration because Participant Seven reported that "we don't have a lot of those materials…so the struggling readers chart is a struggle for teachers…you don't have the materials that you need to provide the interventions."
Unsure/Lack of confidence in their knowledge	• Participant One shared that "I definitely have some students that are behind due to the language but some that use that language as a crutch…because they don't really speak that [language] so much." • Participant Six reported, "I try to be mindful of that…if a child may look like they can function and they may be able to function, they may not necessarily understand." • What if they really are on level in their home language? Should we hold them back just because they aren't adapted to English yet? I don't know." (Participant One)

Benefits of RtI

Six out of the eight teacher participants reported positive aspects to the Response to Intervention process. Participant Three reported that he/she appreciated the information that teachers got from the RtI process; specifically, the graphs that are generated for progress monitoring. Participants had positive comments about examining student progress in order to make more informed decisions about instructional practices for struggling students through the RtI process. Participant Three stated, "I think that making us show that we've done the RtI process before we can move on with placing anybody in special programs or labeling, I think that's a good thing."

Participant Four identified one of the key elements of RtI in positive statements about the process: early interventions for struggling learners. Participant Four stated, "I think that they are screening earlier than what they used to do. So by screening earlier, they are catching children and they are not getting into a situation…where they haven't been given any services or extra help." Participant Eight noted he/she saw that a student was struggling and, together with the parents, decided to provide interventions. Participant Eight said that the mother came back two years later and thanked him/her for "talking her through the decision." Participant Eight noted that "apparently now she's being successful and sometimes interventions really do help, so if we could find what intervention works, we can help."

These positive aspects reported by teacher participants in the current study addressed the research question asking how elementary general education teachers feel about their understanding of Response to Intervention. The teacher participants reported that they "learned a lot" through the RtI process and that students benefit from the structure of the process. Participant Four reported that the Response to Intervention process helps to identify struggling students and to provide appropriate interventions in a timely manner. However, Participant Four did not explicitly address whether the RtI process provided help for English learners; the participant made the general statement about all students. On the contrary, five participants reported that it takes an exorbitant amount of time to address the needs of English learners when implementing the RtI framework, as noted in the next section. The teacher participants may be able to provide more timely interventions as a result of their understanding of the RtI process.

Drawbacks of RtI

All of the eight participants reported negative aspects of the Response to Intervention process from their experiences. Participants expressed frustration with different aspects, including the time that it takes to go through the process, understanding the process, and meeting students' needs through the process.

Participant Five expressed frustration with the RtI process: "Why does it take so long?" The participant went on to express specific concerns with English learners and RtI. "The ESOL students…it's strange when they're tied up with RtI…I feel like I wait longer to bring ESOL students up to RtI because of the different circumstance from the other students." Participant Eight reported, "I think it takes way too long for a child to get through RtI." The participant continued, "They get further and further behind in the two years it takes you to get through the process where you find out what kind of extra help they need because they are not responding to RtI." The participant also stated: "As a teacher, I have instincts that I rely on in the classroom and I think, at this point, that I can say which of those ESOL students will be a concern...outside of the ESOL aspect….ESOL constraints…make it more difficult for them to get the services that they need early on."

When asked to expand on the "ESOL constraints," Participant Eight replied: "Pushing them on because of their classification…as opposed to actually looking at their work and what you observe on a day to day basis." Participant Four also reported that there are "too many steps now" to the RtI process. Participant One reported that the RtI process "take[s] a lot of time" and that they thought it was "everyone's complaint." Participant One went on to say, "There are some kids you just know that they need…to

be tested, and soon. I had a kid in my class who was tested, he wasn't placed until almost half the year was over. He did not belong in my classroom…it wasn't the best environment for that child to learn."

Participant Two reported issues with the "red tape" that one has to go through with RtI; specifically, the "documentation has to be in before you can move to the next step; that's kind of frustrating at times."

Participant Six expressed confusion when addressing concerns with English learners through RtI: "It's a case by case basis…you have to know exactly what information you have on the child but, to me, every time is different. It's not, to me, not every time is that consistent…I get confused sometimes." Participant Three reported that much of the confusion about English learners in RtI comes from terms used. "I get the feeling that the terms change all the time and sometimes people may get a little confused in the process because what was termed RtI now was termed something else a few years ago." Participant Three went on to say, "And the acronyms…I think the acronyms change and terms change and people get lost trying to keep up with what this means and what that means and there just doesn't seem to be consistency with that." Participant Seven expressed frustration with limited resources because during interventions, one must use "the actual intervention on the struggling reader chart." This caused frustration because Participant Seven reported that "we don't have a lot of those materials…so the struggling readers chart is a struggle for teachers…you don't have the materials that you need to provide the interventions."

The negative aspects reported by the teacher participants helped to address the research question asking how elementary general education teachers feel about their

understanding of Response to Intervention. The frustration and other negative aspects reported by the teacher participants may be a result of the misunderstanding or misconceptions of certain elements of the Response to Intervention process. This process provides a method of addressing student needs through the use of evidence-based interventions and progress monitoring through ongoing data collection. The definitive goal of following the RtI process is to address student needs, not to qualify students for special education programs or to "get through RtI. "Participants perceive that the needs of the students are not necessarily being met through the RtI process since the student gets "further and further behind" as they go through the RtI process.

Participants Three and Six expressed confusion about the process. Participant Six also reported an issue with lack of continuity in the RtI process, while Participant Three reported confusion with the seemingly constant change in terms used when discussing Response to Intervention. The concerns described can be addressed through increased support and professional development to reduce any misconceptions about RtI and the most effective way to implement the process to help meet the needs of all students. The graphic organizer in Appendix S demonstrates the connection between reported knowledge of the RtI process and participants' feelings about their understanding of the process; the organizer helps to illustrate the importance of addressing teacher feelings and knowledge of the RtI process in order to improve instruction and assessment experiences for teachers and students.

Professional Development and Support for RtI

Teacher participants provided their feelings about their understanding of the Response to Intervention process. Their responses addressed research question three

regarding how elementary general education teachers feel about their understanding of Response to Intervention. Teachers described their experiences with the collaborative problem solving team (CPST), professional development, and other support systems related to the Response to Intervention process.

   Collaborative problem solving team (CPST). All participants reported positive experiences with the CPST. Participant Two said that the CPST is "a huge benefit" and that he/she "enjoy[s] coming together because I like to say what I'm seeing and what I think the problem is and what we should be doing in order to help correct the issue or help the child." Participant Eight said that "I've always thought it was a very good experience. People listen…they seem to value what I have to say." Participant Two reported that the CPST "come[s] at me with other ideas which I can try in my room, they support me by coming into my room and trying things out with the child themselves." Participant One found that the CPST provided "reassurance that you are doing something right, like, oh yeah I see that too, or yeah, that is a valid concern. It's a good support system." Participant Three "rather enjoys" the CPST experience. The participant continued, "I thought it was pretty cool to hear perspectives from different perspectives from different people." Participant Six reported, "Everyone comes to the table well prepared, everyone knows the child…it's very collaborative and you can get things done. I've never been part of a team where it hasn't been consistent." Participant Five agreed that CPST meetings are "productive" and that the team "make[s] you feel comfortable."

   Participant Two mentioned specific members of the CPST that helped him/her through the RtI process: "Having our psychologist is always beneficial to me because he has such a different way of thinking, being a psychologist and not a teacher…I'm always

interested in what he has to say." Participant Two went on to say, "It's nice to have the ESE specialist there because they can help guide me in the right direction; for example, when I had an issue answering that hypothesis question, I came to [the ESE specialist]…and we sat down and talked about it." Participant Five also valued the input of the school psychologist. Participant One "like[s] being part of that team" because the team is made up of "experts to help brainstorm a solution to try to fix a problem rather than hide it under the carpet…rather than just give up, you have everyone trying to help so a child can learn better." Participant Three specifically mentioned that he/she valued the perspectives of the members of the CPST; for example, "like administrators' perspectives, the guidance counselor, the school psychologist, the ESE teacher…I thought it was neat that all these different perspectives were coming to the table to have a discussion about a specific student." Participant Seven stated that he/she "learned a lot from the [RtI] process" and that the CPST "was definitely a team made up for the benefit of the student…everyone was there because we wanted to make sure that the needs of the child were being met."

Participant Four reported some positive experiences as a member of the CPST. The participant reported that "we usually talk very openly" but the meetings "take you away from your students in your classroom." While many participants reported issues with the RtI process and the length of time it takes to "go through the process," Participant One reported that the CPST does not "wait months and months…they'll meet with you the next month if you request it."

Participants provided feedback on their experiences participating in CPST meetings. The CPST is a part of the Response to Intervention decision-making process

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and is comprised of different school faculty members. One participant expressed that the CPST provided a "good support system" and "reassurance that you are doing something right." A teacher participant stated that the CPST members provide different perspectives on instruction and "come at me with other ideas which I can try in my room." The perspective of other members like the school psychologist is helpful and provides "a different way of thinking" since the psychologist "is not a teacher." The teacher participants reported their experiences with the CPST and provided insight into how elementary general education teachers feel about their understanding of Response to Intervention. The multidisciplinary team is an important support provided through the RtI framework. RtI is part of a multi-tier system of supports put into place to ensure that all students are receiving the most appropriate instruction (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006). One of the intended benefits of the RtI process is to provide supports, like the CPST, to help make appropriate instructional decisions about all students, including English learners, to avoid inappropriate special education placement or implementation of ineffective interventions (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006; Klingner & Edwards, 2006).

Professional development and supports related to RtI. Three participants had specific insight to offer on the professional development and support they have received for the Response to Intervention process. Participant Two reported that "one thing that I do like that the district did with RtI is the team that comes along with the RtI process…we would speak individually…we would address problems before the meeting." The participant went on to say, "when I had an issue answering the hypothesis question, I came to [the ESE specialist] and I said I don't know what that means, what am I supposed to write there? And we sat down and talked about it and she explained it."

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Participant Seven stated that he/she thought that his/her understanding of the RtI process was better because "we had a lot of workshops on the RtI process" and that the school psychologist and a case worker helped to guide them through the process. Participant One reported that the "training and support for schools, some modeling on how to make the charts" was helpful for the participant.

Participant Seven reported that the case worker for his/her grade level was the reading coach; the reading coach supported Participant Seven by "provid[ing] me with resources or help[ed] me figure out interventions…we would meet…to check on their progress so that somebody above you was checking to make sure that we were following the right steps." Participant One valued the help of the school psychologist; he was "very friendly…there's just a lot of support there." The participant also was provided with sample forms to help fill out requisite RtI documents: "I think we had a sample form so we had something to look at, which always makes it a little easier."

Participants reported their feelings about their understanding of the Response to Intervention process, with a specific focus on English learners. Teachers shared positive and negative perceptions of the RtI process. The positive sentiments were general and included the effective use of interventions for struggling students, including English learners, and addressing students' needs earlier. The drawbacks, however, outnumbered the positive responses. Teachers reported that the RtI process takes too much time and that they are unsure of their knowledge about the process. Teacher participants worried about English learners falling behind in the time that it took for the team to develop an appropriate plan, implement the plan, and monitor student progress. They expressed confusion about the process in general, and specifically with the acronyms used when

discussing RtI. Teachers also felt that the RtI process required them to complete too much paperwork and the hypothesis portion of the teacher document was difficult for them to complete. Teacher participants were unsure if the primary cause of academic difficulties was a learning difficulty or a natural part of the language acquisition process. Teachers did describe the CPST aspect of RtI as a positive experience overall and many teachers appreciate the collaborative nature of the team meetings. Participant responses addressed the question of how elementary general education teachers feel about their understanding of the Response to Intervention process. Teachers reported that the RtI process provided a good framework for addressing student concerns. Teacher participants reported many drawbacks including the perceived time that it takes to address student concerns, confusion about the process in general, including terms and acronyms. Teacher participants also reported negative feelings about the documents used during the RtI process. The participants felt that there is an excessive amount of documents used during the RtI process and participants have difficulty completing some of the documents.

In response to research question three asking how elementary general education teachers feel about their understanding of Response to Intervention, teachers reported perceived benefits, drawbacks, and level of professional development and support related to RtI. Teachers reported that the RtI process was beneficial for struggling English learners. The RtI framework includes targeted interventions for struggling students and participants perceive that RtI helps to identify students with disabilities earlier. Participants reported drawbacks related to RtI. Teachers reported that it takes "too much time" to "get through" the RtI process for struggling English learners; English learners "fall behind" because it takes an excessive amount of time to identify students.

Participants shared areas of confusion like the number of acronyms and uncertainty about the procedures of the RtI process. Teacher participants are provided with RtI supports and training. The participants specifically focused on the collaborative problem solving team as a beneficial support system for teachers navigating the RtI process. Teacher participants learned about the RtI process by being involved in the process. As demonstrated on the graphic organizer, a strong connection exists between teacher participants' feelings about their understanding of the RtI process and their reported knowledge and interpretation of policies and procedures for the instruction and assessment of English learners.

Research Question 4

In this question, participants were asked how elementary general education teachers feel about their understanding of instruction and assessment for English learners. Six categories were developed from the list of codes: language acquisition and learning disabilities, adjustment time for English learners, assessments for English learners, parental involvement and experiences, instruction for English learners, and professional development and support for instruction of English learners. These categories are outlined in Table 7. The interview protocol contained eight questions; responses to questions seven and eight were used to address research question four. The second interview protocol contained six questions; responses to questions four, five, and six were used to address research question four. Each category was used as a subsection heading. The researcher summarizes findings and answers the research question at the conclusion of the section.

Table 7

Research Question 4 Categories and Codes

Language Acquisition and Learning Disabilities	Adjustment Time for English Learners	Assessments for English Learners	Parental Involvement and Experiences	Instruction for English Learners	Professional Development and Support for Instruction of English Learners
Unsure of language acquisition process	ELs are "pushed through"	Assessments are "pointless for ELs"	Parent input is hard to get	Technology	Little support
Language acquisition or learning disability	ELs need more time	Assessments cause frustration		Good for all	Current PD and support
		Assessments are fair			

Language Acquisition and Learning Disabilities

Half of the participants expressed explicit concerns with their understanding of

the language acquisition process and the connection between this misunderstanding and

the possible identification of students with learning disabilities. Participant Six expressed

that they wanted to improve on their understanding of the language acquisition process:

"I need to remember you still need to give them that foundation. Sometimes it looks, on

the surface, that they're getting it and they're parroting, they're going through the

motions, but they don't have that foundation." Participant Six continued, "I try to be

mindful of that…if a child may look like they can function and they may be able to

function, they may not necessarily understand." Participant One questioned the

assessments used in school to determine a student's current academic functioning and the

information the assessments give teachers about English learners. "There is not another

alternative test to show where they really are…What if they really are on level in their home language? Should we hold them back just because they aren't adapted to English yet? I don't know." Participant Eight offered an opinion about struggling English learners, "I do not think that the fact that he is having learning difficulties has anything to do with his ESOL-ness, I think, a lot of times, these difficulties…they may be actual learning disabilities. They speak some English at home."

Participant Six suggested that the use of "different paperwork" for English learners may help analyze the reason for a struggling English learner:

Maybe you can isolate if this is strictly an ESOL issue or are there other things in addition to ESOL. There may be some kids who are identified that need some extra support and it's very easy to bypass what the ELL students' needs are, is there really an RtI or is there really that the teacher just needs to put into practice those strategies that we did in those ESOL courses…I think that could identify a lot more students rather than when they get to high school and you find out the kid never learned how to sound out a word.

The feedback that the teacher participants provided helped to give perspective on how elementary general education teachers feel about their understanding of instruction and assessment for English learners. Four teacher participants expressed concerns about their understanding of the language acquisition process and the connection between this misunderstanding and the possible identification of students with learning disabilities. It is difficult to plan student instruction without understanding the cause of difficulties and how to address those difficulties with appropriate instruction.

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Adjustment Time for English Learners

Four out of eight participants made explicit statements about adjustment time for English learners. Participant Five reported that he/she "should've referred [a student], but I didn't. Some ESOL students…you have to give them extra time." Participant Two also stated that he/she felt that English learners need more time "acquiring the English language before we can determine that it's something other than just that." Participant Two went on to share a specific experience related to this point:

> I had a student, who, last year was an A1…or an A2…I retained her because I felt that her acquisition of English was not sufficient enough for her to be successful in the next grade, and she was definitely behind…obviously she met the criteria for retention, but I felt that a second year, given the time to learn those vocabulary words, those sounds…that she will have success and actually move forward. But at the same time, there actually could be more there and I feel that if they give her that time and she is not progressing, that it is not an ESOL issue, that it is a learning issue…and we will see.

Participant Six reported that English learners may be overlooked because of their language status: "I've heard comments…oh, he's just an ESOL kid…he's ESOL, and so…he's pushed through, he'll get it…pushed through like not taken seriously as an English speaker. I think that they are overlooked because of the ELL status, that's just my opinion."

Participant Six continued to offer his/her thoughts on instruction for English learners:

I think a lot of time the ESOL kids don't get that squeaky wheel because, it's ok, they're ESOL. One of the things, you know, even the kids that are struggling that qualify for retention but the fact that they qualify for ELL status they're pushed on to the next grade level when you know that there are things that can be done in that grade level…They're not getting the services that are needed because everything is contributed to ELL and I don't think it could be further from the truth.

Participant One provided similar thoughts on the time provided to English learners to adjust to educational programming. "I think, sometimes, the expectations…I think they might need a little more time to adjust." The participant went on to say, "Because we are not sometimes talking about a language barrier, we are talking about cultural differences." Participant One also reported, "I think a lot of time we forget about that, sometimes, they just need more time…you might need more opportunities, more examples…more ESOL strategies up front." Teacher responses related to the adjustment time for English learners provided insight into participants' feelings about their understanding of instruction and assessment for English learners as well as their feelings about their understanding of the Response to Intervention process; the graphic organizer demonstrates the connection between participant responses related to the adjustment time for English learners and each research question.

Assessments for English Learners

Five participants provided thoughts on how they felt about assessments for English learners. One of the five (Participant One) interpreted *assessments* to involve psychological evaluations as well as state and district testing; four participants interpreted

assessments as assessment tools administered in the classroom in addition to state and district testing.

Participant One reported feelings about his/her understanding of assessments for English learners: "I think what's nice for [English learners] is not counting them for the FCAT or [district] testing because there's no control there." Participant One then went on to speak about psychological evaluations: "They found someone who spoke his language in order to test the child so I thought it was more of an authentic result." Participant One went on to say, "I think that they're trying to be very fair when offering kids who are really being considered for testing and finding a psychologist who speaks that language, which I think is nice." The remaining four participants did not share the positive outlook on assessments for English learners. Participant Seven stated outright, "I don't think that a lot of the stuff that we use is all that valid." When asked to elaborate, Participant Seven continued: "I think the tests themselves aren't bad. I think the way we…the time that we devote to these kids is not optimal…so I think the time that we are given to assess the students…you have 18 kids in your class while you are trying to assess one…I just don't think it's fair to you or them."

Participant Six reported that he/she did not think that the "assessment procedures that are currently used are fair." Participant Six offered more detail about frustration related to assessments for English learners:

> You can't get a pen or pencil test and expect a child to get it. A child comes in from another country and the next day they have to take the FCAT. I think there needs to be some accommodation made for those students where they are either

tested in their own language or they're tested in English doing something, not

bubbling words…It's nonsensical.

Participant Two expressed a similar outlook on assessments for English learners:

"For an English learner who is just acquiring the language and is not able to read in

English…I think it's a pointless test. To make them sit there and take it…knowing that

they can't do any of it is not only a waste of time for them, but it is frustrating and makes

them feel really unsuccessful."

Participant Six provided further insight on assessment for English learners: "If

you really want to know if a child knows what a noun and a verb is, have them draw a

picture of somebody doing something as a verb."

Participant Four expressed a positive outlook for the future of assessments for

English learners and for all students: "Now I'm excited because for Common

Core…you're putting the thinking back on the child and you can kind of guide them."

Participant Four continued, "You get them to do a little more talking…you reason it out

with them to see where they're coming from…you do more projects and group work."

Participant Six also expressed hope for how assessments will look in the near future.

"Using a lot more portfolio assessments and project-based learning, it's going to be a lot

more helpful. To me it's a push in the right direction."

With respect to assessments for English learners, it appears that teacher

participants had mixed feelings about their understanding. The term assessment means

different things to each of the participants who offered feelings about this element of the

Response to Intervention process. One of the participants shared perceptions of

assessments related to psychological evaluations used to inform special education

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placement for students. The participant felt that the procedures used to evaluate English

learners for special education placement are "fair," particularly because a speaker of the

student's heritage language is present during the evaluation. Four of the participants felt

that current assessments for English learners are not used in an optimal way. Participants

felt that state and district tests are not appropriate for the most limited English speakers:

the assessments are not fair, waste time, frustrate students, and do not provide good

information.

Parental Involvement and Experiences

Three of the participants noted that parental involvement and experiences outside

of school impact instruction for English learners. Participant Eight reported that he/she

felt that experiences and language acquisition impact English learners' academic

functioning: "They don't have a lot of language…because they're not talked to in the

same way that a lot of other children are, they don't have the experiences to connect to

instruction." Participant Eight provided a specific example of how students' experiences

impacted instruction:

> I was doing an activity yesterday and we have a high frequency word "or" so I
>
> was trying to give them…or is what we call a homophone…it has a
>
> meaning..."or" meaning black *or* white, milk *or* cookies…that kind of thing. But
>
> it can also be used another way. It's not spelled the same way but it sounds the
>
> exact same, so I asked have you ever been in a boat...nothing…have you ever
>
> seen a boat on television…have you ever seen…you put those sticks in the water
>
> and paddle yourselves…well, that is spelled o-a-r, some looks from
>
> students…then hands go up and he says I have a video game *Iron Ore*…that's a

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different kind of or…nobody else has ever hear of oar before but because of a video game…but that lack of connectedness…because who has ever been in a boat with an oar…but a lot of other children have had those experiences…so learning really has to be connected to experiences.

Participant Five provided an example of how parental involvement helped one of his/her students who was an English learner: "He had his own handbook where he would write words in English and Spanish and he wanted all the words in that book. His mother helped him with it because she wanted him to learn English." Participant Five continued to say, "This involvement is lacking in many families." Participant Five also contributed much of past English learners' academic success to parental involvement. "I've had ESOL students who have done extremely well and that's probably because the parents provide support at home." Participant Six continued, "You don't want to compare and say how come this one can do it and that one can't…so that gets frustrating sometimes because you see…the lack of parental involvement and support."

Teacher participants shared perceptions of parental involvement and support related to the instruction of English learners. Participants reported connections between parental involvement and support and the impacts of instruction and assessment for English learners. Participants felt that students had limited cultural and linguistic experiences; the limited experiences had implications for instructional planning for English learners. The participants' perceptions on parental involvement and the implications for instruction of English learners provided insight into their feelings about their understanding of instruction and assessment for English learners.

Instruction for English Learners

All teacher participants offered their feelings about instructional practices for English learners. Participant Two expressed that his/her instructional practices were "very beneficial to my English learners" and that he/she gives those students "a lot more time to socialize with the kids because that's how you learn a language…just being immersed." Participant Two did report that he/she makes sure that he/she is "using as many ESOL strategies as I can while I'm teaching during the day," but also gives English learners time to interact with peers because "they just love being with each other and they will figure out a way to communicate with each other." Participant One reported that he/she uses ESOL strategies for English learners but that he/she felt that "a lot of the instructional practices we use with the English learners work well with all kids…a good strategy is a good strategy." Participant One went on to say, "If you use labeling, it might help a kid who has trouble with labeling, or word recall, listening centers, Venn diagrams, listening cues, all the strategies are good strategies." Participant Four reported that the instruction for English learners in the classroom "seems to come from my own experience…if one thing doesn't work, I try something else."

Six out of eight teachers went on to describe instructional strategies for English learners that they use in their classrooms. During the second interview session, teacher participants were provided with copies of two sections of the district's ESOL Department Handbook: the Comprehensive Program Requirements and Student Instruction section, including the ESOL Instructional Strategies Matrix, and the Statewide Assessments and Accommodations section, and were asked to react to the documents. Teacher participants shared their experiences with the ESOL Instructional Strategies Matrix. After reviewing

the document, all of the teacher participants shared instructional strategies that they implement from the matrix. Six of the eight teacher participants reported that they were familiar with the ESOL Instructional Strategies Matrix document and one participant shared that he/she has not reviewed the document in many years, but is familiar with the existence of the matrix.

Participant Three said that he/she did "a lot of cooperative groups" and that this was "important for them so that they are not just…listening to the teacher all day long." Participant Three felt that it was important to give the English learner students opportunities to speak with native English speaking peers because "children have a way of communicating with each other and understanding each other better because they're on each other's level." Participant Two also reported group work as an element of his/her instructional practices for English learners: "Having them paired up with another child that may speak their language kind of helps them ease into it, explain things around the classroom, where we are going, what we are doing."

Participant Four expressed the difficulty in teaching English learners specific subjects, like reading and spelling, "for speakers of other languages, it's difficult for them because the English language is probably one of the most difficult languages because for every rule there is a rule that's broken." Participant Six felt that consistency was an important part of his/her instructional strategies for English learners. Participant Six stated, "I make sure that what happens on day one is what happens on day two and day three…there's not much change involved and if there's change there's a lot of preparation." Participant Two reported that he/she uses "a lot of pictures and a lot of repetition" to instruct English learners. Participant Six reported that he/she looked at the

ESOL matrix and that he/she has used "all of those things because I think that kids learn in many different ways…they have to hear things, they have to see things, they have to move, everything is visual." Participant Four also expressed ways that he/she has tried to be creative with instruction of English learners: "You almost have to make it a game in order to get students to follow along…struggling students…make it a game to follow along."

Professional Development and Support for the Instruction of English Learners

Two of the teacher participants expressed concern over the lack of professional development and support for the instruction of English learners that they have experienced. Participant Three reported, "I guess there didn't seem to be any communication with anybody, whether it be somebody at our school or somebody at our district and me, as the classroom teacher…it was just me." Participant Three continued, "I was just winging it…hoping that something worked. There was no one saying…maybe you should try this…I was just figuring it out myself." Participant Three did explain that he/she took online courses to complete the ESOL endorsement requirement. According to Participant Three, the courses "really did a good job providing you with ideas…they give you knowledge if you take the courses…but then the teacher just has to follow up with it." Participant Three reported that he/she took the courses to complete the ESOL endorsement when he/she received a notification: "I didn't get any support except this letter telling me that I was out of field and that I had to take these courses." Participant Three went on to further explain frustration:

> There were no resources given to me, there was very little help at school and I
> didn't know who to go to. I did finally get a couple of books from our guidance

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counselor three quarters of the way through the year that I was like, man, I wish I had these in the beginning of the year when they didn't know any English…more resources…more communication from personnel would've been nice.

Participant Four reported that he/she found resources to help them with instructional practices for English learners, "I like to read the instructional resources conference and people will have good ideas, even in the team meetings when we plan together…I got some nice ideas from a new team member."

During interview sessions, teachers were asked to share their feelings about their understanding of instruction and assessment of English learners. Overall, teachers were unsure of their knowledge about the language acquisition process. Participant Six noted that, "Sometimes it looks, on the surface, that they're getting it…but they don't have that foundation." Participant Eight speculated whether a struggling English learner's "learning difficulties had anything to do with his ESOL-ness…they may be actual learning disabilities." Teachers were not confident that they would be able to determine the difference between the language acquisition process and a learning disability. Participant Two addressed an adjustment time for English learners. The participant reported that English learners need more time "acquiring the English language before we can determine that it's something other than that." Participant Six shared that all of the instructional and assessment needs of an English learner may not be fully addressed, putting much of the emphasis of student difficulties on the student's ESOL status. "I've heard comments…oh, he's just an ESOL kid…he's pushed through, he'll get it.…I think that they are overlooked because of the ELL status," reported Participant Six. One teacher participant specifically addressed preparation and efficacy related to the

assessment of English learners. Participant Three feels unprepared to assess students, even after attending courses designed for the instruction of English learners. The participant felt like "it was just me" when faced with providing accommodations and supports for English learners in the classroom. The responses provided by the eight teacher participants addressed research question four asking how elementary general education teachers feel about their understanding of instruction and assessment for English learners.

Teacher participants reported a perceived lack of professional development and support related to the instruction and assessment of English learners. Based on the teacher responses, it appears that information related to instruction and assessment of English learners was disseminated with limited support or follow up. One teacher participant found an instructional resource developed by the district and reported that the resource was helpful for instructional planning for English learners. Overall, teacher participants reported limited clarity related to the instruction and assessment of English learners. Teacher participants find it difficult to determine whether academic difficulties are caused primarily by a learning disorder or a natural part of the language acquisition process.

In response to research question four, which asks how elementary general education teachers feel about their understanding of instruction and assessment for English learners, teachers reported perceptions on language acquisition and learning disabilities, adjustment time for English learners, assessments for English learners, parental involvement and experiences, instruction for English learners, and professional development and support for the instruction of English learners. Participants felt unsure

of the language acquisition process for English learners. Teachers find it difficult to

determine if limited English proficiency is the primary cause of academic difficulties for

English learners, or if the concerns are a result of an underlying learning disability.

Participants perceive that English learners are "pushed through" instead of considering an

English learner's level of language proficiency. Responses were conflicting; teachers

reported that it took "too long" for students to "get through" the RtI process, but

participants also felt that English learners needed more time to acquire the language

before considering more intensive interventions or special education referrals. Teachers

shared that many assessments cause frustration for English learners and are "pointless"

because they do not provide reliable results for the most limited English speakers.

Participants reported that parental involvement and student experiences were limited;

these limits have a negative impact on student progress. Teachers use technology with

their English learners and feel that many technology programs are beneficial for

instructing and providing supports and strategies to English learners. Responses related to

professional development and supports were mixed. One participant reported feeling

unsupported by school and district staff because of little professional development.

Another teacher participant reported that each professional development session she

attended throughout the district had English learner strategies infused in the program.

Summary

The current study focused on the teacher perceptions of the Response to

Intervention process for English learners. Elementary general education teacher

participants involved in the current study reported their knowledge of the Response to

Intervention process when specifically related to English learners, addressing research

question one. Participants reported that documents are a significant part of the RtI process. Many participants described the use of different documents and two out of eight participants brought documents to the interview sessions. Some of the participants described issues with the documents, including frustration with completing portions of the documents as well as the perceived volume of documents used for the RtI process. All eight teacher participants were able to describe key elements of the RtI process, using the language of such resources as the National Center on Response to Intervention. The key elements included the three-tiered framework, interventions, data collection, and progress monitoring. Participants noted that the RtI framework includes multiple tiers and progression through the tiers indicates more intensive interventions for students. Two participants expressed uncertainty about when students should proceed to the next tier, or more intensive intervention, while one participant, Participant Seven, shared confidence with the tiered levels of the RtI process.

Research question two examined how elementary general education teachers report their interpretation of policies and procedures with respect to instruction and assessment of English learners related to the Response to Intervention process. The researcher provided a copy of the Comprehensive Program Requirements and Student Instruction section of the ESOL Handbook for review during the second interview session. The section of the handbook also includes the ESOL Instructional Strategies Matrix. All teacher participants were able to list examples of instructional strategies that they implement when instructing English learners. Six of the eight participants were familiar with the ESOL Instructional Strategies Matrix document. Three participants reported the use of technology to help meet the instructional needs of English learners.

One participant, Participant Three, said that he/she used "technology like interactive websites to help students understand things with pictures." Four of the teacher participants provided information about assessment accommodations for English learners and testing practices implemented in the classroom. Participant Six reported assessment procedures that the teacher uses for the English learners in the classroom, "If you really want to know if a child knows what a noun and a verb is, have them draw a picture of somebody doing something as a verb." Participant Six also shared hopes for a change in assessments for English learners; for example, students can be tested "in their own language or they're tested in English doing something…not bubbling words."

Research question three examined how elementary general education teachers feel about their understanding of Response to Intervention. Participants reported their feelings about their understanding of the Response to Intervention process, with a specific focus on English learners. Teachers shared benefits and drawbacks related to the RtI process. The positive sentiments were general and included the effective use of interventions for struggling students and addressing students' needs earlier. The drawbacks outnumbered the positives. Teachers reported that the RtI process takes too much time and that they are unsure of their knowledge about the process. They expressed confusion about the process in general, and specifically with the acronyms used when discussing RtI. Teachers also felt that the RtI process required them to complete too much paperwork and the hypothesis portion of the teacher document was difficult for them to complete. Teachers, however, did describe the CPST aspect of RtI as a positive experience overall and many teachers appreciate the collaborative nature of the team meetings.

Research question four examined how elementary general education teachers feel about their understanding of instruction and assessment for English learners. During interview sessions, teachers were asked to share their feelings about their understanding of instruction and assessment of English learners. Overall, teachers were unsure of their knowledge about the language acquisition process. Participant Six noted that, "Sometimes it looks, on the surface, that they're getting it…but they don't have that foundation." Participant Eight speculated whether a struggling English learner's "learning difficulties had anything to do with his ESOL-ness…they may be actual learning disabilities." Teachers were not confident that they would be able to determine the difference between the language acquisition process and a learning disability. Participant Two addressed an adjustment time for English learners. The participant reported that English learners need more time "acquiring the English language before we can determine that it's something other than that." Participant Six shared that all of the instructional and assessment needs of an English learner may not be fully addressed, putting much of the emphasis of student difficulties on the student's ESOL status. "I've heard comments…oh, he's just an ESOL kid…he's pushed through, he'll get it….I think that they are overlooked because of the ELL status." One teacher participant specifically addressed preparation and efficacy related to the assessment of English learners. Participant Three reported feeling unprepared to assess students, even when provided with professional development designed for the instruction of English learners. The responses provided by the eight teacher participants addressed research question four asking how elementary general education teachers feel about their understanding of instruction and assessment for English learners.

CHAPTER FIVE. DISCUSSION

The study used a qualitative case study approach to describe teachers'

understanding and perceptions of instructional elements and assessment of the Response

to Intervention framework in one elementary school. Eight elementary general education

teachers shared their knowledge of and feelings about the Response to Intervention

process when specifically related to English learners. Teacher participants also were

asked to discuss their experiences with referrals for evaluations as members of

multidisciplinary teams or of a collaborative problem solving team (CPST) as well as

their knowledge of and feelings about instructional and assessment practices for English

learners.

Study Summary

The current study took place in the Wise School District (WSD) and used a

qualitative case study approach to describe teachers' understanding and perceptions of

instructional elements and assessment of the Response to Intervention framework related

to English learners during the 2013-2014 academic year. Ten teachers of grades

kindergarten through five were asked to participate in the study using a recruitment script

Eight of the 10 teachers agreed to participate in the study and signed an adult consent

form approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB). The teacher participants

represented both primary and intermediate grade levels: one kindergarten teacher, two

first grade teachers, two second grade teachers, and three third grade teachers. Each

teacher participated in two interview sessions. The first interview session was conducted

within the first six weeks of the academic year. The second interview session was conducted the two weeks prior to spring break. Each interview session lasted from 40 minutes to 1 hour and 5 minutes.

During the interview sessions, participants shared their knowledge of the Response to Intervention process, and how they felt about the process and their understanding of the process. Participants also shared experiences related to referrals for evaluation for struggling English learners as well as their experiences as a member of a multidisciplinary team. Participants also were asked to discuss policies and procedures used to dictate instruction of English learners and assessment and instructional practices related to English learners.

Research Questions

The research questions addressed in the study were:

1. What do elementary general education teachers know about the Response to Intervention (RtI) process for English learners?

2. How do elementary general education teachers report their interpretation of policies and procedures with respect to instruction and assessment of English learners, specifically relating to the Response to Intervention model?

3. How do elementary general education teachers feel about their understanding of Response to Intervention?

4. How do elementary general education teachers feel about their understanding of instruction and assessment for English learners?

Discussion of the Findings

Research Question 1

Research question one asked what general education teachers know about the Response to Intervention (RtI) process for English learners. Three categories were developed after the participant interviews were transcribed and analyzed: documents, RtI framework, and teacher practices.

Teacher knowledge of RtI document use. All participants made connections between the implementation of the RtI process and documents. The participant responses related to RtI documents addressed research question one about what general education teachers know about the Response to Intervention process for English learners. While all teacher participants mentioned documents during the interview sessions, the depth of description varied. The depth of descriptions related to the RtI documents may be attributed to the level of experience or comfort each teacher participant felt about the documents. During the initial contact using the recruitment script, all participants were asked to bring any documents used during the Response to Intervention process. Two out of eight participants brought copies of the documents to the interview session, while the remaining participants mentioned documents during the interview session. Since 25% of participants brought documents to the interview session, this suggests some things about teacher knowledge of the Response to Intervention process for English learners, with a specific connection to the documents used.

All teacher participants reported the use of documents during the Response to Intervention process. One may deduce that documents are an integral part of the RtI process based on the interview responses, although only a fraction of the teacher

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participants brought these documents to the interview session. One reason why the majority of teacher participants did not bring the documents to the interview sessions could be that teachers may not have physical ownership of the documents. Many of the documents used during the Response to Intervention process for students who are in intensive tier 2 or tier 3 interventions are collected by other members of CPST. Five of the participants reported that one specific document used during the RtI process, the student rating form, is returned to the ESE specialist for review. Based on participant responses, documents are an integral part of the RtI process. A suggestion for RtI practices at the school site may be to allow the teachers to have more access to the documents, instead of only the ESE specialist. There seems to be a disconnect between the completion of the documents and what use the documents serve in the instruction and assessment of the students who are involved in the process, especially students in the intensive tier 2 or 3 interventions.

The documents are used to progress monitor throughout the time that a student is involved in an intensive intervention and, if necessary, are used later to complete referral packets for formal evaluations. Teachers usually are not responsible for retaining these documents at this point; a designated member of CPST is responsible for these documents. Participant Three reported experience with completing the student rating form: "I complete it on my own…and then I turn it in before a meeting is ever conducted. And I give this back to the ESE specialist." Based on the responses of five of the teacher participants, the ESE specialist is the designated member of the CPST at the school site responsible for organizing Response to Intervention documents. While maintaining a certain level of document organization is important, it may be beneficial for teachers to

have a copy of the documents. Oftentimes the documents are developed as a result of an initial teacher referral; the teachers see a student concern and are held responsible for implementing interventions and progress monitoring. Therefore, it is important for them to be more involved in the process, including retention of documents and understanding the purpose of each RtI document.

Also, three teacher participants who expressed frustration with the completion of the teacher record form used during the RtI process mentioned that members of the CPST such as the school psychologist and the ESE specialist assisted them with the completion of the documents. Participant Two shared that "it's nice to have the ESE specialist there because they can help guide me in the right direction…for example, when I had an issue answering that question [hypothesis question on teacher record document] I came to her and I said I don't know what that means…and we sat down and talked about it and she explained it."

The assisting members of the CPST may have retained the documents for future use during meetings, progress monitoring, and the completion of referral packets. The nature of teacher responses related to completing RtI documents provided an insight into what general education teachers know about the RtI process, or research question one.

General education teacher participants may not feel comfortable with the documents used in the Response to Intervention process. Participant responses about documents addressed the question related to teacher knowledge of the RtI process for English learners, but also addressed the question related to teachers' feelings about their understanding of the RtI process as well as their feelings about their understanding of instruction and assessment for English learners, as demonstrated on the graphic

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organizer. Based on responses during the interview sessions, three teacher participants found document completion difficult. The two participants who brought documents to the interview sessions, as well as one of the participants who did not, cited the development of the hypothesis on the teacher record form to be a challenge. Participant One described the development of the hypothesis as "the big problem with the form" and Participant Eight expressed "frustration" with the development of the hypothesis. The absence of the actual documents during the interview sessions may suggest a general discomfort with the use of the documents during the RtI process for the teachers involved. McClain, Schmertizing, and Schmertzing (2012) conducted a similar study on the Response to Intervention process, with a focus on preschool teachers in a rural school district. The teacher participants in the study also expressed frustration with completing the RtI documents. One of the teachers reported that the RtI documents were "confusing" and that they feel that "we are using different words to talk about the same things" (McClain et al., 2012, p. 37). Another participant reported that they were "afraid that I might not do it right" (McClain et al., 2012, p. 37).

Based on participant responses, teachers rely heavily on documents during the Response to Intervention process. Participants used the following comments related to RtI documents: RtI documents "help me target," "answering the questions makes you think about specific things about the child you're writing this on," "it really lays out where the child is so someone who is not familiar with them can really see where they're at and what they're struggling with," and "this form is used to target where they need the most help." Based on information from the website for Florida's Multi-tiered System of Supports, RtI documentation was developed as a means for collecting data. When

considering participant responses, it seems as though the majority of student data analysis is completed when teachers are completing RtI documents. Teachers and, in turn, English learners, may be better served if more collaborative time with the CPST, or specific members of the team, was dedicated to the analysis of student data instead of leaving this important step to teachers.

While only two teacher participants brought documents to the interview sessions, all participants reported some level of use of RtI documents. The descriptions of the documents varied in depth. All teacher participants provided general mention of RtI documents. Two teachers brought copies of the documents and grouped the documents into categories: curricular material/resources, teacher referral forms, and progress monitoring. Teachers categorized the documents based on their perceived use of the documents. Four of the participants generally referred to documents or documentation as part of the RtI process, but did not name any specific documents or describe the use of the documents in depth during the interview sessions.

Overall, documents were mentioned frequently during the first interview sessions, but there was an ambiguity that existed among the teachers' reported use in the current study as well as the current research on Response to Intervention related to documents and documentation. There is limited research that addresses the RtI documents specifically. For example, McClain et al. (2012) conducted research on the implementation of the Response to Intervention process in a rural preschool program. The abstract mentioned that documents like RtI referral forms were collected as forms of data for the study; however, RtI referral forms were not mentioned in the body of the document. An article reporting research conducted by Byrd (2011) on the school's role in

the Response to Intervention process also mentioned RtI documents generally throughout the document, but never made mention of specific documents or the use of the RtI documents. These studies help to demonstrate the gaps in current research on RtI documents. The studies also mentioned documents as a part of the study, but never addressed the specific use of the documents or made recommendations for best practices related to RtI documents. There is a need for further research on the effective use of documents in the RtI process, including the support and professional development that teachers need to complete the documents and practices for maintaining the documents in order to facilitate the process.

The researcher conducted a second round of interviews using a second interview protocol in order to gain more in depth information about instructional practices for English learners. The additional data provided an enriched understanding of what teachers know about the RtI process for English learners and helped to address the first research question. The additional interview questions addressed documents used during the RtI process, specifically the student rating form and teacher record form. Interview questions one and two of the second interview protocol asked teachers to review blank copies of the student rating form and the teacher record form and to describe their use of the document, if applicable. Teacher participants also were asked to describe the use of any documents that they brought to the first and second interview sessions.

Teacher knowledge of key elements of RtI. All teacher participants mentioned key elements of the Response to Intervention process during the two interview sessions. Participants shared their knowledge of the RtI process for English learners through their description of the process, addressing the first research question. Interview questions one

and three on the first interview protocol and questions one, two, and three on the second interview protocol addressed teacher participants' knowledge of the RtI process. Interview question three on the second interview protocol reflected the connection between the participant responses from the first interview session and information from the National Center on Response to Intervention. The teacher participants were asked to make connections between important elements of RtI: three tiers of RtI, evidence-based interventions, data and data collection, and progress monitoring.

Teacher understanding of tiered interventions. During the first interview session, Participant Seven shared an important element of the format of the RtI process: "Everyone in your class is really in RtI because everyone in your class is tier one, at first…If their needs are not being met, you go on to the next tier." During the second interview session, Participant Seven provided additional information on their knowledge of the three tiers of RtI:

> Every student is a tier one student. If the student is having trouble with tier one curriculum, then you go to a tier two by using the struggling reading chart to see what a tier two student is…Those students are double dosed so they're in a regular reading group and then pulled for their tier two intervention. And the teacher's keeping track of how they're doing in that intervention and seeing if it's helping in their tier one curriculum. If it's not…then you go to a tier three intervention.

Participant Seven expressed confidence in knowledge of the tiered structure of the RtI process.

Not all participants expressed a clear understanding of the progression of the RtI tiers. Participant Two stated that he/she felt "confused" about when it was appropriate to proceed from one tier to the next. Participant Two questioned: "What tier one is as opposed to tier two, how long do you do each one?" In the second interview session, Participant Eight reported, "I guess, I got confused with the whole leveling system. If they have to be…you know…tier one…you have to progress through it even though…I thought right off the bat that they were already tier 3." Participant Four shared his/her "interpretation" of the tiered structure of the RtI process: "Tier one, to me, is information that you give all of your students. Tier 2 would be…or am I going to mix it up…tier 2 would be vocabulary words or more specific to say science or social studies and you give that, you may not give as much to tier 2 students as you would to the rest of your class that are on level."

These responses addressed participants' reported knowledge of the Response to Intervention process for English learners, or the first research question. The nature of the responses provided by Participants Two, Four, and Eight demonstrated an uncertainty of the tiered structure of RtI and the appropriate progression of students through each tier. The three participants' responses also addressed the third research question inquiring how elementary general education teachers feel about their understanding of Response to Intervention.

Researchers have attempted to address the progression of the RtI process. Decisions about interventions are based on student assessment data; if students are not responding to current instruction, then it is appropriate for students to move on to the next tier (Ardoin et al., 2005; Denton, 2012). Further research conducted on the Response to

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Intervention process recommends that the implementation of interventions should be provided for a "reasonable amount of time" before proceeding to the next tier and providing the student with more intensive interventions (Gersten et al., 2008, p. 26). Wanzek and Vaughn (2007) stated a more specific timeframe, 20 weeks, for the most effective implementation of early childhood reading interventions. Given the ambiguity about the expected timeframe for each RtI tier, one would expect some confusion about when students should move from one tier to the next. Teachers in the current study may not be comfortable deciding how long a student should be instructed using a specific intervention before they are able to determine that the intervention is not working and they should move on to a more intensive intervention.

Teacher knowledge of evidence-based interventions. All participants spoke about the use of interventions as part of the Response to Intervention process. According to the National Center on Response to Intervention (2012), evidence-based interventions are an important element of the RtI process. Participant One credited the use of a targeted intervention for improving a struggling English learner's reading skills. Another participant, Participant Seven, noted that the interventions used for English learners also were beneficial for the instruction of native English speakers. Participant Eight named specific interventions used for struggling English learners during the second interview session and stated that he/she thought that the interventions were "beneficial" for students who are English learners.

During the second interview session, the participants were asked to discuss *evidence-based* interventions as part of the list of important elements of RtI compiled from participant responses in the first interview and from information from the National

Center on Response to Intervention. During the second interview session, Participant

Eight reported using interventions such as the evidence-based interventions Fundations,

Touch Math, and Handwriting Without Tears. During the second interview session,

Participant Two reported using interventions like Fundations, but spoke about providing

interventions to students "whether or not other people are saying that is what they need"

because "I know, as the teacher and as someone who is working with a child every single

day, that that is what they need." Participant One reported using the Write In Reader

program, which is part of the basal reading series, to help address the needs of English

learners in the classroom, but also spoke about using other programs that may not be

evidence-based to address language deficits. "I've also done other things like that we

don't really have that have to do with the English language like idioms so that they

understand multiple meaning words and using those picture clues and doing that

vocabulary with pictures." Participants described the use of evidence-based interventions

like Fundations and Touch Math, which helped to demonstrate those participants'

understanding of the evidence-based element of the RtI process, addressing research

question one.

A fraction of the participants also mentioned the use of interventions that are not

recognized as evidence-based, such as teacher-developed activities involving idioms and

other skills that teacher participants want to emphasize for struggling English learners.

There may be a few reasons why teacher participants reported the use of interventions

that are not recognized as evidence-based. Teacher participants may not have internalized

the importance of using evidence-based interventions for struggling students and further

professional development emphasizing the importance of evidence-based interventions

implemented with fidelity may be helpful. Participant Seven provided some insight into a potential reason why teacher participants may implement interventions that are not recognized as evidence-based: a lack of resources. Participant Seven reported that there was an evidence-based intervention that he/she had previous experience using and felt that his/her English learners would benefit from the intervention strategies. However, he/she could not implement it because the school did not have all of the materials necessary for implementation. An important factor in implementing interventions with fidelity is having all of the necessary components of the intervention available to teachers. Without the necessary components, teachers are at a disadvantage and may have to develop their own interventions or modify the implementation of an otherwise evidence-based intervention to help address student concerns.

Participant Two provided another perspective on the use of interventions that are not recognized as evidence-based for struggling English learners. Participant Two reported that he/she provided certain interventions and strategies "whether or not other people are saying that is what they need." The participant cited that he/she was qualified to make that determination because he/she was "the one working with a child every single day" and that he/she could determine that "that is what they need." It is suggested that a certain level of professionalism be granted to teachers to collect the data, to monitor student progress, and to determine what will work best to address specific student concerns. As Participant Seven noted, teachers are responsible for determining whether students require intensive interventions; teachers then are responsible for implementing the interventions and for monitoring student progress for identified students. With that level of accountability, it is suggested that teachers be able to rely on

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their professional judgment to determine which interventions are implemented for struggling students. Teachers may benefit from professional development that focuses on progress monitoring, collecting data, and using the data that is collected to make instructional decisions for English learners.

Research question one asked what general education teachers know about the RtI process for English learners. Participant responses addressing an important element of RtI, evidence-based interventions, addressed the first research question. Teacher participant knowledge of RtI and evidence-based interventions are part of the effective implementation of the RtI process. The barriers previously described, such as limited resources and questionable trust of educational practitioners, may be addressed in order to ensure even more effective implementation of the RtI process. Successful implementation of the RtI process will positively impact appropriate instructional planning for English learners and help to address the disproportionate placement of English learners in special education programs due to ineffective instructional practices.

Teacher knowledge of data collection. Research conducted on the use of interventions through the RtI process targets the importance of data for the implementation of effective interventions. Abbott and Wills (2012) reported that the best student outcomes are a result of data-driven decision-making. Teachers play an important role in the successful implementation of interventions through the RtI process; the success of an intervention is dependent upon the quality of teacher implementation, with a specific focus on implementing the intervention with fidelity (Abbot & Wills, 2012; Chamberlain, 2010). Gaining teacher knowledge of data collection as a part of the RtI process is an important step in addressing the first research question about teacher

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knowledge of the Response to Intervention process for English learners. The current study gained teacher knowledge of data collection as part of the RtI process for English learners through teacher interviews. Teacher understanding of data collection in order to inform effective instruction for struggling English learners positively impacts appropriate instructional decisions for English learners and helps to avoid inappropriate special education placement.

Data collection is another important element of the Response to Intervention process, based on information from the National Center on Response to Intervention. Abbott and Wills (2012) reported that optimal student outcomes are a result of data driven instruction and interventions. Teacher participants shared their knowledge of the RtI process during the interview sessions by describing their experiences with data collection and RtI. The information provided addressed the first research question inquiring about what teachers know about the Response to Intervention process for English learners. Participants reported meeting with the CPST to review data to plan instruction and interventions and to determine if an intervention is successful. Denton (2012) reported that the main purpose of Response to Intervention is to identify at-risk students and provide them with evidence-based, data-informed interventions before the struggling students fall further behind. During the first interview session, Participant Eight reported that despite being provided with interventions during the RtI process, "They get further and further behind in the two years it takes you to get through the process where you find out what kind of extra help they need." Throughout the Response to Intervention process, the student is provided with interventions and progress is monitored in order to address the specific needs of the student. There is paucity in the

current research related to a timeline for data collection. Teacher participants reported that it took an extended period of time to meet the needs of struggling students appropriately because, while the teacher had to collect data for progress monitoring purposes, the student was falling further and further behind. There is no prescribed time for data collection in the RtI process; instead a "reasonable" amount of time is recommended for a data collection timeline (Gersten et al., 2008, p. 26). The ambiguous recommendations for the amount of time data should be collected to monitor student progress may leave teachers feeling unsure of their practices. Unclear data collection procedures and growing teacher accountability can only add to the anxiety that teacher participants reported regarding meeting struggling students' needs in an appropriate amount of time. Further research is needed to identify effective supports for teachers for data collection. Further information also is needed to help support teachers understand appropriate data collection procedures specifically for English learners to address instructional planning concerns. Teachers expressed specific concern with understanding the results of assessments for English learners and interpreting whether English learners were struggling because of limited English proficiency or inappropriate instructional support. Teachers may feel more comfortable and knowledgeable about how to meet the needs of struggling English learners if they have prescribed guidelines to follow for data collection or confidence that they will be able to make an informed decision as a professional. Teachers may benefit from professional development focused on data collection: what data to collect, effective tools to use for data collection, analyzing and interpreting data, and using the data to make instructional decisions for English learners.

Teacher knowledge of the impact of assessments on instruction. Research

conducted by Bianco (2010) highlighted the importance of teacher use of assessments to

impact instruction; in order to have a positive impact on teaching, teachers need to

understand how to use multiple types of data to inform one's teaching practice. Teacher

responses about assessments helped to provide insight into their knowledge of the RtI

process for English learners, the focus of the first research question. Educators use the

information gathered through the use of assessments to inform instructional decisions.

Teacher knowledge of assessment data is an important factor to predict effective

instructional planning. In the current study, Participant Four reported that he/she used

"test results, standardized tests, quizzes I give, observations" to determine the

implementation of an academic intervention. Fuchs and Fuchs (2006) reported that most

Response to Intervention assessments are used for progress monitoring; the information

impacts decisions and modifications about intervention programs and instructional

approaches.

Teacher knowledge of data collection, progress monitoring, and uses for

instruction. Progress monitoring is an important element of the Response to Intervention

process and data collection helps educators not only monitor progress but also inform

instruction (National Center on Response to Intervention, 2012). Data-driven instruction

is an effective way to impact student achievement (Abbott & Wills, 2012). Participant

One reported using research-based resources to make instructional decisions. Participant

One reported that "we look at the struggling reader's chart for interventions…and that's

how we determine what program to do next." Participant Two also made the connection

between data collection and making instructional decisions: "Start by determining which

intervention would best suit that area and again we start collecting data. We meet again after a certain amount of time and look over the data to see if the intervention is working or not."

Based on a report by the U.S. Department of Education [USDOE] (2008), teacher confidence about knowledge of data analysis and interpretation impacts the teacher's rate of data use to make instructional decisions. A study conducted by the U.S. Department of Education (2011) addressed educational data collection and decision-making. The study involved interviews with teachers conducted individually and in cadres. Included in the findings were that teachers generally were able to locate information but had difficulty answering questions involving the manipulation and comparison of complex data (USDOE, 2011). A response from Participant Two provided similar sentiments about data collection and analysis for the purpose of instructional planning. Participant Two addressed these findings during his/her interview session: "Data collection is easy for me, I can give you ten scores, but I have a hard time using the data to determine what data suggests is the likely cause of the problem." Participant Two expressed comfort with the actual data collection, but difficulty with the analysis of the data that is collected. A possible recommendation is to provide teachers with additional support and professional development aimed at data collection and analysis for the purposes of instructional planning. The North Carolina Teacher Academy developed a learning module in collaboration with Jennifer Morrison, a consultant specializing in school processes and classroom data and assessment (Morrison, 2009). The school administrators in the district wanted a way to help teachers interpret learning results and teachers in the district demonstrated a need to understand all of the data that was being collected (Morrison,

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2009). The team in North Carolina developed a learning module for both teachers and administrators in an effort to provide training on analyzing student data and how to use the data once it is analyzed (Morrison, 2009). A similar recommendation could be made for the teachers and administrators in the Wise School District. Teacher participants may benefit from the support of an expert in school systems and data. The support of an expert in this particular area would provide the necessary knowledge of how to collect data effectively, how to analyze the data, and how to put it into practice in the classroom. It also is important for any professional development and support to consider the unique needs of culturally and linguistically diverse students. The teacher participants' reported comfort level and self-efficacy provided insight into what they know about the RtI process for English learners, as well as how they feel about their understanding of instruction for English learners, addressing research question one as well as research question three.

The research conducted by the U.S. Department of Education (2011) also provided information about perceived understanding of test validity and reliability. The teacher participants in that study expressed limited understanding of test validity, score reliability, and measurement error, which can lead to invalid analysis and inferences of test results (USDOE, 2011). It is important to understand test validity, reliability, and measurement error when analyzing test results for students from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Teachers may not understand the implications of using the same assessments for all students, including English learners. Educators may consider various assessment tools for English learners or a modified interpretation of assessments for English learners. Professional development and supports also could focus on the specific

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assessments and interpretation of assessments that would address the needs of English learners in order to make effective instructional decisions.

Progress monitoring may seem straightforward; the tool used to monitor progress should be targeting the specific student concern addressed through the intensive intervention. As Participant Seven noted, however, there is confusion about the interpretation and measurement of student progress. Participant Seven shared experiences about struggling English learners showing growth when the progress monitoring tool was focused on the specific area of concern. However, the student growth was not as apparent when the team compared the student's data to the performance of grade-level peers. Teachers may find clearer guidelines for progress monitoring helpful when interpreting student growth. Guidelines for progress monitoring may be prescribed with caution, as rigid guidelines may inhibit the goal of individualizing intensive interventions for struggling students.

Suggestions for future research. Given the findings of the current study, questions arise for future research or further review. Researchers could ask teacher participants about their feelings on data collection, with a specific focus on data analysis and interpretation of the data collected. Teacher preparation could focus on data collection and analysis through professional development and ongoing support. Teachers could benefit from more effective systems for data collection. The study conducted by the U.S. Department of Education (2009) found that there was an increase in teacher access to student data systems; however, there was a limited connection between the data and classroom instruction.

Teacher participants in the U.S. Department of Education study reported issues with data collection, including frustration with lack of training on the data system to use it to get information, lack of time to search through the data systems, and limited useful or pertinent information on the data systems (USDOE, 2009). Districts involved in the study conducted by the U.S. Department of Education (2009) reported that six out of nine districts have district-funded, school-based staff to help teachers with data. The support from the district staff varied; some staff got the data and helped teachers analyze and interpret the data in order to inform instructional decisions while some staff taught teachers how to analyze the data and held informal sessions to help teachers analyze and make connections between data and instructional decisions (USDOE, 2009).

Research Question 2

Research question two asked how elementary general education teachers report their interpretation of policies and procedures with respect to instruction and assessment of English learners, specifically relating to the Response to Intervention model. Eight general education teachers participated in two interview sessions where they were asked to discuss their interpretation of policies and procedures with respect to instruction and assessment of English learners. Questions six and seven on the first interview protocol and questions four, five, and six on the second interview protocol addressed the second research question. Two categories were developed from the list of codes: instructional policies/procedures and assessment policies/procedures.

During the first interview session, teacher participants were asked to describe the policies and procedures that would dictate instruction of English learners. A majority of participants seemed unclear about policies and procedures for instruction of English

learners and asked for clarification of the question. When participants asked for clarification, the researcher asked participants to describe what their instruction would look like for English learners in their classrooms. The participants then went on to describe instructional strategies, including strategies that are listed on the ESOL Instructional Strategies Matrix provided by the school district. Participants seemed more comfortable discussing their instruction for English learners when asked to describe their instruction. Participants Two and Three reported the use of cooperative groups when instructing English learners; this instructional strategy is listed on the ESOL Instructional Strategies Matrix as Interactive Strategies & Cooperative Learning Settings: Peer Pair. Participant Four described how they expected students for the upcoming year to do more "acting out" or Interactive Strategies & Cooperative Learning Settings: Role Play. Depending on the student's English proficiency, Participant Six provides repeated instructions, as indicated on the matrix, Instructional Modifications Based on Level of English Proficiency: Use of Substitution, Expansion, Paraphrase, Repetition. Participants One, Two, and Six described visual supports for English learners; Participant Six said that "depending on the child, I actually go over and model it" while Participant Two uses "a lot of physical movements to explain what I'm saying to them in English." The strategies the participants reported using are also listed on the matrix as Instructional Modifications Based on Level of English Proficiency: Modeling. Throughout the first interview session, teachers described instructional strategies that are listed on the matrix provided by the district. Participants may not have been comfortable using the technical terms for the policies and procedures for instruction of English learners, but the teachers

were able to describe district recommended strategies that were put into practice in their classrooms.

Based on the information provided by teacher participants during the first interview session, the researcher developed additional questions and used a second interview protocol during the second round of interviews. During the second round of interviews, teachers were provided with a copy of the Comprehensive Program Requirements and Student Instruction section of the ESOL Department Handbook for them to review and discuss. The document also included a copy of the ESOL Instructional Strategies Matrix. Teacher participants were asked to describe how the requirements outlined in the section are implemented for English learners in their classrooms. All teacher participants provided specific examples of ESOL instructional strategies implemented in their classrooms, which correlated with the ESOL Instructional Strategies Matrix. Their responses addressed the second research question inquiring how elementary general education teachers report their interpretation of policies and procedures with respect to instruction and assessment of English learners, specifically relating to the Response to Intervention process.

Participants also were asked to describe policies and procedures for assessing English learners in order to address research question two. The ESOL Instructional Strategies Matrix lists alternative assessment instruments in addition to instructional practices for English learners. Participant Three felt that appropriate modifications or instruments are not implemented for assessing English learners in her classroom: "From what I understand, I was supposed to be provided by the district a foreign language dictionary or something that he was able to use throughout the school year and then on

the test and that never happened." The use of a dictionary is listed on the matrix as Instructional Modifications based on Level of English Proficiency: Bilingual Dictionary. Participant Three was aware of this strategy for instruction and assessment, but does not implement it due to lack of resources. The participant was unaware of how to acquire district approved resources to assist in the effective instruction and assessment of English learners. Further investigation may be needed to help teachers make the connections between policies and practice, with a specific focus on the practical applications and steps necessary to implement strategies. Participant Six explicitly described alternative assessments listed on the matrix: "Using a lot more portfolio assessments and project-based learner, it's going to be more helpful" and that portfolio assessments and project-based learning is more appropriate for assessing English learners than a "pen or pencil test." The strategies that Participant Six described for assessing English learners are listed on the matrix as Alternative Assessment Instruments: Portfolio. Six of the eight teacher participants reported that they used the ESOL Instructional Strategies Matrix document when planning their instruction and assessments for English learners.

Research Question 3

Research question three asked how elementary general education teachers feel about their understanding of Response to Intervention. Eight general education teachers participated in two interview sessions to provide information to address the research question. Teacher participants discussed reported their feelings about their understanding of RtI. The researcher analyzed the data derived from the interviews and developed three categories from a list of codes: benefits of RtI, drawbacks of RtI, and professional development and support for RtI.

Participants described positive aspects of the Response to Intervention process during the interview sessions. One of the benefits of the RtI process for participants was the perception that it helped to screen students for disabilities sooner. A study conducted by Swanson, Solis, Ciullo, and McKenna (2012) gained special education teachers' perspectives on the Response to Intervention process. The special education teachers expressed appreciation of early identification of academic needs before struggling students fell further behind (Swanson et al., 2012). Participant Two also finds it helpful to come together to discuss student concerns. "Everyone sits down at that moment and discusses what the problem is…how we are going to address the problem and then we come back again after we have tried some interventions and we talk about what's going on." Participant Seven expressed that he/she "learned a lot" through the "necessary process" and appreciated that a team of educators comes together "for the benefit of the student." Participant One provided a positive aspect of the RtI process and the help of the team in developing the hypothesis, and specifically mentioned that the school psychologist was a helpful member of the team. Teacher participants reported perceptions of positive aspects of the Response to Intervention process, including the opinion that they "learned a lot" by going through the process and that they received support from the team to help meet the needs of English learners in their classrooms.

Teacher participants also expressed negative perceptions of the Response to Intervention process. Participants reported that it takes too long for students to go through the RtI process. Participant Five stated that "the ESOL students…it's strange when they're tied up with RtI." Participant Eight reported "I think it takes way too long for a child to get through RtI." Participant Four reported that there are "too many steps now."

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McClain et al. (2012) reported similar sentiments about the Response to Intervention process; teacher participants in their study reported that RtI had "too many steps and it takes too long." The Response to Intervention process includes the instruction of all students, not just struggling students. Teachers reported that it "takes too long" for students to "go through" the RtI process; but what is the final destination that teachers have in mind once students "go through" the process? Do teachers perceive the Response to Intervention process only as a means to refer students for psychological evaluations or special education placement instead of a way to meet the instructional needs of all students?

Teacher participants also expressed concern with their own knowledge of the Response to Intervention process. Participants in the study conducted by McClain et al. (2012) also reported discomfort with the implementation of the RtI process. Participants in related studies reported "I'm afraid I might not do it right" and that they felt "woefully unprepared" (McClain et al., 2012). Participant Six reported confusion about English learners in RtI and the terms used: "I get the feeling that the terms change all the time and sometimes people may get a little confused." Participant Three stated "I think acronyms change and terms change and people get lost trying to keep up with what this means and what that means…doesn't seem to be consistency with that." McClain et al. (2012) reported similar findings: "The paperwork is confusing and sometimes I think we are using different words to talk about the same things."

All teacher participants in the current study mentioned documents or paperwork in their interview responses. Participant Five explicitly stated that RtI requires "a lot of paperwork." Participant Two reported that "There's a lot of paperwork…it's the 15-

question forms…which takes more time for me.…It's taking away from my teaching time, my planning time." During the second interview session, Participant Two was confusing the documents during the discussion and explained, "Sometimes it can get like you are getting papers shoved at you. Especially when you have a child going through the RtI process and will be further tested." Dr. Hammill, a scholar of special education, stated that RtI requires "considerable paperwork related to recording, charting children's progress, and other activities not commonly encountered by teachers" (Chamberlain, 2010, p. 314). Swanson et al. (2012) also noted that the paperwork and documentation required for the RtI process added to the already stressed schedules of teachers involved in the study.

Teacher participants reported difficulty with addressing the hypothesis of why the student is struggling. Participant One perceives that teachers are "writing the hypothesis incorrectly." Participant Eight was frustrated with the development of the hypothesis because "if I knew what was causing the problem…I'd be able to address the problem myself. I have a question about why they are struggling because I don't know what's causing it." Oftentimes, educators are accustomed to addressing student deficits without examining the instructional context and learning environment (Harry & Klingner, 2006; Orosco & Klingner, 2010). Teachers must examine the current instruction instead of singularly focusing on possible deficits within the struggling student (Harry & Klingner, 2006; Orosco & Klingner, 2010). When teachers only focus on possible deficits with the student and do not examine current instruction, the development of a hypothesis will be difficult. Teachers may benefit from determining a possible deficit in instruction and the impact that it has on student progress. It may be beneficial when teachers can focus the

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hypothesis on factors within their control, not socioeconomic status or cultural linguistic diversity. Educators need to take context into consideration; this consideration is lacking specifically in schools with cultural and linguistic diversity (Orosco & Klingner, 2010; Xu & Drame, 2008).

All participants spoke about their experiences with the collaborative problem solving team, or CPST, during the interview sessions. Participants noted that CPST meetings helped to provide reassurance to teachers, as well as validate concerns that teachers have about struggling students. One of the fine points of CPST was the collaborative nature of the team meetings. Participant Two spoke about meetings with the team to make decisions on instruction for struggling students: "Everyone sits down at that moment and discusses what the problem is…we come back again after we have tried some interventions and we talk about what's going on." Teacher participants found team meetings helpful and reported that they learned from others on the team. Participant Five also described the collaborative nature of CPST meetings and shared that they met with the team to determine the level of need for a struggling student and developed interventions together during meetings. In a related study, special education teachers also felt that CPST meetings were positive experiences and appreciated working collaboratively with colleagues like interventionists, administrators, and counselors to discuss struggling students and work together to make instructional decisions (Swanson et al., 2012).

While teacher participants found working with the CPST to be a benefit of the RtI process, it is important to assure that teachers on the team feel that their judgment and knowledge is equally important and is used to contribute to the decision making process

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for students. The findings of the current study may suggest a lack of support in the understanding of the RtI process, including instruction and assessment related to English learners. The current study was conducted in one school and, if replicated, the findings of further studies may provide more data on how teachers feel about their understanding of the RtI process and their feelings about their role on the team. The findings of future research, in addition to the findings of the current study, may have policy implications related to teacher preparation related to the implementation of RtI as well as policies and procedures related to the instruction and assessment of English learners.

It is noteworthy to mention that while school administrators are part of the collaborative problem solving team, the participants did not specifically mention administrators during their interview sessions. There may be several reasons why teacher participants do not specifically mention school administrators as a support system through CPST. School administrators, along with teachers, are experiencing a change in accountability and increased expectations. School administrators may not have the time to dedicate to each meeting or supporting each teacher on targeting the individual needs of students. School administrators also may not have the professional development on data analysis and instructional decision making for English learners, making it difficult for the leaders of the school to support the teachers. The findings of the current study suggest that teachers may benefit from an increase in support from school administrators; the increase in support may be facilitated by the development of professional development for administrators.

While the teachers in the current study reported that many of their decisions about instruction for struggling students were made collaboratively, a study conducted by

Vineyard (2010) reported that teachers often make special education referral decisions on their own. While teachers in the current study spoke about working collaboratively to make instructional decisions about struggling students, they did not explicitly address making decisions about special education referrals. The instructional decision-making process that takes place throughout RtI and during CPST meetings is a precursor to special education referrals and the possible placement in special education programs.

RtI and special education identification. It may be difficult to miss the connection between the Response to Intervention process and special education identification. While educators may see the RtI process as a means to determine whether special education placement is necessary for struggling students, when students do not make progress after going through the RtI tiers it may not be a special education issue. Klingner and Edwards (2006) noted the importance of taking a closer look at the instruction instead of making the assumption that students are not making progress due to a deficit within the student. The current study gained an insight into teacher understanding of RtI process for English learners, the subject of the first research question.

Participant Three reported that RtI is "a way for us to track [student] progress and see what specific interventions may be for that specific student without just giving them a label right away." When implementing an intervention, one must consider factors that impact student success, such as diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Educators also may consider the difference between the ideal instructional environment used to develop an intervention or instructional program and the practical environment in which the instruction actually is taking place (Klingner & Harry, 2006).

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Three of the participants shared their perceptions on the professional development and support they have received for the Response to Intervention process. Participant Two reported that the CPST is a positive element of RtI provided by the district: "One thing that I do like that the district did with RtI is the team that comes along with the RtI process." Lee-Tarver (2006) reported the importance of teams to help address student needs and to review alternative instruction and supports for struggling students. Participants of the current study felt that training related to RtI is available. Participant Seven reported an improved understanding of the RtI process because of "a lot of workshops on the RtI process" conducted by the school psychologist. Participant One also reported receiving "training and support" and "modeling on how to make the charts" to address progress monitoring for RtI. Related studies reported mixed findings on professional development and supports related to RtI for teachers. A study conducted by McClain et al. (2012) reported that teachers felt "woefully unprepared" and that teachers "need more training about how to get this done" (p. 37). A study conducted by Lee-Tarver (2006) found that a large majority of teachers received training on the Response to Intervention process only after they were involved in the team. Based on the teacher responses in the current study, the teachers at the Wise School District feel adequately supported by the collaborative problem solving team (CPST), contrary to the findings in related studies. The research in the current study seems to indicate that teachers view the CPST, an important support system involved in the RtI framework, as a benefit. A recommendation for the Wise School District may be to provide the teachers with additional professional development and support related to instruction and assessment for English learners, and to involve the CPST as much as possible. It may be beneficial to

involve the current CPST to implement the professional development and supports considering the positive teacher responses related to the team; teachers seem to feel comfortable with the team and may be more receptive to programs developed and shared by the team.

The frustration and other drawbacks reported by the teacher participants may be a result of the misunderstanding or misconceptions of certain elements of the Response to Intervention process. Teacher responses related to feelings about their understanding of the Response to Intervention process addressed the third research question. Based on teacher responses during the interviews, teachers reported awareness of relatively new or unfamiliar practices related to Response to Intervention; using terms like *progress monitoring*, *data collection*, and *evidence-based interventions*. One participant, Participant Three, shared some insight into possible reasons for the emphasis on data collection during the Response to Intervention process:

> [Data collection] wasn't so necessary maybe a few years ago…they weren't
> having to show that they were doing RtI. They would maybe say, yeah, we're
> doing this, we do this, and maybe they weren't having to graph or show it on
> paper. I think…I get the feeling that the district is forcing us to prove it on paper
> that we are doing the process before we can label or place.

Some of the frustration that the teacher participants feel may derive from the shift in accountability compounded with the changes in instructional standards. Participant Eight shared a concern with students getting "further and further behind" while in intensive interventions addressed through RtI. Participant Seven expressed concern about students making progress but still functioning years behind in academic areas, and

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wondered how to demonstrate the progress shown through data collection while a student receives intensive intervention but is assessed in the same way that students who are instructed on level are assessed. Participant Seven shared his/her thoughts on demonstrating progress and accountability for students in RtI:

> The state, I'm saying, needs to recognize that we are meeting the students' needs but they're still not on grade level, stop punishing us for, you know, meeting the student's needs. You're helping them to make progress at their rate, then you are being…you are doing your job, but then they test them at the end of the year on grade level and they don't look so good. And you as a teacher can see their progress. And they get so frustrated. So if a student's an RtI student, I think that they should have an RtI test.

Participant Seven helped to verbalize some of the frustration that teacher participants may feel with the changes in education and the heightened focus on teacher accountability. The response provided information on how elementary general education teachers feel about their understanding of Response to Intervention. Given the growing emphasis on teacher accountability, governing bodies of education at the state and district level need to provide support and professional development to support teachers. The CPST may be a beneficial means of support for teachers for the purposes of providing additional help to teachers. It may be unfair to increase expectations without the adequate supports and professional development.

Participants perceived that the needs of the students are not necessarily being met through the RtI process, as they get "further and further behind" as a student goes through the RtI process. In response to the third research question, how do elementary general

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education teachers feel about their understanding of Response to Intervention, the teacher participants provided perceptions of the RtI process, including benefits, but also concerns and frustrations. Teachers reported that it takes "too much time" to "get through" the RtI process for struggling English learners; English learners "fall behind" because it takes an excessive amount of time to identify students. Participants shared areas of confusion, like the amount of acronyms and uncertainty about the procedures of the RtI process. The concerns described can be addressed through increased support and professional development to reduce any misconceptions about RtI and the most effective way to implement the process to help meet the needs of all students. Teacher participants reported their perceptions of the Response to Intervention process and provided an insight into their understanding of the RtI process. Teachers reported that the RtI process is beneficial for struggling English learners. The RtI framework includes targeted interventions for struggling students and participants perceived that RtI helps to identify students with disabilities earlier. Participants reported drawbacks related to RtI. The participants specifically focused on the collaborative problem solving team as a beneficial support system for teachers navigating the RtI process. Teacher participants learned about the RtI process by being involved in the process.

Research Question 4

Research question four asked how elementary general education teachers feel about their understanding of instruction and assessment for English learners. Eight teachers participated in two interview sessions where they were asked to describe their instructional and assessment practices for English learners. The researcher gathered the information gained during interview sessions and developed six categories from a list of

codes: language acquisition and learning disabilities, adjustment time for English learners, assessments for English learners, parental involvement and experiences, instruction for English learners, and professional development and support for instruction of English learners.

Half of the teacher participants provided concerns with their understanding of the language acquisition process. Participant Six shared that he/she tried to be "mindful" that "on the surface" students appear to comprehend and demonstrate proficiency in English, but that they may not have the "foundation" and that English learners "may not necessarily understand." Studies reviewed by Vineland (2010) concur with the sentiments shared by Participant Six: an adjustment period for English learners is necessary. The studies reviewed by Vineland (2010) also reported that there may be inaccuracies in distinguishing between language acquisition and learning disabilities. Educators often lack understanding of the language acquisition process, making instructional decision-making difficult for many teachers (Au, 2005; Baca & Cervantes, 2004; Orosco & Klingner, 2010). Klingner and Harry (2006) stated that educators often misinterpret a lack of full proficiency in English as low intelligence or as a learning disability. Participant Eight noted his/her opinion about struggling English learners: "I do not think the fact that he is having learning difficulties has anything to do with his ESOL-ness, I think, a lot of times, these difficulties…they may be actual learning disabilities. They speak some English at home." It may be difficult to miss the connection between the Response to Intervention process and special education identification. While educators may see the RtI process as a means to determine whether special education placement is necessary for struggling students, when students do not make progress after going

through the RtI tiers it may not be a special education issue. Klingner and Edwards (2006) noted the importance of taking a closer look at the instruction instead of making the assumption that students are not making progress due to a deficit within the student. The current study gained an insight into teacher understanding of RtI process for English learners, the subject of the first research question.

Participant Three reported that RtI is "a way for us to track [student] progress and see what specific interventions may be for that specific student without just giving them a label right away." When implementing an intervention, one must consider factors that impact student success, such as diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Educators also may consider the difference between the ideal instructional environment used to develop an intervention or instructional program and the practical environment in which the instruction actually is taking place (Klingner & Harry, 2006).

When teacher participants were asked to discuss their feelings about the instruction of English learners, some of the participants expressed frustration. Participant Three reported a perceived lack of communication with the support staff at the school and district level. Participant Three felt that he/she was "winging it…hoping that something worked" when instructing English learners in the class. Participant Three also reported that he/she received no help when making instructional decisions for English learners and that he/she was just "figuring it out." While Participant Three did report feeling underprepared and unsupported, the participant did note that he/she participated in ESOL classes as a requirement for the ESOL endorsement. Related studies found that teachers are inadequately prepared to instruct English learners (Menken & Antunez, 2001; Orosco & Klingner, 2010). Teachers are charged with instructing English learners, but are not

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well versed in effective instructional and assessment practices for English learners (Au, 2005; Baca & Cervantes, 2004; Orosco & Klingner, 2010). Participant Three felt unprepared for effective instruction of English learners, and Orosco and Klingner (2010) would agree: teacher education and preservice professional development do not adequately prepare teachers to understand the intricacies of teaching English learners to read in a language other than their heritage language. Based on the findings of the current study, overall, teacher participants were not comfortable with their knowledge of the language acquisition process for English learners and the implementation of the assessment and instruction related to students who are English learners. The findings suggest a need for improvement in the level of supports for teachers to address the unique needs of culturally and linguistically diverse students. Teachers potentially serve as one of the most important team members involved in a student's educational planning and may need to be better prepared to meet the demands of a complex, and growing, student population. Teachers may be faced with increased expectations and accountability; their position may be best served with improved supports and professional development to facilitate their role in effectively educating English learners. Ideally, supports, teacher preparation and professional development will provide general education teachers with improved self-efficacy related to the instruction and assessment of English learners while provided teachers with increased professional autonomy. Based on the responses of teacher participants, teachers do not feel comfortable making decisions based on their own assessment results, placing the teachers at a disadvantage. Teachers are accountable for instructing and assessing culturally and linguistically diverse students, but may not

receive the requisite supports for the effective implementation of instruction and assessment of complex learners.

Participant Three mentioned that he/she got good "ideas" and "knowledge" about instruction from the ESOL courses, but only took the courses after receiving a letter from the district notifying that he/she was out of field because she did not have an ESOL endorsement. After the courses were completed, Participant Three felt that he/she still was not prepared or supported in instructing English learners; there was no follow through or further support at the school or district level. Participants felt uncertain and unsupported in instruction of English learners despite reports of professional development courses provided by the district. A suggestion for further investigation would be teacher expectations for professional development and support for the effective instruction of English learners.

Conclusion

The findings of the current study demonstrate the complex nature of the instruction of English learners and the implementation of the Response to intervention process**.** Culturally and linguistically diverse students have been disproportionately placed in special education programs for decades (Artiles et al., 2005; Klingner et al., 2005). Students placed in special education programs may not receive appropriate instruction or may not be provided access to the appropriate general education curriculum (Klingner et al., 2005). The Response to Intervention process provides a framework to help identify struggling students, provides research-based interventions, and impacts the ongoing instructional decision-making process with careful progress monitoring (National Center on Response to Intervention, 2012). The purpose of the current study

was to describe elementary general education teachers' understanding and perceptions of instructional elements and assessment practices within the implementation of the Response to Intervention framework.

In the current study, elementary general education teachers reported knowledge of basic elements of the Response to Intervention process, although they also expressed frustration and limited self-efficacy when putting elements of the RtI process into practice. Teacher participants shared perceived positive and negative aspects of the Response to Intervention process.

Based on the findings of the current study, participants reported that the RtI framework included multiple tiers and progression through the tiers indicated more intensive interventions for students. Three of the participants expressed uncertainty about when students should proceed to the next tier, or more intensive intervention. Related studies provided a range of recommendations for when students should proceed to the next tier or when the intervention should intensify. Based on the RtI framework, educators must use progress monitoring tools to determine the effectiveness of current instruction and whether a more intensive intervention is necessary. A clearer understanding of progress monitoring and data collection may make instructional decision-making easier and more concrete for educators who find the progression through the tiers of RtI ambiguous. Teacher participants offered their knowledge of the Response to Intervention process for English learners during the two interview sessions.

Based on the current findings, elementary general education teacher participants were able to describe their interpretation of instructional procedures. All teachers described using instructional strategies that were explicitly stated on the district's ESOL

Instructional Strategies Matrix, although only six out of eight participants had possession of the ESOL Instructional Strategies Matrix in their classrooms. The teacher participants reported their interpretation of policies and procedures with respect to instruction and assessment of English learners, specifically relating to the RtI model during the interview sessions. During the second interview session, teacher participants reviewed copies of two sections of the ESOL Handbook: the Comprehensive Program Requirements and Student Instruction section and the Statewide Assessments and Accommodations section. The teachers reviewed and reacted to the requirements outlined in the sections, providing specific examples of their interpretation of those policies and procedures in their classrooms.

Participants described their feelings about their understanding of the RtI process. Based on current findings, teacher participants have mixed feelings about the Response to Intervention process. Teachers appreciated the perceived effect of interventions developed through the RtI process for struggling English learners. Teachers felt that it took too much time for students to "get through" the RtI process. Based on these findings, it appears that teachers view the RtI process as a barrier to get through instead of a framework to help address student needs with research-based interventions and to monitor student progress. Teacher participants perceived that the RtI process involves too much paperwork and elements of the paperwork, specifically the hypothesis, were difficult to develop. Teacher participants felt uncomfortable with completing the documents and analyzing data in order to address items like the hypothesis. Teacher participants felt that CPST meetings were positive experiences and provided teachers with support and collaboration with different school and district staff members. Teacher

participants found these meetings to be beneficial when making decisions about the instruction and interventions for struggling English learners; teachers felt well supported by the team.

Teacher participants were asked to share their feelings about their understanding of instruction and assessment of English learners. Overall, teachers were unsure of their knowledge about the language acquisition process. Teachers were not confident that they would be able to determine the difference between the language acquisition process and a learning disability. Based on the findings of related studies, teachers are not adequately prepared to address the unique needs of English learners learning how to read and how to function academically in an additional language to their heritage language. One teacher participant specifically addressed preparation and efficacy related to the assessment of English learners; even though the teacher participated in district developed coursework for teachers of English learners, the participant felt unprepared to address the instructional and assessment needs of English learners. Related studies concur that most inservice professional development and teacher preparation programs designed to address the instruction of English learners are not preparing teachers adequately to meet the needs of a culturally and linguistically diverse student population.

APPENDICES

Appendix A

FAU IRB Approval

Institutional Review Board
Mailing Address:
Division of Research
777 Glades Rd., SU-80, Suite 106
Boca Raton, FL 33431

Tel: 561.297.0777 Fax: 561.297.2573

http://www.fau.edu/research/researchint
Nancy Aaron Jones, Ph.D., Chair

DATE: April 29, 2013

TO: Gail Burnaford
FROM: Florida Atlantic University IRB

IRBNET ID #:   428922-2
PROTOCOL TITLE: [428922-2] Teacher Perceptions of Response to Intervention for English Learners

PROJECT TYPE: New Project
ACTION: APPROVED

APPROVAL DATE: April 29, 2013
EXPIRATION DATE: April 28, 2014

REVIEW TYPE: Expedited Review
REVIEW CATEGORY: Expedited review category # B7

Thank you for your submission of Other materials for this research study. The Florida Atlantic University IRB has APPROVED your New Project. This approval is based on an appropriate risk/benefit ratio and a study design wherein the risks have been minimized. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

- This study is approved for a maximum of **15** subjects.
- Please submit a copy of the ▉▉▉▉▉▉ School District IRB approval letter to FAU once secured.
- It is important that you use the approved, stamped consent documents or procedures included with this letter.
- **Please note that any revision to previously approved materials or procedures, including modifications to numbers of subjects, must be approved by the IRB before it is initiated.** Please use the amendment form to request IRB approval of a proposed revision.
- All SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported to this office. Please use the appropriate adverse event forms for this procedure. All regulatory and sponsor reporting requirements should also be followed, if applicable.
- Please report all NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this study to this office.
- Please note that all research records must be retained for a minimum of three years.
- **This approval is valid for one year.** A Continuing Review form will be required prior to the expiration date if this project will continue beyond one year.

Generated on IRBNet

If you have any questions or comments about this correspondence, please contact Elisa Gaucher at:

Institutional Review Board
Research Integrity/Division of Research
Florida Atlantic University
SU-80, Suite 106
Boca Raton, FL 33431
Phone: 561-297-0777

* Please include your protocol number and title in all correspondence with this office.

**This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations,
and a copy is retained within our records.**

Generated on IRBNet

Appendix B

District Approval

August 7, 2013

Mrs. Tiffany McCahill

■

Dear Mrs. McCahill:

Thank you for submitting your research proposal, #753 — *Teacher Perceptions of Response to Intervention for English Learners* — for consideration by ■ ■ Staff has reviewed your research proposal and approval has been granted for you to *contact* ■

This approval means that we have found your proposed research methods to be compatible with a public school setting and your research questions of interest to the school district. The expiration date of your proposal is *Thursday, August 7, 2014.* If you are unable to complete your research by the expiration date, you must submit a Request for Renewal, ■ to the Student Assessment & Research Department *four weeks* prior to the expiration date. If a renewal is granted, a Renewal Approval Letter and Approval Memorandum will be issued.

Implementing your research, however, is a decision to be reached by the affected school-based staff on a *strictly voluntary basis.* To assist the school-based staff in their decision to participate, please outline the operational steps to be performed by staff at their school. Based upon this information, each school-based staff would then be *asked to make a decision to participate or not* and *inform you or the requesting research parties of their decision at the time of your/their request.* School-based staff has been instructed not to cooperate unless you **provide this District Approval Letter and the Principal Approval Memorandum.**

The anticipated date for submitting an electronic copy of your research findings is *Monday, December 8, 2014.* If additional assistance is needed from our staff, **please contact me at** ■

Sincerely,

■

■
Attachments

Appendix C

Letter of Cooperation

Letter of Cooperation

February 27, 2013

To the Florida Atlantic University (IRB):

I am familiar with Tiffany McCahill's research project entitled Teacher Perceptions of Response to Intervention for English Learners. I understand ████████████████ nvolvement to allow teachers to be interviewed and documents related to the Response to Intervention process to be reviewed with teacher participants. Mrs. McCahill will obtain permission from teachers prior to conducting interviews and reviewing documents.

I understand that this research will be carried out following sound ethical principles and that participant involvement in this research study is strictly voluntary and provides confidentiality of research data, as described in the protocol.

Therefore, as the institutional authority of ████████████████ I agree that Tiffany McCahill's research project may be conducted at our school. I understand that if I have any questions about this research study I can direct those questions to Mrs. McCahill at ████████ or her faculty advisor, Dr. Gail Burnaford at ████████.

Sincerely,

Appendix D

FAU IRB Approval (Amended)

DATE: February 6, 2014

TO: Gail Burnaford
FROM: Florida Atlantic University Social, Behavioral and Educational Research IRB

PROTOCOL #:   428922-3
PROTOCOL TITLE: [428922-3] Teacher Perceptions of Response to Intervention for English
                             Learners

SUBMISSION TYPE: **Amendment/Modification**

ACTION: APPROVED

EFFECTIVE DATE: February 6, 2014

Thank you for your submission of Amendment materials for this research protocol. The Florida Atlantic
University IRB has approved your request to modify your protocol as outlined below:

1. *Adding additional interview questions addressing tools used during the RtI process.*
2. *Amending the consent form and recruitment script for a second interview session*

Please use the stamped, revised (consents, instruments, etc.) that accompany this approval letter.

If you have any questions or comments about this correspondence, please contact Tina Horton at:

Institutional Review Board
Research Integrity/Division of Research
Florida Atlantic University
Bldg. 80, Rm. 106
Boca Raton, FL 33431
Phone: 561-297-0777

* Please include your protocol number and title in all correspondence with this office.

**This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations,
and a copy is retained within our records.**

Generated on IRBNet

Appendix E

District Approval (Amended)

███████████████████████████████**FLORIDA**

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

████████████████████████████████████

███████████████   **SCHOOL BOARD**

Institutional Review Board (IRB) Chair   *Chair*
████████████████████   *Vice Chair*

                                              Board Members

March 5, 2014

Mrs. Tiffany McCahill

████████████████

Dear Mrs. McCahill:

We are in receipt of your Change Request Form dated *Friday, February 14, 2014*, for research proposal #753 — ***Teacher Perceptions of Response to Intervention for English Learners*** — *requesting changes in consent, permission, or assent documents, the manner in which a consent, permission, or assent is obtained, recruitment materials, and in duration of study or time of participation.* IRB staff has reviewed your request and approval has been granted for you and/or members of your research team to *contact* ████████████████████████████

PLEASE NOTE: All researchers and team members must complete the District's security clearance procedures to receive a **Security Identification Badge** before entering a ████████ campus or sponsored school event, or having contact with students or staff under any circumstances. **Researchers who do not complete these procedures before visiting a school site will have their IRB approval suspended.**

If additional assistance is needed from our staff, please **contact us at** ████████████

Sincerely,

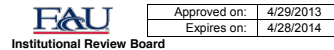████████████████

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Attachments

Appendix F

Recruitment Script – General Education Teachers

Recruitment Script – General Education Teachers

Hello, my name is Tiffany McCahill and I am a student in the doctoral program in the College of Education at Florida Atlantic University. I am conducting research to collect data for my dissertation. A component of the dissertation study is to understand Response to Intervention and how general education teachers report implementation of the assessment and instructional elements of the framework. The reason I am contacting you is that, as a teacher, your input on the subject is important and of great value to the success of the study. The interview would take approximately 45 minutes to an hour, at a location and time that are convenient for you. If you choose to participate in the study, please bring any documents that you use during the RtI process, like intervention records and progress monitoring graphs. Please remove student names that may be on any of the documents used during the RtI process. Remove names using a black marker and black out students' names. The goal is to have participants bring documents that address each of three categories: curricular materials/resources, teacher referral forms, and progress monitoring documents. You may want to bring teacher referral documents, academic intervention records, progress monitoring documents like graphs, and instructional and intervention resources. Participation or lack of participation will not be used for evaluation purposes nor will participation or lack of participation be shared with school administrators. Information obtained will not be used for any purpose other than research.

If you have any questions about the study, please feel free to ask. Your participation in the study is greatly appreciated!

Seidman, I. (2006). *Interviewing as qualitative research: A guide for researchers in education and the social sciences* (3rd ed.). New York: Teachers College Press.

FAU
Institutional Review Board

Approved on:	4/29/2013
Expires on:	4/28/2014

Appendix G

Adult Consent Form

ADULT CONSENT FORM
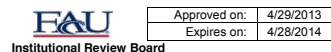
1) <u>Title of Research Study:</u> Teacher Perceptions of Response to Intervention for English Learners

2) <u>Investigator(s):</u> Dr. Gail Burnaford and Tiffany McCahill

3) <u>Purpose:</u> The purpose of this qualitative research study is to describe classroom teachers' understanding and perceptions of instructional elements and assessment of the Response to Intervention framework.

4) <u>Procedures:</u> As a participant, you will be asked to participate in an interview. Before the interview, you will be asked for permission to audiotape the interview and you will be asked to bring any documents that you use for the Response to Intervention process. The goal is to have participants bring documents that address each of three categories: curricular materials/resources, teacher referral forms, and progress monitoring documents. You may want to bring teacher referral documents, academic intervention records, progress monitoring documents like graphs, and instructional and intervention resources. When you attend the interview, you will be asked questions about your knowledge and feelings about the Response to Intervention process, your experiences with Response to Intervention, assessments and instruction for English learners, and how you use the Response to Intervention documents, if you elected to bring them to the interview. One interview session is planned and should last approximately forty-five minutes to one hour. If necessary, you may be asked follow-up questions for clarification after the interview session. You will also be asked to review the interview transcripts for accuracy. The research will be done at your convenience. The interviews may be conducted before or after school, evenings, or weekends and can be conducted in a location that you prefer; for instance at the school or a public area (e.g. coffee shop). The interview sessions will be audiotaped with your permission.

5) <u>Risks:</u> The risks involved with participation in this study are no more than one would experience in regular daily activities. Your participation or lack of participation will not be used in your evaluation nor will your participation or lack of participation be shared with your administrators. Information obtained will not be used for any purpose other than research.

6) <u>Benefits:</u> We do not know if you will receive any direct benefits by taking part in this study. However, this research will contribute to a greater understanding of teacher perceptions of the Response to Intervention process for English learners.

7) <u>Data Collection & Storage:</u> Any information collected will be kept confidential and secure and only the people working with the study will see this data, unless required by law. The data will be kept for one year in a password protected computer as well as a locked file cabinet in the investigator's office. After one year, paper copies will be destroyed by shredding and electronic data will be deleted. We may publish what we learn from this study. If we do, we will not let anyone know your name/identity unless you give us permission. Your name will not be used and you will be assigned a randomly selected pseudonym.

8) <u>Contact Information:</u> For questions or problems regarding your rights as a research subject, you can contact the Florida Atlantic University Division of Research at (561) 297-0777. For other questions about the study, you should call the principal investigators, Dr. Gail Burnaford at (561) 297-6598, or Tiffany McCahill at ████████.

9) <u>Consent Statement:</u> I have read or had read to me the preceding information describing this study. All my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I am 18 years of age or older and freely consent to participate. I understand that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. I have received a copy of this consent form.

I agree _____ I do not agree ___ be audiotaped.

Signature of Subject:_____ Date: _____

Printed name of Subject: First Name _____ Last Name_____

Signature of Investigator: _____ Date: _____

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| Approved on: | 4/29/2013 |
| Expires on: | 4/28/2014 |

Interview Protocol I[1]

TITLE OF STUDY: TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF RESPONSE TO

INTERVENTION FOR ENGLISH LEARNERS

Name of Interviewer: <u>Tiffany McCahill</u>
Name of Interviewee: _____ Position: _____
Location of Interview: _____ Date: _____
Start Time: _____ End Time: _____

Interview Introduction:

      I appreciate you agreeing to participate in this interview. The overall purpose of our interview is to gather teacher perceptions and reported implementation of the Response to Intervention process for English learners. Because of the essential role you play as a classroom teacher, your input on the subject is important and of great value to the success of the study.

      I would like your permission to audiotape this interview, which I will later transcribe for the purpose of analysis. You have indicated your consent to participate in this study through your signature on the Adult Consent form where you have also indicated your permission to audiotape this interview. If you did not provide consent to audiotape, I will take only handwritten notes during this interview.

      Please know that a pseudonym will be used in place of your real name, and only the interviewer, me, will know your true identity. This protects your anonymity and the confidentiality of the data from this study. All data from this interview will be aggregated and will be kept confidential. The results of this interview will not be shared with school administrators and will not be used in any way for evaluative purposes. As stated in the original contact regarding this interview, this interview session will take no less than 45 minutes and no more than one hour.

      Thanks again for your participation. Before we begin, do you have any questions about the subject of this study, or any other questions in general?

Interview Questions:
1. Please share your knowledge of the Response to Intervention process.
   a. What is your knowledge of the Response to Intervention process when specifically related to students who are English learners? If I were a person unfamiliar with the education field, how would you describe this process?

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[1]Based on Creswell, J. (2007). Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing among five approaches. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage; and Seidman, I. (2006). Interviewing as qualitative research: A guide for researchers in education and the social sciences (3rd ed.). New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

2. How do you feel about the Response to Intervention process and, specifically, your understanding of the process?
   a. What do you think the school district is doing well in relation to Response to Intervention?
   b. What do you think may not be working in the district when it comes to Response to Intervention?
3. Let's take a look at the documents that you brought today. (If participant did not bring documents to the interview session, skip to question #4.)
   a. If you had to divide the documents into three categories: curricular materials/resources, teacher referral forms, and progress monitoring documents, how would you do so?
   b. Tell me about the [name of document]? How do you use this document during the Response to Intervention process?
4. Please take a moment to think about referrals for evaluation that you have been involved in for struggling English learners. Describe your experience.
5. Describe your experiences as a member of a multidisciplinary team (child study team, collaborative problem solving team, CPST).
6. Take a moment to think about any policies or procedures that would dictate your instruction of English learners. Please share these policies and procedures and what implementing these policies and procedures would look like in your classroom.
7. How do you feel about assessment practices as they relate to students who are English learners?
   a. What do you think the school district is doing well related to assessments for English learners?
   b. What do you think may not be working in the district when it comes to assessments for English learners?
8. How do you feel about instructional practices as they relate to students who are English learners?
   a. What do you think the school district is doing well related to instruction for English learners?
   b. What do you think may not be working in the district when it comes to instruction for English learners?

Closing:
Thanks again for your time and contribution to this study. May I contact you for any follow up questions or clarification that may be necessary?
Please feel free to contact me with any questions or concerns:
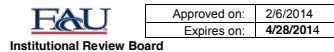email: tpatella@fau.edu
phone: ████████

Appendix I

Recruitment Script – General Education Teachers (Amended)

Recruitment Script – General Education Teachers

Hello, thanks again for your past participation in a second interview session discussing the Response to Intervention process and English learners. A component of the dissertation study is to understand Response to Intervention and how general education teachers report implementation of the assessment and instructional elements of the framework. The reason I am contacting you is that, as a teacher, your input on the subject is important and of great value to the success of the study. I would like to conduct a second interview with you in order to gain more information about your perceptions on the subject. This second interview would take about an hour, at a location and time that are convenient for you. I will provide copies of documents for you to review and discuss during the interview session. Please bring any documents that you use during the RtI process, like intervention records and progress monitoring graphs, if you so choose. Please remove student names that may be on any of the documents used during the RtI process. Remove names using a black marker and black out students' names. The goal is to have participants bring documents that address each of three categories: curricular materials/resources, teacher referral forms, and progress monitoring documents. You may want to bring teacher referral documents, academic intervention records, progress monitoring documents like graphs, and instructional and intervention resources. Participation or lack of participation will not be used for evaluation purposes nor will participation or lack of participation be shared with school administrators. Information obtained will not be used for any purpose other than research.

If you have any questions about the study, please feel free to ask. Your participation in the study is greatly appreciated!

Seidman, I. (2006). *Interviewing as qualitative research: A guide for researchers in education and the social sciences* (3rd ed.). New York: Teachers College Press.

	Approved on:	2/6/2014
FAU	Expires on:	4/28/2014
Institutional Review Board		

Appendix J

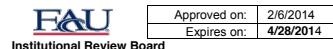# Adult Consent Form (Amended)

ADULT CONSENT FORM

1) <u>Title of Research Study:</u> Teacher Perceptions of Response to Intervention for English Learners

2) <u>Investigator(s):</u> Dr. Gail Burnaford and Tiffany McCahill

3) <u>Purpose:</u> The purpose of this qualitative research study is to describe classroom teachers' understanding and perceptions of instructional elements and assessment of the Response to Intervention framework.

4) <u>Procedures:</u> As a participant, you will be asked to participate in a second interview. Before the interview, you will be asked for permission to audiotape the interview and you will be asked to bring any documents that you use for the Response to Intervention process. When you attend the interview, you will be asked questions about your knowledge and feelings about the Response to Intervention process, your experiences with Response to Intervention, assessments and instruction for English learners, and how you use the Response to Intervention documents. This second interview is planned for one session and should last approximately one hour. If necessary, you may be asked follow-up questions for clarification after the interview session. You will also be asked to review the interview transcripts for accuracy. The research will be done at your convenience. The interviews may be conducted before or after school, evenings, or weekends and can be conducted in a location that you prefer; for instance at the school or a public area (e.g. coffee shop). The interview sessions will be audiotaped with your permission.

5) <u>Risks:</u> The risks involved with participation in this study are no more than one would experience in regular daily activities. Your participation or lack of participation will not be used in your evaluation nor will your participation or lack of participation be shared with your administrators. Information obtained will not be used for any purpose other than research.

6) <u>Benefits:</u> We do not know if you will receive any direct benefits by taking part in this study. However, this research will contribute to a greater understanding of teacher perceptions of the Response to Intervention process for English learners.

7) <u>Data Collection & Storage:</u> Any information collected will be kept confidential and secure and only the people working with the study will see this data, unless required by law. The data will be kept for one year in a password protected computer as well as a locked file cabinet in the investigator's office. After one year, paper copies will be destroyed by shredding and electronic data will be deleted. We may publish what we learn from this study. If we do, we will not let anyone know your name/identity unless you give us permission. Your name will not be used and you will be assigned a randomly selected pseudonym.

8) <u>Contact Information:</u> For questions or problems regarding your rights as a research subject, you can contact the Florida Atlantic University Division of Research at (561) 297-0777. For other questions about the study, you should call the principal investigators, Dr. Gail Burnaford at (561) 297-6598, or Tiffany McCahill at ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮.

9) <u>Consent Statement:</u> I have read or had read to me the preceding information describing this study. All my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I am 18 years of age or older and freely consent to participate. I understand that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. I have received a copy of this consent form.

I agree _____ I do not agree _____ be audiotaped.

Signature of Subject:_____ Date: _____

Printed name of Subject: First Name _____ Last Name_____

Signature of Investigator: _____ Date: _____

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Approved on:	2/6/2014
Expires on:	4/28/2014

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Appendix K

Interview Protocol II[1]

TITLE OF STUDY: TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF RESPONSE TO

INTERVENTION FOR ENGLISH LEARNERS

Second Interview Session

Name of Interviewer: <u>Tiffany McCahill</u>
Name of Interviewee: _____ Position: _____
Location of Interview: _____ Date: _____
Start Time: _____ End Time: _____

Interview Introduction:

I appreciate you agreeing to participate in this second interview. The overall purpose of our interview is to gather teacher perceptions and reported implementation of the Response to Intervention process for English learners. Because of the essential role you play as a classroom teacher, your input on the subject is important and of great value to the success of the study.

I would like your permission to audiotape this interview, which I will later transcribe for the purpose of analysis. Please know that a pseudonym will be used in place of your real name, and only the interviewer, me, will know your true identity. This protects your anonymity and the confidentiality of the data from this study. All data from this second interview will be aggregated and will be kept confidential. The results of this second interview will not be shared with school administrators and will not be used in any way for evaluative purposes. As stated in the original contact regarding this interview, this second interview session should take about one hour.

Thanks again for your participation. Before we begin, do you have any questions about the subject of this study, or any other questions in general?

1. Based on responses from the initial interview sessions, documents were used during the Response to Intervention process. I would like to share some blank copies of these documents with you. They are copies of the teacher record form and student rating form. Please take a look at the documents. Do you use any of these documents during the Response to Intervention process? If so, please describe your use of these documents.

_____

[1] Based on Creswell, J. (2007). Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing among five approaches. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage; and Seidman, I. (2006). Interviewing as qualitative research: A guide for researchers in education and the social sciences (3rd ed.). New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

2. *If the teacher brought documents:* Let's take a look at the documents that you brought today. Please tell me about [name of document]? How do you use this document during the Response to Intervention process?

3. Based on responses from the initial interview sessions and information from the National Center on Response to Intervention, a list of important elements of RtI was developed. I will provide you with a list of the elements: 3 tiers of RtI, Evidence-Based Interventions, Data and Data Collection, Progress Monitoring. What connections do you make between these elements and your instructional practices for English learners?

4. How familiar are you with the county's ESOL Department Handbook?

5. Please take a look at the Comprehensive Program Requirements and Student Instruction section of the ESOL Department Handbook. Describe how the requirements outlined in the section are implemented for English learners in your classroom. Please describe specific examples, if possible.

   a. We will address a specific element of this section noting the ESOL Instructional Strategies Matrix. The matrix was developed by the ESOL department in conjunction with the ███████████████████████. Please take a look at the matrix. Please describe how the strategies outlined in the matrix are implemented for English learners in your classroom. Please describe specific examples, if possible.

   b. How do you feel about the requirements outlined in this section? What is your overall comfort level with the requirements outlined in this section?

6. Please take a look at the Statewide Assessments and Accommodations section of the ESOL Department Handbook. Describe how the requirements outlined in the section are implemented for English learners in your classroom. Please describe specific examples, if possible.

   a. How do you feel about the requirements outlined in this section? What is your overall comfort level with the requirements outlined in this section?

Appendix L

Document Guide and Table[1]

Name of Document	Research Question	Notes
Student Rating Form	1, 3	-Get doc from ESE Specialist when student concern is expressed -Helps to focus teacher concerns -Addresses academics and behavior -Provides reflection for teachers on student concerns -Relatively easy to complete the form
Teacher Record Form	1, 3	-Participants describe form and use -Focused more on intervention than student -3/8 teachers report never used the form -1/8 teachers report that have not used it "recently"
ESOL Department Handbook; Comprehensive Program Requirements and Student Instruction	1, 2, 4	-Majority of participants are familiar with instructional strategies matrix -All participants describe strategies used from the matrix -Majority of participants specifically address dictionary use -All but one participant has seen the actual ESOL Department Handbook -All participants have had some form of related professional development
ESOL Department Handbook; Statewide Assessments and Accommodations	1, 2, 4	-Participants report that they provide accommodations for class assignments and tests -Accommodations are reviewed by ESOL Contact or testing coordinator at the school -CELLA was mentioned but many participants are unfamiliar with specifics of the test

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[1] Based on Creswell, J. (2007). Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing among five approaches. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Appendix M

Interview Question Guide and Table[1]

Interview Protocol Question Number (Interview #1)	Research Question
1, 3	1
6, 7	2
4, 5	3
2, 7, 8	4

Interview Protocol Question Number (Interview #2)	Research Question
1, 2, 3	1
4, 5, 6	2
1, 2, 3	3
4, 5, 6	4

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[1] Based on Creswell, J. (2007). Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing among five approaches. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Appendix N

Research Question 1 Category, Codes, and Connection to Data

Category	Code	Connection to Data
Documents	• Paperwork/Documents (DOC-PAPER • Teacher Record Form (DOC-TRF) • Hypothesis for student difficulty (DOC-HYPO) • Observation Form (DOC-OF) • Student Rating Form (DOC-SRF)	• The teacher record form: "was the actual RtI form that you fill out when you want to initiate a referral for a student concern" (Participant One). • "They were writing the hypothesis incorrectly" (Participant One). "Frustration" with the hypothesis: "if I knew what was causing the problem, I would hope that, as the teacher, I'd be able to address the problem myself." "How should I know what the hypothesis is?" (Participant Eight) • "The observation form is used when you have to observe a student in class for a thirty minute period and document the observation on that form." (Participant One) • "The [student rating form] that you would say the area of concern …and where we're collecting data." (Participant One). "So if I said, there was a kid in my class that's not a fluent reader [the reading coach] would provide me with resources or help me figure out the interventions, help me to fill out that paper…the packet that you have to fill out…the rating form" (Participant Seven)
RtI Framework	• 3 Tiers of RtI (RTI-TIERS) • Interventions (RTI-IV) • Data and Data Collection (RTI-DATA) • Progress Monitoring (RTI-PM)	• "You have tier 1, 2, and 3…there are different stages. Before you didn't have any of that." (Participant Five) • "I thought he may have a potential learning problem but he showed lots of positive response to the intervention through the RtI process." (Participant One) • "We begin by collecting data and using the data to determine an area of weakness." (Participant Two) • "Modeling on how to make the charts" to address progress monitoring for RtI. (Participant One)
Teacher Practices	• Accommodations for ESOL students (TP-ACCOM) • Assessments (TP-ASSESS) • Evaluation and Testing (TP-EVAL)	• "Got what they needed for accommodations as far as dictionaries." (Participant Three) • "Using a lot more portfolio assessments and project-based learning." (Participant Six) • "And this would be the first round, I guess, of evaluation." (Participant Eight)

Appendix O

Research Question 2 Category, Codes, and Connection to Data

Category	Code	Connection to Data
Instructional Policies/Procedures	• Technology (IP-TECH) • Descriptions of ESOL Strategies (IP-DESCRIBE) • Materials for ESOL Students (IP-MATERIAL) • ELs need opportunities/experiences (IP-OPPS)	• "Technology like interactive websites to help students understand things with pictures." (Participant Three) • "If you use labeling, it might help a kid who has trouble with labeling, or word recall, listening centers, Venn diagrams, listening cues, all the strategies are good strategies." (Participant One) • "You don't have the materials that you need to provide the interventions." (Participant Seven) • The student gets the "opportunity" to see words in her heritage language. (Participant One)
Assessment Policies/Procedures	• Assessments Impact Instruction (AP-IMPACT) • Assessments for ESOL (AP-ESOL)	• "Whatever your assessments are…if [students'] needs are not being met, you go on to the next tier." (Participant Seven) • The "assessment procedures that are currently used are fair." (Participant Six)

Appendix P

Research Question 3 Category, Codes, and Connection to Data

Category	Code	Connection to Data
Positives-RtI	• Beneficial (POS-BEN) • Interventions (POS-IV) • Helps students to be screened for disabilities earlier (POS-DIS) • Teachers have improved understanding of the process (POS-UNDRSTND)	• "Very beneficial to my English learners." (Participant Two) • "Sometimes interventions really do help, so if we could find what intervention works, we can help." (Participant Eight) • "I think that they are screening earlier than what they used to do. So by screening earlier, they are catching children and they are not getting into a situation…where they haven't been given any services or extra help." (Participant Four) • "Learned a lot" through the "necessary process." (Participant Seven)
Negatives-RtI	• RtI takes too much time (NEG-TIME) • Too many acronyms, confusion (NEG-CONFUSE) • Unsure of one's own knowledge (NEG-UNSURE) • Too much paperwork (NEG-PAPER) • Students fall behind because it takes too long to identify students (NEG-FALL)	• "Why does it take so long?" (Participant Five) • "Not every time is that consistent…I get confused sometimes." (Participant Six). "And the acronyms…I think the acronyms change and terms change and people get lost trying to keep up with what this means and what that means and there just doesn't seem to be consistency with that." (Participant Three) • "Sometimes I just don't think I'm getting it until I'm going through it." (Participant Six) • The "red tape" that one has to go through with RtI, specifically, the "documentation has to be in before you can move to the next step, that's kind of frustrating at times." (Participant Two) • "I think it takes way too long for a child to get through RtI." (Participant Eight)
CPST	• Provides reassurance, validates concerns (CPST-VALID) • Collaborative, learn from others on the team (CPST-COLLAB) • Personal support (teacher to student, CPST to teacher) (CPST-SUPPORT)	• CPST provided "reassurance that you are doing something right, like, oh yeah I see that too, or yeah, that is a valid concern. It's a good support system." (Participant One) • "Everyone knows the child…it's very collaborative and you can get things done." (Participant Six) • "Like administrators' perspectives, the guidance counselor, the school psychologist, the ESE teacher…I thought it was neat that all these different perspectives were coming to the table to have a discussion about a specific student." (Participant Three)
PD and Support for RtI	• CPST Team (PD-CPST) • Training available (PD-TRAIN) • Teachers learned RtI by going through the process and doing it (PD-EXP)	• "When I had an issue answering the hypothesis question, I came to [the ESE Specialist] and I said I don't know what that means, what am I supposed to write there? And we sat down and talked about it and she explained it." (Participant Two) • The "training and support for schools, come modeling on how to make the charts" was helpful. (Participant One) • "Learned a lot from the process" (Participant Seven)

Research Question 4 Category, Codes, and Connection to Data

Category	Code	Connection to Data
Language Acquisition and Learning Disabilities	• Unsure of language acquisition process (LA-UNSURE) • Language acquisition or learning disability (LA-DIS)	• "I need to remember you still need to give them that foundation. Sometimes it looks, on the surface, that they're getting it and they're parroting, they're going through the motions, but they don't have that foundation." (Participant Six) • "I do not think that the fact that he is having learning difficulties has anything to do with his ESOL-ness, I think, a lot of times, these difficulties…they may be actual learning disabilities." (Participant Eight)
Adjustment Time for English Learners	• ELs are "pushed through" (AT-PUSH) • ELs need more time (AT-MORE)	• "I've heard comments…oh, he's just an ESOL kid…he's ESOL, and so…he's pushed through, he'll get it…pushed through like not taken seriously as an English speaker. I think that they are overlooked because of the ELL status, that's just my opinion." (Participant Six) • English learners need more time "acquiring the English language before we can determine that it's something other than just that." (Participant Two)
Assessments for English Learners	• Assessments are "pointless for ELs" (A-POINT) • Assessments cause frustration (A-FRUS) • Assessments are fair (A-FAIR)	• For an English learner who is just acquiring the language and is not able to read in English…I think it's a pointless test. (Participant Two) • "To make them sit there and take it…knowing that they can't do any of it is not only a waste of time for them, but it is frustrating and makes them feel really unsuccessful." (Participant Two) • "I think that they're trying to be very fair when offering kids who are really being considered for testing and finding a psychologist who speaks that language, which I think is nice." (Participant One)
Parental Involvement and Experiences	• Parent input is hard to get (PI-HARD)	• "That gets frustrating sometimes because you see…the lack of parental involvement and support." (Participant Six)
Instruction for English Learners	• Technology (IN-TECH) • Good for all (IN-GOOD)	• Teacher uses "technology like interactive websites to help students understand things with pictures." (Participant Three) • "A lot of the instructional practices we use with the English learners work well with all kids…a good strategy is a good strategy."(Participant One)
Professional Development and Support for Instruction of English Learners	• Little support (PD-NO) • Current PD and support (PD-NOW)	• "I guess there didn't seem to be any communication with anybody, whether it be somebody at our school or somebody at our district and me, as the classroom teacher…it was just me." (Participant Three) • "I like to read the instructional resources conference and people will have good ideas, even in the team meetings when we plan together…I got some nice ideas from a new team member." (Participant Four)

Research Questions and Codes

Research Question 1: What do elementary general education teachers know about the

Response to Intervention (RtI) process for English learners?

    <u>Codes</u>:

    Interventions

    Documentation

    Consistency

    Accommodations for ESOL students

    Assessments

    Data and Data Collection

    Evaluation and Testing

    ESOL/ELL

    Student Growth

    Diagnostic

    Student Concerns and Areas of Concern

    Hypothesis for Student Difficulty

    Paperwork/Documents

    3 Tiers of RtI

    Assessments impact instruction

    Common Core State Standards

    Teacher Referral Form

    Portfolio Assessments

Progress monitoring

Teacher Record Form

Student Rating Form

Observation Form

Anecdotal Form

Graphing student progress

Research Question 2: How do elementary general education teachers report their interpretation of policies and procedures with respect to instruction and assessment of English learners, specifically relating to the Response to Intervention model?

Codes:

Consistent

ESOL, ELL

Materials for ESOL available-computer programs, visual aids

Assessments impact instruction

Assessments for ESOL students

Technology

Descriptions of ESOL strategies

ELLs need opportunities

ELLs need experiences in order to succeed

Research Question 3: How do elementary general education teachers feel about their understanding of Response to Intervention?

Codes:

Interventions-not enough time for them

CPST-collaborative, learn from others, helpful, brainstorm ideas

RtI for ELLs needs change

Teachers are scared of RtI

Personal Support (teacher to student, CPST to teacher)

Positive feelings about RtI process-beneficial, good, necessary, helps students to be screened earlier, improved understanding

Negative feelings about RtI process-too many acronyms, confused, unsure of one's knowledge, takes too long, too much paperwork, students fall behind without services because it takes too long to identify students
RtI training available for schools

RtI process is modeled

Reading coach

Principal

ESE Specialist

Learned about the RtI experience by doing it

Evaluation from RtI takes too long, too many steps

School Psychologist

RtI takes too much time

Positive CPST-good, provides reassurance, validates concerns

Hypothesis is difficult to develop

VE Teacher

CPST doesn't try to put everyone in special education

Research Question 4: How do elementary general education teachers feel about their

understanding of instruction and assessment for English learners?

Codes:

ESOL kids are "pushed through"

Parent input-lack of it, hard to get

Questionable learning disabilities

ELLs need more time (to adjust, learn English, learn culture)

Assessments- "pointless" for LEPs

Frustration-giving assessments to LEPs, don't understand evals, RtI takes too long

Technology available

Feel unclear about policies and procedures for ELs

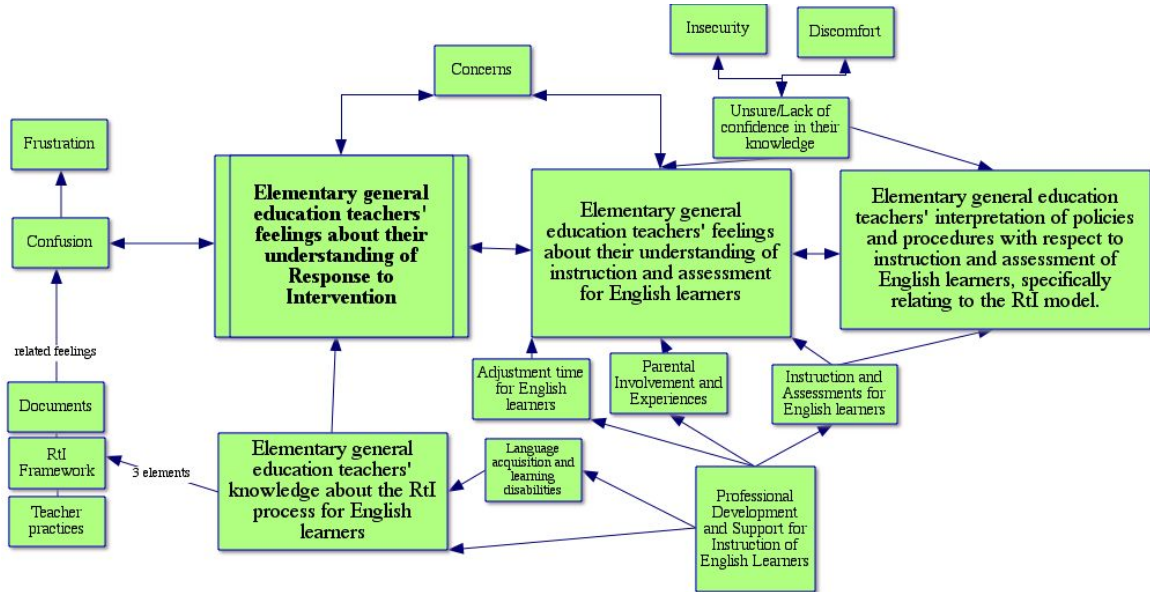Evaluations are fair for ESOL-interpreters

ESOL instruction is good instruction for all students

Struggling students-language acquisition or learning disability-unsure

Unsure of language acquisition process for ELs

Appendix S

Relationship between Research Questions 1-4

REFERENCES

Abbott, M., & Wills, H. (2012). Improving the upside-down response-to-intervention triangle with a systematic, effective elementary school reading team. *Preventing School Failure, 56*(1)*,* 37-46.

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