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The Impact and Utilization of Reading Interventionists

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Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative, semi-structured interview study was to explore the role of a reading interventionist within an elementary school setting to help bring increased clarity to the responsibilities of a reading interventionist. Research questions focused on the role and impact of reading interventionists when working with developing readers at the elementary level. Twelve reading interventionists from around the United States participated in the interview. Data sources, including transcribed audio recordings, follow-up questions, and memos, were used. The elementary schools implemented a Response to Intervention/Multi-Tiered Systems of Support model in which reading interventionists focused on Tier 2 and Tier 3 students. They had multiple duties and responsibilities within the school, including working with all school personnel and providing data sources to drive intervention. Limitations included having all female interviewees and limited participants due to emotionally and physically demanding times in teaching. We recommend that administrators acknowledge the heavy workload expected of reading interventionists and provide the proper training to support students and staff adequately.

Keywords: Reading interventionist, qualitative study, semi-structured interviews, Response to Intervention (RTI), Multi-Tiered Support System (MTSS)

Introduction

As children made their way into classrooms full-time after the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers and administrators observed the results of children who had not received direct instruction for their learning needs. Many schools hired a reading interventionist to help identify and close the learning gaps.

A century ago, students experiencing difficulties in various areas of literacy started to gain attention, but the research supporting reading interventions was scarce. By the 1930s, reading intervention practices moved from labs to classrooms and were taught by teachers (Scammacca et al., 2016). A strong focus on reading intervention led to a greater understanding of reading disabilities. Throughout the 1950s to 1970s, reading instruction and intervention practices were being implemented across the United States and expanding in new directions. In the 1980s, the research on reading interventions made a significant shift. Cognitive psychologists interested in the study of reading influenced educational researchers to develop innovative approaches to reading interventions (Scammacca et al., 2016). The innovative practices focused on reading comprehension and vocabulary in the 1990s. In 2004, the US Congress passed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA). This "allowed schools to identify students for special education services through a multi-tiered instructional approach known as a response to intervention, thus changing the framework for providing reading interventions as both prevention and remediation" (Scammacca et al., 2016, p. 20). The Response to the Intervention/Multi-Tiered System of Support model evolved from this law.

Specialized literacy professionals are often referred to as reading specialists. In 2001, the International Literacy Association appointed a commission to summarize the role of reading specialists and the ways they function in schools. Then in 2015, given the changes in literacy because of the passing of IDEIA in 2004 and the later Response To Intervention (RTI) and Multi-Tiered Support System (MTSS**)**, the International Literacy Association supported a second study designed to investigate the role of reading specialists (Bean et al., 2015). In this study, "reading specialists" was the general term to define the position of teachers with a literacy focus. Reading specialists were separated into 1) reading interventionists who focus on the assessment and instruction of students, 2) reading coaches who work directly with teachers, and 3) literacy supervisors who have supervisory roles within the school or district.

Currently, there are 18,912 reading specialists in the United States, but the specific number of reading interventionists is unknown; between 2018 and 2028, the career is expected to grow by 3% and produce 13,600 job opportunities across the United States (Zippa.com). Approximately 83% are women working mainly in public or private United States schools. For this study, the focus will be on reading interventionists.

What is the role of reading interventionists within elementary schools? What impact do reading interventionists seek to have on student learning? Seeking answers to these research questions, this study analyzed data based on interviews with reading interventionists across the United States. Comparing and contrasting responses in educational background, school district context, RTI/MTSS approach, assessments, setting goals, and measuring success provided a foundation for the research data to answer the research questions.

Review of Literature

With the higher need for reading interventionists in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, there was a need for further research on the role of an interventionist within our elementary school systems. This literature review focuses on the RTI/MTSS background, reading interventionists' competence and responsibilities, and data collection through semi-structured interviews.

Response to Intervention (RTI)/Multi-Tiered Support System (MTSS)

The RTI/MTSS model is a three-tiered system with the goal of early detection and prevention (Preston et al., 2015). The intervention process is referred to as RTI, with a common adjustment called the intervention MTSS. This adjustment includes behavior support as well as academic support (Berkeley et al., 2020)

The Problem-Solving Model and Standard Treatment Protocol (Marchand-Martella et al., 2007) are the two common approaches to RTI. A Problem-Solving Model is an individualized approach for each student. In this model, individual needs are met by matching the intervention to the function or cause of the academic deficit. The Standard Treatment Protocol is an approach that "involves the implementation of a scientifically validated program for groups of students who have similar reading difficulties and allows for consistency for both teaching staff and students" (Marchand-Martella et al., 2007, p. 4). The school's RTI team determines, based on the school's philosophy, which model will be used within the school. The models can be used separately, as a means for preventing disabilities or identifying students with learning disabilities, or as a blended model of the two (Preston et al., 2015). Preston et al. (2015) state that researchers continue to find effective ways to implement RTI, and practitioners continue expanding their research. However, even with the ever-growing body of research, researchers have a solid foundation for implementing RTI.

When implementing RTI, essential components are the building blocks for a school. In April 2010, the National Center on Response to Intervention stated that the four critical components in RTI include a multi-level instructional and behavioral system practiced school-wide, a screening process, progress monitoring completed regularly, and data-based decision making for instructional movement between levels.

The RTI framework consists of three levels of prevention: primary, secondary, and tertiary (National Center on Response to Intervention, 2010). "A rigorous prevention system provides for the early identification of learning and behavioral challenged and timely intervention for students who are at risk for long-term learning problems" (p. 4). Within each level, multiple tiers of intervention may be used to help offer a continuum of support.

Schoolwide literacy screening and progress monitoring must be present within the RTI model (National Center on Response to Intervention, 2010). Universal screeners should be completed three times per year to help identify at-risk students by comparing them to benchmark scores (Mesmer & Mesmer, 2008). Screeners must "demonstrate diagnostic accuracy for predicting which students will develop learning difficulties" (National Response to Intervention, 2010, p. 5). Reliable and valid data is needed to make informed decisions. Progress monitoring is a process used to track a student's learning progress over time, evaluate effective instruction practices, assess students' responsiveness to instruction, and formulate effective individual programs for students who are

least responsive to effective instruction (National Response to Intervention, 2010). This assessment data helps determine whether students are making adequate gains toward instructional goals (Denton, 2012). It should focus on testing specific skills targeted within the intervention and note the influence of students' reading (Mesmer & Mesmer, 2008). Screeners and progress monitoring must be completed with fidelity to be used in decision making.

Data data-driven decision making occurs when educators triangulate student data from screeners and progress monitoring. Once they triangulate the data, they determine what multi-leveled instruction would be the correct instructional level for each student. If a student has not responded to instruction at any level of the prevention systems, teachers adjust the intensity and nature of interventions (National Response to Intervention, 2010). In 2020, a decade after the IDEIA regulations were finalized, Berkeley et al. (2020) studied a snapshot of where the 50 states landed in the implementation process. Findings revealed that a support system was available in all the states and identified many adjustments made across the board.

Response to Intervention (RTI)/Multi-Tiered Support System (MTSS) Success

RTI/MTSS aims to provide all students with the best opportunities to succeed in school, identify students with learning or behavioral problems, and ensure that they receive appropriate instruction and related support (National Response to Intervention, 2010). The proper education is individualized to each student depending on where they fall on the learning continuum.

Denton (2012) states that students with reading difficulties benefit from purposeful and targeted instruction that progresses from more accessible to more challenging skills. Students in reading intervention benefitted from explicit education, ample independent practice with corrective and positive feedback, and active student involvement. Research on early reading intervention revealed that many children responded positively to reading interventions (Denton, 2012). The RTI/MTSS approach increased the quantity and the quality of instruction for all readers, specifically students experiencing difficulties in various areas of literacy (Mesmer & Mesmer, 2008).

Furthermore, a comprehensive review of research literature from 2002 to 2014 indicated that 19 of the 20 implemented reading interventions produced positive or potentially positive results (Gersten et al., 2017). It included that all 11 individually administered interventions resulted in positive effects, and when focusing on small group intervention, eight out of nine of the groups displayed positive results (Gersten et al., 2017). The study also revealed the most robust and consistent effects in word and pseudoword reading. Reading comprehension and passage reading fluency also posted positive results through interventions. However, there were no effects found in vocabulary. There is a need for further research when discussing adequate intervention responses, which can be influenced by timing, location, duration, and providers of interventions (Denton, 2012).

Reading Interventionists

Bean et al. (2015) identified the tasks of reading interventionists. The survey results included instructing students, assessing students, analyzing data, supporting teachers, and performing administrative tasks. Interventionists were expected to be knowledgeable in the content of reading, which is why many choose to further their education by enrolling in graduate school and specific literacy training. Bean's research also indicated that reading interventionists had high expectations for all students, general classroom teachers, special education teachers, paraprofessionals, and administrators. At the heart of successful reading, instruction was a collaboration by all administration, faculty, and parents, working toward taking the next step in a student's reading progression (Bean et al., 2015). All teachers aimed to equip students with the necessary skills and strategies to become confident and competent readers. A study by Buterbaugh (2021) identified a strong correlation between a student's reading ability and success. Success in reading creates motivation to keep reading, especially for young learners.

In addition to having the responsibility of multiple tasks within RTI and MTSS, Porter et al. (2021) explored the knowledge level of reading interventionists. The study identified the English knowledge level of primary teachers, including 1,369 general education teachers, 131 special education teachers, and 74 reading interventionists. The analyses confirmed that reading interventionists demonstrated the most robust knowledge of all three groups in the reading content domains of phonological sensitivity, phonemic awareness, encoding/decoding, and morphology.

The most recent research (Bean & Kern, 2017; Bean et al., 2018; Cunningham & Falk, 2020; Mahaffey et al., 2020) focuses on the challenge many reading interventionists face in the multiple roles they often find themselves in. Reading interventionists find themselves with various tasks. Although interventionists may have an official job description of working with Tier 2 or Tier 3 students, they are frequently asked to be coaches for classroom teachers, leaders of data analysis teams, and facilitators of professional development programs. Principals reported (Bean et al., 2018) that reading interventionists or specialists positively influenced the school literacy climate. In addition, they said confusion existed in the multitude of job responsibilities of a reading interventionist, possibly resulting in fewer opportunities to focus and develop expertise in one area.

Power of Interviews

Qualitative researchers seek to understand interviewees' experiences. Through the power of technology, a person can connect virtually with many worldwide and experience a face-to-face interview. For several thousand years, interviewing has been used effectively to gather data (Whiteley et al., 2003). Qualitative structured interviews typically offer a high response rate and avoid misinterpretation from respondents since the interviewer is present to explain the questions

(Queiros et al., 2017). When entering an interview, we have predetermined hypotheses based on prior research. The interview is then used "as an opportunity to test the validity of their hypotheses" (Knox & Burkard, 2014, p. 348). Qualitative interviews strive to achieve fuller development of information and not focus on simple answers to standardized questions (Weiss, 1995). Qualitative structured interviews provide advantages that allow easy comparison of respondent answers, reach a large sample size, are easy to replicate, and can be conducted reasonably quickly (Queiros et al., 2017). Since the qualitative study gathered complete responses, the analysis focused on interpretation, summary, and integration (Weiss, 1995). Because of this, we developed a well-rounded account of the interviewees' experiences.

Methods

Participants and Setting

Before conducting this research, we received approval from the university's Institutional Review Board to conduct the study. The participants were chosen by random sampling. We posted a message asking for participants in four different reading interventionist groups on the social media site Facebook. To be eligible for participation, individuals needed to be elementary reading interventionists and have at least one year of experience. From those posts, 12 participants (all female) agreed to participate in a semi-structured interview. The states represented were New York, California, Pennsylvania, South Dakota, Massachusetts, Wisconsin, Illinois, Virginia, and Hawaii. See Table 1.

Table 1. Participants' pseudonyms, states, highest educational degrees, years in education, and school contexts.

Participant Name	State	Highest Educational Degree	Years in Education	School Context
Lora	Virginia	Master's in Curriculum Instruction	23	K–5, 400 students, public
Kayla	Hawaii	Master's in Education	12	PreK–5, 500 students, charter
Kassie	Pennsylvania	Master's in Reading Specialists	22	K–5, 550 students, public
Adeline	California	Master's in Reading and Language Arts	10	K–6, 1,600 students, public

Regan	Illinois	Master's in Reading and Literacy	14	K–8, 1,200 students, public
Ivory	Wisconsin	Master's in Literacy	15	K–3, 330 students, public
Melissa	Massachusetts	Master's in Education	34	K–6, 450 students, public
Mya	South Dakota	Master's in Reading	15	K–6, 130 students, public
Valarie	California	Reading Specialization Credentials	41	K–8, 400 students, private
Kristen	California	Master's in Reading	25	K–2, 6 students, learning facility
Shirley	New York	Master's in Literacy	16	2nd–6th, 500 students, public
Jessica	Pennsylvania	Graduate-Level Reading Certification	27	K–12, 1,200 students, public

The research was conducted at a mutually available time for both the researcher and participants. We met through a password-protected Zoom meeting to protect participants' privacy. All participants were audio-recorded during the interview to gather accurate data to transcribe, and the audio recording was saved to a password-protected laptop. When the study was completed, we shredded the transcribed copy of the audio interview. Participants were coded with numbers, and data was kept on a private password-protected laptop.

Procedure

We wrote an interview guide to help prepare for the semi-structured interviews with participants. An interview guide allowed the participants to openly express their experiences and the interviewer the flexibility to follow up and probe for more details (Roberts, 2020). The areas of focus included 1) professional background, 2) school context, 3) RTI/MTSS, 4) assessments, and 5) goals/successes. Each participant had the opportunity to review the interview questions before the scheduled interview. See Table 2. However, we asked follow-up questions to clarify the message and focus on the research questions. The interview was piloted with a university advisor. We conducted the interviews during October, November, and December. The discussions were audio-recorded and transcribed to ensure accuracy. The transcription was sent to the participant for review and confirmation. Semi-structured interviews are designed to gather and compare

responses from all interviews by inquiring about the participants' experiences (Queiros et al., 2017).

Table 2. Interview questions by category

Interview Questions
Background
1. What is your teaching background?
2. What is your educational background?
3. What degrees do you hold?
School Context
4. How long has your school had the reading interventionist position?
5. What does your typical day/schedule entail?
6. Do you have any extra duties? (examples: planning professional development, assessments, data organization, weekly meetings)
7. What do you feel is expected of you in your current role?
RTI/MTSS
8. Does your school follow an RTI/MTSS model? If not, what type of model do they follow?
9. What is your knowledge of implementation of the RTI model in your school or classroom?
10. What type of training have you had to help implement the RTI model within your classroom?
11. How is the intervention setup determined within your school?
12. Are there any specific programs used for intervention?
Assessments
13. How do you determine intervention grouping?
14. How do you measure student growth?
15. What assessments do you use to collect data?
16. How is the data collected used to drive instruction?

Goals/Success

17. How are goals set for your students? Teachers?
18. What are considered successes for your intervention groups?
19. How do you feel about your school's current intervention setup?
20. If you could change one thing to improve your intervention time, what would it be, and why?

Data Analysis

After completing the interviews, we used grounded theory (Glaser, 1978) techniques to analyze the data. We broke our data down into substantive codes. The codes were background, school context, duties/expectations, intervention model, training, assessments, setup, and goals/growth. Examples of data that emerged within the background code were the participant's years in education, graduate degrees, and specialization/certifications. The school context code included the number of students, type of school (public, private, or charter), grades within the building, and history of interventionist position at school. Examples of data within goals/growth included personal professional goals, school district goals, and data growth.

We then analyzed the transcripts, looking for similarities and differences within each interview. We used a constant comparative data analysis process to code, developed themes, and kept the participants' initial responses to prevent incorporating anything other than the interviewees' voices into the analysis.

Throughout the analysis process, we remained open to new themes. We used memos to track thoughts and ideas throughout the analysis to ensure rigor. As Creswell (2007) suggests, we used peer debriefing to code the transcripts, and collaboration happened when there were discrepancies in interpretations, which resulted in highly stable responses. The following themes emerged to answer and support the research questions: 1) What is the role of reading interventionists within elementary schools? 2) How do reading interventionists perceive the impact of their work on student learning? Names were changed to protect confidentiality.

Findings

Three significant findings emerged when determining reading interventionists' role in elementary schools. Reading interventionists were involved with all readers, with a heavy focus on students

experiencing difficulties in various areas of literacy; had multiple roles within the school setting; and used different screeners/diagnostic tools to determine proper instruction. The impact of a reading interventionist was often measured using numbers and percentages; however, the interviewees painted a picture of how they reached each student and allowed them to grow into successful readers. A sample of the participants' thoughts on the themes is included below.

Works With Tier 2 and Tier 3 Students

All elementary schools implemented some type of intervention model. RTI or MTSS was mentioned in all interviews.

> *"We use MTSS, a multi-tier system of support, which is very similar to RTI. We are rolling over to MTSS, where our new COVID money comes in because now every elementary school has an MTSS coach overseeing that process." Kassie from Pennsylvania*

In response to intervention models, Tiers 1, 2, and 3 provided appropriate instruction for each student. In most schools, the general classroom or the homeroom teachers taught Tier 1 instruction, and reading interventionists taught Tier 2 instruction. Depending on the severity of the student's academic learning, special education teachers taught the Tier 3 level of intervention. Interviewees expressed the importance of working with the special education department with Tier 3 learners.

> *"In our RTI model, we really are in that pyramid. So, we've got our Tier 1 instruction in the core, and then our Tier 2 is really our reading lab (reading interventionist room), and our tier three is more of our special education." Adeline from California*

Even though a reading interventionist worked with Tier 2 students, they responded and redirected their instruction based on the students' developing skills and needs.

> *"Response to Intervention is just part of me. It's ingrained in who I am. So, a lot of times I dabble between Tier 1, Tier 2, and Tier 3 at any given point with any learner, depending on where they are currently performing." Kristen from California*

Uses Data to Form Groups and Drive Instruction

Throughout all interviews, reading interventionists mentioned numerous screeners and diagnostic tests. See Table 3.

Table 3. Screeners and diagnostic tests used by reading interventionists and the number of times each was mentioned

Tool	Times Mentioned

Core Phonics Screener	10
The Heggerty Curriculum	10
Orton Gillingham	9
Dibels Next, Dibels 8, Acadience	6
95% Group	5
iReady Assessment	4
AimsWeb, AimsWeb Plus	3
Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA)	3
Fountas and Pinnell	3
Florida Center for Reading Research	2
Renaissance Star Reading	2
Running Records	2
FastBridge	1
Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening (PALS)	1
Systematic Instruction in Phonological Awareness, Phonics, and Sight Words (SIPPS)	1
Wilson Assessment of Decoding and Encoding (WADE)	1
West Virginia Phonics	1

The most common assessment tools interviewees mentioned were 1) The Core Phonics Screener, 2) Heggerty, and 3) Orton Gillingham. These screeners focused on phonemic awareness and phonics development. Many interviewees mentioned using more than one screener and diagnostic tool when collecting student data.

> *"Heggerty is an absolute favorite for all that use it. The book is only $75 so you can buy it yourself if you need. It's just one book and you do the assessment followed by instruction. It takes about ten minutes every single day. We actually pushed it into our pre-k, kindergarten, and first-grade classrooms because we found such a weakness in our Tier 1 that we gave it to all of our primary and then intervention double-dipped them because that was a huge need at the time." Adeline from California*

Data collected and analyzed through benchmark testing, screeners, and diagnostic tests determined academic progress, and consequently, reading interventionists based their grouping decisions on students' weaknesses or needs on the assessments.

> *"It's really about finding all those gaps in the student's learning. Once you do that, we have found that tells us what the child's weaknesses are. And if we can get those stronger, they can usually move on." Melissa from Massachusetts*

Has Multiple Responsibilities

All responses showed that reading interventionists were responsible for far more than working with students experiencing difficulties in various areas of literacy. They played a role with all students and teachers within their schools. Investing in each student's learning was evident in different ways.

> *"I try to purchase things that benefit everyone, not just my students, but all students. So that's part of my role is researching and talking to teachers, seeing what they need, and what they don't have that they would like to help support their readers." Ivory from Wisconsin*

Reading interventionists were responsible for administering beginning, middle, and end of the year benchmark testing. The benchmark testing produced, organized, analyzed, and communicated data to all involved parties by the reading interventionist.

> *"I am always responsible for scheduling, like all the benchmark assessments in the building, conducting those assessments, and then organizing the data meetings. I have to keep track of everything, and I do that through an online program. This also helps keep everyone on the same page." Jessica from Pennsylvania*

Reading interventionists collected data to determine each group's intervention groupings and instructional focus. Appropriate support needed to be given to all levels of readers. Reading interventionists helped classroom teachers provide support by providing relevant professional development, assisting teachers in carrying out best practices in their classroom, and providing material/resources to reach all readers.

> *"I look at data with the principal and classroom teachers and determine intervention groups. I do intervention for all students who need support in reading, English, and writing. I also put*

> *together enrichment packets for each grade because some kids need more challenges. I've done professional development for our teachers. I run the English language development program (in addition to) my interventions." Valarie from California*

Reading interventionists felt they had responsibilities with other teachers, administrators, and students. Additional responsibilities included paraprofessional prep work, grade level coaching, facilitating data meetings, English Language Learner coordinator, and preparing intervention material and paperwork.

> *"So, I feel this year I'm supposed to be an instructional coach for reading, writing, and word study. I'm also the gatekeeper of RTI. I also had to put on a third hat with just the curriculum in general and coordinating that." Kayla from Hawaii*

Regardless of being pulled in many directions, reading interventionists advocated and worked for the success of their readers.

Strives for All Students to Be Successful Readers

Reading interventionists monitor data; however, numbers alone did not provide a complete picture of each learner's path to becoming a successful reader. All the interviewees spoke with passion when working with developing readers. They wanted to do everything in their power to help each student succeed. All the interviewees had master's degrees in the education field. They all acquired additional reading certifications to keep updated with best practices. They put their students' needs first, regardless of the lack of training provided by school districts. Out of the 12 interviews, 11 interviewees spoke of the lack of training.

> *"I was told we were moving to RTI, and I went and bought a book on it; I think that's how I even found out what it stood for. When I requested it (training), I was denied. Excuses were given. So, there's no training, I pay for books myself, and I do online things myself." Shirley from New York*

Despite obstacles, reading interventionists knew the impact of valuable instruction and strived to deliver it. Reading interventionists individualized instruction to meet each student's needs when supporting readers. By identifying weaknesses and lacking skills, they worked to fill the gaps and move readers along their reading continuum.

> *"The ultimate goal is to be able to get every kid reading at grade level, obviously. But that doesn't always happen. There are some kids that just always need that support. That is why it is so important that we can offer that consistent support to them for however long they need it." Mya from South Dakota*

Eleven interviewees expressed the importance of improving when measuring growth and success.

> *"So, our goal is to close the gap, but more importantly, each student should be on a positive steady incline when looking at data graphs. We are always looking at universal data, the screening data, and we are trying to adjust our instruction to ensure we are constantly moving students up." Adeline from California*

Developing and supporting readers to become confident and successful was at the forefront of reading interventionists' efforts. On the same spectrum, 10 of the 12 interviewees spoke about instilling a love for reading in their students. They felt a passion for reading could be fostered by providing students with books they could accurately and fluently read and comprehend.

> *"Honestly, it doesn't matter what they're reading as long as it's independent. They really need just to be able to read it, get enjoyment from it, and get a message. And through conferences is how we guide kids to pick things that are just right for them." Lora from Virginia*

At the end of each interview, a question was posed regarding one thing the interviewee desired to change about their current model. The responses included more prep time, relevant professional development, time to explain the methodology to teachers, flexibility in scheduling time with students, smaller group sizes, a better curriculum that provides a more robust phonics scope and sequence, more time to prepare paraprofessionals, and adding another reading specialist due to high demand.

> *"If I could change one thing about our system, it would be more time and more support because those are your two driving factors on how many kids I can support. I want to provide adequate support for all my students, and sometimes I don't feel like I am doing that, and it's out of my control." Regan from Illinois*

This response further supported the narrative that reading interventionists have their students' best interests at heart and want to do everything they can to provide appropriate and practical instruction to each student whose lives they influence.

What We Learned

What was the role of a reading interventionist within elementary schools? A reading interventionist's role was valued and necessary. They played a part in every developing reader's journey. "When I first took this job, I didn't realize how many hats I would be wearing, but everything is connected. I'm the one constant variable in every reading decision throughout our whole school" (Valarie, California). Elementary schools had intervention models to meet their students' changing academic needs. Reading interventionists primarily worked with Tier 2 and Tier 3 students. Reading interventionists used screeners to assess students, analyze data, communicate data to others, and determine appropriate next steps for data to drive their instruction. A reading interventionist's role also extended further than just working with students. They constantly communicated and supported classroom teachers, paraprofessionals, and administrators.

How did reading interventionists perceive the impact of their work on students' learning? A reading interventionist's influence was evident through their dedication to supporting their students and coworkers. By investing in their education, earning master's degrees and reading specialist certifications, reading interventionists worked hard to know and deliver the most effective instruction despite not receiving proper and complete training from their school districts. When asked about training, Ivory from Wisconsin stated, "That's a problem. I'm only Orton-Gillingham

trained because I paid for it at my last district. I just needed some tools in my toolbox to help my students. So, I did what I needed to do on my own." Reading interventionists set goals for themselves and their students to keep improving their skills. They wanted to instill a love for reading within the entire student body and helped developing readers gain confidence and success to last a lifetime.

Our research supported the findings from Denton (2012) that students with reading difficulties benefited from purposeful and targeted instruction that progressed from more accessible to more challenging skills. Reading interventionists provided the proper support for all students to learn uniquely through an RTI model. "We have so many tools at our fingertips that we could pull anything developmentally appropriate and work on filling that gap for that specific student" (Adeline, California). Reading interventionists collected and used data to drive instruction. They witnessed growth when students were consistently provided with explicit, systematic instruction. The National Center on Response to Intervention (2010) stated that the four essential components of RTI included a multi-level instruction school-wide system, a screening process, progress monitoring completed regularly, and data-based decision making for instructional movement between levels. Our interviews confirmed that elementary schools are implementing and enforcing those four components. When implemented with fidelity, the quantity and quality of instruction for all readers were increased, especially for students experiencing difficulties in various areas of literacy (Mesmer & Mesmer, 2008).

Limitations

The COVID-19 pandemic affected our teaching world more than we can measure. The pandemic put stress and strain on teachers, and many still deal with its ramifications. Adding an optional interview for research was not something many were willing to commit to. This affected our sample size, and we could only secure 12 interviews. All our interviewees were female, and the teaching profession contains both men and women.

Recommendations

The findings of this research point to the heavy load placed on reading interventionists. The findings also encourage administrators to look at what is expected and required of the position within their school district. Additionally, school districts should offer more training for any teacher working academically with students, especially when they are asked to implement a program with fidelity. Professional development opportunities need to increase for reading interventionists and allow reading interventionists to provide professional development for other staff who provide services to students.

Further research is recommended on the role of reading interventionists within a school. As we continue to see the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic within our classrooms, a closer look at the instructional material used for intervention programs becomes valuable information. This research looked at the assessments used to drive instruction, but further clarification could determine intervention focus. Lora from Virginia discovered that "not only did we need intervention groups with actual books and guided reading lessons, but we also needed skill-based groups. Moreover, sometimes those skill-based groups had kids not reading at the same level." Reading interventionists have a unique and influential role in a young reader's journey. By continuing to research this topic and share our stories, we can help all students be successful, confident readers.

Kristi Allen *has 10 years of elementary teaching experience and earned her master's degree in reading. She is currently the reading interventionist at Platte-Geddes Elementary.*

Rachelle Loven *has taught for 45 years at the K-graduate levels. Currently, she is focusing on undergraduate teacher development and collaborating on graduate research at the University of Sioux Falls.*

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