Teachers Use and Perceptions of the Impact of Response to Intervention (RTI) on Co-Teaching at the Secondary Level in General Education Classrooms

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TEACHERS USE AND PERCEPTIONS OF THE IMPACT OF RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION (RTI) ON CO-TEACHING AT THE SECONDARY LEVEL IN GENERAL EDUCATION CLASSROOMS

by

Hawazen Ahmad Alasiri

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate College
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Education
Special Education and Literacy Studies
Western Michigan University
June 2019

Doctoral Committee:

Dr. Elizabeth Whitten, Ph.D., Chair
Dr. Luchara Wallace, Ph.D.
Dr. Jeanine Mattson-Gearhart, Ed.D.
DEDICATION

The completion of all requirements of the Doctoral degree in Special Education and Literacy Studies was made possible with endless support from my husband and children. I dedicate this work to you all and appreciate your support, patience, and love. Thank you for being by my side and supporting me to the end. I also dedicate this work to my parents: To my mother who sends love and prayers to me from overseas and to my father in heaven who surely watched me grow to become the person who I am today. I love you both. I dedicate this study to the Special Education field, to students with special needs all over the world, and to the literature with the desire that this work will make an important contribution.

Hawazen Ahmad Alasiri
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my committee chair Dr. Elizabeth Whitten for her support since day one on my doctoral journey from developing my program of study, to every single course, dissertation, and to the final defense. Thank you for your continuous support, thank you for believing my abilities to reach this point.

Next, I would like to thank my committee members Dr. Luchara Wallace and Dr. Jeanine Mattson-Gearhart for your advice, support, and feedback. Thank you for your time, effort, and recommendations that make this study one the significant achievements that I have accomplished.

Finally, I would like to thank my husband, Abdul-Majeed, my little princess Julanar, my birdy Muath, and my mothers, Jawaher and Eve. Abdul-Majeed thank you for your incessant support to make my dreams come true, thank you for your prayers, patience, and love to make this happen. Julanar, thank you for your understanding and patience when I am busy, thank you for your beautiful drawing that made my days when I am home. Muath, thank you for your beautiful smiles that says everything will be fine after all. Jawaher and Eve thank you for sending love and prayers, thank you for your support, encouragement, I am lucky for having you in my life.

Hawazen Ahmad Alasiri
When working together, Response to Intervention (RTI) and co-teaching can serve the needs of teachers and their students in a duet that Murawski and Hughes (2009) called “a logical combination for successful systematic change” (p. 267). According to the U.S. Department of Education, the number of students with disabilities, ages 6–21, who spent most of the school day in general classrooms in regular schools increased from 33% in 1990 to 62% in 2014 (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). With twice as many students with disabilities attending general education classrooms today, it is essential that all stakeholders in the education field gain a deep understanding of teaching and learning in inclusive classrooms. Today, co-teaching allows two professional, certified teachers to work together, sharing the responsibility of delivering instruction for all students in general classrooms, including students with special needs, using flexible approaches to meet individuals’ needs (Friend, 2008). Response to Intervention (RTI) is a three-tiered identification and support system designed to meet the needs of all students by providing “quality differentiated instruction” (Villa & Thousand, 2011). Together, co-teaching and RTI can create an effective environment for students with different needs. In part, co-teaching serves as an ideal method for putting RTI into action. Often, research on co-teaching focuses on teacher roles and responsibilities. It tends to overlook the impacts on student educational achievement and social development, thus, creating a gap in the literature. This
phenomenological qualitative study explores teachers’ use and perceptions of RTI on co-teaching in general classrooms and the benefits and barriers impacting co-teaching. It is informed by the increase of students with disabilities in general education classrooms, growing implementation of co-teaching practice, combined value of RTI and co-teaching, and lack of student-focused research on the subject.
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

According to Murawski and Hughes (2009), “If a primary goal of RTI is to address the needs of all learners in the general education classroom by using research-based best practices in a proactive approach, it would be folly to imagine that individual teachers can accomplish this alone” (p. 270). This statement emphasizes the need for co-teaching as a force for effectively driving Response to Intervention (RTI). RTI is a prevention, identification, and support system which provides the necessary supports to ensure academic success for all students (Whitten, Esteves & Woodrow, 2009). Co-teaching is defined as a method (Murawski & Hughes, 2009) where “two or more professionals jointly deliver substantive instruction to a diverse, or blended, group of students in the same physical space” (Cook & Friend, 1995, p. 1). RTI and co-teaching share the fundamental goal of supporting all learners. RTI implementation success depends upon collaboration between professionals sharing their expertise and a responsibility to provide high-quality instruction—each considered essential components of co-teaching instructional practice. Given these parallels, Murawski and Hughes (2009) described the powerful meeting of RTI and co-teaching as “a logical combination for successful systemic change (p, 267). When working together, “co-teaching becomes a powerful means of meeting the goals of RTI” (Murawski & Hughes, 2009, p.269).

Statement of the Research Problem

The number of students with special needs receiving instruction through RTI as well as spending most of the school day in general education classes continues to rise (Winn & Blanton,
According to the U.S. Department of Education (2016), in fall 2014, 95% of students served under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) were enrolled in regular schools. Among all students ages 6–21 served under IDEA, those who spent most of the school day (80% or more of their time) in general education classrooms increased from 33% in fall 1990 to 62% in fall 2014 (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Likewise, the data showed students with special needs disabilities did not make progress in their achievement according to the Nation’s Report Card. According to Samuels (2018), “Students with disabilities posted stagnant scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress in 2017 and failed to close the gap with students not identified as having disabilities, who also reflected generally flat performance on the latest results”. In addition, Council for Exceptional Children stated that the results of the National Assessment of Educational Progress for math and reading indicated “students with disabilities posted flat scores on the Nations Report Card”. Also, students with disabilities did not show improved performance in 2015 assessment, and “the majority of students with disabilities performed in the “below basic” achievement level”. In regard to Part B of IDEA, the State Performance Plans (SPP) Letters and Annual Performance Report (APR) Letters indicated graduation rate, drop out, and participation of students with IEPs in the State of Michigan needs improvement. Furthermore, Michigan was the only state identified as “needs Intervention” and “needs Assistance” from 2014-2017. In response to the previous report, a state level committee was given the task to develop a response to MDE “The Path Forward” followed by a timeline and implementation of goals and objectives for improvement (Michigan Department of Education, 2018).

Fletcher and Vaughn (2009) reported on several studies demonstrating that students with special needs showed “flat levels of growth and little evidence that typical interventions close the
achievement gap” (Bentum & Aaron, 2003; Donovan & Cross, 2002; Vaughn, Levy, Coleman, & Bos, 2002; Torgesen et al., 2001; Hanushek, Kain, & Rivkin, 1998; Glass, 1983; p. 33).

It could be argued that Tier 1 and 2 of RTI implementation can be facilitated by one teacher in an inclusive classroom. For example, Quinn (2010) described a method of delivering RTI through whole class and small group leadership by a single instructor. Through this approach, the instructor provides intensive intervention to small groups while also leading the entire class. Certainly, one positive aspect of this balancing act is the continuity of instruction based on a single teacher’s planning and implementation. However, as Quinn (2010) also suggested, “It is extremely difficult to lead both your full class and a targeted small group effectively at the same time” (Quinn, 2010, p. 25). It can be overwhelming and may be impossible for a teacher to deliver individualized intervention for small groups while teaching a full classroom. This may lead to ineffective teaching instruction (Quinn, 2010). Thus, for effective implementation of RTI, general education teachers and their students benefit from assistance from professionals helping to meet the diverse needs of students in inclusive classrooms. This, paired with the substantial growth of inclusive classrooms, indicates a need for teachers to be equipped to meet the challenges of teaching general and special education students in the same classroom. This need can be met through the combination of well-implemented RTI, driven by collaborative-teaching.

Co-teaching is as an ideal solution to effectively incorporate RTI into these growing inclusive classrooms. RTI and its multi-tiered framework allows co-teachers to begin with a foundation from which they may differentiate instruction to meet individual students’ needs. Esteves and Whitten (2014) highlighted how all students differ in their academic learning preferences, interests, and readiness. This stresses the need for co-teaching partners to be
proficient in RTI applications, collaboration, sharing their expertise in planning for classroom instruction, and practicing differentiated instruction (Murawski, 2012). Differentiated instruction is a teaching method where teachers meet students’ learning preferences by applying progress monitoring and data-based decision making (Roy, Guay, and Valois, 2013).

RTI and co-teaching training can play an important role in helping students with disabilities succeed. Teachers have limited professional development of RTI and co-teaching. Reith and Polsgrove (1998) found that to include students with special needs in the classroom without support is simply to “invite their failure”. Thus, it is recommended for co-teachers to receive training on co-teaching models (Dieker & Murawski, 2003). The lack of teacher training related to co-teaching raised concerns regarding their ability and knowledge to successfully implement co-teaching (Walther-Thomas, 1997). Similarly, Castro-Villarreal, Rodriguez, and Moore (2014), discovered that teachers’ lack of training related to RTI caused negative outcomes of the RTI’s system in the classroom. This is was the most concerning aspect preventing teachers from successful RTI implementation. In addition to the lack of training, general education teachers claim there is no time to provide individualized support to students at Tier III and meet the requirement of RTI as well (Castro-Villarreal & Moore, 2014).

The literature draws parallels between the benefits and barriers faced by co-teachers and teachers incorporating RTI into their classrooms. For example, both groups experience issues related to planning, time management, preparation, and funding (Lane, Bocian, MacMillan, & Gresham, 2004; L. Fuchs & Fuchs, 2007; Friend, 2008; Murawski & Hughes, 2009). Also, importantly, educators on either side of RTI and co-teaching share the benefits of offering their students high-quality differentiated and explicit instruction and a variety of strategies, purposeful grouping, and meeting the needs of all students in an inclusive environment (Murawski &
Hughes, 2009; Sileo, 2011; Tomlinson, 2005& Whitten, Esteves, & Woodrow, 2009). Sharing common goals, benefits, and barriers make RTI and co-teaching natural partners in delivering the best possible inclusive approach to meet the needs of diverse students in inclusive classrooms.

Furthermore, there is a limited number of qualitative studies related to RTI (Benjamin, 2011). Other researchers reported on the lack of RTI studies at the high school level due to the complexities at the secondary level (Fisher and Frey, 2013). In addition, an intensive data-based search, conducted by the researcher, revealed a lack of studies that focused on RTI incorporation into co-taught classrooms. At the same time, there was no evidence of documented policy in the literature related to RTI and co-teaching implementation at the secondary level.

**Purpose of the Study**

This study was designed to explore teachers’ use of and perceptions about the impact (benefits and barriers) of RTI on co-teaching in secondary level, general education classrooms. According to Murawski and Hughes (2009), when integrating RTI into the general education classroom to serve the needs of all students, “simply putting two educators in the same room is neither sufficient nor necessarily collaborative” (p. 269). RTI implementation requires that teachers purposefully collaborate on appropriate lesson plans steeped in research, developed with direct access to the curriculum to meet the needs of all learners, mined consistently to measure progress, and allows students in Tiers II and III to receive purposefully grouped and individualized instruction (Friend & Cook, 2007; Murawski & Hughes, 2009& Walther-Thomas, et al., 2000). Co-teaching serves as a method for putting RTI into action (Whitten & Hoekstra, 2002). However, to be effective, co-teaching and RTI require collaboration. Friend (2000) indicated that the term “collaboration” has become somewhat diluted due to its prevalence in education literature, and it has been described as an umbrella term under which a variety of
interactions fall (Cook & Friend, 1995; Murawski & Hughes, 2009). However, it is essential that despite its omnipresence throughout the education field, collaboration must be taken seriously, and its significance not undervalued in the bringing together of RTI and co-teaching. Any attempt to implement RTI and co-teaching without vital collaboration will prove pointless (Murawski & Hughes, 2009). Therefore, this study sought to investigate how teachers collaborate to implement RTI in their co-taught classrooms and what they perceive as the benefits and barriers related to RTI incorporation. Through this study, special and general education teachers incorporating RTI will find valuable knowledge and guidance for use in their co-taught classrooms, while stakeholders will become more aware of co-teachers’ RTI-based needs.

Research Questions

RQ 1: How does the incorporation of Response to Intervention (RTI) into co-taught, secondary general education classrooms benefit the teacher experience and student academic and behavioral success?

RQ 2: How does the incorporation of Response to Intervention (RTI) into co-taught secondary general education classrooms result in barriers to the teacher experience and student academic and behavioral success?

RQ 3: What are teachers’ perceptions of the overall impact of Response to Intervention (RTI) on co-taught secondary level, general education classrooms?

Significance of the Study

According to Esteves and Whitten (2014), “When implemented well, [RTI] can be a powerful engine for improving the achievement and engagement of all students” (p. 1). The co-
taught classroom can help more efficiently drive RTI and result in more effective outcomes for all learners. Gaining a better understanding of how co-teachers use and perceive the benefits, barriers, and overall impact of RTI incorporation into their co-taught classrooms served as the motivation behind this study intending to educate general and special education teachers.

By 2004, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) referred to RTI as a “response to scientific, research-based intervention” and required all states in the U.S. to implement RTI as an alternative to the discrepancy model previously used to identify students with LD. Prior to the development of RTI, identification for these students was based on the gap between their academic achievements and IQ test scores (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006, RTI Action Network.org, n.d.).

IDEA (2004) and the No Child Left Behind Act (2001) (later replaced by Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015), stressed the significance of RTI implementation and mandated RTI integration toward meeting the needs of all students by providing a free, appropriate public education at no cost through high-quality instruction taught by highly-qualified teachers in the least restrictive environment (RTI Action Network.org, n.d.). Today, while RTI “can lead to a diagnosis of a student’s specific learning disability, it provides a school with a great deal more” (Esteves & Whitten, 2014, p. 1), which means it has moved from a singular application to a complete system of student-centered support and ongoing evaluation. Placement alone is not the key to student achievement, for there “is no compelling evidence that placement rather than instruction is the critical factor in student academic success” (Hocutt, 1996, p.1). The multilayered supports afforded through RTI facilitated through the co-taught classroom move beyond identification and placement to meet a variety of student needs. Thus, this study was
intended to raise awareness of the wider impacts of RTI on co-teaching with an emphasis on the benefits and barriers related to teacher and student experience.

Benjamin (2011) stated there are a limited number of qualitative studies investigating RTI, and there is a need to develop a deeper understanding of RTI for the benefit of co-teachers and students. Esteves & Whitten (2014) emphasized the need for incorporating RTI into co-taught classrooms. The researchers’ text, which informed this study, provides middle school teachers with “the practical information and tools [teachers] need to put RTI in place, to harness its benefits, and to successfully tackle its challenges” (p. 1). Murawski and Hughes (2009) argument that RTI and co-teaching are a “logical combination” (Murawski & Hughes, 2009, p. 267) also informed this study. Their work provided educators “with practical understanding of what RTI may look like in the classroom and how co-teaching… can make RTI more efficient, effective, and realistic” (Murawski & Hughes, 2009, p. 267). However, based on this research, there remains a limited number of studies on RTI and co-teaching (Whitten, 2018).

There is also a deficiency of studies regarding RTI applications used in middle and high schools (Faggella-Luby & Wardwell, 2011). Fisher and Frey (2013) for example, identified a lack of studies focused on RTI in high schools due to the scheduling obstacles and compliance issues commonly faced when working with secondary school students. A search was conducted using the Education Resources Information Center (ERIC) database specifically focused on peer-reviewed articles conducted between 2006-2017 to determine the number of studies related to the topic under investigation. Using the phrases “response to intervention” AND “co-teaching”, the search resulted in 19 peer-reviewed articles. Only two articles of the 18 combined response to intervention and co-teaching. When using the abbreviation RTI instead of “response to intervention”, the search resulted in only four studies; two of four studies were related. Another
search used the phrase “Response to Intervention” AND “co teaching” AND “qualitative” with criteria narrowed to the secondary level. The results revealed that no studies have been conducted. This significant lack of studies on RTI and co-teaching served as a catalyst to conduct this study and contribute to the literature a better understanding of the benefits, barriers, and overall impacts of RTI on co-teaching. A summary of the ERIC search is provided in Table 1.

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<td>RTI AND Co-teaching</td>
<td>Murawski &amp; Hughes (2009)</td>
<td>The article stressed that implementing co-teaching models into classrooms increases the effectiveness of RTI and provides practical guidance for teachers to increase the effectiveness of both practices.</td>
<td>USA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RTI AND Co-teaching</td>
<td>Hamilton-Jones &amp; Moore, (2013)</td>
<td>The article emphasized that several recommendations need to be considered to ensure high-quality inclusion. Two professionals collaborate to deliver instructions equally, ensure high-quality inclusion practices.</td>
<td>USA</td>
</tr>
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**Dissertation Structure**

This dissertation contains five chapters. Chapter I includes the introduction of the study as well as the research purposes, significance, and questions. Chapter II provides a literature review. This chapter will be informed by the significant studies on in the field on RTI, co-teaching, as well as the benefits, barriers, and overall impacts of RTI on co-teaching. Chapter III focuses on the methodology used to carry out the investigation to reach the desired results and answers the research questions. This chapter highlighted the research design, sample, participants, site, and data collection instrument. Chapter IV presented the results of the data collected in qualitative form serving the research design. The final chapter, Chapter V, presents a
discussion of the findings and limitations, and provides suggestions and recommendations for others researcher.

Definition of Terms

Co-teaching: Two professional, certified teachers working together (usually a general education teacher and special education teacher) sharing the responsibility of delivering instruction for all students in general classrooms, including students with special needs, using flexible approaches to meet individuals’ needs (Friend, 2008).

Response to Intervention (RTI): A requirement of the Individuals with Disabilities Improvement Act (2004), Response to Intervention is a multi-tiered prevention, identification, and support system, which provides the necessary support to ensure academic success for all students (Whitten, Esteves & Woodrow, 2009).

Collaboration: A professional partnership between educators who are sharing responsibilities for planning, teaching, and educational resources (Friend& Cook, 1990).

Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA): The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (2004) was passed to ensure all students with special needs have access to free, appropriate public education, which provides special education services and related services to meet their needs. The law also provides rights and protections for students with special needs and their parents. More importantly, the law aides all educational institutions to provide effective educational opportunities to students with disabilities (Congress, U. S., 2004).

Least Restrictive Environment (LRE): The Least Restrictive Environment refers to the environment that provides the maximum possible meaningful educational opportunities for
students with disabilities and their non-disabled peers, in the same school that students with no disabilities attend with the use of necessary supports (Wright & Wright, 2004).

**Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) and No Child Left Behind (NCLB):** The Every Student Succeeds Act replaces the No Child Left Behind Act passed in 2002. ESSA (P.L. 114-95) was passed in 2015 and requires all American students be held to high academic standards. It provides protection for minorities and those in need, holds high expectations regarding student outcomes, ensures needed information to support everyone in need, provides resources to improve education, and prepares students for the future (Darrow, 2016).

**Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE):** Free Appropriate Public Education refers to all special education services and related services that are provided for students with special needs with no charge to preschools, elementary or secondary school in the state, with Individualized Education Program (IEP), and meeting the standard State Education Agency (SEA) (Congress, U. S., 2004).

**Individual Education Program (IEP):** An Individualized Education Program is an individualized document for students who receive special education services and related services to meet their needs. As mandated by law, an IEP includes the student’s current level of performance and annual goals; special education and related services; time spent with nondisabled peers; state and district-wide testing; dates and places related to services; required transition services and needs related to transition; majority age, and measuring process (Yell, Conroy, Katsiyannis & Conroy, 2013).
Summary

This qualitative study was introduced in this dissertation in five chapters. Chapter I included the introduction to the phenomenological study, statement of the research problem, purpose of the study, significance of the study, and definitions of terms used in the study.
CHAPTER II
LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter will provide an overview of the history of Response to Intervention (RTI) and co-teaching and identify the main components of RTI and co-teaching models. The benefits and barriers of both practices are highlighted. Also, the chapter will provide insight drawn directly from the literature into the significance of incorporating both approaches.

Response to Intervention (RTI) History

The story of special education in the U.S. began in the early twentieth century when a group of parents gathered to bring education to their children with disabilities. It was not until the middle of the twentieth century that students with disabilities were regularly accepted into public school classrooms. Prior to that, most students with special needs were either ill-educated or completely excluded (Pulliam & VanPatten, 2006). According to Special Education News (2015), In 1965, Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Elementary and Secondary Education Act into law. The law Johnson backed made financial support available for primary education, and today is recognized for widening the public education access reach for students with disabilities.

By 1970, a small number of children with special needs started attending public schools (ValleCorsa DeBettencourt, Zigmond & Davis, 2000). Important advancements were made in 1973 when President Richard M. Nixon signed into law Section 504, which guaranteed basic civil rights for individuals with disabilities and required public schools to provide accommodations for students with disabilities. In 1975, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EHA) (also known as PL94-142) was signed by President Gerald R. Ford,
guaranteed a free, appropriate public education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment (LRE) and mandated that each student with special needs to have an individualized education program (IEP) (Turnbull et al., 1999). LRE refers to the environment that provides the maximum possible meaningful educational opportunities for a student with disabilities with their nondisabled peers, in the same school that students with no disabilities attend, with the use of necessary support (Wright & Wright, 2004; Yell, 1995). According to A Guide to the Individualized Education Program, an IEP is an educational program designed to meet student needs related to their current performance, annual goals, special education and related services, participation with nondisabled children, transition service needs, and measuring progress. An IEP is used in schools to ensure all students with special needs are on the right path (Kupper, 2000).

Over time, Congress discovered a staggering 50% of students with disabilities in American schools were not receiving adequate educational opportunities and similarly to the exclusion of the early twentieth century, one million students were still facing complete exclusion from public schools. This prompted Congress to reauthorize and rename EHA to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), which was signed into law by President George H.W. Bush in 1990, reauthorized once again in 1997 by President William J. Clinton.

Simultaneously, change was underway to the 1965 ESEA. By 2001, ESEA was reauthorized to become the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), which provided deeper supports for students in elementary and secondary school. NCLB is considered “the most significant expansion of the federal government into education in U.S history” (Yell, Drasgow & Lowrey, 2005, p.1). NCLB impacted the way teachers facilitate instruction and student assessment, for the law required teacher, administrative, and school district accountability based on proven
student academic achievement and stressed the use of data-based approaches to instruction and procedures by highly qualified teachers (Smith & Tyler, 2013; Yell, Drasgow & Lowrey, 2005). In addition, the law focused on improving the academic performance of low-achieving students and expanding training for teachers to ensure the quality of their teaching instruction (Yell, Drasgow & Lowrey, 2005). Because of the expanded need to support increasing numbers of students in need, the act was updated in 2015 when President Barack Obama signed into law the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). The act called for strengthened protections for students at risk, initiated higher academic standards and higher quality instruction for all students, and demanded that informative resources regarding state testing and other assessments be provided to parents, families, and teachers to measure student achievement and needs (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). Through ESSA, funding and support was now made available at the state level, giving states more opportunities to serve and improve their school districts, teacher instruction quality, and student achievement (Darrow, 2016; Pollitt & Leichty, 2017).

Response to Intervention (RTI), which got its start in the 1980s, was adapted and refined through improvements made over time to IDEA and overall, the high-quality instruction and needs-meeting, high academic standards required through IDEA shaped the same high-quality expectations which comprise the contemporary framework and use of RTI (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006). As “a scientific, research-based intervention” (Hale, 2008, p. 5), IDEA helped drive the modern use of RTI. This major shift came about as IDEA underwent reauthorization in 2004. The law, signed by President George W. Bush, now required students with special needs to be taught by highly-qualified teachers with full state certification as special education teachers who possess a teaching license, and have at least a bachelor’s degree [34 CFR 300.18(b)(1)] [20 U.S.C. 1401(10) (B)] (Yell, Shriner & Katsiyannis, 2006).
A major aspect of the law was early identification for students with learning disabilities. Prior to 2004 updates, learning disability identification was made using the discrepancy model, which was based on apparent gaps related to academic performance and the IQ test (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006). Several issues surrounded the use of discrepancy model, including the over referral of students to special education services, and thus, researchers questioned the validity of the model. The discrepancy model’s “wait to fail system” allowed students to fail without providing the necessary support needed to improve students learning performance (Restori & Lee, 2009). RTI provided an alternative to the discrepancy model and through IDEA 2004, the law permitted schools to apply both identification models (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006; Stecker, 2007; Murawski & Hughes, 2009). According to Responsiveness to Intervention and Learning Disabilities (2005), “An RTI approach has been suggested as a way to reduce referrals to special education by providing well-designed instruction and intensified interventions in general education [which helps teachers distinguish] between students who perform poorly in school due to factors such as inadequate prior instruction from students with LD who need more intensive and specialized instruction” (p. 2) Through high-quality, research-based instructional intervention, the use of RTI decreased the numbers of referrals to special education services. No longer were students referred to special education services due to low-quality teaching instruction (LD Online.org, 2005). RTI not only is an identification system for students with learning disabilities, but it is also “a process that provides immediate intervention to struggling students at the first indication of failure to learn” (Ross, n.d. p. 2).

Response to Intervention Definition

Response to Intervention (RTI) is based on student progress in the areas of academic achievement and behavioral performance through research-based interventions. The layers of
different RTI support is based on the students’ responses to intervention, which leads to identification of placement on a RTI’s multitiered framework and allows students to become eligible for more intensive instruction (Gresham, 2007). RTI-based assessments and interventions are designed to help increase the students’ academic achievement and decrease their behavioral issues (National Center on Response to Intervention, 2010). For RTI to effectively benefit students, it is necessary for teachers to implement research-based interventions with integrity (Gresham, 2007).

**Response to Intervention System Components**

RTI is an identification system that serves as an alternative to the discrepancy model used to identify students with learning disabilities (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006; Murawski & Hughes, 2009). RTI’s main components, which include “proactive instruction, ongoing assessment, data-based decision making, and intensive instruction greatly affects the general education teacher and classroom” (Murawski & Hughes, 2009, p.268). Schools and instructors may combine or choose to apply one of two research-based RTI intervention models: the problem-solving and the standard protocol approach (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006). In the former, educators following the Heartland Educational Agency’s protocol which is comprised of four levels stressing direct support and quick responses to students in a timely manner (Grimes, 2002). In the first level, a practitioner holds a meeting with a student’s parents to discuss academic or behavioral problems to resolve them. In level two, the teacher works with the school’s team of professionals to identify and analyze the student’s problem, determine an appropriate intervention to address his or her needs, and implement and monitor the student response to intervention. In the third level, teachers “use behavioral problem solving to refine or redesign the intervention and coordinate its
implementation” (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006, p. 59) and finally, they apply special education assistance and due process considerations (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006).

Other RTI practitioners apply the standard protocol approach, which is an alternative model to problem-solving protocol. The implementation of a standard protocol, demonstrated through Vellutino and colleagues (Vellutino, Scanlon, Sipay, Small, Chen, Pratt & Denckla, 1996), requires a length of approximately 10 to 15 weeks with intensive, personalized support administered to students individually or via small groups (Al Otaiba & Fuchs, in press; McMaster et al., 2005; Vaughn et al., 2003; Vellutino et al., 1996). Beginning with tier one of the standard protocol, a teacher provides treatment to a small group of students measuring their response to the treatment trial. Those students who do not respond as expected will require more intensive intervention while those who respond to the intervention as expected, and show no indications of disabilities, will be allowed to return to their classroom instruction (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006). Similarly, in the protocol’s tier 2, students who respond to the intervention provided as expected and show significant progress return to their classroom instruction. Those who show insufficient progress in Tier 2 will receive more intense instruction in Tier 3. If students receiving Tier 3 intervention are not successful instructors will consider further evaluation for a potential disability. Thus, these students will require more evaluation to be matched with the appropriate educational services (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006). Fuchs & Fuchs (2006), indicated the problem solving and standard protocol approaches both avail themselves to RTI principles which include providing necessary and needed interventions in a timely manner to assess struggling learners and provide high-quality instruction to increase intervention effectiveness. More significantly, Fuchs and Fuchs (2007) suggested to schools to “rely on a
combination of approaches with a standard treatment protocol used for academic difficulties and a problem-solving approach used for obvious behavioral problems” (p. 16).

The three-tier framework is the most the commonly used model of RTI across the country and most commonly recognized by the National Association of State Directors of Special Education (Bender & Shores, 2007). According to the Center on Response to Intervention at American Institutes for Research, there are four major components of the RTI system, including Multi-Level Prevention System (three tiers), Universal Screening, Progress Monitoring, and Data-Based Decision Making (Center on Response to Intervention, 2007; Vaughn & Fuchs, 2003).

For this study, it is important to note that the idea of prevention associated with RTI is not necessarily indicated for identification of adolescents, for at the secondary school level, these students have been living with academic and behavioral struggles throughout their educational journey. Instead, prevention, often associated with at-risk elementary students, takes on a different meaning. “It might seem odd to refer to prevention in secondary education,” (RTI ActionNetwork.org, n.d. para.4) explained, “because by the time some students get to middle school, they already have a history of academic failure that often worsens in high school…[thus] there are different ways to think about prevention with adolescents” (RTIActionNetwork.org, n.d. para.4). Concerns eased by the preventions made possible through RTI include the potential embarrassment of poor grades, not earning a diploma, or ultimately, choosing to drop out of school. Likewise, these struggles can impact students socially, such as reductions in self-esteem, feelings of isolation, antisocial behavior, and possibly, future criminal activity (Duffy, 2007; RTI ActionNetwork.org, n.d.). This RTI-based secondary school focus on prevention also includes an attention to literacy—one of the essential skills required for long-term academic and independent
living. RTI empowers instructors to help secondary students build these essential skills, from vocabulary and text comprehension to the problem solving and critical thinking skills students will need throughout middle school, high school, college, and for the rest of their lives (Esteves & Whitten, 2014; RTI ActionNetwork.org, n.d). Thus, the prevention made possible through RTI is applicable not only to struggling young students, but also to secondary school students.

**Multi-Level Prevention System**

RTI is a multitiered service delivery method which schools provide in their general classrooms to support students’ academic and behavioral achievement. The three levels differ in their intensity and are designed to permit students to work in small groups of individualized, intensive instruction based on their levels of response to interventions; RTI is also known as Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) (Esteves & Whitten, 2014; Fletcher & Vaughn, 2009). Fuchs and Fuchs (2006), explained that teachers increase the intensity level of their research-based intervention by “(a) using more teacher-centered, systematic, and explicit (e.g., scripted) instruction; (b) conducting it more frequently; (c) adding to its duration; (d) creating smaller and more homogenous student groupings; or (e) relying on instructors with greater expertise” (2006, p.94). RTI intervention durations commonly last between eight (Bradley et al., 2007) to 30 weeks (Murawski & Hughes, 2009; Mathes, 2006). Student responses to the interventions made possible in each tier are assessed through progress monitoring, which can be defined “a form of dynamic assessment because its metric is change in students’ level or rate of learning” (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006, p. 94). Outcomes measured via progress monitoring are applied in data-based decision-making to determine the most effective teaching approaches, curriculum, and materials to be used to meet each students’ needs. A critical process that allows teachers to determine student strengths, weaknesses and achievements, data-based decision-making results in more
accurately informed instruction decisions (Mertler, 2014; Mertler & Zachel, 2006). These data are also used to make placement decisions (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006). The following paragraphs delve more deeply into RTI’s three tiers and essential components.

**Tier I.** Quinn (2010) describes Tier I as “full class instruction and full class intervention” (p. 9). Following universal screening, which is “conducted to identify or predict students who may be at risk for poor learning outcomes” (Center on Response to Intervention, 2007), all students receive high-quality, scientifically-based instructions in the general classroom. Then, through progress monitoring, students are assessed at least three times a year (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2007) which also accounts for a universal level for all learners (Esteves & Whitten, 2014). Approximately 80% of students are served under Tier I. As advocates for the benefits of research-based instruction, Miskovik and Hoop (2006) encourage teachers to be action researchers in their classrooms and remain aware in case some students may be struggling and need more academic and behavioral support. Some students will remain in their classrooms receiving high-quality, research-based instruction while other students, identified as struggling learners in Tier I, move to Tier II where they receive more intensive support targeted to their needs.

**Tier II.** Tier II provides “special services, often delivered by a special education teacher in a small group or one-on-one” (Quinn, 2010, p. 9). Those students identified by a teacher as needing additional support—meaning they fall behind on the benchmark or are at risk of failure academically and behaviorally—move to Tier II to receive more intensive and concentrated individualized instruction (Esteves & Whitten, 2014; L. Fuchs & Fuchs, 2007; Vaughn & Roberts, 2007). Reports demonstrate a range of percentages associated with students served by Tier II. For example, the NASDE reported in 2008 that 7% of students are served under Tier II.
and in 2009, Mathes reported the number of students served under Tier II as 15% (Murawski & Hughes 2009; Mathes, 2006). Tier II support is provided through collaboration between general education teachers and other specialists based on student needs.

**Tier III.** In Tier III, students receive additional instructional time most often delivered by a reading specialist, special education teacher or other support specialist through small group or one-on-one instruction. (Quinn, 2010). A student’s failure to respond academically and behaviorally to Tier II intensive instruction and support will make them eligible to move to Tier III for more intensive individualized instruction for longer durations (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2007). Tier III’s intervention intensity can be reached “in two ways that may overlap. One way is to increase the amount of time spent working on the targeted goals… [and the other is] to decrease the students-to-interventionist ratio” (p. 14) based on the professional team decision to meet the individuals’ needs (Esteves & Whitten, 2014). The more improvements and response to intensive instructions a student makes, the less time the student remains in Tier III (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2007). Significant improvements can lead to the possibility of a student moving back to Tier II (Reschly, 2006). In contrast, the more a student struggles to respond to Tier III intervention, the longer the time needed for more intensive support as well as the possibility of eligibility for special education services in schools that identify Tier III as special education (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2007). Other schools may designate Tier IV as their special education services tier (Esteves & Whitten, 2014). Given the progress students make at each tier, there is always monitoring of student progress for movement within the tiers (Murawski & Hughes, 2009). Figure 1 demonstrates the three tiers as they relate to academics as well as behavioral aspects of RTI.
For RTI to succeed, it must involve assessment intended to identify progress and need and drive decision making (Whitten, Esteves, & Woodrow, 2009). Universal screening, progress monitoring, and data-based decision making are other fundamental components of RTI (National Association of State Directors of Special Education, 2006).

**Universal Screening**

Universal screening is an assessment conducted at the beginning of the school year. Some schools screen two to three times throughout the year to identify students below the screening “cut point”. A cut point is defined as “a score on the scale of a screening tool or a progress monitoring tool” (National Center on Response to Intervention, 2010, p.5). Then, teachers use more reliable assessment tools that can predict in more depth which students truly have learning or behavioral problems. Instructors consider cut points when making intervention and duration decisions (National Center on Response to Intervention, 2010).

To prevent over-identification of students at-risk of failure, educators must administer sensitive, reliable, and valid screening tool for all students. “The screening instrument can be norm referenced or criterion referenced, the latter often representing the first assessment of a
progress monitoring tool” (Fletcher & Vaughn, 2009, p. 32; Fletcher, Lyon, Fuchs, & Barnes, 2007). For instance, researchers have proven that the use of Curriculum-Based Measurement (CBM) is a valid tool used to measure students’ actual performance as well as helps to improve students’ achievements (Esteves & Whitten, 2014; Stecker, Fuchs & Fuchs, 2005). In secondary education, CMB takes two approaches: first, it is used to determine the skills a student needs to understand and be knowledgeable of the content area, and second, generalized performance indicators are applied to determine progress over time (Stecker et al., 2005). The universal screening used to implement RTI in secondary education proves essential. For example, there are numerous circumstances related to academic and behavioral issues which may lead some students to drop out of high-school and prevent students from graduating from high school. Therefore, universal screening allows teachers to spot potential problems according to key indicators and provide appropriate intervention to support struggling learners before their struggles become obstacles (Esteves & Whitten, 2014).

**Progress Monitoring**

According to the Center on Response to Intervention, progress monitoring is used to “assess students’ academic performance, to quantify a student rate of improvement or responsiveness to instruction, to evaluate instructional effectiveness, and for students who are least responsive to effective instruction, to formulate effective individualized programs” (2007, p. 6). As they do for universal screening, educators use cut points to measure responses, needs for instruction changes, and service placement from less intensive to more intensive. Progress monitoring alerts teachers of needed instructional changes for students who do not respond to the instruction provided (Esteves & Whitten, 2014). To emphasize the importance of progress monitoring, Esteves and Whitten (2014) stress that “when students are active participants in their
own growth, articulating their learning goals and the progress they’ve made will come naturally” (p. 79). CBM serves as a commonly used progress monitoring tool. Proven a reliable, valid, and highly standardized, research-based source of data (Esteves & Whitten, 2014; Stecker et al., 2005), CBM permits teachers to track their students’ progress toward accomplishing academic goals and gaining needed skills (Esteves & Whitten, 2014).

**Data-Based Decision Making**

The Center on Response to Intervention reports that school administration and teachers apply data analysis and decision making at all points of the RTI three tier system and instructional implementation. RTI teams draw data from screening and progress monitoring to make informed decisions that move students from tier to tier. They also use RTI as an early disability identification system informed by data (2007). This process applies students’ actual performance on standardized tests, and other kinds of assessments and assignments, to help teachers develop lesson plans that better serve their students’ needs (Mertler, 2014; Mertler & Zachel, 2006). According to Tiered Intervention in High School, “Data are used to guide these decisions. Interventions are commensurate to a student’s demonstrated need and are changed or intensified if they are found ineffective” (Learned, 2010, p. 1).

**The Significance of Response to Intervention**

For the National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Gersten, Gonchar and Dimino conducted an intensive review of the literature from 2002 to 2014. The researchers intentionally identified 27 efficacy studies which they deemed appropriate to meet What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) evidence standards (What Works Clearinghouse, 2014). Findings from their studies reviewed, which identified 20 interventions, suggest that RTI implementation successfully impacted student achievement; in this case, in reading achievement.
For example, they found that using evidence-based reading interventions with students in grades 1-3 improved the reading outcomes of at-risk students. Significant findings include the demonstration of positive/potentially positive effects for 11 individually administered small-group interventions and that all 20 interventions allowed for effective continued teacher support, as well as support for paraeducators, volunteers, and others involved in student success (Gersten, Gonchar & Dimino, 2017).

Co-Teaching

Co-Teaching Definition

Co-teaching has been described by many scholars and education professionals. Bauwens and Hourcade (1995) called it, “a restructuring of teaching procedures in which two or more educators possessing distinct sets of skills works in a co-active and coordinated fashion to jointly teach academically and behaviorally heterogenous groups of students in integrated educational settings” (Bauwens & Hourcade, 1995; Walther-Thomas, 1997, p. 396). Also, in 1995, Cook and Friend, described it as “two or more professionals delivery substantive instruction to diverse or blended groups of students in a single, physical space” (p. 1) and later, they defined it as a purposefully flexible instructional delivery option used to meet the needs of students with and without disabilities with a variety of concerns (Friend & Cook, 2010). Co-teaching relies on a partnership between two teachers, including a general education teacher and a special education teacher or another specialist (Friend, 2008; Garvar & Papania, 1982). Co-teaching allows students with special needs access to general curriculum in the least restrictive environment where they may be taught in general education classrooms (Conderman & Hedin, 2013). Kohler-Evans (2006), refers to co-teaching partnerships as a “professional marriage,” which emphasizes the importance of relationship-building between two professionals. According to Friend and
Cook (1995), four key elements are essential to developing a deep understanding of co-teaching. The first element requires the bringing together of two educators. Typically, this combination includes a general education teacher and special education teacher. However, the pairing can also be comprised of a general education teacher and a specialist equipped to meet the students’ needs, such as a speech specialist or other specialist of related services. The second element of co-teaching requires that both professionals actively collaborate in the delivery of teaching instruction to serve all students in their classroom. Third, to meet IEP requirements of students with special needs, special education or related services specialists prove necessary to general classrooms to provide necessary support. Finally, co-teaching serves as an instructional delivery option for students with and without disabilities and allows students to share the same setting in one classroom (Friends & Cook, 1995).

Co-Teaching Models

To effectively facilitate co-teaching in one physical classroom, teachers must consider several factors before selecting specific co-teaching approaches to implement in general classrooms. These considerations include student age ranges and maturity, subjects and content to be taught, and teachers’ instructive creativity (Friends & Cook, 1995). Co-teachers are not expected to design paired strategies on their own—a series of approaches has been developed to aid in co-teaching practice and not one of them is better than another (Friend & Cook, 1995).

The series of approaches developed for co-teachers include the following: one-teach, one-assist; station teaching; parallel teaching; alternative teaching; and team teaching (Friend & Cook, 2012; Scruggs, Mastropieri & McDuffie, 2007). In the one-teach, one-assist model, the general education teacher takes the instructional lead and teaches the content, and the special education teacher monitors, observes, and assists students’ needs individually (Friend & Cook,
2012; Scruggs, Mastropieri& McDuffie, 2007). Several studies indicate that one teach-one assist is the most widely used co-teaching model by teachers in general classrooms (Magiera, Kathleen et al, 2006; Pancsfar & Jerry, 2016; Scruggs, Mastropieri & Mcduffie, 2007;), and other studies indicate after one-teach, one-assist, the parallel co-teaching model is the second most widely used (Parker, McHatton, & Allen, 2012). Based on the frequent use of one-teach, one-assist, Hamilton-Jones and Moore (2013) advise teachers to beware of over using this model. “One caution from the field,” they write, “is that co-teachers can become stuck in the one-teach, one-assist model” (Hamilton-Jones & Moore, 2013, p. 159). Therefore, it is beneficial for co-teachers to consider the student needs and instruction goals and try to explore the benefits and uses of each of the six models when planning instruction. To emphasis this point, Hamilton-Jones and Moore (2013) offer, “Remember, classroom instruction should look significantly different with two teachers” (Hamilton-Jones & Moore, 2013, p. 159). The other five models are described below.

One-teach, one-observe refers to one teacher managing the instruction of the entire group of students, while the other assesses and gathers data on an individual or on small groups of students, or even the entire class, which leads to a better understanding of students’ behavior, social skills, and academic achievement related to the instruction. Parallel teaching takes place when teachers divide the classroom into two groups and each group is taught the same content at the same time by one teacher. In station teaching, teachers divide the content and the students into three groups or stations, resulting in two teacher-led groups and one independent group. Alternative teaching takes place when the teacher divides the students into two groups. The larger group reviews previous skills taught, and the smaller group teaches skills reemphasized. In
team teaching, both teachers teach and engage in the instruction as a team (Friend & Cook, 2010; Scruggs, Mastropieri & McDuffie, 2007).

The flexibility of using a variety of co-teaching models allows teachers to be able to differentiate instruction, assess and collect data regarding students’ progress, and meet diverse needs in their classrooms (Hamilton-Jones & Moore, 2013).

Figure 2. Co-Teaching Models

The Significance of Co-Teaching

Friend (2008) stated that co-teaching is considered a significant teaching method toward meeting the requirements of laws that allow students with special needs to be a part of general education classrooms. Co-teaching permits two or more professionals to share their expertise to address a variety of needs in their classrooms. According to Friend (2008), the contribution of each professional will positively enhance student learning. For instance, a general education teacher may contribute with deep knowledge in a particular content area, possess the skills to
manage the classroom by engaging students with several activities, be familiar with the students’ learning styles and behavior routines, and base instruction on experience with the appropriate timing needed to meet educational goals as expected and planned. In partnership with the general education teacher, the special education teacher may be able to facilitate the knowledge students need to comprehend the content by providing appropriate accommodations, modifications, practices, and techniques to ensure that students’ learning needs are met. The teacher may possess the competence to understand students’ individual needs and address them appropriately and, due to training and position, is entitled to be involved in students’ IEP meetings to ensure that each student meets their IEP goals. Special education teachers also contribute because they are trained in skills mastery (Friend, 2008).

By sharing their expertise, professionals strengthen their performance in general classrooms, and this empowerment benefits their students. The fact that co-teaching permits students with special needs access to general education classrooms with their non-disabled peers serves as one of the essential elements of the increasing popularity of co-teaching practices in schools’ today. However increasingly popular, co-teaching implementation can be challenging. Friend (2008), identified barriers that may confront teachers as they work toward implementing co-teaching practices. These barriers are associated with planning time, relationship building, assigning and respecting teacher responsibilities and roles, and principal support. The benefits and barriers noted here will be further expanded on later in the study.

**Benefits Related to Response to Intervention and Co-Teaching**

Co-teaching has been identified as beneficial to both teachers and students (Walther-Thomas, 1997). To ensure these benefits proliferate in general classrooms, several components should be taken into consideration. These include adequate planning time, participant
volunteering, administrator support, mutual respect and shared instructional philosophy, teachers’ attitudes, and behavioral management (Scruggs, Mastropieri, & McDuffie, 2007). Several benefits related to RTI and co-teaching were discussed in-depth below including collaboration, roles and responsibilities, benefits to students, professional development, school setting, and administrative support.

**Collaboration**

The significance of collaboration in both RTI and co-teaching cannot be overemphasized. It is only through collaboration that the benefits can be realized. For example, co-teaching partnerships allow for a sharing of expertise and knowledge. Teachers in Walther-Thomas’ study (1997) found sharing their teaching as rewarding and one stated that it was beneficial to “have another adult in the classroom to share the good times and the bad times” (p. 401). Murawski and Dieker (2004), the benefits of two professional’s collaboration, permits verity of instructional activities, flexibility and creativities during lesson. Likewise, RTI models can be successfully accomplished and their benefits realized when teachers willingly collaborate to address student needs, identify appropriate instructional strategies, review students’ learning progress, and make informed decisions (Duffy, 2007).

To achieve successful collaboration, it is essential that teachers discuss and create a responsibilities-sharing protocol (Hamilton-Jones & Moore, 2013). Hamilton-Jones and Moore stress that collaboration is “not a task or an action, but rather an engagement style for professionals” (p. 158). Speaking on the importance of RTI collaboration, Hamilton-Jones and Moore (2013) professionals must establish a plan upon which both teachers may depend when they work together to teach in the inclusive classroom environment. Toward this goal, they must identify and specify each teacher’s roles and responsibilities, including preparing classroom
materials, assessment grading, and observing students’ behavior (Hamilton-Jones & Moore, 2013). Similarly, Dieker (2006) emphasized the importance of employing a co-teaching planning framework, which outlines each teachers’ roles and responsibilities and thus allows co-teachers to more effectively address any concerns which may emerge. By using a co-teaching planning framework, both teachers are afforded a voice when making decisions and feel more satisfied with the division of responsibilities.

Collaboration is key when implementing RTI at the high school level. According to Duffy (2007), “implementing RTI requires that general education teachers focus on the instructional supports they provide all students, rather than the identification of deficit in the students who are not achieving at the level expected level” (p. 3) Thus, through effective coordination and collaboration, education professionals work together to “identify the most effective and developmentally appropriate instructional interventions and progress monitoring tools for high school students” (Duffy, 2007, p. 3). The need for collaboration is not limited to the classroom. On a larger scale, successful RTI implementation includes “coordination and collaboration of districts and school staff to ensure the most effective instructional approaches are used to meet the needs of students” (Duffy, 2007, p. 4). Clearly, scholars on either side of RTI and co-teaching stress the importance of collaboration.

**Roles and Responsibilities**

Walther-Thomas (1997) described co-teaching procedure as a shared responsibility between two teachers whereby partners “share responsibility for direct instruction, curriculum development and/or modification, guided practice, reteaching and enrichment activities, progress monitoring, communication with families, and student evaluation” (Walther-Thomas, 1997, p. 396). Because both instructors are responsible for delivering instruction, support, and discipline,
teachers’ “mental walls” crumble as they learn to see all members of the classroom as “our students” (Walther-Thomas, 1997, p. 396). Friend (1995) indicated that “the issue of sharing responsibilities, modifying teaching style and preferences, and working closely with another adult represent serious challenges for some educators” (p. 9). For teachers to collaborate, it is essential for each professional to assess their individual willingness to work as a co-teacher and closely partner with other professionals for co-teaching purposes. Successful co-teaching collaboration demands that teachers possess several personal characteristics. These include a willingness and commitment to the co-teaching practice, flexibility, and communication skills, (Armbruster & Howe, 1985; Gelzheiser & Meyers, 1990; Redditt, 1991), as well as the skills of decision making, collaborative problem solving, and interpersonal strengths (Bauwens & Hourcade, 1995; Pugach & Johnson, 1995). The requirements related to implementing RTI in high schools also creates a demand for specific teacher roles, responsibilities, and characteristics. Because RTI requires general education teachers to monitor and respond to student progress, it demands that teachers are willing participants in RTI protocol. For example, these teachers must be flexible and willing to take on additional training that will allow them to provide targeted, differentiated instruction to students with a variety of special needs. Likewise, through RTI, special education teachers are more frequently called upon to share their special education knowledge with general education teachers while asked to absorb greater content knowledge and teaching strategies appropriate for general as well as special education students (Duffy, 2007).

**Benefits to Students**

The processes associated with RTI and co-teaching have both been identified as beneficial academically, behaviorally, and socially for students with and without disabilities. In terms of academic benefits, in a study by Walther-Thomas (1997), teachers remarked that their
students with disabilities in elementary and middle school classrooms, who had previously encountered academic failure, thrived in the co-taught classroom and some recognized their skills as better than some of their non-identified peers. Middle school teachers also reported on the classroom performance improvement demonstrated by students receiving increased attention due to the reduced student-teacher ratio via co-teachers (Cook & Friend, 1995), and this attention positively benefited students’ awareness of study skills and use of cognitive strategies (Walther-Thomas, 1997). In another study, a sixth-grade student expressed, “I like that there are two people to help out and you don’t have to wait so long to get your questions answered” (Luckner, 1999, p. 27).

Regarding behavioral benefits, Walther-Thomas’s (1997) study revealed that students with disabilities in co-taught settings learned proper classroom behavior through the role model of their peers without disabilities. Teachers commented on how their students with disabilities in inclusive, co-taught classrooms displayed more appropriate behavior than those students with disabilities in special education classrooms. Co-teachers have observed heightened student cooperation in their co-taught classrooms (Salend, Johansen, Mumper, Chase, Pike & Dorney, 1997).

Benefits related to students’ social development have also been identified. For instance, students with special needs are better able to establish relationships and friendship with their peers in the blended classroom. Not only were students involved in classroom team selection, peer activities, and student council positions, but through their co-teachers, they were provided with a stimulating environment where peer relationships were supported. General education students prove better able to benefit in terms of social skills than academic skills in the co-taught classroom (Scruggs et al., 2007). Likewise, the embarrassment and pain related to being singled
out as different or required to leave the classroom for special instruction can be increased through RTI (Dupuis, Barclay, Holmes, Platt, Shaha& Lewis, 2006) with early identification and proper placement, and through co-teaching, with inclusive settings that welcome all students and prevent stigmatizing outcomes. Walther-Thomas (1997) explained that when two teachers share the responsibilities of instruction, support, and discipline, they “avoid unintentionally stigmatizing students with identified needs” (p. 396).

Another aspect of the social experience in schools, students with disabilities have been observed as more self-confident and self-assured through the co-taught classroom approach. “Teachers,” wrote Walther-Thomas (1997), “noted that many identified students developed better attitudes about themselves and others; they were less critical and defensive, more motivated, and more capable at looking at their own strengths and weaknesses objectively” (p. 399).

The significance of RTI is powered by a high-quality instructional implementation intended to improve and minimize the number of students who need more intensive instructional intervention (Fletcher & Vaughn, 2009; Vaughn& Roberts, 2007) as well as improving the outcomes of students who have learning disabilities (Fletcher & Vaughn, 2009; Murawski & Hughes, 2009) by “preventing or remediating specific academic skills, where focus on academic domains is especially important” (Fletcher et al., 2007). Another positive aspect of RTI as it applies to student benefits is can be found in its identification properties. Studies show that “RTI may be an effective way of identifying students, in terms of both allocating additional instruction and qualification for special education services” (Dorn & Schubert, 2008; Barnett, Daly, Jones & Lentz, 2004; O’Connor, 2000).
Studies also show that co-taught classrooms offer benefits to students. Co-taught classrooms receive positive remarks from students as active learning environments which offer them “extra attention and support” (p. 401). In contrast, teachers report that students feel that the co-taught classroom makes it more difficult for them to “get away with things” (Scruggs, Mastropieri & Mcduffie, 2007, p. 401). Duffy (2007) connected RTI to expanded parent communication beyond requirements, and this outreach can lead to better understanding of students’ needs and goals as well as community-building. Overall, while co-teaching is necessary for students with disabilities, those students with learning issues not eligible for special education as well as gifted and talented students, benefit from the opportunities provided through differentiated instruction (Cook & Friend, 1995). In sum, it may be argued that everyone benefits.

RTI offers many benefits that can support struggling learners. Through the implementation of RTI, poor instructions are no longer an excuse for students struggling academically. Likewise, early intervention is provided for struggling learners for two reasons: first, to prevent their failure and provide remediation before the achievement gap increases between struggling students and their peers. More significantly, progress monitoring allows teachers to determine the most effective teaching instruction to help students learn better. To emphasize RTI’s quality of student responsiveness, Whitten, Esteves, and Woodrow (2009) stressed that “RTI is an instructional model that is truly responsive to students’ needs” (p. 11). Several researchers conducted meta-analyses that provide proof that RTI evidence-based interventions are efficient and impact student outcomes positively. These studies include work by Swanson, Hoskyn, and Lee (1999) who reviewed 180 interventions for students with learning disabilities; Wanzke and Vaughn (2007), who reviewed 100 reading interventions; Scammacca
et al. (2007) reviewed 31 reading interventions studied; and Graham and Perin (2007a, 2007b) who conducted meta-analyses on the effectiveness of writing interventions (Fletcher & Vaughn, 2009).

RTI provides high-quality instruction for all students (Fisher & Frey, 2013). This is a significant aspect of RTI that benefits students because it frequently reduces the referral to special education services (Fisher & Frey, 2013; VanDerHeyden et al., 2007). RTI makes a difference by specifically addressing “the overrepresentation of students of color in special education” (Fisher & Frey, 2013, p. 1) and increasing students’ academic performance in general classrooms (Fisher & Frey, 2013; VanDerHeyden et al., 2007). RTI serves as a truer referral system than prior protocols. For example, a study investigating five elementary schools employing RTI for identification purposes demonstrated a reduced number of referrals to special education services (VanDerHeyden et al., 2007). Simultaneously, in terms of eligibility, those students assigned for special education assessment were found eligible for special education services. Therefore, it may be argued that RTI serves a good prediction tool to determine students’ true levels of academic performance (VanDerHeyden et al., 2007).

Professional Development

Because RTI concentrates on the implementation of research-based intervention in general classrooms and the students’ response to those interventions, and these responses impact the role and the responsibilities of teachers, general education teachers are required to develop progress monitoring skills as well as knowledge about effective instructional practices targeted to students’ needs. Likewise, the role of the special education teacher in general classrooms is vital and the related responsibilities have expanded beyond the resource room, where supports are provided for students with special needs in an isolated setting. Special education teachers may
benefit general education high school teachers and their students as RTI is integrated into general classroom. According to Duffy (2007), “Special education teachers may find their roles shifting to an even greater degree to be team teachers in general education settings or to provide professional development for their general education colleagues” (p. 9). This teacher-to-teacher support is also true of co-teaching. Co-teaching serves as a method of empowering teachers with “assistance in the development, delivery, and evaluation of effective instructional programs” (Walther-Thomas, 1997, p. 396). Scholars recommend that secondary level co-teachers should be afforded with teacher training and awareness of diverse co-teaching models (Dieker & Murawski, 2003). In Walther-Thomas’ 1997 study, both general and special education teachers remarked that they felt co-teaching led to more professional satisfaction as well as increased professional and personal growth. Special education teachers may experience greater content knowledge through the co-teaching relationship where the general education teacher benefits through increased knowledge of classroom management and adapting instruction to meet student needs (Austin, 2001). This co-sharing of knowledge is summed up in a quote from Frisk (2004) “I learned so much this year from my partner” (p. 98). Specific to this study, high school teachers must be aware of the high-quality instructional strategies applicable across subject areas, and this emphasizes the need for ongoing professional development to increase knowledge of effective practices, such as differentiated instruction (Duffy, 2007). In terms of available interventions, despite the high number of evidence-based reading and writing interventions that have been proven to be effective, there are far fewer interventions available in mathematics (Fuchs Compton, Paulsen, Bryant & Hamlett, 2005).
School Setting and Administrative Support

Co-teaching can provide specialists with a better understanding of the demands of classroom settings, teacher expectations, and the appropriate teaching interventions to best support low-achieving students, as well as student performance (Walther-Thomas, 1997). Benefits to co-teaching success move beyond the classroom to the principal’s office, for the principal is often required for the efficient placement and scheduling of students, especially when computer overrides are needed (Walther-Thomas, 1997). Historically, many scholars have emphasized that effective administrative support and involvement serves as key to successful initiatives and programming implementation (Barth, 1990; Carlson, 1996; Chase, Pike & Dorney, 1997; Curtin, 1998; Frisks, 2004; Fullan, 1991; Fullan, 2012; Fullan & Miles, 1992; Goodlad & Lovitt, 1993; Morocco & Aguilar, 2002; Salend, Johansen, Mumper,; Norris, 1997; Smith & Andrews, 1989; Thompson 2001; Vesay, 2004; Yoder, 2000). Thus, administrative support in co-teaching implementation is also beneficial. “It was not surprising to find,” reported Walther-Thomas (1997), “that schools where the principals were actively involved in the development of new special education services seemed to do better over time” (p. 404). Similarly, successful implementation of RTI requires adequate funding, effective collaboration between special and general educators, professional development based on evidence-based practices, and that leadership teams at the state, district, and school level provide administrative support (Sansosti, Goss, & Noltemeyer, 2011).

Barriers Related to RTI and Co-Teaching

Duffy (2007) identified several barriers related to high school level RTI. These issues are associated with research and development as well as high school RTI practices. These issues, explored in more depth below, are lack of collaboration, roles and responsibilities, barriers
related to students, lack of professional development, school setting and administrative support. Walther-Thomas (1997) identified barriers related to co-teaching, which include difficulties finding the time for planning and scheduling.

**Lack of Collaboration**

If collaboration is essential to co-teaching success, then compatibility is a key element in co-teaching. According to Rice and Zigmond (2000), co-teachers “rated personal compatibility between partners as the most critical variable for co-teaching success” (p. 194). When teacher personalities are not well-suited to compromise and flexibility, compatibility suffers and thus, this can lead to co-teaching failure. For example, with relation to the lack of planning time, when compatible co-teaching partners plan, they are better equipped to maximize their brief scheduling time, but those co-teachers that are incompatible may waste their planning time and therefore, negatively impact their co-teaching practice. Walther-Thomas (1997) found that if teachers failed to develop a strong working partnership within their first year, they did not return to work together the next school year. Duffy (2007) stated that in terms of their structures, high schools can make RTI models difficult to navigate. Therefore, Duffy called for structural supports intended to reinforce professional collaboration because “RTI models require a great deal of collaboration and coherence,” (p. 9). A common misconception which leads to RTI implementation barriers is that RTI was established to serve special education teachers and student exclusively. For example, the reauthorization of IDEA (2004) drove many teachers to believe that RTI is special education related only. However, RTI requires a strong relationship between general and special education teachers, and/or other professionals who are certified to provide support for their students (Fletcher & Vaughn, 2009).
Co-teacher teams face a lack of adequate planning time to effectively collaborate and “discuss and plan for [the] instructional, behavioral and logistical needs of the class” (Dieker & Murawski, 2003, p. 3). To effectively discuss and plan instruction suited to meet the needs of their heterogenous classrooms, co-teachers require adequate planning time (Scruggs et al., 2007; Gately & Gately, 2001; Vaughn, Schumm, & Arguelles, 1997). However, coordinating equally convenient planning times for two busy teachers during the school day can be challenging. Some teachers report a need for at least an hour to work with their co-teaching partner to plan five weekly class sessions (Walther-Thomas, 1997). Of course, it may be argued that middle and secondary school teachers have the benefit of meeting during those periods where their students are attending other classes (Walther-Thomas, 1997), however, teacher teams at the secondary level report planning time averages of only 45.5 minutes per week and stress that three times this amount would be more appropriate (Scruggs, Mastropieri & McDuffie, 2007; Dieker, 2001). The structure of secondary schools may cause difficulties for co-teachers due to issues including “large class size or caseload, [a] wide range of learning needs, an overwhelming amount of paperwork (such as IEPs), [and] a wide variety of support staff (social worker, guidance counselor, nurse, work study coordinator) with whom collaboration is expected to occur” (Murawski & Dieker, 2003, p. 4). A lack of time can create barriers in terms of RTI implementation. For example, Fisher and Frey (2011) wrote of a powerful finding which surfaced through their case study on RTI implementation in a small high school relating to perceptions about RTI, time, and general education teachers. The researchers expressed that they “could not find any students who received individualized intensive intervention (Tier 3), other than these students who were already identified as having a disability” (p. 108). When they asked interview participants why this was so, one respondent suggested that individualized instruction
was not feasible in high school. “I wish I could individualize for all of my students,” the teacher said, “but it’s just not real. The sped [special education] teachers are the only ones who have time for that” (p. 108). Teachers may find themselves challenged by the lack of time to plan, integrate, and collect data when they must meet the diverse needs of classrooms with large numbers of students. Studies show that some teachers see many RTI requirements as time consuming on top of the variety of responsibilities already expected of them (Castro-Villarreal &Moore, 2014). Also, the RTI process can be overwhelming to teachers required to follow certain RTI integration requirements and teachers complained about the volume of time-consuming paperwork and expressed that “the various forms [paperwork] are lengthy and some are duplicated” (Villarreal, Rodriguez &Moore, 2014, p. 108).

Roles and Responsibilities

Co-teachers face workload issues and difficulties meeting the diverse needs of their students when the specialist partner in the relationship carries a heavy caseload. “Many caseloads were so large,” Walther-Thomas (1997) said of her study, “that it was difficult for many special educators to meet general education teacher requests for co-teaching and/or consultation” (p. 404). About this issue, Scruggs et al., (2007), cautioned that “these ill-fated classrooms set teachers and students up for failure and frustration” (p. 402).

Several teachers indicated that it is necessary for a teacher to voluntarily participate to co-teach with another partner (Scruggs, Mastropieri & Mcduffie, 2007; Thompson, 2001). Others suggest giving teachers the opportunity to choose the partner with whom they would like to co-teach (Carlson, 1996). Vesay (2004), reported a positive impact of voluntary participation to co-teach from three pairs of co-teachers and thus found that “the effect on their collaboration is positive when both teachers make a voluntary commitment to initiating the partnership” (p.152).
Murawski and Dieker (2004) indicated that “teachers often are forced with schedules that are crafted before co-teaching teams are assigned, as a result, students with disabilities are often placed in classes that are already full” (p. 53) Barriers arise when special education teachers are assigned to work with numerous teachers within a single class period, which prevents special education teachers from effectively collaborating with their co-teaching partner. RTI can be perceived as a heavy burden for already overbooked teachers. For instance, due to the overwhelming responsibilities of RTI implementation, several “teachers who report feeling burdened by paperwork or who only see RTI as an additional burden toward eligibility may be in systems that are not effectively set up to implement RTI practices well” (Castro-Villarreal, Rodriguez & Moore, 2014, p. 106).

**Barriers Related to Students**

Some teachers maintain that co-teaching does not benefit all students, especially regarding “difficult students who threatened co-teaching efforts” (Hazlett, 2001, p. 107). Off-task behavior can interfere with the continuity of instruction and students’ attention. Student scheduling can also become a barrier in co-taught classrooms. According to Walther-Thomas (1997), many professionals “experienced problems with scheduling students with disabilities into mainstream classrooms and coordinating co-teaching schedules” (p. 403). It is important to note that purposeful planning, instead of computer-based, random assignment, must be applied to student scheduling to maintain heterogeneity. Hand scheduling often makes this possible where computerized scheduling is not flexible enough to meet this heterogeneity requirement. However, because hand scheduling is a labor-intensive process, some staff members responsible for conducting this type of scheduling have been known to complain and resist the activity Walther-Thomas (1997). In a related matter, Fuchs and Fuchs (2007), noted that as a
consequence of larger classrooms, the incorporation of high-level instructional support needed to efficiently enhance student performance in Tier III can be threatened.

Moreover, several studies have also indicated that difficult students do not get benefits from co-teaching integration into an inclusive classroom environment (Scruggs, Mastropieri & Mcduffie, 2007; Frisk, 2004; Ward, 2003; Feldman, 1998; Carlson, 1996; Pugach & Wesson, 1995). Given the volume of cases suggesting that inclusive classrooms do not serve as beneficial to all students, it is useful that the “general report of benefits to students with disabilities in co-taught classes must be tempered with teachers concern that students must meet minimum skill expectations” (Scruggs, Mastropieri & Mcduffie, 2007, p. 403). Scruggs, Mastropieri, and Mcduffie (2007), reported on teachers who disagreed with the argument that co-teaching proves beneficial for all leaners. In the study, participants expressed their concerns over students involved in co-taught classrooms who have minimum academic and behavioral skill levels. Thompson (2001), reported on teachers who stressed that the needs of students with special needs could not be met in general education classrooms. Walther-Thomas (1997) reported on the negative impacts of co-teaching due to “poorly planned classrooms… heavily weighted with students who had learning and/or behavior problems. Unfortunately, these ill-fated classrooms set teachers and students up for failure and frustration” (p. 403). Similarly, Reith and Polsgrove (1998) described that assigning students in general education classroom without providing needed support and training for their teachers to meet their needs is “surely invites their failure” (p. 257). Studies indicate that RTI, when not effectively implemented, may not be effective for all students. This focus falls especially on Tier 3 interventions where inadequate responders struggle to show improvement even after a year of intensive intervention. (Denton, Fletcher, Anthony, & Francis, 2006). Further supporting this concern, Fletcher and Vaughn (2009)
maintain that “Studies of outcomes for students placed in special education show flat levels of
growth and little evidence that typical interventions close the achievement gap” (Bentum &
Aaron, 2003; Donovan & Cross, 2002; Vaughn, Levy, Coleman, & Bos, 2002; Torgesen et al.,
2001; Hanushek, Kain, & Rivkin, 1998; Glass, 1983; p. 33). In contrast, it has been suggested
that students may benefit from more focus on the remediation of inadequate responders when
RTI, effectively implemented, reduces the number of students requiring intensive interventions
(VanDerHeyden, Witt & Gilbertson, 2007; Burns, Appleton, & Stehouwer, 2005).

**Lack of Professional Development**

Co-teachers express the need for continuing education and to build stronger skills on both
sides of special and general education, including content areas. High school co-teaching teams
may find a disparity in their content area-based knowledge. For example, as Rice and Zigmond
(2000) found, while a co-teacher pair described their partnership as “‘an enmeshing of our
abilities’…they were clearly not equal partners in the instruction” (p. 195) due to a lack of
special education teacher content knowledge. Walther-Thomas’ 1997 study revealed that
teachers experienced concern due to lack of training and holes in their abilities and knowledge.
Staff development funding cutbacks and limited time reserved for skills-building can negatively
impact teachers’ co-teaching professional development opportunities (Walther-Thomas, 1997).
Limitations can be observed regarding co-teacher background knowledge. For instance, while
the special education teacher may not possess the content knowledge of the general education
teacher, the general education teacher commonly lacks the accommodations-based and
intervention approaches mastered by the special education teacher (Dieker & Murawski, 2003).
This is because secondary level general education teacher preparation concentrates on specific
content areas at high levels but because it often lacks coursework related to serving the needs of
students with disabilities, middle and high school general education teachers may be unprepared to offer the appropriate support that should be provided to students with disabilities (Dieker & Murawski, 2003). In addition, the intensity of content knowledge at the secondary level can serve as a co-instructional obstacle when special education teachers face a lack of deep understanding on subject areas (Dieker & Murawski, 2003). This occurs not because special education teachers are not capable of this rich content comprehension, but because their training focuses on providing accommodations and modifications meant to meet the needs of students with exceptionalities, and as a result, lacks content training. This may leave special education teachers with limited knowledge of specific content areas commonly taught at the secondary level (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1997). It may be argued that teacher preparation allows them to provide necessary support for students at the elementary level. Thus, the same principal should apply to secondary school teachers, which places a demand on stakeholders to be knowledgeable of both the content and support needs required for comprehensive teaching preparation programs (Dieker & Murawski, 2003). Based on the academic, behavioral, social, and IEP needs of students with special needs, it is fundamental that special education teachers build stronger content knowledge foundations to better serve the diverse needs of the general classroom (Dieker & Murawski, 2003).

To ensure the success of integrating co-teaching into the general classroom, Dieker and Murawski (2003), emphasize the need for teachers to understand what co-teaching is and what it is not. One of the common misconceptions is that co-teaching pairs a teacher with an assistant, paraprofessional, or teacher’s aide instead of the combining of two co-equal faculty members, with a preference for credentials. Rather than understanding it as two partners who work together to benefit heterogenous students simultaneously in one setting, some may mistakenly view co-
teaching as the act of pulling a group of students out of their classroom to work with a special educator or relocating a group of students with special needs to the rear of the general education classroom. Some may view co-teaching as an approach whereby the general education teacher engages in the overall instruction planning and the special education teacher simply follows orders. However, the co-teaching approach requires paired instructional planning and implementation (Dieker & Murawski, 2003). Specific to this study, general and special education teachers in middle and high schools face major issues with co-teaching implementation. These challenges include grade level complexities caused by a variety of curriculums and student expectations and the growing demands placed on teachers to meet numerous requirements, such as serving their students with special needs while some face a lack of required knowledge, skills, and awareness of instructional practices. Likewise, teachers may experience increased stress due to accountability pressures of standardized testing expectations and “increased autonomy among teachers at the secondary level” (Dieker & Murawski, 2003, p. 3; Cole & McLeskey, 1997). In terms of barriers, it is true to say that the co-teacher pair bring their own limitations to the classroom. However, the expertise they also bring mutually strengthens that which they can offer their students (Murawski & Dieker, 2003).

Castro-Villarreal, Rodriguez, and Moore (2014), conducted a qualitative study focused on teacher perceptions of RTI. The researchers revealed several barriers related to professional development which impact RTI effectiveness. These include the lack of adequate training, planning time, and staff support. The researchers stress the complexity of the RTI process as well as RTI paperwork as obstacles of integrating RTI in their schools. Teachers stressed the importance of access to programs where they could learn more about RTI evidence-based practices interventions that they can use in their classrooms as well as data collection tools used
for progress monitoring purposes to ensure intervention effectiveness. Most of the teachers reported a poor level of understanding of the overall RTI system. Teachers had a lack of understanding of RTI’s main components, how to integrate RTI tiers, how long students should stay at each tier, and how to manage RTI implementation while at the same time, gathering data for progress monitoring (Castro-Villarreal, Rodriguez& Moore, 2014). It has also been suggested that there is a lack of options for progress monitoring tools appropriate for use at the high school level (Brozo, 2009-2010). Given these varied teacher concerns, adequate training through ongoing professional development is necessary to clear up the confusion that teachers face to develop a better understanding of RTI (Castro-Villarreal, Rodriguez& Moore, 2014). Teachers face challenges associated with a lack of the specialists required to follow through after diagnoses are made and to identify interventions. Additional concerns include a lack of teachers able to implement purposeful grouping to integrate RTI intervention, and lack of resources and materials available to students who perform below their peers (Villarreal, Rodriguez& Moore, 2014).

Because RTI is commonly implemented in elementary grade levels (Fisher & Frey, 2013), it can be argued that most teachers are more familiar with the elementary level implementation process. However, RTI implementation and what it looks like at high school level can be unclear (Ehren, Deshler & Graner, 2010; Duffy, 2007; Torgesen, 2003). Some may mistakenly view RTI solely a model for identifying students with LD. Likewise, the tiered interventions that accompany RTI may need to be accelerated or made more flexible when applied at the high school level (Ehren, 2009; Duffy, 2007). This can be connected to the sense of urgency related to starting high school classes for the first time. For instance, students who start high school with an undiagnosed LD may face challenges in keeping up with their peers.
because they may not have the time necessary to properly respond to given interventions (Duffy, 2007).

Castro-Villarreal and Moore (2014), investigated teachers’ perceptions and attitudes about RTI in their school and found that teachers were most concerned about the process of RTI implantation. These concerns served as one of the “most cited barriers” preventing “successful RTI implementation in their school” (p. 110). Among the implementation issues troubling teachers, the need for training topped the list, as well as paperwork requirements, time required for RTI meetings, a sense of isolation in moving the student through the tiers, and confusion over how responsibilities would be divided. Teachers expressed their need for a clear and well-organized plan for RTI implementation in their schools. Some indicated that their schools may be implementing RTI without developing a clear outline. Likewise, a special education director emphasized that teachers would benefit from additional instruction on and clarity about the RTI structure to allow more consistent RTI implantation throughout all grade levels (Sansosti, Goss, & Noltemeyer, 2011).

In addition, the scaling issues related to progress monitoring impact the implementation of RTI due to a lack of evidence-based intervention. Thus, RTI implementation in secondary schools can appear frightening to teachers. This is especially true based on the limited research conducted on intervention and progress monitoring tools for adolescents (Fletcher & Vaughn, 2009). While there are few studies conducted on secondary school RTI implementation, there are many recommendations about and reports on that which high schools may be able to achieve by implementing RTI (Ehren, Deshler & Graner, 2010; Torgesen, 2003). There is limited evidence of the effectiveness and methods of RTI implementation methods in high schools (Brozo, 2009-2010). Fuchs, Fuchs, and Compton (2010) indicate that scheduling issues and some challenges
inherent when working with older students can prevent researchers from conducting research in middle and high schools entirely. Thus, the needs of intensive professional development are essential to assist teachers in developing deep understanding of “scientifically based curricula and instruction … before teams can make assumptions about a student’s need for increased support (i.e., Tier II)” (Murawski & Hughes, 2009, p. 268).

**School Setting and Administrative Support**

Lack of administrative support can serve as an obstacle to co-teaching success. Regarding the collaborative structures required to implement co-teaching procedures, Walther-Thomas (1997), reveals that “most classroom teachers engaged in collaborative relationships receive many good ideas but little actual help in implementing these strategies” (p. 396). Likewise, the wrong kind of administrative involvement can weaken co-teaching effectiveness. For example, it can be harmful when administrators force teachers to co-teach (Scruggs et al., 2007). Murawski and Dieker (2004), noted that some administrators may appoint special educators to partner with several general education teachers during a single class period. This proves harmful to the special education teacher’s effectiveness as he or she may not have the time and/or ability to effectively collaborate with their co-teaching partners. Thus, administrators’ involvement is essential to facilitate effective collaboration, and give teachers opportunities to collaborate before beginning co-teaching implementation to ensure the success. Co-teaching partnerships thrive when given adequate time by administrators to correctly schedule students, develop a relationship with their partners, have an opportunity for lesson planning, and when they are afforded optimal materials on creating a strong collaborative arrangement toward meeting the needs of all learners (Murawski & Dieker, 2004).
Funding is considered one of the biggest obstacles that schools face when integrating an RTI system. IDEA and Title I criteria-based issues can arise related to the different programs responsible for issuing the funding to certain schools and these issues cause struggles when the lack of funding results in less support of needed intervention models (Fletcher & Vaughn, 2009; NASDSE, 2006). Murawski and Hughes (2009), recommended that administrators can make a difference when addressing the funding issue by purposefully scheduling general and special education teachers into classrooms with balanced homogeneity which include students with and without special needs. Thus, through this manageable scheduling, both teachers may serve all learners. This approach “would necessitate moving one student without special needs and three students with disabilities into different classes” (p. 269). In this way, teachers will have a more manageable and realistic number of students with special needs, which will permit teachers to serve them better. This homogeneity results in balance in terms of students who need and who do not need intensive individualized instruction (Murawski, 2008).

**Response to Intervention and Co-Teaching: Playing a Duet**

Through a weaving together of the benefits and barriers associated with RTI and co-teaching, this literature review reveals that RTI and co-teaching share a remarkable number of similarities and based on their common goals, can serve as a duet in the effective meeting of the needs of our growing heterogenous classrooms. Because identifying “age- and developmentally appropriate interventions that will work for high school students across subject areas and intervention levels” (Duffy, 2007, p. 8) serves as an RTI foundation, this identification process can only be strengthened by the collaboration of a general and a special education teacher trained in research-based interventions. Both RTI and co-teaching strive to identify, implement, and assess approaches appropriate for meeting the diverse needs of students. Each practice employs
models designed to maximize students’ academic, social, and behavioral strengths. When working together, RTI and co-teaching can serve the needs of teachers and their students in a duet that Murawski and Hughes (2009) called “a logical combination for successful systematic change” (p. 267). Co-teaching blurs the boundaries between general and special education teachers whereby both teachers work as partners to integrate RTI in general classrooms (Esteves & Whitten, 2014). In this way, “RTI requires increased levels of collaboration among those responsible for putting it into practice” (Esteves & Whitten, 2014, p.105; Whitten & Hoekstra, 2002). Murawski and Hughes (2009) stress that the combination of RTI and co-teaching requires intensive collaboration between general and special education teachers as well as other professionals which call upon education professionals to redraw the lines between general and special education teachers. Murawski and Hughes (2009) analogized the marriage of co-teaching and RTI when they said,

“implementing RTI without collaboration and co-teaching is like moving a canoe through and eddy at the confluence of two rivers. The result is two systems trying to go in the same direction, but they both end up just going around in the circles. It is far better to work together to navigate the currents and to pilot out children down the river of success” (Murawski and Hughes, 2009, p.274).

Thus, the main goal of RTI is providing high-quality differentiated instruction designed to benefit all students’ achievement. Co-teaching is a means to putting RTI into action in general education classrooms where goals are reached by a team of experts according to student needs. By integrating appropriate co-teaching approaches to meet students’ needs, teachers will have greater opportunities to observe, collect, and analyze student data while other specialists have the chance to intervene and reinforce student needs. The co-teaching model’s flexibility permits professionals to group and regroup to go above and beyond expectations to provide a high-quality, supportive learning environment for all learners (Villa & Thousand, 2011).
Summary

In this chapter, the researcher began the literature review with an overview of the historical background of RTI and its components. Also, the researcher discussed co-teaching practices in-depth and presented its model. The benefits, barriers, and impacts of RTI and co-teaching as independent and combined practices were discussed in-depth. This was accomplished despite the lack of studies investigating the incorporation of RTI into co-taught classrooms at the high school level. To close the chapter, the researcher demonstrated how RTI and co-teaching can play a duet to serve all learners.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

A qualitative research design was used to investigate teachers’ use of and perceptions about the benefits, barriers, and overall impacts of Response to Intervention (RTI) on co-teaching in secondary level general education classrooms. Semi-structured interviews and observations were used to gain rich data that fully answered the research questions and provide insight about the research problem. The methodology chapter consisted of an informative description of the research design used, data collection tool, recruitment, participants, and data analysis.

Phenomenological Research

Definition

A phenomenological research design “describes the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon. Phenomenologists focus on describing what all participants have in common as they experience a phenomenon” (Creswell, 2013, P.76). The phenomenological approach was used to examine this study’s researchable problem. Based on Creswell’s (2013) definition, the phenomenological approach served as the design “best suited for this form of the research” (Creswell, 2013, P.81). For this study, the phenomenological qualitative research design was used to develop a deep understanding of how teachers collaborate to implement RTI in their co-taught classrooms, and what they perceive as the benefits, barriers, and overall impacts on their experience as teachers and colleagues, as well
as the impacts of student academic and behavioral success. In other words, co-teachers were asked to respond to three main questions, which include:

RQ: How does the incorporation of Response to Intervention (RTI) into co-taught, secondary general education classrooms benefit the teacher experience and student academic and behavioral success?

RQ: How does the incorporation of Response to Intervention (RTI) into co-taught, secondary general education classrooms result in barriers to the teacher experience and student academic and behavioral success?

RQ: What are teachers’ perceptions of the overall impacts of Response to Intervention (RTI) on co-taught, secondary level, general education classrooms?

This qualitative research design used the phenomenological approach as a fundamental element. The researcher used this approach to highlight the awareness of individuals’ lived experiences. This approach allowed the researcher a deep understanding of the essence of the phenomenon while extracting meaning from collected data (Saldana, Leavy & Beretvas, 2014).

**Advantages of Phenomenological Research**

A phenomenological research approach is the only qualitative research design that explores the individual’s lived experience in-depth and gives the findings meaning (Marshal & Rossman, 2016). The approach’s outcomes demonstrate each participant’s lived experience, by more fully unpacking how they “perceive it, describe it, feel about it, judge it, remember it, make sense of it, and talk about it with others” (Patton, 2002, p.104). Phenomenology allows researchers to develop deep understanding of lived experiences and give them meaning. Beginning with themes which emerge from the data collected, the researcher can look at the
overall picture. There are no statistical restrictions in phenomenological research. The researcher has the freedom to interpret the data and share individuals’ lived experiences in ways which let their voices be heard. Consequently, the results of the approach allow stakeholders to learn more and take appropriate actions, provide the needed support, and resolve complexities (Center for Innovation in Research and Teaching.edu, n.d.).

Disadvantages of Phenomenological Research

One of the disadvantages of phenomenological research is that because the study participants must have the competency to express their feelings and share their lived experiences, some individuals may not be able to share their thoughts on a level applicable to phenomenological research. The approach also seeks to isolate the researcher from her/his bias, so the researcher’s previous experiences will not impact the collected data and the study findings. Also, the study findings will not be generalizable and statistically reliable based on the number of the sample size. Sometimes the researcher faces difficulties accessing study participants that leads to appropriate data collection. These impacts can slow analysis and may result in delays in getting to the study findings (Center for Innovation in Research and Teaching.edu, n.d.).

Data Collection Tool: The Semi-Structured Interview

Definition

A qualitative interview is considered as an effective way to document data from participants’ own words to understand the “perspectives, feelings, opinions, values, attitudes, and beliefs” (Saldaña, 2011, p.32) of their lived experience. Based on research questions, research problems, and the research purpose, the researcher generated the interview questions used as
guidance during the interview. It is necessary to be aware that the dialogue between the interviewer and the interviewee may take an unexpected turn and lead to an awareness of other areas to be investigated (Saldana, Leavy & Beretvas, 2014).

The interview can differ from highly-structured to instructed to serve the researcher’s needs. It can also be conducted with one individual separately or a group of individuals as a focus group. Based on the research needs and other factors, the participants may be interviewed once or several times. However, to provide more focus to serve the purpose of the study, the researcher developed semi-structured interview questions to seek deeper knowledge of the teachers’ experiences (Schneider & Whitehead, 2013).

According to Cohen and Crabtree (2006), a semi-structured interview allows the interviewer and the interviewee to actively engage in the interview experience. The interview protocol is used to guide the conversation toward gathering rich data about the topic under investigation. In addition, “The semi-structured interview guide provides a clear set of instructions for interviewers and can provide reliable, comparable qualitative data” (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006, P.1) as well as providing new and unique ways to understand the researchable topic. It is advisable to prepare the interview questions ahead of the time where each question purposefully serves the research questions, research purpose, and research problems. Because this approach gives the interviewees freedom to express their perspectives using their own words, the semi-structure interview is considered a reliable tool for qualitative data (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). Study participants were asked to answer the interview questions and provide rich data regarding their experiences as co-teachers in general classrooms which incorporate RTI.
Advantages of Semi-Structured Interviews

The interview is regarded as the most common data collection tool employed in qualitative research (Jamsehd, 2014). It is a primary data collection tool for the phenomenological research design, which stresses intensive focus on participant experiences by providing deep meaning for participants’ lived experiences (Marshal & Rossman, 2016). One interview form is the in-depth, semi-structured interview, which is used in this study (Jamshed, 2014). The semi-structured interview is considered a formal interview style that provides deep and rich knowledge used to serve the research purpose. One of the most significant advantages of the qualitative interview is its ability to demonstrates the individuals’ views and perceptions of their experiences (Marshal & Rossman, 2016).

Providing deep and rich information regarding their experiences depends on the level of engagement between the interviewer and the interviewee in conversation (Marshal & Rossman, 2016). Here the researcher realizes the significance of building a relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee and creating a balance between “being friendly and developing a friendship” (Marshal & Rossman, 2016, P.148). This interview style has been a successful data collection tool used in teacher socialization studies (Maloy, Pine & Seidman, 2002). Semi-structured interviews allow researchers to “ask specific questions in a specific sequence” (Marshal & Rossman, 2016, P.150). Semi-structured interviews give the participants the freedom to express their views about or experiences with the phenomenon in a systematic way. This allows the research to gather data where the interview questions are designed and structured to access deep, rich information leading to functional data analysis (Marshal & Rossman, 2016; Galletta, 2013).
When a researcher plans to conduct an interview, flexibility is fundamental. For example, to prevent the challenges associated with meeting face-to-face, time zone differences, or the location of interviewer or interviewee, the interview can be conducted through technological options including electronic email (Marshal & Rossman, 2016). Other contemporary options include Facetime and Skype. This type of flexibility not only allows participants to be able to respond to the interview questions at the individual’s convenience, but also allows the interviewee to revise and review their narrative (Marshal & Rossman, 2016).

**Disadvantages of Semi-Structured Interviews**

Interviewing as a data collection tool has several disadvantages. The relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee plays an important role. The lack of a trust-based relationship between interviewer and participant can have negative impacts. The interviewer will not be able to explore and understand the interviewee experience deeply, especially when the interviewee is unwilling to share all knowledge and experience on the phenomenon under investigation, which impacts the level of engagement and fluency in the conversation between the interviewer and the interviewee (Marshal & Rossman, 2016).

An in-depth interview focuses on the present experience of the phenomenon. When exploring the essence of the experience, the narrative data can cause confusion between the data collected based on the participant’s experience and that which the researcher is already knowledgeable of regarding the phenomenon. To overcome this confusion, the researcher should write an “epoche,” which includes a description of his/her experience of the topic under investigation toward bracketing his/her experience from the study participants’ experience (Marshal & Rossman, 2016).
Interview Questions

Please introduce yourself, and include your name, level of education, special or general education expertise, specialty area, experience with Response to Intervention (RTI), experience working as a co-teacher, your role as a partner in the classroom, and the grade level(s) you have taught and are currently teaching.

1. How does RTI benefit your ability to work collaboratively with your colleague?
2. How does RTI benefit the instructional quality of your co-taught classrooms?
3. How do you employ RTI in your co-teaching practices to benefit your students’ academic and behavioral success?
4. It is essential that administrators provide support to co-teachers incorporating RTI into their co-taught classrooms. In what ways does administrators support benefit you as an RTI-practicing co-teacher?
5. What barriers have you faced throughout the implementation of RTI?
6. Are there any barriers related to RTI and co-teaching which lead to failure of student academic and behavioral success?
7. Do you believe that there are students who are too low for co-teaching? In other words, that their performances are significantly lower than their peers to successfully participate in your RTI-based co-teaching practices?
8. In what ways does administrators’ support or lack of support cause barriers to you as an RTI-practicing co-teacher?
9. From your perspective, how can co-teaching make Response to Intervention (RTI) more efficient in general classrooms?
10. Overall, do you believe RTI has a positive or negative impact? Please explain how and why.

Data Collection Tool: Observation

Definition

Observation is a significant data collection tool in qualitative research. Creswell (2013) referenced Angrosino (2007) by stating that observation “is the act of noting a phenomenon in the field setting through the five senses of the observer, often with an instrument, and recording it for scientific purposes” (Cresswell, P. 166). Marshall and Rossman (2016) considered observation as “central to qualitative research” (P.143).

Observation permits the researcher to monitor all activities in the research setting. It allows the researcher to collect data in the social sitting. The use of a checklist is suggested to allow researchers to “tick off preestablished actions” (P.143). Thus, for this study, non-participating/observer as participant was the type observation used for data collection. Through this approach, the researcher was required to sit far away from those under observation. The researcher was required to sit, watch, and take notes monitoring all activities without direct involvement with those under observation (Creswell, 2013). According to Marshall and Rossman (2016) “Observation is a fundamental and highly important method in all qualitative inquiry. It is used to discover complex interactions in natural social settings. Even in studies using in-depth interviews, observation plays an important role as the researcher notes the interviewee’s body language and affect in addition to her words. It is, however, a method that requires a great deal of the researcher” (P.143).
Advantages of Observation

According to User-Friendly Handbook for Project Evaluation (2002), there are several advantages of conducting an observation as a data collection tool. Observation permits the researcher to acquire data directly related to the people, group, or phenomenon under investigation. It allows the observer to be a witness to the real-life situation and develop a deeper understanding. In addition, observation offers the researcher an excellent chance to learn and discover unexpected outcomes and new knowledge. Likewise, observations “exist in natural, unstructured, and flexible settings” (Frechtling & Sharp, 2002. P. 67).

Also, one of the advantages of observation is that the data collection process can be conducted using a variety of senses. This occurs particularly when the researcher has issues with his/her vision. The researcher will still be able to draw a conclusion using his auditory skills, touch, and smell to come up with a rich description of the setting under investigation (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Creswell (2013) highlighted the importance of using an observational protocol during the observation. During this study, the researcher developed an Observation Components of RTI and Co-Teaching checklist to collect observed data. Creswell also recommended the interview protocol should include a “header giving information about the observation session, and then include a descriptive notes section for recording a description of activities” (2013, P. 169).

Disadvantages of Observation

According to User-Friendly Handbook for Project Evaluation, there are several disadvantages of conducting an observation as a data collection tool. Not only can the observation be time intensive and financially prohibitive, but also it requires professional
observers who are well-trained to conduct observation. It might require the observer to have background knowledge about the content. At the same time, observation may impact participant behavior. Similarly, observer bias and perception could influence the data collected. Moreover, during the observation, the participants’ behavior might be affected as a result of their being observed. This resulted in atypical behavior (Frechtling & Sharp, 2002).

According to Creswell (2013), one of the challenges of using the observation as a source of data collection is the observer role during the observation process; particularly when the observer is considered as “participant, nonparticipant, or middle ground position” (P.172). In addition, another issue may occur when it comes to remembering to take notes or changing roles by the researcher from being engaged with the group of people who are being observed or being an outsider seated at a distance to observer and collect data. The demands of transforming all data heard and observed into a narrative form could cause the researcher stress (Creswell, Page172). Labaree (2002) discussed issues related to being a participant observer who engaged and developed relationships with the study participants instead of remaining at a distance.

**Data Collection Tool: Documentation Review**

**Definition**

Document review is the third data collation tools used in the study. Brown (2009) defined document review as “a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents—both printed and electronic (computer-based and Internet-transmitted) material” (P.28). Documents and objects are considered artifacts, may be used to reveal “something about a culture,” and include “pictures, clothing, poetry, and trash” P.164. According to Marshall and Rossman (2016)
“documents can provide background information that helps establish the rational for selecting a particular site, program, or population” P.164.

Advantages of Documentation Review

Marshall and Rossman (2016) indicated that “researchers often supplement participant observation, interviewing, and observation with gathering and analyzing documents product in the course of everyday events or constructed specially for research at hand” P.164. Thus, they stressed that the research question should guide and serve as the link to documents that were chosen to be gathered and analyzed. Likewise, before analyzing and interpretation of the documents, it is important for the researcher to explore document meaning through other methods (Marshall& Rossman, 2016). Denzin (1970) explained that document analysis is used for triangulation purposes. Yin (1994) stressed that when conducting a qualitative study, the researcher is expected to have drawn upon at least two sources of evidence. The use of multiple sources of data allowed the researcher “to seek convergence and corroboration”. As a primary source of data collection as it relates to observation, triangulation of data is another benefit of using document review. The use of document review increases the trustworthiness and credibility of the evidence (Eisner, 1991). It allowed the researcher to reinforce the finding using another source of data to corroborate findings across data sets. At the same time, it permitted the researcher confidence against the disadvantages of using a single method of data collection or involvement of researcher biases (Patton,1990).

Documents lead to further questions, add background and supplementary info, and serve as a gauge to track development. They help researchers to verify their other data sources. They provide an additional way to for researchers to collect data when participants have forgotten details or when the time of observation has passed (Brown, 2009).
Brown (2009) stated several advantages of document review in relation to qualitative research. The document analysis is not time consuming, which make it more efficient “It requires data selection, instead of data collection” P.31. The internet has opened up the availability of many publicly accessible documents to researchers. Documents analysis costs less than other data collection methods. It is said that for researchers working with document analysis, there is “lack of obtrusiveness and reactivity…they are unaffected by the research process” P.31. This may be compared to observation as a data collection tool, for example, where the researcher may influence the finding. Also, as a result of their being “non-reactive,” the documents remain stable throughout the investigation. Thus, the document is still suitable for another review by other researchers. Exactness also plays a role. Brown (2009) stated that “the inclusion of exact names, references, and details of events makes documents advantageous in the research process (P.31). The documents also provide a wide range of information representative of a long period of time at many settings (Yin, 1994).

Disadvantages of Documentation Review

According to Brown (2009), document review has disadvantages as well. Some documents can be inadequate sources for research because they may have been created for other purposes. Thus, some documents do not provide rich details to answer research questions. Often the documents are not recoverable, or researchers can face challenges when attempting to find, access, or use them again. In some cases, the documents are intentionally blocked from public use (Yin, 1994). Also, Yin (1994) referenced “biased selectivity” P.80 when he described document selection. According to Yin, biased selectivity is the result of an incomplete collection of documents. Yin (1994) wrote that especially within an organizational context, selected documents “are likely to be aligned with corporate policies and procedures and with the agenda
of the organization’s principals” (p. 80). Still, the advantages of document review outweigh the disadvantages.

**Procedure**

The preplanning of the interview process included contacting the study participants through emails to determine the interview dates, times, and locations according the participants’ best interests. The dates and times were selected based on the participants’ availability and conducted in each participant classroom when a teacher did not have a class at the time of the interview. The participants received an email one day before the interview was scheduled as a reminder to ensure participant availability at the interview time and to provide an opportunity to reschedule if needed (Saldana, Leavy & Beretvas, 2014). The length of the interviews was 45-60 minutes. Because of that, the interview time was well-managed and purposefully spent serving the purpose of the study and the researchable problems. The interview protocol guided the interview to the serve the research purposes (Saldana, Leavy & Beretvas, 2014). After arriving to the interviewee’s classroom to conduct the interview, the teachers signed the consent forms, which were obtained from the HSIRB. The purpose of the study was reviewed as was the time needed to complete the interview (Creswell, 2013). General and special education teachers who co-taught in RTI-incorporated classrooms separately underwent semi-structured interviews. Before commencing the interviews, the researcher ensured interviewee understanding by defining what is meant by RTI and co-teaching allowing the interviewee and interviewer to speak the same language (Friend et al, 2010). The interviews included four sections that guided each discussion. Interviews began with demographics inquiries followed by a set of questions based on the benefits related to RTI and co-teaching; the barriers related to RTI and co-teaching and concludes with questions about teachers’ perceptions about the overall impacts of RTI on co-
teaching. The researcher followed the interview protocol, however, was permitted to ask more questions (probes) when applicable to have a deeper understanding and expand the participants’ responses with clear knowledge as needed. An interview protocol is fundamental to gain the best data from study participants and allows the interview process to be successful (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). During each conversation, the interviewer drove the interview using guided questions to cover a list of topics related to the research questions. The interview structure was developed using open-ended questions to allow teachers to provide deep knowledge regarding their experiences and perceptions.

The interviews were recorded, which has been suggested as the preferred method for data recording, and then transcribed for analysis purposes (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). Developing a good rapport with study participants is essential, therefore, Cohen and Crabtree recommend researchers focus on the interview and build connections with the study participants rather than taking notes during the interview. Notetaking during the interview may result not only in poor note taking but also failure of making the dialogue between the interviewer and the interviewee strong and meaningful (2006). Building a connection allows participants to share their experiences resulting in valuable rich data (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). After the interviews were conducted, the researcher informed the participants that they may be contacted to clarify specific points of their responses.

Following interview completion, observations were conducted with five special education teachers during their co-teaching experience working with general education teachers in general education classrooms. To schedule these observations, the special education teachers informed the researcher of a convenient observation date and time. The researcher observed the participants for one class period each using an observation checklist comprised of components of
co-teaching where RTI is implemented into classrooms. The researcher remained a nonparticipating/observer who watched from a distance and observed the participants under investigation in a real time sitting. The researcher monitored and recorded their activities without being involved (Creswell, 2013).

In terms of document review, the researcher reviewed several online documents from the Michigan Department of Education, and schools’ districts website while others were provided by the Directors of Special Education at Schools A, B, and C. The researcher also reviewed previous literature on the process of RTI and co-teaching implementation at the high school level.

To increase study validity, three approaches were used to ensure findings accuracy. First, member checking was used to review a summary of the major themes and raw data of interview’s transcriptions to help keep the researcher biases from influencing an inappropriate interpretation of the finding that may have impacted the main purpose of the study. Also, member checking allowed the researcher to be confident of evidence that breeds credibility (Creswell, 2015). In addition, the study participants received the interview transcripts to ensure the accuracy of the information transcribed increasing the research validity. Second, the researcher used peer debriefing to reach high agreement related to the transcriptions, themes, analysis, and the interpretation of the findings. Finally, triangulation was used to increase the trustworthiness of the study. The researcher triangulated data between the interview findings, observation, and the documentation. This step increased the validity and the accuracy of overall the study outcomes (Creswell, 2015). Reliability and validity were addressed in-depth below.
Human Subject Institution Review Board (HSIRB)

The researcher obtained approval for this research proposal from Western Michigan University’s Human Subjects Institution Review Board (HSIRB). Following proposal approval, the researcher engaged in a teacher recruitment process and obtained consent forms from participating teachers. Participants were informed that their participation contributes to students with special needs, specifically to ensure their successful inclusion. According to Creswell, because this study does not involve minors, it is considered exempt, expedited, or full review (2013).

Recruitment and Selection of Study Participants

The researcher facilitated the participant recruitment process in several stages. First, permission to conduct the study was obtained from the Directors of Special Education at three schools located at the State of Michigan. Specifically, the study took place in high schools located in urban, suburban, and rural school districts in southwest Michigan. The directors contacted general and special education teachers who co-taught in secondary education and utilized RTI. These educators were informed of the study. Second, both directors of special education provided the researcher with a list of teachers who were interested in participating in the study along with their contact information. Third, the researcher contacted the potential co-teacher participants via email, provided participants with more details about the research purpose, problem, and the value of their participation, and then set up meeting time to conduct the interview and the observation.

Fourth, based on specific criteria related to the research questions, a purposeful sampling selection was used to select the study participants and sites, including general education teachers and special education teachers from urban, suburban, and rural school districts in southwest
Michigan. (Creswell, 2013; Schneider & Whitehead, 2013). Eligibility requirements dictated that participants teach secondary education, specifically grades 9-12, in three public school classrooms where RTI is implemented and have at least one year of co-teaching experience.

**Sample**

The study’s targeted population was comprised of general education teachers and special education teachers who co-taught at the secondary education level in urban, suburban, and rural school districts in southwest Michigan. The sample site was chosen due to its location within the region in which the Western Michigan University Review Board is located, as well as the city in which the researcher studies and lives.

The selection of the study participants was based on the appropriate individuals able to provide deep and meaningful answers to the study inquiry (Saldana, Leavy & Beretvas, 2014). To reach full understanding of co-teacher’s experiences with and perceptions of the benefits, barriers, and overall impacts of RTI in the co-taught classroom, the researcher sought out study participants by using purposeful sampling strategies. Purposeful sampling refers to the selection of specific sites, participants, and sample size to be studied (Creswell, 2013). Several authors in qualitative research have different points of view regarding how many participants are considered enough for the study (Saldana, Leavy & Beretvas, 2014). To demonstrate this disparity, an analysis of the top five cited papers in education and health science, 2008-2012, exploring 11 phenomenological studies in the education field, used sample sizes ranging from 8 to 31 participants at a single site (Guetterman, 2015). Polkinghorne (1989) recommended the researcher should interview 5-25 individuals considered appropriate for the study. McCracken (1988) stated that in a phenomenological research design, researchers should conduct in-depth interviews for data collection as the primary data collection tool with a small number of
individuals up to 10 to understand and describe the participants’ phenomenal experiences. Also, Dukes (1984) stated that three to ten participants would be the most appropriate sample size in phenomenology. The researcher kept these studies in mind when choosing this study’s sample size, which was comprised of 8 participants including three general education and five special education teachers. Saldana, Leavy & Beretvas (2014) stated “as long as you have sufficient interview data, whether from one person to twenty, you’ll then have a sufficient corpus for analysis” (p. 34). Schneider and Whitehead (2013) stress that “Small samples are far more manageable because of the amount of potentially rich and detailed data that sample size in qualitative research can be generated from each single participant” (p.7).

**Data Collection**

The data collection process involved several stages. First, the researcher obtained data through in-depth, face to face, semi-structured instructed interviews with study participants who have had experience working as co-teachers in a general education classroom, in order to provide deep and rich understanding to the researchable problem. Teachers’ own classrooms were chosen as locations convenient to conduct interviews. The interviews were conducted individually (one-on-one) with participants, recorded, and transcribed. Later, several recommendations from Marshall and Rossman (2016) were taken into consideration. The recorded interviews were labeled with a code given to each participant, each recording was given a backup record, and the researcher took notes immediately after data collection (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Data from the recordings were transcribed. The researcher reviewed the transcripts to ensure the accuracy of the transcriptions and data validity. According to Creswell’s description of member checking, which allows increased credibility of interview outcomes, participants were given copies of their transcribed interviews for review and permitted to remark on the content for accuracy and
meaning (Creswell, 2015). The recordings were destroyed immediately after the transcriptions were completed. Moreover, for the participants’ privacy and data confidentiality, all transcriptions were stored in safe computer files (Creswell, 2015), and the researcher and principal investigator were the only individuals who had access to the information.

Next, the researcher contacted the special and general education teachers to conduct the observation during their co-teaching times in general education classroom. The researcher used a checklist to record the participants’ behaviors and to develop a deep understanding of what the incorporation of RTI in co-taught classroom looks like at the high school level. The researcher was a “complete observer” as Crabtree and Miller (1999) described, meaning that the researcher sat at a distance to prevent disturbing the study participants and to collect data. Using observation as an additional source of data permits the researcher to triangulate findings. This leads to additional layers of authenticating evidence (Creswell, 2015). Five observations were conducted based on teachers’ availability at the time of observation.

Finally, the researcher asked the Directors of Special Education of school under the investigation to provide some documents for reviewing purposes related to RTI and co-teaching implementation at high school level. Also, the researcher also reviewed online documents that related to RTI and co-teaching implementation in the state of Michigan and each school official website. Finally, literature review was conducted to get deep understanding of RTI and co-teaching at secondary level as divided and as combined.

**Data Analysis**

The researcher followed six steps for data analysis. First, the researcher organized the data by transcribing all recordings, gave each participant a coded name, and sorted the
transcription in two folders: General education teachers and special education teachers. Then, the researcher uploaded the transcriptions to NVivo coding software and organized the data into two separate folders as well. Second, the researcher read and reread the data to make sense of the information. The researcher took notes of patterns, commonalities, observations, and notable comments which surfaced from in-depth reading of the data. Third, the researcher started the coding process by organizing the data using the NVivo coding software to assist with the coding process. The researcher organized the data into chunks and then chose terms which represented each category. These were terms used repetitively or words the researcher used to describe the data chosen. The researcher gathered all codes under several categories. Fourth, during the coding process, the researcher created category descriptions and generated themes which were considered as the major themes of the study. In the fifth step, the researcher determined how the description and themes would be represented in narrative form by identifying the five major themes and sub-themes. In the sixth and final step, the researcher interpreted the findings, made meaning of data, and connected with the essence of the phenomena (Creswell, 2014).

In more depth, the researcher began data organization procedures by creating an electronic folder for each participant. Each folder included the interview transcript, interview-based notes, a coded name, and the interview time and location. Transcripts were also printed as a back-up. Through these processes, the researcher was easily able to find the data needed. The researcher revisited the interviews several times to engage with the participants’ narratives, identify any commonalities or divergences between teacher responses, and become familiar with the data to effectively make sense of the interviews. Coding was used in the process of finding meaningful results from collected data. A code in a qualitative study is defined as an inquiry, which “is most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient,
essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data” (Saldana, 2009, P. 3). The researcher used NVivo Coding software to organize the transcribed data. NVivo Coding is an appropriate software for qualitative research and is especially targeted to beginning qualitative researchers. It is applicable to studies in which researchers concentrate on participants’ voices and words and based the coding on their actual words (Saldana, 2009). After uploading the data transcripts to NVivo, the researcher drew the codes directly from the literature review as well as from exact words used and repeated by the study participants in the interview transcripts. Then, the researcher developed a list of codes that matched the transcription segments. Next, the researcher classified the qualitative information and identified themes (categories). Referencing Moustakas (1994), the researcher distilled the themes into textural and structural descriptions, and then combined these pieces to create composite descriptions which represented the essence of the phenomenological experiences of each participant. In this step, the researcher reflected on and interpreted data based on the themes which emerged from the interviews. Finally, the researcher drilled more deeply into the data collection to make meaning and connect the themes, which lead to the development of the findings. These were presented within the framework of the research questions related to teachers’ experiences (Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

Through the data collected from the observation, the researcher used a checklist to develop a rich understanding of the incorporation of RTI and co-teaching in general education classrooms. From the use of the checklist, the researcher determined how RTI and co-teaching were implemented at School A, School B, and School C. Then, the researcher wrote a summary reporting on the components of RTI and co-teaching which were observed in practice and
implemented in the general classroom for each school. The observation outcomes were used for triangulation purposes and increased the validity of the study.

Figure 3. Data Analysis in Qualitative Research

*Adopted from Creswell (2014).

The documentation review process was driven by the purpose of the study and the research problem. The researcher looked for RTI and co-teaching implementation policy at the high school level and focused on clear guidance and a clear outline that teachers can follow through the implementation of both practices at the secondary level. Thus, the documentation review outcomes were used for triangulation purposes following the observation.

**Reliability and Validity of the Study**

To stress the importance of trustworthiness in qualitative research, data interpretation must be reliable and trustworthy. Therefore, Marshall and Rossman (2014) indicated that “in qualitative inquiry, where the researcher is “the instrument,” calling herself “reliable” isn’t
enough. Instead we distinguish the traits that make us personally “credible” and ensure that our interpretations of the data are “trustworthy” (P.44). To achieve this essential credibility, a member checking procedure was used toward ensuring the data and the interpretations of the data are trusted, reliable, and valid. This was achieved by sharing the data and researcher interpretations with the study participants (Marshall & Rossman, 2014; Maxwell, 2012; Creswell & Miller, 2000; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In addition, the participants were giving the opportunity to review the rough draft of the interview transcriptions as well as reviewing major themes to ensure the accuracy of the study outcomes (Creswell, 2013). Through email, the researcher sent each participant the final draft of the interview transcriptions and a summary of the major themes that emerged among different interviewees. After reviewing the transcripts of their interviews and the theme-based summary, all participants replied with “Approved” to the research.

Creswell (2014) recommended the use of multiple approaches of validation strategies to enhance research validity. Thus, in addition to the use of member checking, peer debriefing served as the second approach the researcher used to increase the accuracy of the study findings. Peer debriefing is defined as “a process of exposing oneself to a disinterested peer in a manner paralleling an analytical session and for the purpose of exploring aspects of the inquiry that might otherwise remain only implicit within the inquirer's mind” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 308). Through this process, two colleagues worked in peer debriefing roles and closely review the interviews’ transcriptions (teachers' names and personal information removed for privacy), examined the analysis process, generated themes, and the interpretation of the data. The colleagues studied teacher interviews for deep understanding and reached an agreement with the researcher on themes and data interpretation. In doing so, the colleagues’ added validity to the qualitative study (Creswell, 2014). In compliance with WMU’s HSIRB requirements, both
colleagues underwent HSIRB training. Both had a high level of expertise with qualitative research and were knowledgeable about the topic of the study under investigation. The researcher and the reviewers met after achieving certain goals in the process. Each peer debriefer came up with themes and sub-themes to ensure the accuracy of the researcher’s data analysis, and then compared these themes, sub-themes, and interpretation of the finding to what the researcher discovered. Both researcher and reviewers came to a high level of agreement when reviewing the transcriptions, data analysis, and finding interpretations. The researcher also used triangulation with the reviewers to validate the findings outcomes.

Finally, triangulation was used as third strategy to increase study validity. Creswell (2013) defined triangulation as a researcher’s “use of multiple and different sources, methods, investigators, and theories to provide corroborating evidence to triangulated data between multiple sources” (P. 251). The researcher triangulated data among the interviews’ outcomes, document review, and the observation as well triangulated the outcomes of the peer debriefing investigation in order to better interpret the teachers shared experiences and validate the study findings.

To address the reliability of the study and ensure the efficiency of the transcripts, all interviews were recorded. More significantly, NVivo coding was used to assist with the coding process. Data analysis excluded the researcher’s personal perspectives (Creswell, 2013). Moreover, the researcher followed a procedure recommended by Gibbs (2007) and thus, checked the transcript for any mistakes which accrued during the transcription process. Study participants also checked the transcriptions and agreed with data transcribed.
Summary

This chapter discussed the research methods used to conduct the study. The researcher presented the definition of a phenomenological study and presented the advantages and disadvantages of the study approach. Purposeful sampling was used to select the study participants after the researcher obtained HSIRB approval to conduct the study. Also, in this chapter, the researcher clarified the definition of a semi-structured interview and the advantages and disadvantages of its use as a data collection tool. Then, the researcher described Creswell’s data analysis steps which were used to analyze the data and reach the essence of the phenomenon. Finally, aspects of validity and reliability were addressed to ensure that the findings were accurate.
CHAPTER IV
RESULTS

This chapter demonstrates, in-depth, the results of phenomenological research investigating teachers’ use of and perceptions on the impact of RTI on co-teaching at secondary level in general education classrooms by highlighting benefits and barriers through individual interviews, observation, and documents review. The chapter includes a description of the study participants, the outcomes of the investigation by answering three main research questions through interviews, classroom observations, and document review and a summary of the findings.

Participant Demographic Summary

Eight special education and general education teachers were invited to participate in the study. The eight participants consisted of three general education teachers and five special education teachers. There were six female teachers and two male teachers. Four teachers including two general and two special education teachers, were interviewed from School A, two special education teachers were interviewed from School B, and one general and one special education teacher was interviewed from School C. Teachers were identified through a coded, three-digit system. This system combined the high school (A, B, or C) with the teacher’s role (G=General; S=Special) and a number assigned to that specific teacher, role, and school (1 or 2). (See Table 2).
Table 2

Participants’ Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total participants</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of participants</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

School A

School A is located in a growing midwestern suburban school district in Michigan. At the time of the study, it was a highly rated school (niche.com, 2018) serving approximately 1,350 students, ninth to twelfth grades. The student diversity included 74.2% White students, 8.2% Multiracial, 6.2% African American, 5.9% Hispanic, 5.5% Asian, 0.1% Native American, and 0.1% Pacific Islander. In addition, 18% of students qualified to receive free lunch, and 4% were eligible to receive reduced lunch (niche.com, 2018). (See Table 3 and Table 4).

Participating teachers. AG1 is a general education teacher with 16 years of teaching experience. She is a specialist in social studies teaching at the high school level. She has a master’s degree in curriculum instruction. AG1 has six years of experience at School A, twelve years of experience with RTI, and 16 years of co-teaching experience. She teaches Social Studies, American History, European History, and Contemporary History.

AG2 is a general education teacher with 10 years of teaching experience. Seven of those 10 years have been with at-risk students, and four took place in general education at School A.
She majored in history and English and has a master’s degree in education. Her specialization in curriculum and instructional design has a focus on at-risk education. She is a doctoral candidate in urban education with experience at the high school level. AG2 has 10 years of experience with RTI, and four years of co-teaching experience. The teacher taught ninth through twelfth grades. (See Table 5, Table 6, Figure 3, and Figure 4).

AS1 is a special education teacher with 12 years of special education experience and one year as a paraprofessional. For seven of her 12 years of teaching special education, she worked as a co-teacher and resource room teacher at the high school level. For five years, she taught students with emotional impairments in a self-contained classroom. She also co-taught at the elementary level. She has a master’s degree in special education with endorsements in Learning Disabilities and Emotional Impairments. She teaches ninth through twelfth grades. The teacher has two years of experience at School A, and 12 years experience with Response to Intervention, and co-teaching. (See Table 5, Table 6, Figure 3, and Figure 4).

AS2 is a special education teacher with a master’s degree in special education with endorsements in emotional impairments and autism. The teacher has 12 years of experience with RTI and nine years of co-teaching. She was a teaching consultant in four core areas, teaching at the ninth-grade level, and has 10 years of experience at the ninth-grade level. She had three years of experience at her current position at School A. (See Table 5, Table 6, Figure 3, and Figure 4).

School B

School B is located in a rural area in southwest Michigan. At the time of the study, the school had 685 students from ninth through twelfth grades. The student diversity included 92.3% White students, 2.3% Multiracial, 0.4% African American, 3.1% Hispanic, 1.8% Asian, and
0.1% Native American (niche.com, 2018). In addition, 21% of the students’ population qualified to receive free lunch, and 4% were eligible for reduced lunch (publicschoolreview.com). (See Table 3 and Table 4).

**Participating teachers.** BS1 is a special education teacher with 24 years of experience teaching grades three through twelve. BS1 has teaching experience as a special education teacher at the high school level for six years. BS1 has a master’s degree in Educational Leadership. She is certified as a special education teacher in grades K-12, with an endorsement in emotional impairments, and is certified to teach general education in grades K-8. She has teaching experience in a special education self-contained classroom for 10 years, special education resource room experience totaling six years, and 10 years of experience as a level two teacher with students who are cognitively impaired. She has extensive Response to Intervention training including participation on the committee responsible for implementing RTI at the elementary level in the district. In addition, she is a member of the school leadership team at the high school providing feedback between staff members and administrators regarding the RTI process. BS1 has six years of experience with RTI and co-teaching and nine years of experience at her current position at School B. (See Table 5, Table 6, Figure 3, and Figure 4).

BS2 is a special education teacher with a year and a half of total teaching experience as a co-teacher and in working with Response to Intervention. She has endorsements in learning disabilities and emotional impairments and a math minor. She has taught at both the middle and high school level. BS2 has one and a half years of experience with RTI and co-teaching at her current position at School B. (See Table 5, Table 6, Figure 3, Figure 4, and Figure 5).
School C

School C is located in a suburban area in the southwest region of the state of Michigan. At the time of the study, the highly ranked school had 799 students from ninth through twelfth grades. The student diversity included 93.4% White students, 0.3% Multiracial, 1.9% African American, 3.6% Hispanic, 0.5% Asian, 0% Native American, and 0.4% Pacific Islander. In addition, 20% of the student population qualified to receive free lunch and 5% were eligible to receive reduced lunch (niche.com, 2018). (See Table 3 and Table 4).

Participating teachers. CG1 is a general education teacher with 13 years of teaching experience in his current position at School C as a general education teacher from ninth to eleventh grades. He had a bachelor’s degree in Science and Secondary Education, with earth/space and general science specialties. He teaches Chemistry A and B, Physics, Meteorology, Biology, and Human Body Systems. The participant has 11 years of co-teaching experience and five years of RTI experience. He was a team member who established and launched RTI in the high school. (See Table 5, Table 6, Figure 4, and Figure 5).

CS1 is a special education teacher with a bachelor’s degree in special education and a minor in chemistry. He is a Level One special education teacher with endorsements in learning disabilities and emotional impairments and is certified at the secondary level in chemistry. CS1 has three years of teaching experience in his current position at School C, and four and a half years of experience with RTI and co-teaching. (See Table 5, Table 6, Figure 3, and Figure 4).
### Table 3

Students’ Racial Distribution

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Racial group</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Hispanic</th>
<th>African American</th>
<th>Multiracial</th>
<th>Native American</th>
<th>Pacific Islander</th>
<th>Asian</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School A</td>
<td>74.2%</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
<td>6.2%</td>
<td>8.2%</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School B</td>
<td>92.3%</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School C</td>
<td>93.4%</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 4

Students’ Eligibility for Free or Reduced Lunch

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School name</th>
<th>Eligible for free lunch</th>
<th>Eligible for reduced lunch</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School A</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School B</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School C</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5
Participants’ Credential Profile

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Degree</th>
<th>Other qualifications</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AS1</td>
<td>Master</td>
<td>Endorsements in LD &amp; EI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AS2</td>
<td>Master</td>
<td>Endorsements in emotional impairments and autism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AG1</td>
<td>Master</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AG2</td>
<td>Master</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BS1</td>
<td>Master</td>
<td>Endorsement in EI, Certified EI for K-twelfth Certified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>General Education K-ninth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BS2</td>
<td>Bachelor</td>
<td>Endorsements in LD &amp; EI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Math minor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CG1</td>
<td>Bachelor</td>
<td>DH Science Major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>DX General Science Minor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CS1</td>
<td>Bachelor</td>
<td>Endorsements in LD &amp; EI Certified School Chemistry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>minor in chemistry</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6
Teachers’ Years of Experience at Current Position, with RTI and Co-Teaching

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher name</th>
<th>Years of experience at current position</th>
<th>Years of experience with RTI</th>
<th>Years of experience with co-teaching</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AG2</td>
<td>4 years</td>
<td>10 years</td>
<td>4 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AG1</td>
<td>6 years</td>
<td>12 years</td>
<td>16 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AS1</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>12 years</td>
<td>12 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AS2</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>12 years</td>
<td>9 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BS1</td>
<td>9 years</td>
<td>6 years</td>
<td>6 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BS2</td>
<td>1.5 years</td>
<td>1.5 years</td>
<td>1.5 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CS1</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>4.5 years</td>
<td>4.5 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CG1</td>
<td>13 years</td>
<td>5 years</td>
<td>11 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Participants (N=8) consisted of five special education teachers and three general education teachers. Of the five special education teachers, one held one endorsement and four held two endorsements. Additionally, two of the special education teachers held at least one teaching minor and one general education teacher held two teaching minors. The other two general education teachers did not hold teaching minors.

Figure 4. Number of Endorsements and Teaching Minors

Figure 5. Teachers’ Years of Experience
Participants’ years of teaching in their current role spanned from one to 13 years. Five of the individuals had been in their current positions from two to five years. Two participants were in their current positions six to ten years. One individual had been in their current position for over ten years. In addition, three of the individuals had two to five years of experience with RTI. Two participants had six to ten years of experience with RTI. Three individuals had over ten years of experience with RTI. Moreover, three of the individuals have had two to five years of co-teaching experience. Two participants had six to ten years of co-teaching experience. Three individuals had over ten years of co-teaching experience (Figure 2).

For the following participants (AS1, AS2, AG1, AG2, BS1), the data shows that these five teachers have a master’s degree. Teachers, AS1 and AS2, have two special education endorsements, and BS1 has one special education endorsement. The remaining three participants (BS2, CG1, and CS1) have bachelor’s degree including minors. Two of three teachers (CS1 and BS2) have two special education endorsements. The majority of participants (AS1, AS2, AG1, AG2, BS1, CG1) brought a wealth of co-teaching (four to sixteen years) and RTI (five to twelve years) experience. Their interviews demonstrated that all the teacher participants have a deep understanding of RTI and co-teaching implementation. They shared meaningful insights related to their lived experiences, play a major role in their classroom, and expressed their thoughts on the importance of collaboration among teachers.

Participants CS1 and BS2 each have bachelor’s degrees in special education. Both have two endorsements in special education and one has a minor in chemistry. CS1 has four and a half years of RTI and co-teaching experience while BS2 has one and a half years of RTI and co-teaching. CS1 provided more in-depth descriptions of his experienced with RTI and co-teaching. He expressed vivid details of his lived experience of the phenomenon under the investigation.
However, BS2 lacked details and depth when sharing her experience compared to other study’s participants which appeared to be due to her lack of teaching experience.

In summary, the richness of the participants’ responses were not impacted by participants level of degree or number of years of experience at their current schools. Rather, what did tend to influence the content, quality, and length of teacher participant responses was the number of years of experience with RTI and co-teaching. Years of field experience play a more important role in the teachers’ understanding of RTI and co-teaching implementation than their educational level. Alongside the obstacles that teachers highlighted as they discussed the incorporation of RTI in their co-taught high school classrooms, more years of experience permitted teachers to reach above and beyond their limits when implementing RTI and co-teaching. (see Table 5, Table 6).

Findings

The findings of the study were informed by five major themes presented below. As a result of deep engagement with the data collected, the themes were logically organized as they emerged. The five major themes were: (A) teachers’ philosophy of teaching and learning, (B) RTI and co-teaching implementation, (C) benefits of RTI incorporation into co-taught classrooms, (D) barriers of RTI incorporation into co-taught classrooms, and (E) the impact of RTI incorporation into co-taught classrooms. Sub-themes were also included under major themes (see Table 7). Finally, a summary of the chapter provided closure for the research.
Table 7
Themes Resulting from Data Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research question</th>
<th>Major themes</th>
<th>Number of responses</th>
<th>Sub-themes</th>
<th>Number of responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General theme</td>
<td>Teachers philosophy of teaching and learning.</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General theme</td>
<td>RTI and co-teaching implementation</td>
<td>25</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How does the incorporation of Response to Intervention into co-taught, secondary general education classrooms benefit the teacher experience and student academic and behavioral success?</td>
<td>Benefits of RTI incorporation into co-taught classrooms</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>(a) collaboration</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(b) instructional quality</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(c) improve students’ academic performance</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(d) improve students’ behavioral performance</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(e) administrative support</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How does the incorporation of Response to Intervention into co-taught secondary general education classrooms result in barriers to the teacher experience and student academic and behavioral success?</td>
<td>Barriers of RTI incorporation into co-taught classrooms</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>(a) lack of time.</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(b) Lack of administrative support.</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(c) Lack of background knowledge</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(d) Lack of collaboration</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(e) Issues related to students.</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(f) Attitude toward RTI</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are teachers’ perceptions of the overall impact of Response to Intervention on co-taught secondary level, general education classrooms?</td>
<td>Overall impact of RTI incorporation into co-taught classrooms</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>(a) Positive/ Negative impacts.</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(b) Ways to make RTI and co-teaching efficient</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Number of times participants responded was drawn from NVivo coding software.
Teachers’ Philosophy of Teaching and Learning

Within teachers’ responses to the interview questions, 50% of teachers shared their beliefs about teaching and learning. AG2 said, “Because my experience here has absolutely been that the students come first, and students’ needs come first” AG2 believed all co-teachers she worked with shared the same belief and “they’ll definitely do what it takes to make sure that a student has every single support in place that they need to progress in the gen ed curriculum.” CG1 also stressed his responsibility to send struggling students to RTI class to get the support they need.

BS1 stated, “Our principal has said, every kid will get what they need in the amount of time that they need it”. Then she added, “Unfortunately, not every teacher believes that 100% of the students will get what they need in the amount of time that they need it”. The same teacher believed every student is a general education student first, and all students deserve the same level of instruction. From there, explained BS1, teachers set expectations and guarantee every student will get what they need, no matter how long it takes to get there. At the same time, there were teachers who believed if the students do not want to make the effort, “I cannot force them”.

CS1’s co-teaching philosophy may be based on his professional self-image. He confirmed this by questioning his teaching ability when he remarked, “I should have been a better value added” to the classroom where he co-taught. He showed concern regarding his level of content knowledge for the subject being co-taught.

RTI and Co-Teaching Implementation

To better understand RTI as it is applied in high school, this section addresses high school RTI use through interview participant responses. Seven teachers expressed that in high
school, they have what is referred to as “RTI time,” also called “plus time,” where students are given a chance to get extra support in different content areas.

School A

Interview summary of RTI implementation at School A. When asked about RTI implementation, AG1 at School A explained,

We have a pyramid of intervention and there [are] different tiers. But I monitor my own kids’ data in a way that’s very isolated and like, if they’re missing stuff, I email…their study hall teacher, I email their parents, maybe email their counselor if they’re not doing well. But I don’t view their data in a way that I look at it [from] their whole schedule and what all their classes look like… You know, I teach close to 180 kids in a day. I don’t look at all their schedules.

AG1 also mentioned that in her previous teaching experience at another school, where the student population was smaller, she felt like she had more of a hand in the RTI and interventions. Likewise, AS1 added that all teachers at School A used formative and summative assessment. They monitored the students’ progress and when teachers noticed a student’s grades dropping, teachers moved students’ seats, accommodated or modified assignments, and involved parents. The support team, including the school counselor, became involved in finding individualized supports, such as after school programs at “the assist room,” math room, and for students with an IEP, the “Direct Learning Room.” These services were available several days a week and taught by certified teachers.

Interview summary of co-teaching implementation. At School A, when teachers were asked to describe the co-teaching implementation at their school, AS2 indicted that special
education teachers were assigned to co-teach according to specific grade levels where special ed teachers co-taught all four core content classes. AS1 mentioned that students with special needs who are diploma-bound were served in full inclusion classrooms supported by general and special education teachers. According to AG2 “Every core teacher who has more than 10 students with IEPs in a class is assigned a special ed co-teacher for that class.” AG1 also indicated that teacher pairs were assigned based on student needs and the number of available special education teachers. AG1 provided this example: “There is at least one section of all of the freshmen and sophomore core classes that are co-taught. I think there are co-teachers assigned to junior and senior English classes as well. Sometimes I will have a co-teacher with me for junior level history.”

Classroom observations. The first classroom observation conducted at School A to observe RTI and co-teaching in the general education classroom consisted of AS1 and a general education teacher who was not an interviewee. This observation of AS1 was conducted in a 10th grade math class. The general education teacher took the instructional lead to introduce the content to students. Thus, the instruction was delivered by a highly qualified teacher and support was provided to all learners in need. During the lecture time, the special education teacher observed the instruction and took notes. Next, the general education teacher used modeling to demonstrate to students how to solve the given task. Then, students were purposefully grouped to better meet their learning needs through small and large group instruction. Both the general and special education teachers were supporting all learners. The special education teacher supported students using flexible small group instruction and provided one-on-one support including the use of several evidence-based instructional strategies to assist students, including direct instruction, repetition, and graphic organizers. Instruction and interventions were provided
through differentiated instruction. The teachers also used formative assessment throughout the class by asking questions to students and checking for their understanding. Tiers I and II were observed in the classroom.

Regarding co-teaching, there were two professionals working collaboratively in the general education classroom. They were both available for the entire classroom period, supporting all students. The teacher used two co-teaching models including one-teach, one-observe; and one-teach, one-assist. Both teachers were responsible for behavioral management at the time of the observation. In addition, it was easy for the researcher to determine the general education teacher and special education teacher as well as the special education students from the general education students due to the intensity of support provided to a few special education students. After the special education teacher had provided direct instruction to a student, the researcher noticed the special education teacher was frustrated when the student refused to put any effort into solving the given task and waited for her to return. This example of learned helplessness is described in depth as one of the barriers that teachers face in the co-taught classroom.

The second observation conducted in School A was to observe AG1 and AS1 in a general education classroom during RTI implementation in a co-taught classroom. The observation was conducted in a 10th grade English class. During the observation period, the general education teacher started the lesson with an activity to review the previous lesson. The students had already read a story from a book, watched the first half of a movie of the story, and on the day of the observation, students were asked to complete watching the second part of the movie. Students were then given a list of questions related to story and asked to answer them in small groups of three to four. Highly qualified teachers delivered the instruction and supported all learners based
on their needs. The general education teacher used direct instruction, explicit vocabulary instruction and differentiated instruction. The intervention was provided by both teachers in the classroom and Tier I and II were implemented. The general education teacher used formative assessment several times. She collected the group responses, asking questions to prompt responses, and surveyed opinions from the students with a thumbs up or down at the end of the lesson. Regarding the co-teaching, there were two professionals working collaboratively in one classroom for the entire classroom period and supporting all students. Only two co-teaching models were used including one teach-one observe, and one teach-one assist. Likewise, both teachers shared classroom responsibilities and classroom management. In addition, it was easy for the researcher to determine who was the general education teacher and special education teacher, but it was not as simple to separate the special education students from the general education students due to the shared instruction provided by both teachers.

School B

**Interview summary of RTI implementation.** Similarly, at School B, BS2 demonstrated RTI implementation in her school by sharing her experience in the biology class co-teaching with a general education teacher.

We’re both in there to assist the students in the best way they need, then sometimes we’ll parallel teach where we’ll bring some of the students into the classroom to really focus in on what they need or move them along a little quicker in the process. Once assignments are done, we’ll kind of assess and see where the students are at. If they really missed that essential learning target that we wanted them to meet, we’ll take them during RTI time… If they didn’t actually accomplish the assignment, they are assigned to a before-or-after-school time… or if they need help with that, they’ll get that extra help. And then we do a
lot of accommodating and modifying of tests and assignments in the classes as well for the students at different tier levels. BS1 added that if the students need more intervention, the math department and science departments offer extra support, such as labs. Both are mandatory and available to students every Monday and Wednesday.

**Interview summary of co-teaching implementation.** When teachers were asked how co-teaching is implemented at School B. BS1 and BS2 indicated that co-teaching was implemented daily at their school. Special education teachers were assigned to co-teaching by department. BS1 added “we co-teach content areas we are highly qualified in/or have strengths in”

**Classroom observations.** The first classroom observation conducted at School B to observe RTI and co-teaching in the general education classroom consisted of observing BS1 and BS2 with their general education co-teaching partners who were not interviewees.

The observation of BS1 was conducted in a 10th grade English class. To describe the implementation of RTI, the highly qualified general education teacher started the lecture. She presented the task to students through worksheets and asked students to solve given tasks explaining the instructions step by step. Next, she showed the students how to solve given tasks using their computer. She used her own computer to model for students using a projector. The special education teacher applied differentiated instruction to meet the needs of several students. BS1 used explicit instruction, scribe writing for students with writing difficulties, highlighting to assist a student with reading/writing tasks, facilitated small group instruction and asked probing questions to further students understanding. Therefore, several evidence-based instructional strategies were implemented by the special education teacher. Co-teachers also used flexible small and large group instruction based on students’ needs as well as formative assessment was
in a form of probing questions to check students understanding. Likewise, Tier I and II were observed in the classroom, and the special education teacher was responsible for behavioral management.

Regarding co-teaching, the researcher observed two professionals working in the classroom for almost the entire classroom period. Students were supported by both teachers. One-teaching and one-observe was the only co-teaching model used during the observation. In addition, it was easy for the researcher to determine who was the general education teacher and special education teacher, but it was not as obvious who were the special education students and the general education students. Sixty-five percent of the students in the classroom had IEPs or 504 Plans. However, during the observation, the researcher was able to identify at least two of students with special needs due to the fact that one of the students was non-verbal and the other was diagnosed with ASD.

The observation of BS2 was conducted in basic geometry in a 10th grade classroom. The students were given the opportunity to construct a 3D building using paper boxes. The students had been previously provided instruction on the project. Regarding the implementation of RTI in School B, the researcher noticed that highly qualified teachers delivered the instruction and supported all students. The general education teacher used large group instruction. The instruction was based on students needs. Teachers used formative assessment by asking all students to share their project rubric so they could monitor student progress as they moved to the end of the project. Tier I and II were observed in the classroom. Both teachers provided support to all learners. Due to the nature of the classroom (hands-on project), the researcher observed the use of research-based instruction including direct and differentiated instruction to meet all students’ needs, and the special education teacher used purposeful small group instruction.
Regarding co-teaching, there were two professional teachers in the general education classroom for almost the entire classroom period. They both worked collaboratively in support of all learners and shared most responsibilities, but the special education teacher was accountable for the behavioral management. They used the one-teach, one-observe co-teaching model. In addition, it was easy for the researcher to determine who was the general education teacher and special education teacher, but could not easily recognize the special education students from the general education students.

**School C**

**Interview summary of RTI implementation.** CG1 indicated that RTI at School C consisted of students completing worksheets based on their needs, individually or in small groups. Additionally, students were allowed to finish or retake a test or attend a general review for missed assignments or content. CS1 added that although they have three tiers of RTI in their school, it is more about identifying who are struggling. This is determined according to the students’ scores in class or a school-wide formative assessment, which considers progress monitoring. CS1 also mentioned that

I’m familiar with RTI. I don’t think we always do it with 100-percent fidelity. I don’t think anybody is a master at it, but there are some that do a very good job, and we’re working towards that. Still working towards it.

**Interview summary of co-teaching implementation.** When teachers were asked to describe the implementation of co-teaching at their school, CG1 and CS1 said special education teachers were assigned to co-teach by the special education department chair and the school principal according to the classes’ needs. CS1 added that assignments were “largely decided by
the number of students in that class with IEPs and 504s as well as "at risk" students,” while some were “based on the students who are in those classes and if they may have a higher/lower level of need.”

**Classroom observations.** A classroom observation conducted at School C to observe RTI and co-teaching in the general education classroom consisted of observing CS1 with a general education co-teaching partner who was not interviewee.

At School C, one observation was conducted to observe RTI incorporation into co-taught classroom in a real-life setting. The observation was conducted to observe CS1 in the general education classroom during the incorporation of RTI in co-taught classroom. The observation was conducted in a 9th grade biology class. The general education teacher led the instruction by asking questions to follow up on previous lesson. Thus, highly qualified teachers delivered the instruction, and supported all learners based on their needs. The general education teacher used explicit instruction to explain to students how to tackle their given assignments. The students were asked to sit in small groups and work on tasks as a team. The general education teacher stressed the importance of group work to help students successfully complete the assignment. The special education teacher used numerous research-based instruction methods to assist students in need of additional support. These include direct instruction and differentiated instruction focused on student need. Formative assessment was applied throughout the assignment as the teachers asked probing questions to check students’ understanding. Teachers then collected and graded the assignments to assess students’ comprehension of the content taught. Tier I and II were observed in the general education classroom.

Regarding co-teaching, the researcher observed both professionals working in one classroom for the entire classroom period and supported all students. More than one co-teaching
model was used. Teachers used one teach-one observe at the beginning of the class followed by one teach-one assist. Then both teachers used the shared model during the instructional time addressing all students. Teachers showed a high level of collaboration and communication. In addition, it was easy for the researcher to determine who was the general and special education teacher because the special education teacher provided intense support to few students with special needs. Due to the level of support provided by the special education teacher, the researcher could easily identify the special education students from the general education students. Students worked in groups, divided the assignment among them, then shared their answers to the entire group. Later, the general education teacher led the classroom by pointing to different students from each group and asking them to answer questions. The special education teacher used the overhead projector to record the students’ responses.

Document Findings Related to RTI and Co-Teaching Implementation at the Secondary Level

A document review was conducted on several online documents previous literature, and resources provided by the Directors of Special Education for Schools A, B, and C as well as from the Michigan Department of Education (MDE), www.michigan.gov, and others. The purpose of the review was to determine the implementation process for Response to Intervention and co-teaching at the secondary level. When conducting research on the school districts’ websites, the researcher discovered no evidence of the implementation process for RTI and co-teaching. Thus, the researcher reached out to the special education directors at each of the schools’ districts. The directors informed the researcher there was no specific implementation process for RTI and co-teaching at the secondary level at the high schools in their districts. However, some evidence, including the Guidance Handbook for Educators of English Learners with Suspected Disabilities by the Michigan Department of Education, was found at MDE
related to Multi-tiered System and Support (MTSS). It included general information about the system overall. Likewise, through a deep search on michigan.gov, and Michigan Department of Education (MDE), such as Practice Profile for Multi-Tiered System of Supports (2018) was found. The handbook included general knowledge of the MTSS system and stated the philosophy of the support system followed by the main components of the MTSS. The handbook detailed what is expected through use of the practice, developmental use of the practice, and unacceptable use in practice. There was no specification for secondary level implementation. A deep search of previous literature resulted in no specific path or implementation of RTI and co-teaching particularly designed for the secondary level.

The review of documents provided by Director of Special Education from School A, stated that the district of School A had a strong vision and clear goal of the way MTSS should be implemented at all schools in the district. For instance, In Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) Development and Implementation (2013), the school district stressed the importance of MTSS implementation with fidelity across schools. The leadership team, including the executive team, district implementation team, and building level team, were all well informed of MTSS practices and worked together to achieve their mission. The Building Level Team included “Building Leadership Team/ School Improvement Team, Collaborative Teacher, Teams/ Grade Level Professional Learning Community, Building Cycle Review Team, and Student Support Team”. Each team had their role for implementing MTSS tiers across schools.

A document review of the district in which Schools B and C participate revealed that the district has broad strategies, a general plan for RTI implementation, K-12, and a literacy plan for the elementary school level. However, at the middle and high school level, RTI is implemented using a workshop style for course work addressing a variety of content areas. Also, the school
district stressed the use of assessment within Professional Learning Community meetings to collect data, analyze and interpret data, and make decisions accordingly. No documents were provided regarding RTI implementation at the high school level.

In terms of co-teaching, several documents were reviewed. For example, one document was reviewed named Michigan Department of Education, Early Literacy, Coaching Model. According to the document, “The model is aligned to the General Educational Leadership Network (GELN) Early Literacy Task Force (ELTF) Essential Coaching Practices in Elementary Literacy and supports the Essential Instructional Practices in Early Literacy” (P.4, 2018). The document provided knowledge about the implementation of co-teaching practices and stressed the essential elements of co-teaching practices. Deep review of previous literature revealed some tips and strategies for successful co-teaching at the secondary level (Murawski & Dieker, 2014; Murawski, 2012). Similarly, the Administrators Guide to Successful Co-teaching provided essential steps which must be taken into consideration for smooth co-teaching implementation. The document was designed for K12, however; not specifically for the secondary level (Murawski & Bernhardt, 2015). No documents were provided for review from the school district associated with Schools A, B, and C. The directors indicated there were no documented policies for co-teaching implementation at their districts for any level. Nevertheless, teachers were required to use co-teaching models during their assigned co-teaching time.

**Benefits of RTI Incorporation into Co-Taught Classrooms**

In the first research question of, how does the incorporation of Response to Intervention (RTI) into co-taught, at the secondary general education classrooms benefit the teacher experience and student academic and behavioral success? Both general and special education teachers shared their experience related to the benefits of incorporating RTI into co-taught,
secondary general education classrooms. The experiences teachers shared regarding the benefits of RTI incorporation into co-taught classrooms led to the emergence of the following five themes: (a) collaboration, (b) instructional quality, (c) students’ academic performance, (d) improve students’ behavioral performance, and (e) administrative support.

**Collaboration**

Based on the responses of the general and special education teachers, 50% of the teachers indicated that RTI emphasized the importance of collaboration among teachers in co-taught classrooms. AG2 explained that not only does RTI facilitate “collaboration...[for] you know consistently where they [students] are and then when they are ready to move up or if they…need more intervention,” but it also, permits the use of “the common language and the common vocabulary...” This helps a teacher to “get on the same page more easily with your co-teacher.” AG2 pointed out that collaboration between the general and special education teacher allows teachers to implement more interventions in their classrooms. Thus, collaboratively, both teachers plan instruction based on student needs and determine who will teach each part of the lesson and which group of students. AG2 also indicated that after evaluating the students’ answers through the use of formative assessment, AG2 shared the results with the special education teacher and asked for the co-teacher’s expertise to identify any specific strategies to re-teach unclear parts of the lesson. This level of collaboration allows both teachers to be aware of clearly defined learning targets and allows them to work together to reach the same learning targets based on student needs. AG2 stressed that the collaboration occurred only for planning student assessment, grading, project breakdowns, and re-teaching based on formative assessment during the lesson. However, there was no collaboration regarding lesson planning and content delivery. Similarly, BS1 stated
We do not lesson plan together every week, but we’re together every day two class periods a day. So, we are able to…tweak our lesson plans, tweak the weekly plan, and say okay, they [students] did not really do well in this assessment, so we need to go back and revisit. So, she and I are constantly in communication about the kids and it’s all the kids, not just the kids who might need more intervention, but those that do not. What we are going to do with that group and how are we going make sure we are moving them along, not holding them back while taking care of our kids might need some more instruction.

BS1 stressed the significance of ongoing communication between general and special education teachers. Purposefully grouping students and collaborative decision-making served as the co-teacher’s approach to achieving successful collaboration that meets all students’ needs in their classroom. Because of the collaboration, BS1 said,

We are really fortunate we are able to provide English classes that every student can be successful in because of the co-teaching that goes on. I do not have to teach (a) separate English class because we are able to work together and provide what they need.

Additionally, AG1 discussed the best part of collaboration as the opportunity to gain a second perspective when struggling to make a point to the class. In terms of content knowledge and co-teacher perspectives, AG1 explained

… sometimes as a teacher you know it so well, sometimes it’s hard to pick out what; “What am I missing here” And sometimes they can come at it, because they’re learning it [at] the same time [as the students]. “Oh, let’s think about it that way.” So that’s always fun for me to have someone else’s perspective and to offer up suggestions. And they
might have tools in their toolbox that I never thought about using and review and
different kinds of activities.

Likewise, BS2 emphasized the benefits of working collaboratively with a general education
teacher by sharing that

it really benefits working with my colleague because I feel like I have expertise in
understanding what the actual kids need in modifying or accommodating assignments
where they’re [general education teachers] more of a master in the actual content area.
And I think we collaborate really well knowing I can work on what do the kids actually
need or where do they need extra assistance. And she can really help them in that area
because she is a master at that content area.

AS1 shared her view of the team approach which demands teachers to work together.
She expressed that collaboration allows co-teachers to “bounce ideas of each other and share
strategies that are working and that are not working and just give rounded perspectives.” AS1
also stressed how collaboration depends on the colleagues’ personalities. “Some colleagues,” the
teacher explained, “are more open to sharing and changing and being flexible, and some
colleagues are very kind of set in their ways and this is how they have done it and [thus, it] takes
more time to develop a trust in a relationship to be able to do that.” Likewise, AS2 expressed that
“RTI…places us in collaborative environment, because of the students that need that extra
support, but I think that just about placement.” She additionally indicated that effective
collaboration among teachers has to do with teachers’ willingness and effort to collaborate with
another teacher. Moreover, AG2 felt students who were cognitively impaired were failing prior
to being placed in a co-taught classroom. However, as a result of the collaboration and strong
relationship between the co-teachers, as well as the para-professional assigned to support the
students, students who were significantly cognitively impaired have been able “to really be a part of every single thing that we’ve done in class and [become] a part of the culture.”

Teachers indicated the level of collaboration between general and special education teachers depend on two vital factors: the teacher’s background knowledge and the teacher’s willingness to collectively work with another partner. First, teachers argued that co-teachers who shared the same background knowledge and special education expertise can offer more value to the co-taught classrooms whereas co-teachers who do not share the background knowledge with the general education teacher have limited input in the co-taught classroom. A more detailed look at barriers associated with this argument can be found later in this chapter.

In terms of common prior knowledge, AG2, who has English degree, expressed that

if I get a co-teacher for whom English is their specialty area as well, we will co-plan, we’ll co-facilitate lessons, and it will be like an even partnership that way. This year, both of my co-teachers are math [majors] in the English classroom [as] their primary area, so they focus more on accommodations and less on the content delivery.

CG1, who had science background, described his experience working with a co-teacher with a chemistry minor when he said

He [special education teacher] actually has a chemistry minor, so it has been nice, because he understands that, now with physics last year, he kind of just sat back there, observed, and helped the kids where he could. Again, it’s new materials to him and he was learning just as the kids were.

During the observation of CS1, the special and the general education teachers demonstrated a higher level of collaboration as a result of the special education teacher’s
background knowledge (a chemistry minor in addition to special education major). CS1 took a teaching role with the general education teacher through team co-teaching model. They both were actively engaged in the instruction and supporting students. During other observations, teachers showed collaboration to support and serve students based on their needs but lacked the common content knowledge of the subject matter taught. Most commonly, the general education teacher led the instruction and the special education teacher supported students at Tier I, II, and III.

From a special education teacher perspective, CS1 expressed a similar point of view as the general education teacher by sharing that

I am also co-teaching in a chemistry class and we more authentically co-teach that because the kids are used to seeing one of us leading the instruction… We also obviously both assist in the class when the students are doing independent work and other things [but, in physics], we don’t spend much time trying to figure out how to re-teach it or how to help students just because, this year, it’s just been more the focus on kind of learning the content and helping while I’m present. So, I probably don’t do RTI as well as it could be done in my physics class.

Teacher willingness is the second factor impacting the level of collaboration between teachers. AS2 stressed that collaborative application of RTI in the co-taught classroom depended on the willingness of the general education teacher. This occurred if the teacher was willing “to work collectively with other teacher, and willing to put these extra hours that” when teachers were assigned planning time. AS2 also mentioned that collaboration allowed teachers to discuss purposeful grouping and work together to support students not meeting the standard(s).

However, she indicated their willingness to stay after school is the key that allows them to
collaborate. CG1 told a similar story about willingness when he first met his co-teacher. “You’re trying to be as willing as possible to work with them…” he said. Another method used by willing collaborators is to spend time at the beginning of the school year in planning and preparation, often on the teachers’ own time. For example, BS1 described this technique: “We spend a lot of time at the beginning of each trimester [in planning] because we front load the trimester.” This requires willingness on both ends.

**Instructional Quality**

All participant teachers agreed that RTI benefits the instructional quality of their co-taught classrooms. AG2 stressed that RTI …enhances the instructional capacity that we have because it …keeps us on track. You’re always looking for something or you’re always progress monitoring. Our biggest thing is being transparent with students about their goals and having them set goals and having them keep track of data toward that goal. Once you are really pushing toward student ownership of learning, once you’ve included them in keeping track of those kinds of things, it ensures that you’re doing really what you need to do to differentiate for every student.

She added that even with larger class sizes, “it’s easy to just sail the ship. I think having that RTI framework, especially for our co-taught kids, really helps make sure that we are steering the ship in the right direction for each individual student, not [just] the class as a whole.”

AG1 spoke about the benefits of having another adult in the classroom to enhance instructional quality by sharing that “I just always love having another adult in the classroom; another perspective. If I’m struggling to get a point across, they can offer it from a different
perspective.” She indicated that having two perspectives in the classroom allowed the students to ask another teacher in the classroom for more clarification benefitting the instructional quality of the lesson. AG1 offered an example from her math class when teaching a formula and she was not getting through to her students, so she asked her co-teacher to put in his words and the students grasped it. She went on to say that she thinks “it also improves… [the] quality of the instruction because sometimes [her co-teacher] will ask great clarifying questions. [She’ll] ask a question she thinks the rest of the class still has: “Should we underline or circle? What did you want us to do?” So, I think the quality of instruction kids are getting is great”.

Another positive impact on instruction is evident in BS1’s comment on how “we can almost create a classroom within a classroom if we need to.” Through observations in the co-taught classrooms, general and special education teachers used multiple instructional strategies, including direct instruction, differentiation, repetition, re-teaching, and graphic organizers. One co-teaching team used formative and summative assessment. Teams were observed using purposeful small and large group instruction, scribes for students with writing difficulties, and adaptation and accommodation of materials when necessary.

AS1 gave her perspective on the instructional quality of her co-taught classroom. “I may not know the content,” she explained, “but I know ways to get to the content.” In response to the impact of RTI on co-taught classroom instructional quality, teachers presented a variety of methods. Teachers explained that they “pull kids into the hallway and read aloud for some of our struggling readers or break [and] chunk things up for them.” They also signed them out [for RTI plus time]. Other methods used included online activities, shortening the assignment; graphic organizers; audio versions, and purposeful small grouping. Teachers also “modify or accommodate the curriculum, incorporate topics that students are interested in, [provide a]
station activity, reteach, and [give] pre-quizzes… and review for their quiz with some extra support.”

AS1 discussed the importance of providing valuable techniques to students that would support them in higher education such as “how do we study, how do we prepare for the test, how do we use mnemonics” and how can you remember.

BS1 shared an example of how collaboration between two teachers can lead to a classroom with a high level of instructional quality.

We can almost create a classroom within a classroom if we need to…We are able to plan together, divide the kids where there are at. If we have gotten kids that need more instruction on subject and verbs, and we got other kids that are ready to move on subordinating and coordinating conjunctions…we have the ability to divide the kids to provide that extra instruction for them.” Another teacher shared that while the special education teacher reteaches the struggling learners, the general education teacher works with higher-level achieving students using “higher thinking questions” to ensure all students make progress in the classroom.

Progress monitoring. Moreover, 100% of the teachers identified progress monitoring as a key element of the RTI system impacting instructional quality. CG1 concluded that, “RTI allows us to identify the students that’re struggling.” Therefore, with two teachers supporting the classroom, teachers are able to provide additional support during class or through pre or post teaching of the content addressed. AS1 indicated that an awareness of the students’ current levels of performance is the starting point, followed by developing interventions that individually meet
student needs. BS1 explained how student assessment has impacted her teaching when in the co-taught classroom.

We have the ability now with all… progress monitoring, with the universal screenings, like we could run [the] XLRY test and we can immediately see within a matter of minutes where our kids are performing and where they’re reading. And we are able to design our lessons, the pacing of our lessons, the curriculum that we cover, how we cover the curriculum with the data that we collect using RTI.

BS1 added that not only is student assessment significant, but also “we want to make sure that the kids are given the time that they need to get the instructional concepts that we want them to master, [as well as] trying to find ways to best intervene during the school day.” Then she shared that “with the amount of data collection for RTI to be effective, you have to collect data and you have to provide timely feedback and with two of us in the classroom we’re able to do that.” BS1 also discussed the challenge of determining student skill and will and commented on how collaboration helps them reach that goal. Together, she and her co-teacher were “trying to figure out and differentiate between skill versus will. Where do our kids who are really struggling with essential learning targets [fit], and where are the kids [that] can’t do it, versus the kids that won’t do it? So that’s been a really challenging task for us this year trying to figure out the skill versus will piece of it.” Then she added “But… because they were two of us in the classroom, we use that for our advantage to provide more support for the kids that needed.”

**Improve Students’ Academic Performance**

Sixty-three percent of the teachers agree that RTI incorporation benefits students’ academic performance. Twenty-five percent of the teachers said students get a chance to take
missing quizzes and work during RTI time. AG1 shared that when quiz results indicate student failure in accomplishing unit learning targets, she can review what the students missed in the quiz during RTI time. This takes place before the general education teacher moves to the next unit. CG1 also noted that RTI “allows students… to work on late-work, because it allows the kids to come in [and] get that additional help.” According to teachers’ responses above, some see a benefit of RTI as the opportunity for students to complete their missing assignments.

CS1 stated the students’ academic performance benefits from “the opportunity to re-teach; the opportunity to pull a couple students into a small group,” while AS2 stressed the significance of placing students in specific groupings according to their levels of performance on the assessment. She indicated this purposeful grouping can improve the students’ overall academic performance. AS2 added that through grouping, teachers instruct students in small groups while others work independently. CG1 spoke to how RTI allows students to catch up with their peers. By collecting data from the non-graded Common Formative Assessment (CFA) at the end of the unit, he can determine which students did not meet the learning target. These students attend RTI time and benefit from the reteach opportunity.

AS2 expressed the importance of building strong relationships with students which motivated them to work harder. In terms of accountability, she also referred to the responsibility given to teachers to improve students’ academic performance.

Students were supported as soon as they raised their hands and asked for clarification or support. During each observation, the researcher was not able to identify all students who received special education services. The researcher was informed that approximately 60% of students who have IEP or receive a special education services through Section 504 were in co-taught classes.
Improve Students’ Behavioral Performance

Teachers expressed there were minimal behavioral issues in their schools. For example, CS1 said, “behavior is not really a big thing and we don’t really struggle with that a whole bunch. I’ve never really struggled with that in any of my classes.” Additionally, 50% of the teachers agree that RTI benefits students behaviorally. AG2 shared that “a lot of our students have behavior support plans and that behavior support plan is directly based on RTI and data collected.” She stressed that RTI allows students to self-monitor their data. According to AG2, “A lot of [students] have check-in and check-out sheets, so they monitor that in accordance with where they are within their RTI framework. I think that helps them achieve a great deal of success.” AG1 expressed that RTI permits students’ behavioral success where there are two adults in the classroom who believe in the students and the classroom; therefore, they co-manage the classroom together. CS1 shared that the act of sitting with a student with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) to help keep him on track with his activities helped improve the student’s behavior significantly even though, the teacher confessed, it may not be the most ideal intervention. Another special education teacher mentioned that positive behavior interventions support their students by providing rewards for appropriate behavior.

Administrative Support

Fifth percent of the teachers identified various types of administrator support that benefit RTI-practicing co-teachers. AG2 said “most of my administrative support comes from having a co-teacher.” She added, “I’ve always had a very high-quality, very experienced special education professional as my co-teacher, and that comes from administration making it a priority.” AG2 also indicated an advantage found in the administration’s hands-off approach, which “allows my
co-teacher and I to do the kinds of things that we need to do without oversight and without micromanagement and there’s a lot of trust from administration to do what we know is best.”

Similarly, CS1 described how the support from administrators benefits his work. “If I need to flex out of a class to go assist in another class,” he explained, “or if I need to actually change my schedule… they give me the liberty to do that as long as it all still works out.” He expressed his satisfaction about his administrators’ support: for the trust they show him; the respect for his judgment; and the flexibility they give him. For example, to show support for co-teaching, the school principal suggested the teachers visit another high school to observe their co-teaching teams and he covered their classes by hiring substitute teachers.

CG1 highlighted the ways RTI allows administrators to be supportive to co-teachers. For instance, a Google spreadsheet, shared among the teachers, identified struggling students who needed to be signed out for RTI. Administrators reviewed this spreadsheet and student progress and sent reminders to teachers if they failed to sign out a student for RTI. Attending RTI class provided the support students needed to pass their classes. CG1 added “I think that’s kind of a delegated thing from the administration.” It also allows teachers to be more understanding of why a student did not do their homework when the student must work on something else.

BS1 spoke with positivity about principal involvement with RTI.

Our principals are very proactive when it comes to RTI model and RTI practices. They encourage us to attend the workshops that we have… They also send weekly letters out [posing such questions as] what does progress monitoring really mean? What universal screening can you use? What is common formative assessment? And the importance of RTI. So, they are very supportive of the RTI model.
BS1 also mentioned:

our principles push us to that model. They want us to be collecting data and giving timely feedback, and progress monitoring along the way, and knowing exactly where kids need to have interventions. Interventions are not going to be effective if you do not know what need to intervene on. So, they are always supporting us and holding us accountable to make sure that kids get what they need.

BS1 said she had very supportive administrators who allowed teachers to meet and share their concerns. She also stated their administrators allowed them to move very slowly throughout the implementation of RTI to streamline the process, so “it has been [a]very smooth, transparent process.” Similarly, BS2 said that the administrators were very supportive of working toward successful RTI. Also, the teacher emphasized the importance of administrators supporting the Professional Learning Community (PLC), which was held once a week when the school had late start. She described the experience by saying teachers “sit down with our groups, so special ed meets together; biology or science teachers meet together and look at the material and see how they can modify it.” Additionally, professional development was identified as another form of administrative support which discussed below.

**Professional development.** Sixty-three percent of the teachers identified that administration supported teachers through professional development opportunities. For instance, CG1 mentioned that administration supported teachers to pursue additional state certifications and arranged for a weekly early student release so teachers could engage in professional development activities. Similarly, at School A and School B, special education teachers including BS1, BS2, AS1, and AS2; and general education teachers including AG1 indicated
they have weekly late start so teachers can meet in their PLC’s to review data, materials and determine appropriate modifications for instruction.

**Barriers of RTI Incorporation into Co-Taught Classrooms**

In the second research question how does the incorporation of Response to Intervention (RTI) into co-taught at the secondary general education classrooms result in barriers to the teacher experience and student academic and behavioral success. Both general and special education teachers were asked to discuss any barriers associated with incorporating RTI into their co-taught classrooms. What emerged was a sense that while there are no barriers inherent in RTI itself, obstacles can block teachers’ opportunities to implement the RTI process. The question led to discussions about student academic and behavioral success. All of the teachers expressed various points of view. The barriers they experienced related to incorporating RTI into co-taught classrooms formed the following categories: (a) lack of time, (b) lack of administrative support, (c) lack of background knowledge, (d) lack of collaboration, (e) issues related to students, and (f) attitude toward RTI.

**Lack of Time**

One hundred percent of teachers indicated lack of time was the main barrier they faced when implementing RTI in their co-taught classroom. AG2 stated she would like to have designated time to plan with her co-teacher. Because of the lack of time, her plan time includes emailing her co-teacher, meeting before and after class, or before and after IEP meetings. AG2 expressed that while she spent time collecting data for RTI, she did not have the appropriate time to analyze the data collected. She was not able to use the data to coordinate with students’ individual teachers and implement a wraparound approach as she did at her previous school.
AG1, also, identified planning time and time to implement RTI as barriers that she faced when implementing RTI in co-taught classrooms. CG1 also stressed the lack of time is a huge barrier.

Implementing RTI to its full potential can be impacted by changes and cuts to class time. For instance, CG1 described the snowball effect that occurs when a student signed out for RTI misses school due to illness. Helping the student catch up requires time. In the meantime, he needs to balance the pacing of teaching classes timed differently due to cuts made, which include early dismissal or late starts. Sometimes, CG1 said, his RTI instruction time is delegated to other school needs, preventing him from dedicating it to RTI instruction. For instance, RTI time has been used by administrators to schedule junior and senior meetings and even schoolwide testing. “So, you need to remember where you’re at,” CG1 explained, “and… try to keep all the classes paced at the same time, even though you’re fighting two schedules.” While he strives to effectively implement RTI, he found time and conflicting schedules created barriers. “So, throughout the school year,” he said, “between early release, late starts, [and] RTI, I work with six different schedules.”

All of the teachers expressed lack of common planning time is the most challenging piece. According to BS2, “we don’t have that exact time where we can sit down with our co-teachers and really think, what can we do best to help our students? I think we would benefit from that extra time and that would really benefit the students as well, but that is one of the biggest struggles.” BS2 was familiar with RTI as a result of her background knowledge, but the lack of time and scheduling time prevented her from employing RTI as it should be. She added “Time is definitely essential to making sure that RTI is implemented properly and efficiently and effectively.” Also, on common planning time, BS1 added “we do not have that capability right now” so, to improvise, she and her co-teacher make their own planning time. The teacher also
noted that the lack of time prevents implementation of more interventions throughout the week when many needs must be met.

AS2 explained that teachers are not able to collaborate because of time constraints, especially when planning times are not built into the school day. The teacher also expressed how the lack of time prevented her from working closely with other teachers and knowing where each student stood academically. She co-taught with four core class teachers and wondered how she could have a common planning time with each of them. CS1 added that “It just happens to be the luck of the draw if you get the same plan hours as your co-teacher.” Because his co-teacher and he were not given designated planning time, their lesson were often taught without previous preparation. Frequently, their preparation time comes through after hours phone calls: “Hey, what’s gonna happen tomorrow? Okay, let me do these notes; let me put [together] this little activity…”

AS1 revealed she has never had scheduled planning time with any of her co-teachers. She also commented on the lack of time available to pull a student aside and implement specific interventions to meet his or her needs. AS1 explained the difficulties of finding the appropriate time to provide individualized intervention to students at the high school level while the school implemented the Michigan Merit Curriculum (MMC). “It’s hard to pull kids out,” she said, when you have to get through the [MMC] curriculum, “you have to hit the standards…” She framed it in terms of teaching history and diploma-based requirements. Students must study World War II though modern history, she said, and “that’s a lot of content.” For those students falling behind, she explained teachers do not always want to pull kids out because they will be “missing things in the class, and then when you’re in the class, you do not want to necessarily alienate them from their peers, so you just try to find kind of more modest interventions,”
Curriculum expectations can drive content to move more quickly than some students are equipped to comprehend, and this can cause yet another barrier for co-teachers implementing RTI. “I think we’re trying to cram too much information in,” said CS1, “instead of focusing on the big concepts, but that’s a curriculum thing.” This, he said, leaves no time for differentiation. He went on to describe the frustration related to “[t]he content moving along before it feels like you have time to re-teach [it].” Likewise, some tools designed to be helpful to the RTI process can slow teachers down. CS1 would prefer if the common formative assessment process was “quick and easy to do in two minutes, so that you can get the results you need and then be able to look at it instantly…” as opposed to a formal, ten-minute process. Simply put, he said, “[I]t takes time out of class.” Overall, the teacher lamented “I just don’t feel like I have the time during the day to get the things I need to get done.”

Lack of Administrative Support

Seventy-five percent of the teachers expressed the lack of administrative support caused barriers when incorporating RTI into co-taught classrooms. AG2 mentioned that administrators did not provide direct RTI support. AG1 stated their administrators wanted to provide support, but due to a lack of resources, “it’s kind of out of their hands.” She added the lack of administrator communication leads to an unclear RTI implementation path. This proves especially true when administrators provide a plan of implementation without clear explanation of roles and processes. This specifically aligned with the finding in the document review. There was no documentation of an RTI or co-teaching policy or practices at high school level. AS1 stated there is lack of administrative support. She expressed her frustration related to not having protected planning time or training with her co-teacher. AS2 stated that she was not involved in any decision-making regarding the classrooms in which she was assigned to co-teach.
In summary, there are several obstacles teachers identified which were related to the responsibilities of the administration. These barriers relate to professional development, lack of funding, scheduling issues, issues within the RTI system, overfilled classes, teachers’ responsibilities, and a lack of teachers.

**Barriers related to professional development.** Several teachers expressed that having weekly meetings between teachers based on their subject areas caused barriers. One special education teacher admitted their PLC time with other special education teachers is not necessarily valuable when she actually needs to meet with the math teacher or the science professional learning community with whom she co-teaches. The teacher expressed her need to work with the teacher that she co-teaches with in order to modify materials or work on different tiers for students. AS1 explained that in special education department meetings, teachers are provided trainings. She became irritated because she felt general education teachers would also benefit from these trainings. As AS1 said, “we get these trainings… [and say] can we just show this to the whole building? Because I feel they need to see, like we get it, can we show it to everybody else? And that does not happen.” Likewise, CS1 expressed his excitement of observing effective co-teaching at another school, but in contrast, he became frustrated when the general education teachers would not commit to co-teaching. CS1 added that “it doesn’t make sense to even go to professional development or go to a conference together, because why would you want to go to a conference if you might only co-teach with me one hour a day throughout the whole year?”

**Lack of funding.** AG1 mentioned the lack of funding is the main cause of not having common planning time when their administrators do their best to support them. She shared her
positive experiences at different schools where funding was not an issue and common planning
time was present.

According to AG1, “we met with our co-teacher, we had the same planning, we had the
same kids. So, all the four core teachers and the co-teacher could meet on a regular basis. And
that’s where I saw a lot of growth.” She added that this may have been because she “was in a
school district who had a very different population than here and so there was more…title fund
money to kind of do that.” She added that “funding plays a huge role. I think our administrators
here would love to see us have more support in this and have more time to work with our co-
teachers… We have really large class sizes and teach six to seven hours a day.” AG1 concluded
the lack of time is caused by the lack of funding needed to hire more teachers. She stressed that
“our administrators, I think, truly want to help us. There’s just, again, the money and the time
isn’t there.”

CS1 shared that some students were not able to receive extra support after school because
low funding in a rural district prevented adequate transportation. This caused an issue for a sub-
set of the population. CS1 also added that the district lacks funding for such resources such as
Wi-Fi. Many assignments are web-based, and some students do not have access to the internet.
The teacher stressed the need for providing resources including Wi-Fi routers and FM systems,
such as hearing aids, for students who have hearing problems. These provisions, he said, will
allow students to be more successful.

Scheduling issues. Fifty percent of the teachers expressed the issue of scheduling. BS1
stated that “the master schedule is the biggest barrier for us, we do not intervene enough. We
should be having RTI happening every single day in time built-in to the schedule.” CS1 pointed
to RTI and co-teaching ineffectiveness caused by scheduling issues. Speaking in terms of
collaboration with his fellow teacher, CS1 said, “a lot is not in [our] control because of time and scheduling.” When teachers are scheduled together one year, but not the next year, barriers can arise. According to AS2, “you only have one year to build a relationship. You might work with that teacher again in the future, but it is not year after year.”

Issues within the RTI system. CG1 expressed issues faced with the RTI system. As it is set up in his high school, teachers signed students to RTI using a Google spreadsheet limited to teacher access only. The limited access kept information confidential, including where students were tiered. A problem arose when teachers added new students to the RTI list after 7:30 a.m. Any substitute teachers without the most recent version of the RTI list were at a disadvantage because they were unaware of which students should attend RTI. Thus, these students may have missed their RTI time and opportunities for intervention. Another issue within the system occurred when students with limited scheduled RTI periods were made to use that time for other activities. For instance, CG1 described high school students provided with only two days a week to benefit from RTI. For example, students attending vocational education classes taught at another school spend time traveling which limited students’ RTI opportunities to one day a week. Concurrently, all five of their core teachers struggled to pull them to receive RTI support in different subject areas.

CG1 also discussed the difficulties of running the RTI model when teaching different concepts, meeting different needs for many students, and facing scheduling issues caused by early dismissals and late starts. He described what can happen to his schedule when RTI takes place in the morning. “If it is a morning RTI,” the general education teacher explained, “your first and second hour are cut by 20 minutes of the academic time, your third hour is cut by 10, you fourth and fifth hour are normal times… if I have four chemistry classes on Tuesday, I lose
20 minutes of the instruction for first and second hour.” The teacher described the challenges of keeping “…all the classes paced at the same time, even though you’re fighting two schedules.”

**Overfilled classes.** Two general education teachers pointed to the high number of students in their co-taught classrooms as a barrier. AG1 demonstrated the complexity of managing high numbers of students with IEPs in a co-taught classroom by referring to a conversation she had with her special education department head: “Now, do you want two classes where one of them I can co-teach with you and one of them, I can’t, or do you want one class that I co-teach with you, but we have 20 kids on IEPs in that class?” The special education specialist recommended co-teaching one class with the general education teacher and trying the best to make it successful. AG1 questioned herself and added “that’s almost a disservice to those kids because… are they really getting the support they need?” The teacher identified a lack of funding and staff as the cause.

**Teachers’ responsibilities.** Fifty percent of the teachers agreed teachers were overloaded with assigned responsibilities causing obstacles. CG1 explained

I have 20 kids pulled in from three different classes that I am trying to work on. I know [his special education co-teacher] …has his own caseload [that] he’s got to deal with as well as the kids that are falling behind…plus, additional kids from other classes. So, the problem is it’s just not one teacher teaching one subject pulling in one RTI class… I have up to three classes at one time I am teaching trying to pull in kids all at one time and unfortunately there is not so many of me, plus you’re managing an additional 15 kids that are assigned to your room as a homeroom and in the within the RTI.
CGI added that not only is an overload of teacher responsibility a problem, but also, co-teachers do not always co-teach with one teacher. Issues can arise when co-teachers work with multiple teachers on multiple subject areas. He added, “Plus with the RTI, they often have their own caseload kids that are falling behind, so now, they’re working with kids who they do not even have in class, so there’s a lot of things going in RTI for both general and special ed teachers.” Thus, teachers were responsible to check grades to determine which students were not making enough progress and thus, they signed up these students to receive support at RTI time. The teachers were required to remember students’ schedules to determine if they had such scheduled activities as vocational training, in which case a student would not be able to attend RTI time. Likewise, teachers are responsible for ensuring that students receive additional support in case they missed RTI time as a result of absences, such as those due to illness. The teacher also expressed his exhaustion after teaching four different topics in a subject area and meeting the multiple needs of a diverse group of students in 45 short minutes during RTI time.

CS1 has a caseload of 22 students and co-teaches with three different general education teachers teaching three different subjects a day. He added that sometimes he supported his students with IEPs, students with 504, and others who need assistance “so it does involve a little bit of juggling to keep track of what’s going on”. CS1 explained how he told his special education administrator of his desire to be effective as a case manager and special education teacher. He added that he came to the difficult realization that “unless someone else runs our resource room, unless we had a full-time staff person who did that” the overload of responsibilities will continue to prevent him from being effective in class and providing the RTI fidelity that the students deserve. CS1 expressed his hope to achieve more and be a value added to each classroom and every student with whom he works.
**Lack of teachers.** Fifty percent of the teachers indicated a lack of teachers leads to barriers. CG1 argued that the lack of funding from the school district is the reason behind the lack of teachers. This can lead to a shortage of substitute teachers, which in turn, impacts RTI implementation. For example, when discussing RTI barriers, CG1 explained that “we were a teacher short because we couldn’t get subs”. As a result of teachers missing the school day, including their RTI class, students are absorbed into different RTI classrooms and teachers. These students are not normally working with the current RTI teacher; thus, the teacher is not aware of what the students should be working on. The teacher stated that often these unaware teachers simply took the word of the student regarding their assignments.

BS1 mentioned that being in small school district with a lot of shared staff members prevented her from adequately intervening. According to BS1, “The classroom teachers know how to intervene in their classroom without… providing separate instructional time for those kids that need it. We only do an hour a week, and that’s not enough for our struggling kids, they need time every single day, and we do not have that capability yet.” BS1 also talked about the difficulties related to having 40 general education teachers in her school and only two-and-a-half special education teachers available to support students in need. She expressed her wish for more availability of special education teachers to co-teach “because the need is great, the need is very great, and we’re very limited.”

CS1 not only disclosed his need for another teacher who can run the resource room, which would better allow him to serve as an effective co-teacher in general classrooms, but he also talked about the desire for another full-time staff person to take over responsibilities required of him outside of the classroom.
Lack of Background Knowledge

Seventy-five percent of the teachers expressed that the lack of background knowledge caused barriers when incorporating RTI into their co-taught classrooms. From a general education teacher’s perspective, CG1 posited that, not all special education teachers have a major and minor area, so they must take time to learn the subject matter in order to co-teach and support students in that class. He expressed his frustration about the changes which emerged when his long-term co-teaching partner was replaced by a succession of a different special education teacher each year for three years in row. Unfortunately, none of the special education teachers had the necessary content knowledge. Thus, CG1 felt the special education teachers brought limited value to the classroom by only sitting and observing the class instead of actively co-teaching. He sought to remediate this issue by saying to his special education teachers “I want you to learn this material. If there is something you are common with, you understand, or you learn, pop in, and help.”

Thirty-eight percent of the teachers agreed that their own lack of content knowledge can cause barriers. CS1 confessed to experiencing discomfort when co-teaching and not having the necessary content knowledge or not having an established relationship with the general education teacher. Thus, he perceived his role in meeting students’ needs and being present as limited. CS1 recalled feeling defeated when sharing an example from a physics class where, because he did not know the content, he was unable to be a lead teacher. “I can re-teach stuff,” he explained, “and I can work one-on-one or in a small group while we’re going along, but the students… would [not] see me as a lead teacher.” With disappointment, CS1 confessed that as a result of not understanding physics instruction, “I probably don’t do RTI as well as it could be done in my physics class.” CS1 also compared his physics co-teaching experience to his chemistry co-
teaching class where his educational background empowers his teaching abilities. He reported that “I could just jump into any topic right away and I’m more confident with that.” Even though his co-teacher and he have the same planning hour, they do not spend that time planning how to reteach and help students. Instead, the special education teacher spends his time learning the content to better serve students during his class presentations. Beyond background knowledge, CS1 argued that, “Sometimes co-teaching might not work when the content gets extremely heavy.”

BS1 mentioned that the special education teacher’s lack of content knowledge creates barriers. Additionally, general education teachers’ lack of knowledge regarding special education and different instructional techniques permits general education teachers to see special education teachers as experts in the field of special education and differentiation. BS1 discussed how general education teachers rely on her and her small team when there are only two-and-a-half special education teachers serving 40 general education teachers. BS1 also expressed her desire to spend more time with the general education teachers, explaining to them “how to accommodate, how to modify, what good universal screeners are, how to progress monitor along the way, how to create assessments that do not get rid of the content, but are developed differently, that are looked at differently, that’re laid out differently. So, all kids can be successful. It would be amazing.” BS1 said “I would love to never have to co-teach in a classroom again to get those gen ed teachers comfortable enough working with at-risk and our struggling learners to get them to a point where they’re confident enough in themselves to provide intervention right in their classrooms.” BS1 also showed concern over requests sometimes made by her general education colleagues. In a way that adds more work to the teacher’s already full plate and seemingly minimizes her value in the classroom as a co-teacher,
general education teachers ask for quick, visual assessment approvals or assignment/test modifications that do not necessarily involve co-teaching. She said, her colleagues might hand her an assessment or assignment and ask, “can you take a look at this?” instead of collaboratively working on the issue as a team. She explained that often, she finds herself “taking an exam and making it multiple choice or filling in the blank; all those little tricks that have…” when in reality, BS1 would prefer to work directly with the general education teacher on these processes so her colleague could also feel confident teaching students with special needs in a general education classroom.

CS1 shared that general education teachers do not know “what’s acceptable for accommodating assignments, so I think you’re on two sides of the fence. You’re either making it way too easy for them, or…you don’t accommodate the assignments, but you give them extra time [but] extra time doesn’t help unless you’ve cut down the assignment somehow.” The accommodation and modification is contingent on how the course is originally set up, meaning that there are important learning targets that students must achieve. Special education teachers interviewed argues that general education teachers have a lack of understanding of accommodation, what it should look like, and knowing the difference between the accommodation and modification. CS1 said that the general education teacher’s biggest obstacle is accommodating assignments for level one high school students (diploma-bound) and making sure they have covered the same content standard while feeling comfortable and confident that all necessary content was covered. Thus, the lack of awareness causes general education teachers to fluctuate when some of them think, “hey, I have to create a separate assignment and that’s not always the case.” CS1 said.
During the observations in several classrooms, the special education teacher was seen observing and learning the content at the same time with the students. Thus, the special educators’ involvement during instructional time was limited due to lack of background knowledge.

**Lack of Collaboration**

Thirty-eight percent of the teachers, one general and two special education teachers, described their experiences with the lack of collaboration. This lack of collaboration caused a barrier when they were asked if RTI benefits them when they collaborate with one another. CG1 felt that RTI implementation processes at his school did not permit collaboration among teachers.

Unfortunately, we are different sectors… I am here and the other teacher is somewhere else and if we have a bunch of people, we split between each other. Sometimes I will have him [special education teacher] check out some other people, but I realize he has his own caseload that he has to manage as well. Sometimes in terms of RTI, team teaching is not necessarily beneficial because we are not able to correspond during that time to make sure; it’s just kind of splitting kids if we need to.

CG1 talked about how a lack of time impacts collaboration between co-teachers. He mentioned that if he had a common plan time, he would be happy to sit and plan out lessons where he is able to alternate teaching with his co-teacher. This would lead to better team-teaching outcomes instead of planning before or after school, sharing phone calls at night, or having five-minute conversations between classes. CG1 also expressed how a lack of communication between co-teachers is caused by a lack of a common planning period. Thus, he
added “so I just assume I am gonna take them in and try to work with them. If not, I’ll specifically say something to [his co-teacher].”

AS2 mentioned that she never experiences collaboration when working with general education teachers. She stressed that collaboration cannot occur “unless we make the time.” AS2 stated that her only experience collaborating with general education teachers hinged on her colleague’s willingness to stay after school and work. AS2 talked about the weekly meetings she shared with her special education colleagues. She expressed her wish to also meet with the general education teachers with whom she co-teaches so the teachers may collaborate and discuss content toward better serving their students’ needs.

**Issues Related to Students**

Twenty-five percent of the teachers indicated there were several issues resulting in barriers to students when it came to learning in schools incorporating RTI and co-taught classrooms. These concerns include students’ attendance, issues related to levels of support, inappropriate placement, issues of students’ willingness, and issues related to home environment and parents. Before going in-depth with student-related issues, CG1 expressed that

the biggest problem with the RTI is that kids that need the RTI in your classroom or your subject, they are most often kids that need other RTI in other classes so you are fighting with other teachers trying to get them, because usually they’re falling behind in other classes as well. You might not see them for a month because other teachers have signed them out before you could.

CG1 also noted that interventions occur in the classroom or during RTI time. However, a co-teaching team observed one issue related to pulling a student aside to provide one-on-one,
additional support. They described what occurs when a student is falling behind in today’s content because the new content is being covered while they were receiving extra support on the previous content taught. CG1 described that kind of support as a “double-edged sword. They got caught up to fall behind.” Thus, it is challenging for a teacher to provide additional support in the classroom or pull them out during RTI time when they will miss review sessions or new content.

**The issue of students’ attendance.** CG1 indicated that not only do the students have academic issues, but their attendance can also become an issue. This is especially common when students deliberately miss two days of the week during RTI time, so they do not have to attend. CG1 also indicated that students missed when they had another education class that they must attend at a different school, such as vocational education. Still others missed class when they knew they had seven days in which they are able to miss, and they felt the need to take all seven days. As a result of that, students fell behind academically. On top of that, CG1 added “I am working with three kids within the same class but in three different units that they’re behind, they are different.” He asked “is every kid gonna pass that class? Probably not, ‘cause you can only control an hour of the class time and 45 minutes of RTI. After that, it’s hard to control the kids when they leave this for a while.”

**Issues related to level of support.** When asked to share her experience with barriers related to RTI and co-teaching that lead to student academic and behavioral failures, AG1 replied “I can’t really think of any other than we give them so much support.” This support does not necessarily lead to students’ academic failure, she explained, but could hurt students after graduation when the supports upon which they relied are pulled from them. AG1 demonstrated a silent conversation she envisions having with some students threatened by the removal of these supports following graduation: “Are you going to be successful? Well, you were only successful
in School Because we basically spoon fed you everything you needed in School And then you kind of leave School And there’s nobody there to do that for you.” AG1 also listed several student supports and noted the frustrating obstacles sometimes associated with them: “You’re constantly having to have them go to another classroom and have people pull the stuff out their backpack and… [say] ‘These things were due a month ago.’ And this teacher, during his study hall time, has worked with him one-on-one to get me papers from a month ago… How long can we keep that up and continue that, too?” In describing a lack of ownership, AG1 lamented “We’ve gotten so far away from kids owning their behaviors and their work.” She also added “I really struggle as a teacher with that kind of balance.” She expressed her desperation to have every door open to her students with access given to every possible opportunity. However, students must want the same thing for themselves as well. AG1 asked “are we really helping them to be successful or are we just getting them a piece of paper that says they graduated high school?” She stressed that she always has an internal dialogue and constant dilemma about the level of support which should be given to students.

Likewise, from a special education teacher standpoint, AS1 offered her opinion regarding the level of support provided to students. “There are times,” she said, “where students are supported in a little bit of an unrealistic manner.” To avoid this, she thought twice about giving her students too much support. AS1 also gave an example of over supporting level one students [who will receive a high school diploma and go to college]. For instance, when teachers allowed students to use their notes on tests or assessments or retake exams. She described a debate among teachers where some believe that retaking tests [enable] “them to not study or [think] ‘I can just keep taking the test as much as I want’.”
AS2 observed how her freshmen relied heavily on her. This, she believes, is because she spent a great deal of time daily with her freshman group after class. What resulted was they became dependent on her support and they failed to work toward becoming more active and independent learners. AS2 wondered if being around the same students for all four classes “could be hindering their academic success.” Further, she questioned if students lost their motivation to work as a result of her ongoing support. AS2 pointed out how students “sit back and wait for the help, when really, if they just persevere, they could get through by themselves, at least get started.” During the observation, student unwillingness to work and try to understand the given task was very clear in some classes. The researcher noticed some students who were waiting for the special education teacher to come and help them work on the given task. Then, the student did not complete the task even though direct instruction was provided. The student waited for the special education teacher to return for the second time to just give him the answer. In addition, several students appeared disinterested in listening to the instruction. They were busy interacting with each other even though both teachers reminded them to stay on task.

Furthermore, a special education teacher described her way to prevent over-supporting her students. AS1 explained that because she was with the students almost all day, she was permitted to decide when to support them and when to let them work independently. Therefore, time spent with students allowed her to be aware of their skill levels so she could push capable students to succeed on their own versus students who required additional support. She also mentioned providing techniques that can benefit them during school and in college. AS1 asked her students,

“When you are trying to figure it out on your own, what works best for you? How does your brain work? What I tell you might not even work, but, hey, this kid over here, what
do they do? Does that work for you?” She went on to say “it’s a team effort, you know students, teachers, parents, big team effort, like what’s gonna get you there?”

**Inappropriate placement.** Eighty-eight percent of the teachers, five special and two general education teachers, agreed there are some students whose academic performance was significantly lower than their peers in RTI-based co-teaching classrooms. AG2 agreed with that statement due to a lack of training after graduation, lack of experience with special needs, and lack of diversity among the students in her classes. However, at her current school, because of the diversity, the teacher observed that her students are not too low. These students were not in her classes for content knowledge, necessarily, but for social skills development. She explained, “I’ve had a significant amount of neurodiversity just among all the kids” including students with Cognitive Impairment who participated in her classroom. Similarly, another general education teacher CG1 shared

I personally think that no matter how much help a kid has, that in certain general ed classes, they are not going to pass. I truly believe that no matter how hard they try, if they’re low enough, even with the additional co-teacher, they’re not gonna make it… You have a student that’s really low, so sometimes you get the opportunity to have that teacher, but unfortunately that co-teacher is now bogged down with one kid all the time and [that] kind of offsets it because you are not effectively co-teaching it… you’re coming to the idea that you’re spending all your time and resources for one kid when ultimately, they may not be able to make it.

CG1 believed that there are academic expectations of students attending general education classrooms. However, students may not be able to succeed even with additional
supports provided. From his perspective, the students’ limited cognitive ability prevented them from retaining the information, regardless of the amount of support provided.

BS2 shared there are students who were too low for some classes. She gave an example from her biology class, where there were students not performing at their peers’ level. She considered the results of accommodations and modifications provided for struggling students when BS2 questioned “what are we really trying to have the students get out of it?” She stated the single biggest barrier was in knowing when a student should be moved from level one to level two and to effectively make decisions about the best setting for her students. BS2 also stressed that decision-making is based on level intensive evaluation once a student is observed struggling in all subject areas and even after having accommodated all assessments and assignments, the student continued to struggle with core courses.

AS1 said, “I wish there [was] more of a range of services that we could offer instead of just all inclusion, because not every student’s benefits that way.” She added that a lot of her students were in level one and planned to get their high school diploma after graduation, where they need to take all core areas. However, at some points, students became frustrated, which AS1 said served as a red flag that level one was not a good choice for these students because it was not working well for them. So, there were students who were too low for level one, even though they attended co-taught classrooms, but they can choose to be at level two and acquired a certificate of completion from high school. AS1 explained “They might have pull out of classes, but there is always room for some co-teaching and some living skills classes.” She added “while some students, yes, might be too low for diploma-bound co-teaching, they might fit better in a certificate track where they could still have co-taught classes, just more their level and for their needs.” Based on AS1’s observations of student frustrations, she implemented various classroom
interventions. However, the students’ frustrations remained. Thus, she recommended certificate completion processes in lieu of diploma-bound programs.

AS1 shared the same perspective as her colleague who felt that her special education students were able to effectively attend a co-taught general education classroom with an emphasis on the development of their social skills. However, in terms of academic aspects, especially when a student reaches to higher-level classes such as physics two, chemistry two, or algebra two, there are students who were too low for these classes. The need for foundational knowledge and cumulative skills is essential for success in these high-level classes. A lack of background knowledge and skills can frustrate and stress out students when they find that they cannot keep up. This was observed in geometry class. Some students got frustrated easily and began complaining about the content. This is not as often the case with English, social studies, and government classes explained a special education teacher. AS1 said that they had the tools to help students succeed in these classes, but not so with science and math-based courses. She said, “while some students, yes, might be too low for diploma-bound co-teaching, they might fit better in a certificate track where they could still have co-taught classes, just more their level and for their needs.”

AS2 mirrored her colleague’s perspective when she stated that some special education students may be in general education classrooms exclusively for social contact with other students and at the same time, questioned “what they were getting academically.” She observed this in the level of frustration which results when students are not able to master the core content knowledge even with modifications. In turn, obstacles arise when the special education teacher is then required to focus on one struggling student and as a result, “a lot of support [is taken] away from all of the other students.” That is why AS2 questioned if the general education classroom
environment is good for these students. AS2 added that some students did not have a math class at their previous schools; others only learned addition, subtraction, and multiplication. Therefore, it could be difficult for these students to function properly in classes such as algebra. Employing highly modified materials, AS2 did her best to support a student who wanted to stay in algebra. She questioned “how much do we modify? And how much time do we spend on this one student as opposed to every other student in the classroom? It’s frustrating.... because you still want them to feel successful, you do not want them to feel lower than their peers.” CS1 agrees that some students may be too low for a co-taught classroom. He provided the example of two students struggling with the content in his co-taught chemistry class. The students were “not getting it. They’re still failing it, even though they’re trying. So, there are a couple students who are so low that even when they’re in co-taught classes, and there’s two teachers, they still fail.” Sometimes state curriculum requirements exacerbated the barriers related to students being too low for co-taught classrooms. CS1 described the frustration caused when students troubled by the most basic computations were required to learn complex math skills, which “the state of Michigan says that we should cover… so, we have to… and that’s where I think some of the kids are too low,” he said, “because they can’t add. I have kids that can’t add two plus four in their head. Or they can’t multiply two plus four. The basic math facts are a problem.” To best serve these students, CS1 recommends moving them to level two and placing them into a self-contained classroom.

**Issues of students’ willingness.** Sixty-three percent of the teachers, one general and four special education teachers, identified a lack of student willingness as another barrier to learning. CG1 said that students performed as expected in general classrooms with no issue. However, once these students were pulled out for RTI support, some started conversations with their
friends, and did not want to work. He added “There is a reason why they have done their homework prior to their arrival to the RTI, and it is harder to get some kids motivated to work, and then if you have some kids that you can only get for the half an hour now there are showing up halfway through the RTI trying to get the work done.” CG1 indicated that most of students are able to succeed in the general classroom, but they have to put effort into it and buy in to it. Further explanation of this topic can be found under students’ attitudes toward RTI. BS1 mentioned that “Our biggest behavioral issue is the will… the kids that do not want to do it and flat out refuse to do their work. That’s probably the biggest behavioral [barrier].” This aligned with the class observation. BS1 used an example from English class where students were required to write. There were students who did not know what to write, and students who refused to read or open a book. BS1 said that she and her general education co-teaching partner were able to structure… [and] incorporate topics based on students’ interests into the lesson plan and develop a library that meets students’ interests and their reading levels. CS1 explained that when students demonstrate a lack of willingness, as teachers, “We should be able to find what they’re motivated by and try to get them there.” He added “But a lot of these students that are struggling, they’re so bogged down by the amounts” of required schoolwork.

**Issues related to home environment and parents.** Twenty-five percent, special education teachers, indicated that a lack of parents’ support creates barriers to students’ success in RTI co-taught based classrooms. AS1 explained that parents’ involvement is considered one of the foundational pieces of the RTI framework. When this piece does not exist or parents do not know how to meet their child’s needs, barriers arise. Despite students’ support by their teachers at school, the lack of parental education and/or parenting skills in the home environment caused barriers. CS1 said some parents did not attend IEP meetings even though they knew their
children were failing. Barriers arose when parents did not provide follow through with their children or support their steps toward high school success. A lack of parental resources also led to barriers. For instance, CS1 added some parents could not provide transportation, and thus, struggled to support their children when they needed to stay after class to receive support to improve their academic performance. In other cases, some parents were unable to have Wi-Fi at home and because many assignments are web-based, students could not complete homework at home (the issue of the transportation and internet were discussed in depth under the lack of administration support as well).

**Attitude Toward RTI**

Thirty eight percent of general and special education teachers agreed that students, teachers, and school leadership held negative attitudes toward RTI which impacted its overall success.

**Attitude of school leadership.** CG1 mentioned his administrators supported the use of CFA where students take an ungraded test for data collection purposes. Then, students who performed below 60% on the test were asked to attend RTI plus time for a reteaching opportunity allowing them to catch up. He remarked on the district’s shift away from using CFA to connect students to RTI. According to CG1, RTI plus time was often used as a homeroom or study hall instead of an intervention.

So, it has been a shift in a past couple of years away from the CFA in terms of the right way of RTI we got to know just kind of making sure we can pull kids in, get them caught up in missing tasks, homework, test retakes at that time. So, I mean it’s Response to Intervention to avoid them failing, but it’s not necessarily the Response to Intervention in terms of aspects of catching them before they take the test or learning the materials.
Another issue focused on administrative decisions is that RTI time was used for other school activities. CG1 lost out on RTI time with his students when his class time was used for a school-wide mandated test. According to CG1, RTI time has been used for “senior meetings, for junior meetings, they use it for class meetings.” He stressed that using RTI time for other purposes leads to missed opportunities with his students, adding “there is another lost time.” CG1 explained that at his school, while they have 12 weeks of class, there were 20-24 days of RTI time. By using RTI time to meet other purposes, school administrators reduced the number of RTI opportunities to 18. CG1 emphasized the issue caused by reducing the RTI time, he explained, teachers were not always able to pull struggling students into RTI plus time, sometimes students were sick and missed their RTI opportunities. Sometimes teachers were sick and sometimes schools closed due to illness or inclement weather. He tried to put RTI into perspective when he asked, “Is it Response to Intervention in order to keep grades up, and help kids pass, or is it Response to Intervention in terms of knowing the materials ahead of the unit test?” His special education co-teacher, CS1 framed a similar comparative perspective by stating “it’s Response to Intervention to avoid them failing, but it’s not necessarily to the Response to Intervention in terms of aspects of catching them before they take the test or learning the materials.”

**Attitude of teachers.** Similarly, general and special education teachers expressed that teachers’ attitudes toward RTI could cause barriers throughout RTI implementation. They observed other teachers using RTI time as a chance to collect missing work as opposed to a deeper learning experience. For example, CG1 mentioned there are some teachers who do not send students to plus time despite their missing and late work. CS1 said “I think most teachers here…would attest that a lot of that plus time is used to get students’ missing work because the
pace of things just keeps going along and along.” CS1 also described the RTI process as more helping students “to get the grades in and assisting them as opposed to the actual learning process of what I think RTI was intended [to be].” CS1 explained his perspective of how RTI should be by adding “I see these students are struggling with this concept [and I think] let me pull them into plus time and then re-teach it so that they might do better on my unit but also better understand the material.” He also spoke to his general education co-teacher’s attitude toward the reteaching aspect of RTI in co-taught classrooms with regard to the lack of understanding. For instance, the general education teacher asked CS1 “why would you re-teach it the next day if we can just do it during plus time? …I’m in here, so why wouldn’t we do that since this is a class we co-teach together?” CS1 expressed his frustration by stressing that “the idea behind the co-teaching is to do RTI” and he added general education teachers do not understand it well. He emphasized that the goal of RTI “is to really help the students in that class to learn the material when they’re behind. That is the reason you’re in there; it’s not just as an extra body.” Some teachers, he continued, question the value of RTI and ask, “why are we even doing RTI?”

From a special education teacher perspective, it was important to provide individualized interventions, give students appropriate time to absorb the content, and intervene as much as possible. BS1 argued that supporting students beyond the classroom is fundamental in order to get them ready for learning. BS1 said “One of my biggest beliefs for any student is if their basic needs aren’t being met and they come to school and they’re hungry or they haven’t showered for few days because they don’t have running water at home, that we’re not gonna be able to get out of them what we think we know they are capable of. So,” she continued, “I am a firm believer in meeting their basic needs.” Thus, her classroom includes a full kitchen, washer/dryer, and full
bathroom. BS1 added “my little interventions, I call it, is providing those behind-the-scenes interventions for kids so they can come here, get what they need, whether food, clothing, a shower. Whatever they need is provided, so they can be their best when they’re in school during the week.” She followed that up with, “There will be kids in and out all day long getting food and feminine products for girls that cannot afford it, if they have accidents at school, they can come and get cleaned up. So, it’s just amazing.” BS1 provides this extra layer of support “so that [students] can come in, get what they need, and they’re ready for learning for the rest of the day.” CG1 shared a similar desire to provide additional support to students. He encouraged kids to come in to see him either before or after school to ensure fewer interruptions providing them with more focused attention and support.

**Attitude of students.** Student attitudes toward RTI were sometimes seen as negative. CG1 mentioned that at first, “sometimes students have [a negative] attitude when they were pulled to RTI plus time to get their late work done” when what they really wanted to do was work on homework for the upcoming class. Subsequently, CG1 explained, the students “are upset because they lost that time when essentially that time is not designated for them to get their homework done for the next class.” Because some students simply do not want to attend RTI time, it was not uncommon for these students to purposefully miss two days a week of RTI. In many cases CG1 added, students did not leave their classrooms after their teachers asked them to leave for RTI. They hid in plain sight in the classroom and stayed there. Simultaneously, the general education teachers were working with new students in his or her own class, not realizing the student is still seated there and not getting the RTI support they need. Sometimes, they might skip the RTI hour initially. CG1 also added “Unfortunately, not all kids [appreciate RTI]. Kids
sometimes see the RTI as a punishment… [and] that kind of defeats the purpose, because you’re working harder than the kids, which is kind of tough, too.”

The Impact of RTI Incorporation into Co-Taught Classrooms

In the third research question of what are teachers’ perceptions of the overall impact of Response to Intervention (RTI) on co-taught at the secondary level, general education classrooms? All teachers highlighted the positive impacts of incorporation of Response to Intervention (RTI) into co-taught classrooms along with some negative impacts. There were teachers advocating for RTI as well as teachers discussing different ways to make RTI and co-teaching more efficient.

Overall Impact of RTI Incorporation into Co-Taught Classrooms

One hundred percent of the teachers shared their positive experiences with incorporating RTI into co-taught classrooms. AG1 believes strongly in the positive impacts of incorporating RTI into co-taught classes. She appreciates how RTI and co-teaching permitted her to reach students who lacked support at home. AG1 added “we’re allowing them to be successful in a way and learn what success looks like and feels like.” She also described RTI over the course of the high school experience as a foundational tool when she said that she hoped that as her students came off the RTI pyramid into adulthood, that they would continue to have supports. AG1 also mentioned that it is much easier to incorporate RTI with a co-teacher versus a non-co-teacher. It allowed both teachers to manage the classroom more easily by checking in students as well as managing grades and missing assignments. AG1 described the positive impact of having a co-teacher by sharing that “I think it’s so much easier…the holes in the net are smaller with a co-teacher ‘cause there’s two of you constantly looking at the grade book versus [just one
teacher].” Also, in support of the positive impacts, one co-teacher expressed with enthusiasm “If I could, I would co-teach every hour. I think co-teaching is probably one of the best parts of my day.” At the same time, AG1 added that not all teachers have the same experiences as she did.

Another general education teacher, CG1 stressed that certain RTI aspects allow him to better serve his students, and they also permitted him to work with students at risk to get them caught up or identify areas in which they struggle. Thus, it can depend upon how the school is run and shifts the RTI.

AG2 also stated that “RTI absolutely has a positive impact. I think even on… the smallest scale, for teacher accountability.” AG2 clarified that at the teacher level, RTI holds teachers accountable for their students’ success, while at student level, RTI helps the students who need it the most. The RTI framework allowed teachers to determine “where the student is. These are the needs identified; these are the supports they get.” She added when RTI was implemented, it increased students’ success. AG2 highlighted one particular point that she liked about RTI by saying, “We really try to promote a culture of neurodiversity and reduce the stigma associated with…disabilities and just remove that language. We’re differently-abled…” She added, “I really believe in the idea of neurodiversity; it’s a natural difference in…the way our brains are wired. But having RTI helps, too.” AG2 demonstrated the idea of neurodiversity by providing an example from her experiences with her co-teacher. She has students able to access the general education curriculum without help while others require a high amount of support. Then, there are students who have not yet been identified as having special needs. They can benefit from the additional support provided to their peers with special needs. Thus, the RTI model permits AG2 and her co-teacher “across the board [to] provide the same accommodations to unidentified students who request them as them as identified students.” For instance, during test time, AG2
asked the entire class “if you would like the test read to you, please go with Miss [named her co-
teacher]”, and identified and unidentified students were able to willingly join that group. Then
she added “I think having that RTI pyramid allows us to better place those kinds of
interventions.”

BS2 shared that RTI is extremely effective and has a great and positive impact on
students. Even though there is only one day of the week for RTI support, “it’s great when we pull
out our kids when we know they’re really missing the essential learning targets that we’re trying
to teach them.” She said that even though RTI is not as fully implemented as it could be at his
school, students were able to gain benefits. Similarly, AS1 said

Yes, there are barriers, yes, there are gaps and all these things as within any system. I
think overall it’s positive just because at the high school level we’re developing adults, so
when you keep them in a general ed environment and when you can keep them based on
needs, and when you help them build confidence, and help them learn how to interact
with others adult, another peers, I think it just gives them that sense of independence that
they need, and they feel successful that’s way. So, I do think it is positive overall.

**Advocating for RTI**

Fifty percent of teachers interviewed advocated for RTI. When speaking about RTI, BS1
said “It is amazing. The RTI model is amazing for so many different reasons.” She indicated that
“first and foremost… every kid is a gen ed student first and all deserve the same level of
instruction.” She mentioned that to serve their struggling learners, teachers have to
figure out what they’re struggling with, why they are struggling with it, and [be] able to
provide additional interventions to make sure that we guarantee they are gonna get it.
[This] has made a huge impact on not only the staff seeing growth that maybe they would never have [seen] before, but when you see a student that is finding success, how… you can’t put a price on that? It’s the most amazing thing to witness.

BS1 added that even though the RTI process is long, reevaluation is required in some cases. “But [students] deserve that,” she said. “And I think that’s our mentality around here… We are not gonna quit.” BS1 demonstrated that by referring to a biology class where data collection followed up with timely feedback is key for positive outcomes. “I think about biology and our biology teacher is phenomenal.” She is sure to “collect data over a trimester, and to see, she’s now able to see the growth.” BS1 also indicated that without teachers collecting data, they cannot see the trends. She argued that teachers who believe in the RTI process tend to have more success with their students. Establishing a strong relationship with their general education teachers allowed special education teachers to work closely to accommodate and modify assessments to benefit students’ performance and also help teachers to develop a deeper understanding of the RTI model. BS1 shared a positive example of RTI impacting a student’s performance

We’ve got kids that cannot believe their own success. I sat with a kid last week… The difference between this year and last year... He has been in co-taught English classes every trimester, so he’s ending his 6th trimester in English class and he is writing. We have to dictate; he has to say it out loud to me. But his word choice, and his ability to write a complete sentence in a fluid paragraph! I was in tears last week because it was so amazing. But without the RTI model and assessing him along the way and saying, “No, you’re gonna master this concept no matter what and we’re gonna keep doing this until you do.” And then when you see that come to fruition, ahh, there’s nothing better.
BS1 also provided a positive example of student success as a result of RTI intervention

I have a student that is on that track. Last year in prealgebra [she] could barely solve a one-step algebra equation… She has a 100% in her algebra class this year because of the intervention that was provided for her. That intensive level of intervention and instruction that was provided in her freshman year is getting a 100% in her math class. And if you would have asked her last year if that was even possible, she would have just cried. She literally would’ve cried, because it was so hard for her and she’s having so much success, and that’s all based on RTI.

CS1 agreed that RTI has a positive impact, even though he added “I don’t think I’m utilizing it as well as I could be, and I don’t think as a school we do it as well as it should be done.” The teacher also expressed not only his appreciation of having RTI plus time is built into the schedule, but also the ability to reteach twice a week to benefit struggling learners. The teacher questioned “if we don’t do RTI, like, what are we going to do for our kids that are failing and struggling? Obviously, in the past, all they did was fail a class multiple times.” In the same way, AS2 spoke about how the positive benefits of RTI allowed them as teachers to look at where students are performing academically. Without RTI, she reported, “we would not take the time to see where the students are, what they need. It seems like, if RTI was not involved…we would not care; we would not care about the students, we would just keep plugging forward.” BS2 also expressed the same point of view by adding that when testing is done for students, teachers will know students did not get specific learning targets, and teachers need to focus again on what students miss until students master the skills. She added that RTI permitted them to “actually [be] able to stop, get that information for ‘em, and continue instead of wasting time.”
Ways to Make RTI and Co-Teaching Efficient

AG1 discussed the efficiency of incorporating RTI into co-taught classroom through the example of a time when she worked with co-teachers who were passionate about being in the co-taught classroom.

I think when you have two teachers that are passionate about getting kids to learn material and getting kids to be successful, it’s a lot easier to get kids to be successful. You share that load; you share that energy. When one is down and frustrated the other one can pull that person up, or maybe when you’re super frustrated with a student, and you’ve tried everything, then that other teacher can step in and they’re fresh to kind of deal with that, so either behavioral or academic. When you’ve nagged so many times, “Wake up, wake up, wake up, wake up…” or “Where’s this paper, where’s this paper, where’s this paper?” Sharing that load just makes…your attitude towards the class so much better, too.

AG1 also emphasized that “the positive RTI outweighs the negative.” She explained that it is necessarily to make a balance “of how much spoon feeding do we do…” AG1 indicated that it is not meant to push students “away from the support” and out of the nest, but it is important to teach them life skills and consequences.

AG2 explained that when working with her co-teacher, using a common vocabulary, having the same goals, sharing a set of data of where students are performing toward the goals, and being on the same page with the progress monitoring are what make RTI more efficient. She said, “I just think that makes you more efficient when you’re all doing the same thing the same way toward the same goal.” CG1 stated that if he had an hour of common plan time, he would sit
with his co-teacher, discuss students’ needs, determine reasons why they are struggling, and consider new angles to be tried. He would work closely with his co-teacher to “come up with a plan of action that you can really itemize for RTI”.

BS1 indicated that data collection is a key element for better outcomes from the RTI process. She added

   So, forcing our teachers to collect data to see where… there are holes in the curriculum. Maybe the assessments are not aligned very well with what they’re teaching. Maybe there’s too much content being covered in one unit… All of those things, narrowing down the essential learning targets…what are the have to knows and what are the good to knows? What do we want them to have, what do we want them to know? It is an incredible process…it also allows us to figure out how are we gonna systematically build-in intervention time for our kids to make sure and guarantee they are gonna get what they need.

   BS1 expressed that RTI allowed them to know their students better and discover things about their students “that maybe we did not know about.” Moreover, one of the positive aspects of RTI at her high school is that every academic subject area has CFA. Thus, students who have more than one teacher during three trimesters get the same assessment, which will be turned in to the principal. This process also includes getting teacher feedback while they also attend Professional Learning Community meetings which are held once a week with the teachers according to department. These meetings are “specifically geared toward RTI, collecting data, making those, you know, common formative and summative assessments.”
BS1 also added that co-teaching can make RTI efficient “If we could get all of our teachers to spend time with us on how to accommodate, how to modify, what good universal screeners are, how to progress monitor along the way, how to create assessments that don’t get rid of the content but are developed differently, that looked different [and] that’re laid out differently so all kids can be successful it would be amazing.”

Moreover, when CS1 was asked of how co-teaching could make RTI more efficient, he said “That’s my growth edge, being in the class, being familiar enough with the content to go in.” CS1 added being more present as a co-teacher would make RTI more efficient and he noted that he uses RTI warm ups in class but recognizes that not all teachers choose to employ that technique. He spoke about willingness between teachers to commit to doing all it takes to make co-teaching work and he talked about the importance of time to build a co-teaching relationship. These, he said, helped form the building blocks of efficiency. “If I continue co-teaching with someone,” CS1 explained, “and I think I could keep them motivated and keep myself motivated to try to really milk as much of it as we can…that would be how we would make it more efficient…because we don’t have the kids falling behind and getting all these missing assignments racking up because it’s more seamless…” He said that some teachers simply do not know the co-teaching model well enough to be efficient, and provided the analogy, “If you don’t know what’s in your toolbox, you can’t use that tool.”

CS1 also added an efficient way of incorporating RTI into the co-taught classroom by sharing “it would be: do an exit ticket, boom, find out that five kids… don’t understand that concept; next day, the special ed teacher, you know, if I was in that class, during the warm up while the other kids are just doing review from the day before I’d pull them aside, do a quick little lesson to make sure they got it, and let them move on.”
AS1 explained that at the high school level, RTI prepares students for entrance into the real world, which allowed teachers to provide needed support to struggling learners in the classroom environment. She also highlighted the availability of a broader range of services to students is recommended particularly when a teacher is challenged with only seven hours a day to teach different subjects while trying to intervene properly in the classroom.

CS1 thought if he was given the time he needed to complete required paperwork, he would be able to be more present in the class and “be focusing on analyzing how are we gonna help these kids to learn.” He also added if he was given an hour for planning, he would be more effective as a co-teacher and a case manager. CS1 also mentioned if there is a chance to have another staff person who works in the resource room, he would be better equipped to co-teach and prepare for the class. AS2 suggested positive outcomes may result if their school could move from a special education teacher co-teaching all subject areas to one grade level, to where a special education teacher could be considered more of a content specialist. In other words, one special education teacher would co-teach in all math classes, another would co-teach in all science classes. Not only would that help teachers over the years to gain the expertise level that they need in specific content areas, but also it would be easier for them to have a common planning period with the general education teachers. AS2 also suggested that co-teaching could make RTI even more efficient if it was effectively used. For example, through activities where RTI can reach many students, particularly after identifying each student’s level of performance. Thus, both teachers develop the lesson plan according to students’ needs and ability levels. For instance, as AS2 explained, “if we have the 80% reaching the standard, we can have those students work with one of the teachers to do an extended learning opportunity while the other teacher may be with the skills group where we called this in co-teaching, may take the 15 and the
5 to reteach them, to give them a second chance, to use different models, to help them.” She also added “I think that where co-teaching can really help RTI if we’re able to do that, given the time, and the resources, I think can be very effective.”

**Triangulation**

Observations and document review were also conducted to increase the accuracy of the interview findings. The collected data from the observations were aligned with teachers’ descriptions of how RTI and co-teaching are implemented at their schools. The researcher confirmed what teachers expressed as their experience with RTI implementation in co-taught classrooms. Similarly, the document review revealed that there is no specific model of RTI and co-teaching implementation at the high school level. At all school districts under investigation, there was no guide for RTI implementation at the secondary level. The school districts used a policy that was designed for K-12 without consideration of the complexities at the secondary level. In addition, there are no existing policies for co-teaching implementation in the school districts under investigation. The implementation of RTI in co-taught classrooms at the high school level was not implemented as the literature documented. There is an RTI framework and RTI philosophy, but it was not implemented with 100% fidelity as one of the special education teachers described when referencing RTI implementation at his school. In addition, the collaboration between the general and the special education teachers outside the classroom is an essential piece of authentic co-teaching. All teachers did not have planning periods and this impacted the level of collaboration in the classroom. Thus, the researcher found consistency, between the interview outcomes and the data collected during the observations. All students in the classroom received benefits from RTI and co-teaching support provided by both teachers.
Summary

Findings were presented in chapter four according to major themes and sub-themes which emerged from in-depth data analysis. Major themes included (A) teachers’ philosophy of teaching and learning, (B) RTI and co-teaching implementation from teachers’ perspectives, (C) benefits of RTI incorporation into co-taught classrooms, (D) barriers of RTI incorporation into co-taught classrooms, and (E) the impact of RTI incorporation into co-taught classrooms. Each theme was deliberated in-depth and included sub-themes under each major theme. General and special education teachers shared insights into their lived experiences related to RTI incorporation into co-taught classrooms at the secondary level. Through it, they highlighted the benefits, barriers, and overall impact of RTI and co-teaching.
CHAPTER V
DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to find out teachers’ perceptions of RTI incorporation into co-taught classrooms with an emphasis on benefits, barriers, and overall impacts on students at the high school level. The study used qualitative research by collecting from semi-structured interviews with eight teachers, classroom observations of five teachers, and document review. This interview group was comprised of five special and three general education teachers. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed, and combined, the results led to findings founded on the three research questions under investigation. The observations took place in general education co-taught classrooms where RTI was implemented. The documents for review were provided by the Directors of Special Education of School A, B, and C, in addition to online documents and previous literature. In this chapter, the researcher presents a discussion of the results and their implications, limitations of the study, and recommendations for future studies.

The Implication of the Findings

From the researcher’s standpoint, the present study’s finding considers convergent and divergent data and concurrently compares them to the existing literature. According to interpretation of the study data, yes, there are benefits and barriers as well as positive overall impacts of RTI incorporation into co-taught classrooms at high school level. However, the researcher discovered the challenges associated with RTI implementation into high school classrooms can impact the outcomes of the RTI system. Additionally, the level of challenges varied between three high schools studied (Schools A, B, and C). The researcher found the
reality of being a general or special education teacher in co-taught classroom is challenging due to the obstacles teachers face while attempting to incorporation RTI into co-taught classrooms. The new findings that emerged from the observations, interviews, and document reviews will contribute to the literature and will require further investigation. Supported by the existing literature, the study’s findings emerged from analysis of participant responses to the following research questions:

   How does the incorporation of Response to Intervention (RTI) into co-taught, secondary general education classrooms benefit the teacher experience and student academic and behavioral success?

   How does the incorporation of Response to Intervention (RTI) into co-taught secondary general education classrooms result in barriers to the teacher experience and student academic and behavioral success?

   What are teachers’ perceptions of the overall impact of Response to Intervention (RTI) on co-taught secondary level, general education classrooms?

The findings presented below were organized using these research three questions. Beneath each research question, the researcher demonstrated the connection between the study findings and previous literature. The findings are discussed according to major and sub-themes that emerged from in-depth data analysis.
First Research Question: How does the incorporation of Response to Intervention (RTI) into co-taught, secondary general education classrooms benefit the teacher experience and student academic and behavioral success?

To recognize and obtain the findings of this study, general and special education teachers were asked to share the benefits of RTI incorporation into their co-taught classrooms. This study identified five major benefits. These five benefits identified were collaboration, instructional quality, improvements to students’ academic performance, improvements to students’ behavioral performance, and administrative support.

Collaboration

Collaboration between teachers is the first benefit of RTI incorporation into co-taught classrooms. Of key importance in the study was evidence on how two teachers in one classroom shared the responsibilities of all students, supported each other, and celebrated when their students successfully met their learning targets. The study also found collaboration with a co-teacher allows teachers to see more than one perspective leading to better understanding of students’ overall needs. This finding is aligned with the literature, as described in by Walther-Thomas (1997), having two teachers in one classroom allowed them to share the teaching experience (Murawski & Dieker, 2004). Walther-Thomas argued that sharing the teaching experience is considered beneficial and rewarding to both teachers. Similarly, being in one class permits teachers to share the good and the bad moments.

One of the special education teachers reported that working with the same co-teacher and with the same group of students can impact teachers’ classroom performance. She also added that it can permit collaborating teachers to build a strong relationship and enable them to meet
the needs of all students at different levels. The study participants indicated that the level of collaboration increases when teachers schedule time with the same co-teaching partner and same group of students. Conversely, when students are taught by different teachers not in collaboration with special educators, they may not have their needs as effectively met. Thus, Murawski and Dieker (2004) emphasized how important it is for administrators to facilitate effective collaboration and allow partnerships between co-teaching partners to reach a high level of harmony. This can be achieved by purposefully scheduling students, developing a relationship with teaching partners, shared lesson planning, and differentiating student materials to meet the needs of all learners (Murawski & Dieker, 2004).

The present study also reported that RTI allowed teachers to facilitate collaboration. It permits teachers to determine when students need more interventions as an additional support, and when students are ready to move on. Thus, RTI allowed both teachers to be on the same page with each other regarding student needs, provide needed student support, and clearly identify and define each teacher’s role in the classroom. Collaboration between co-teachers allowed them to have common goals and work toward accomplishing them. Likewise, ongoing meaningful communication between co-teachers enhances the level of collaboration and permits teachers to effectively serve their students by purposefully grouping students based on their needs.

The findings also reported that the collaboration between teachers allows them to take advantage of one another’s expertise. Each teacher’s background knowledge plays a fundamental role in collaboration. For instance, a special education teacher benefits from co-teaching a math class with a general education teacher with a strong background in mathematics. Concurrently, a general education teacher benefits from the expertise of the special education teacher in the areas
of differentiated instruction, modification and accommodation, individualized interventions based on student needs, or evidence-based teaching strategies that better meet the needs of students. These findings align with Austin’s study (2001) indicating that being in co-taught classrooms permits both co-teachers to benefit from each other in one way or another. While a special education teacher benefits from learning new content knowledge, a general education teacher also benefits by gaining more classroom management knowledge and special education instruction and techniques to better serve students with special needs. Special education teachers in this study reported they learned the content knowledge as their students learned the content. In doing so, they found that they were better able to support the students. Frisk (2004) supported this idea of teacher teaching teacher by describing teachers learned a lot from their co-teaching partner.

The study also suggests that special education teachers with additional general education minors, such as science or mathematics minors, are often able to collaborate at higher levels. The collaboration with a general education teacher would exceed beyond the accommodation and modification assignments. It permitted the special education teacher to co-plan, co-facilitate, and provide richer content delivery.

The study also reported that the level of collaboration among teachers depends on teacher personalities, the presence or absence of teacher flexibility, and the presence or absence of a willingness to collaborate with another teacher. Rice and Zigmond (2000) indicated the personal compatibility between co-teachers is a critical aspect of successful co-teaching practice. The study found when teachers’ personalities do not suit each other, co-teaching and collaboration can fail.
Additionally, teacher participants of this study indicated it was their willingness to collaborate—often at their own expense—that led to their collaborative success overall. This point parallels Duffy (2007) stating that in order to successfully draw out the benefits of RTI model, teacher willingness serves as an important key to meaningful collaboration. In other words, teacher willingness allows them to better identify and address student needs, implement appropriate instructional techniques, monitor their students’ learning progress, and finally make informed decisions regard teaching and learning (Friend, 1995). Furthermore, when teachers’ personalities suit each other, they can more easily maximize their limited time (Rice & Zigmond, 2000). Thus, teachers expressed the importance of teacher willingness and flexibility to stay after school and collaborate to meet their students needs.

This study also showed the importance of ongoing communication among teachers for better understanding of students’ needs and how to address them. Finally, in terms of collaboration, teachers indicated that regularly working with the same teaching partner and students can positively impact their performance. This is in part the result of building strong relationships across the classroom.

**Instructional Quality**

Instructional quality is the second benefit of RTI incorporation into co-taught high school classrooms. All special and general education teachers agreed that RTI incorporation into their co-taught classrooms benefits the overall instructional quality. Teachers expressed that RTI enhanced the instructional quality, provided more clarification, and permitted students to move on toward success. Several studies aligned with the current study in finding the benefits of classroom instruction led by two teachers. For instance, Murawski and Dieker argue that two
professionals teaching in one classroom permits the implementation of several instructional activities. This model also allows teacher pairs to be more creative and flexible (2004).

Teachers pointed out the impact of progress monitoring: A key RTI component. Progress monitoring enhances instructional quality based on students’ levels of performance. It is determined by measuring students’ progress using assessment tools including the use of Common Formative Assessment (CFA) and others. Progress monitoring allowed teacher awareness of their students’ current levels of performance and permitted them to use data-based decision-making to develop appropriate interventions. The data being collected also assists teachers during lesson planning and instruction. Thus, the pairing of general and special education teachers into one classroom permits teachers to support students efficiently and effectively. The incorporation of RTI into co-taught classrooms allows two teachers to be in one classroom. Teachers are better equipped to ensure that struggling learners receive appropriate support, and likewise, the needs of high-level achievers are also effectively met. This aligns with several studies from the literature. Whitten, Esteves, and Woodrow (2009) stressed that “RTI is an instructional model that is truly responsive to students’ needs” (p.11). They also indicated that with RTI support, poor teaching instruction should no longer an excuse for student failure. They emphasized the importance of progress monitoring which permits teachers to intervene when a student fails to make expected progress before the achievement gap increases. Through continuous progress monitoring, teachers are better informed regarding students’ needs, and therefore better able to provide targeted lessons helping the students master the content.

**Improve Students’ Academic Performance**

Teachers stated that RTI incorporated into co-taught classrooms improved students’ academic performance. These academic improvements were facilitated through the use of
numerous practices. For example, teachers provided students with unit assessments prior to moving on to the next unit. Students were permitted to retake an exam and given a chance to work on delayed or missing homework. Other practices included re-teach opportunities, purposeful grouping, and the use of assessments to ensure students met the learning targets. This aligns with Duffy’s study (2007), that stresses how the implementation of RTI permits teachers to seek more instructional support to address all students needs rather than concentrating on the identification of low achieving learner deficits. Therefore, all teachers noticed the improvement of the students’ academic performance due to the variety of teaching instruction used to address student needs.

Also, teachers mentioned in the current study how all students in the classroom benefit from the enhanced instructional quality including students who are identified and not identified. This connects with a statement by Cook and Friend. They stressed that co-teaching is not only important for students with special needs, but also for struggling learners who have not qualified for special education services. This is also true in the case of gifted students who benefit from the teaching instruction provided for all learners (1995). A general education teacher remarked that the inclusive classroom environment permits all students to receive academic attention equally without the stigma often attached to disabilities. Learner diversity in the classroom allows all students to benefit from the instruction at different levels. Similarly, Dupuis, Barclay, Holmes, Platt, Shaha, and Lewis (2006) discussed the embarrassment students may feel when singled out as one in need of additional support or when required to leave the classroom to receive additional interventions. However, participation in co-taught classrooms with early identification and proper placement can obviate these isolating practices and create a setting where all students may avoid the pain and suffering of stigmatization.
Improve Students’ Behavioral and Social Performance

High school teachers noted that behavioral issues were not a high-level concern in their classrooms which incorporate RTI. The combination of RTI behavioral supports and data collection helped students to become more self-aware behaviorally and to monitor themselves within the RTI framework. Likewise, having two teachers in RTI and co-teaching-based classrooms expands the reach of effective classroom management. Teachers reported that their students with special needs behavior improved significantly as a result of RTI interventions in general classrooms. This relates to Walther-Thomas’s (1997) study, which revealed that students with special needs learn appropriate behavior from their peers. In the present study, teachers stressed that students benefit socially from their experiences in co-taught classrooms. In relation, a study proved that students with special needs benefited positively from a co-taught learning environment. Researchers attributed this to the friendships students established with their peers as a result of their participation in inclusive classroom environments (Scruggs et al., 2007). A general education teacher indicated that a co-taught classroom environment where RTI is implemented removed the stigma associated with the disabilities. The teachers gave an example by sharing that CI students were able to participate in her co-taught classroom through the use of several interventions from which all students can benefit. Thus, the neurodiversity in the classroom permitted students with special needs to actively engage in the general classroom while supported by general and special education teachers and para-professionals. This connects with the Dupuis, Barclay, Holmes, Platt, Shaha and Lewis (2006) study which showed how individualized instruction in a separate classroom for students with special needs can lead to emotional pain that could impact a student socially and behaviorally. Within the inclusive classroom setting, however, early identification, proper placement, and shared instruction can...
help prevent social and behavioral issues related to individualized instruction given outside of the classroom.

**Administrative Support**

Several teachers shared that administrator support plays an important role in facilitating better RTI implementation at the high school level. This study presents several kinds of supports noted by teachers. Teachers identified effective placement of experienced special education teachers into co-taught classrooms as essential to RTI implementation. They also cited administrator trust in teachers to support students to the best of their abilities as key to RTI success. According to teacher responses, RTI-supportive administrators sought to remain aware of student progress within the RTI framework, encouraged teachers to attend workshops, sent weekly RTI framework-based updates, and stressed the value of data collection. Administrator approved meetings proved vital to teacher study participants. They described supportive administrators as those who met and listened to teacher concerns and held weekly meetings to allow teachers to meet within their specialty areas. The latter meeting type permitted teachers to spend time together and discuss their students and classrooms needs. Support can be related to the administrator’s level of RTI implementation involvement and level of support for teachers. These needs surfaced in this study in particular when teachers spoke of administrators who encouraged them to implement RTI slowly; one step at the time to ensure effectiveness. This aligned with a previous study which indicated that successful implementation of RTI required collaboration among teachers, professional development, and support at the district level and the school level (Duffy, 2007).
Second Research Question: How does the incorporation of Response to Intervention (RTI) into co-taught secondary general education classrooms result in barriers to the teacher experience and student academic and behavioral success?

Research findings indicate special and general education teachers referred to numerous barriers associated with incorporating RTI into co-taught high school classrooms. While teachers expressed that there were no direct barriers related to RTI’s system itself, they did identify barriers that tend to accompany implementation of the RTI process. Teachers listed the following as indirect barriers: A lack of time, lack of administrative support, lack of background knowledge, lack of collaboration, issues related to students, and attitudes toward RTI.

Lack of Time

One of the biggest obstacles and most cited issues upon which all teachers agreed was the lack of time needed to effectively implement RTI. Teachers expressed their crucial needs for designated common period planning time instead of desperately trying to find time to discuss their students and classrooms’ needs. This lack of time prevented teachers from analyzing collected data, conducting lesson planning, decision making, and intervening enough to meet students’ need. These barriers impeded teachers’ ability to implement RTI to its full potential. Due to the lack of time, teachers were forced to cut time out of their own schedules to fit in many requirements. Dieker and Murawski (2003) indicated that co-teachers face the issue of the lack of adequate planning time for effective collaboration. Teachers need the time to discuss and plan to meet their heterogeneous classrooms (Scruggs et al., 2007; Gately & Gately, 2001; Vaughn, Schumm, & Arguelles, 1997). Fisher and Frey (2011) drew a powerful finding after they conducted a case study on high school RTI implementation. The study focused on general education teacher perceptions about RTI and time. The researchers were unable to find students
receiving individualize intensive intervention under tier 3 with the exception of students who had been identified with a disability. One teacher argued that it was not possible to offer effective individualized instruction in high school classrooms. The teacher also expressed a desire for high schools to make individualized instruction available for all students, “but it’s just not real. The sped [special education] teachers are the only ones who have time for that” (p. 108). Thus, teachers faced difficulties due to the lack of planning time and collecting and analyzing data, when they tried to meet all students’ needs.

Moreover, the lack of time causes scheduling conflicts. Class time was shortened to create RTI plus time where students can receive RTI support outside of the classroom. Sometimes, administrators used RTI time for other school-wide programming, such as standardized testing times. This led to a loss of RTI time for students in need. Likewise, Murawski and Dieker (2003) described how the multilayered structure of secondary schools can be challenging for co-teachers due to large classrooms with high numbers of students. In addition, these students have different learning needs which teachers must address while tackling mountains of paperwork (including IEPs). Pressure is further added when teachers are also expected to meet with and collaborate with several staff members and provide support at different levels.

Teachers expressed their need for planning time built directly into the schedule. They stated that this provision would ensure that every teacher has a chance to collaborate with their co-teachers effectively instead of using after-hours phone calls, emails, or a few minutes before and after class to plan for their classes. The study also showed that the class time use of assessment tools as one RTI component may slow teaching instruction and impact the overall learning time.
Lack of Administrative Support

Most of the teachers agreed that the lack of administrative support caused barriers to efficient incorporation of RTI into co-taught classroom. Teachers reported that RTI implementation was negatively impacted by a lack of communication with administrators, unclear RTI implementation plans, lack of resources, and not giving teachers planning and training time. These reports are reflective of a study that indicated that the implementation of RTI at the high school level can be unclear (Ehren, Deshler & Graner, 2010; Duffy, 2007; Torgesen, 2003). It could be argued that the path of RTI implementation at the high school level is not as clear as the RTI path used at the elementary school level. Another study suggested that unclear RTI implementation processes proved the most cited barrier impacting effective RTI at the high school level (Castro-Villarreal and Moore, 2014). In this present study, teachers indicated that there is no clear outline of RTI implementation allowing consistency among different subjects and grade levels at their high schools (Sansosti, Goss, & Noltemeyer, 2011). In addition, through intense document review, there is no evidence of clear implementation of RTI or co-teaching at the secondary level. Policy is needed that considers the complexities of the secondary level. Thus, there is an urgent need to address the conflict that teachers face throughout implementing RTI and co-teaching.

Likewise, teachers also pointed to overfilled classrooms with high numbers of students with IEPs. These crowded classrooms can challenge teachers seeking to meet all their students’ needs. One of the interesting barriers special education teachers mentioned was a weekly meeting among teachers based on their department or subject areas. The teachers reported that these meeting were not effective because they co-teach with (science, math, etc.) general education teachers. Thus, while they may benefit from discussion of common issues with other
special educators, they miss out on meeting with the teachers with whom they teach and learning more about the content areas that would help them better serve their students. Teachers also found frustration with annual co-teaching placements. They are typically assigned a new co-teaching partner every year. According to teacher responses, not only can these changes in co-teaching placements prevent co-teachers from building strong relationships and earning one another’s trust, but they can also prevent meaningful growth opportunities over time. For instance, co-teachers with longer lasting partnerships may have increased opportunities to improve their performance in general classrooms. Furthermore, some teachers spoke to the lack of training which prevents teachers from understanding RTI and co-teaching and how to make them beneficial to students. Teachers perceived this to be the result of a lack of funding. This aligns with Dieker and Murawski’s (2003) recommendations for secondary school teachers: A need for more training related to diverse co-teaching models that they can be implemented in their classrooms. Another study stressed the need for high school teachers to receive ongoing professional development in order to be aware of different teaching instructions that effectively work with different subject areas (Duffy, 2007). A teacher interviewed for the current study mentioned the difficulty RTI implementation caused by not having a clear path from the administrators on how to implement RTI in the classroom. That is also similar to the finding of the Villarreal, Rodriguez, and Moore (2014) study. Their work indicated teachers were overwhelmed by the RTI process, particularly when teachers are required to follow specific requirements for RTI integration. They stated that “teachers who report feeling burdened by paperwork or who only see RTI as an additional burden toward eligibility may be in systems that are not effectively set up to implement RTI practices well” (Castro-Villarreal, Rodriguez & Moore, 2014, p. 106). In addition, teachers expressed that they were assigned to co-teach based
on the classroom need or their knowledge about the content; not necessarily for their potential to connect with a specific teaching partner or based on their co-teaching strengths. One study found some administrators forced teachers to co-teach, and they determined this type of administrative involvement harmful to the practice and to all involved (Scruggs et al., 2007). Likewise, another study stressed that assigning special education teachers to co-teach with several teachers during a single class period proved injurious to co-teaching effectiveness and the ability to truly collaborate with co-teaching partners (Murawski & Dieker, 2004).

**Barriers related to professional development.** Teachers expressed that the lack of professional development caused a barrier when incorporating RTI into co-taught classrooms. Teachers discussed their Professional Learning Community (PLC), which is considered a professional development time purposefully created for teacher growth. However, because these meetings were held based according to subject area, some teachers believed these meetings were not beneficial for them. Thus, they called for administrators to assign special education teachers to co-teach based on a subject area. This would allow teachers to understand the content knowledge and be a member of the content PLC. Teachers interviewed preferred this in lieu of administrators assigning a special education teacher to co-teach different subject areas at different grade levels or even different subjects within a grade level.

**Lack of funding.** According to teachers interviewed, funding issues do not only negatively impact time, staff, and professional development, but they also impact the transportation necessary to support students who receive additional support after school. A lack of funding also impacts students who do not have Wi-Fi at home, for many school assignments require use of the internet. Funding exhausted for multiple levels and kinds of programming lead to a deficit for some schools when it came to effectively implementing RTI. When funding is
used for other departments and programs and not properly invested in RTI-related efforts, support for needed intervention models decreases (Fletcher & Vaughn, 2009; NASDSE, 2006).

**Scheduling issues.** Teachers expressed how busy schedules prevented them from collaborating to meet the needs of their classrooms. At the same time, the act of scheduling students with several teachers can make it challenging for teachers to determine their students’ levels of achievement. These challenges are caused by a lack of funding which ultimately impact the level of support provided. A special education teacher expressed that having the same students scheduled at the same time with same teachers allowed special education teachers to become more familiar with students who needed more support. It allowed special education teachers the opportunity to develop relationships with students, work closely with them, and better understand their struggle. This leads to more effective student support. In a related study, Murawski and Hughes (2009) recommended administrators address the funding issue by purposefully scheduling teachers to teach in classrooms which had a balanced homogeneity among students with and without special needs. This approach not only permitted administrators to address the funding issue, but also allowed teachers to be able to manage and support realistic numbers of students in order to serve them better (Murawski, 2008). Murawski and Hughes (2009) suggested that this “would necessitate moving one student without special needs and three students with disabilities into different classes” (p. 269). Through this method, administrators addressed the issue of overfilled classes at their schools.

**Issues within the RTI system.** Several problems caused barriers for RTI implementation in high school and limited students from gaining benefits from RTI support. Teachers interviewed discussed the frustration of having administrators sacrifice scheduled RTI plus time for other school needs. These sacrifices lead to a loss of dedicated RTI supports for their students.
with special needs. Likewise, they expressed concerns over substitute teachers with no access to the RTI database system. These substitute teachers, they argue, were unaware of which students receive RTI support, and as a result, some students fall through the cracks during substitute days. Another barrier arose in terms of students who attend vocational training classes at other schools. Often due to travel time and scheduling, these students miss a day of RTI plus time—time they do not get back. Additionally, all teachers focused on different subject areas would like to pull students in to receive RTI support together at one time. However, a barrier emerges as each student faces individualized struggles with disparate content and concepts from their classmates. Thus, the teacher is called to meet the diverse need of each individual in the classroom, which can be time consuming and challenging. This finding aligns with Duffy’s study (2007), which highlighted the challenges of navigating RTI models at high school level.

**Overfilled classrooms.** Another issue teachers addressed is how the high number of students with IEPs in their co-taught classroom can actually hurt rather than helped their students with special needs. Similarly, teachers agreed that classrooms with high numbers of students without disabilities can also challenge teachers as they strive to meet an array of student needs. This relates to a study by Fuchs and Fuchs (2007), they found that having a large classroom can threaten the high-quality instruction provided to support students at Tier III. In addition, Walther-Thomas (1997) reported on the negative impacts of co-teaching due to “poorly planned classrooms… heavily weighted with students who had learning and/or behavior problems. Unfortunately, these ill-fated classrooms set teachers and students up for failure and frustration” (p. 403).

**Teachers’ responsibilities.** Over-assignment of teacher responsibilities can negatively impact the level of support provided to students in co-taught classrooms. Teaching multiple
subjects, grades, email checking, co-teach in general classroom, teaching in the resource room, completing necessarily paperwork, being effective case manager, and more can be overwhelming to a teacher who would simply prefer to be teaching. This level of responsibility can steer teachers away from the purpose of RTI, co-teaching, and meeting the needs of their students. The present study showed how a special education teacher wanted to be what he described as “a value added” when co-teaching in the general classroom; however, the weight of responsibilities caused him to question the value of his performance in terms of co-teaching effectiveness. A study by Castro-Villarreal and Moore (2014) indicated that teachers with high numbers of students are challenged by overwhelming classroom responsibilities, from collecting and analyzing data to meeting the needs of numerous students. The study also mentioned that some teachers think RTI requirements are time-consuming, especially when they are already under the pressures of a lack of planning time, paperwork, and various other responsibilities requiring their limited time. A similar study indicated that at the middle and high school levels, special and general education teachers faced several challenges when implementing co-teaching. The obstacles included the complexities of different grade levels, navigating different curriculum, and meeting several students’ expectations. Finally, the study found obstacles related to the growing requirements on teachers to meet the needs of students with special needs despite what they perceive as adequate instructional practice knowledge and skills. Teachers also experienced accountability-based stress when students did not meet expectations on standardized testing. Accountability related concerns drove some teachers to want to work independently, which “increased autonomy among teachers at the secondary level” (Dieker & Murawski, 2003, p. 3; Cole & McLeskey, 1997).
Lack of teachers. According to the teachers interviewed in the present study, a lack of teachers caused barriers to RTI incorporation into co-taught classrooms. A limited number of special education teachers made available to a school can limit their ability to effectively intervene and co-teach. The lack of teachers is caused by the lack of funding from the school district. Overall, teachers agreed that problems with funding play important roles in the majority of issues they faced; notably the lack of teachers which result in high student numbers and the lack of training and professional development which have numerous negative impacts.

Lack of Background Knowledge

A lack of background knowledge can be a barrier for general and special education teachers. General education teachers expressed their point of view about the issues which arise when their special education co-teachers do not possess content area background knowledge. In one case, in lieu of sharing the content instruction, a special education teacher supported the co-taught classroom by observing, walking around the classroom, sitting in the back of the classroom, and supporting students in need. As a result, the special education teacher felt inadequate. He expressed he would prefer to know the content and welcomed the chance to learn it along with the students. On the other hand, a special education teacher with a science or English minor as a complement to a special education background can serve as a value added to the co-taught classroom. In this way, the special education co-teacher can be a lead teacher, too; supporting and intervening more often. From another standpoint, teachers interviewed noted that some general education teachers’ lack of special education knowledge caused them to rely more heavily on special education teachers. They argued that general education teachers lack an understanding of how to modify and accommodate assignments and activities, and provide differentiated and individualized instruction. Therefore, training is needed for both general and
special education teachers to increase their classroom performance. Several general education teachers indicated that RTI is often used in a study hall-based way for simply retaking exams and completing missing homework. They did not express what can be done with RTI beyond these test and assignment makeup periods. Thus, general education teachers need to be well-informed with RTI and co-teaching practices and purposes to fully serve their students. Special education teachers suggested they would feel a stronger sense of success if permitted to co-teach based on their background knowledge or on one subject area that they could master over time. Each would allow special education teachers to connect with general education teachers weekly in the PLC meetings and collaborate to better serve student needs. A previous study indicated that co-teaching teams face inequality when it comes to high school level content area knowledge. A special education co-teacher explained that she and her general education partner were not equal when it came to the instruction. This occurred because she excelled in special education as her background area and not in a specific general education content area (Rice & Zigmond, 2000). Similarly, a study indicated that due to middle and high school level complexities, teachers felt burned out trying to meet their job requirements while implementing co-teaching properly despite a lack of content knowledge (Dieker & Murawski, 2003, p. 3; Cole & McLeskey, 1997). Aligned with that and from the teacher perspective, the lack of RTI understanding can be challenging. Teachers face the complexities of the RTI process, understanding the main components of RTI, processing the required and voluminous RTI paperwork, the proper uses of evidence-based practices, data collection tools, and progress monitoring, and the period of time that students should spend at each tier (Castro-Villarreal, Rodriguez & Moore, 2014). Teachers participating in the present study indicated the need for professional development is essential in order to have better understanding of and skill for implementing RTI and co-teaching. Dieker
and Murawski (2003) reported on the limitations regarding co-teacher background knowledge. According to the study, the special education teacher does not have the content knowledge of the general education teacher. Similarly, the general education teacher does not have the knowledge of how to accommodate and using the intervention approaches understood by the special education teacher. Due to the complexity of teaching at the secondary level, general education teachers are prepared to be content specific at a high level of intensity. At the same time, general education teacher programs lack coursework intended to inform teachers on how to serve students with disabilities and how to meet their needs. Thus, teachers at middle and high school level may not be prepared to support students with special needs in their classroom (Dieker & Murawski, 2003). Likewise, the intensity of content knowledge at the secondary level has been described as a co-instructional obstacle for the special education teacher who has lack of deep understanding of the content area. This obstacle results from a content-specific deficiency in their training program focused on approaches of accommodation and modifications designed to meet the need of all learners. The lack of content knowledge may limit the special education teacher from more involvement in the instruction (Dieker & Murawski, 2003; Fullan & Hargreaves, 1997).

**Lack of Collaboration**

Some teachers explained that the lack of collaboration between them is caused by the lack of time to collaborate. While RTI may place them in collaborative environment, teachers agreed that a lack of scheduled planning time and administrator RTI management styles can impede collaboration. In addition, special education teachers interviewed were assigned to co-teach with several general education teachers, several grade levels in different subject areas. Previous literature indicates that inappropriate administrative involvement could harm co-
teaching effectiveness, especially when teachers were forced to co-teach (Scruggs et al., 2007). In the present study, a special education teacher explained that she was placed in a classroom as a co-teacher with no prior discussion. Murawski and Dieker (2004) noted that administrators have assigned special education teachers to co-teach with several general education teachers in one class period. This impacts the level of collaboration among teaching partners due to the lack of time and ability to meet and discuss. Administrators display appropriate involvement by allowing teachers to collaborate before co-teaching implementation. The positivity of a co-teaching partnership flourishes when administrators schedule students properly, allow teachers the time to develop a relationship, and give them the opportunity to lesson plan in order to meet the needs of their students. (Murawski & Dieker, 2004).

Likewise, teachers discussed their weekly PLC meetings and how they are organized according to their subject area. However, some teachers perceive this organization as a barrier, for this can prevent teachers from meeting directly with their co-teachers to discuss their classes or address student needs. Thus, at the high school level, the collaboration among teachers can be a challenging piece due to grade level complexities, subject area, and the lack of time. This aligns with a study which found that high school structures can make the RTI model difficult to navigate, for RTI requires a high level of collaboration (Duffy, 2007). Concurrently, collaboration is an essential element for successful co-teaching (Friend, 1995). The incorporation of RTI and co-teaching has been called a “logical combination” (Murawski and Hughes, 2009), equipped to make significant and positive changes in the classroom. The reality faced by teachers in the current study demonstrated the phenomenon of RTI and co-teaching incorporation into high schools to be far from successful systematic change at some schools. Lack of collaboration between teachers is a major issue. According to Murawski and Hughes (2009),
without collaboration among teachers, practices spin around each other and move in all
directions within one classroom as teachers try to navigate their students to success. Walther-
Thomas (1997) indicated that teachers who engaged in a collaborative relationship receive many
ideas but less actual help implementing these ideas in the classroom.

Issues Related to Students

The study presented many issues related to students which can become barriers to
successful RTI implementation. Teachers identified situations where deliberately missed class to
avoid going to RTI plus time. As a result, the students missed the support and interventions
needed to help them succeed. Another issue is the over-support students in co-taught classrooms.
This can be described as students relying too heavily on the supports given and accommodations
made by their special education teachers. Too much support by teachers can promote learned
helplessness in students. A student’s lack of motivation and willingness to learn is another issue
which negatively impacts RTI implementation and student performance.

The study participants shared that, some students are placed in general classrooms when
they do not have the cognitive capability to effectively comprehend or demonstrate content
comprehension. Thus, low preforming students can face obstacles in RTI co-teach based
classroom at high school level. Range of services was suggested to meet the verity of students’
needs as a result of including is not the best option for all students. Thus, at high school level, the
need of foundational knowledge and good cumulative skills is essential and being at level two
and getting certificate completion can be a best option for those students. A previous study
indicated that teachers were concerned about students involved in co-taught classroom while
they have minimum academic and behavioral skill levels (Scruggs, Mastropieri & Mcduffie,
2007). At the current study, this scenario puts both teachers under stress trying their best to
support students and frustrated students trying to overcome the difficulties of misunderstanding. The present study indicated that not all students benefits from being in inclusive setting or being in co-taught classes. Several studies drew the same conclusion. The researchers found that there were some students who did not benefit from being in inclusive classroom settings (Scruggs, Mastropieri & Mcduffie, 2007; Frisk, 2004; Ward, 2003; Feldman, 1998; Carlson, 1996; Pugach & Wesson, 1995). In the present study, a general education teacher mentioned that there were students unable to pass the class despite the provision of RTI and co-teaching support.

Attitude Toward RTI

According to the teachers interviewed for this study, fellow teachers as well as administrators and students demonstrate positive and negative attitudes toward RTI. These teachers reported that while there are general and special education teachers who believe in the RTI process and outcomes, some general education teachers question RTI itself. They are described as asking questions such as, “why we are doing RTI” or “why are we reteaching in co-taught classroom?” It could be argued that some teachers’ negative attitudes toward RTI and/or co-teaching are caused by a lack of background knowledge related to both practices (explained above). A similar study found that general and special education teachers faced difficulties related to co-teaching implementation in middle and high schools. This is the result of the level of complication caused by the nature of grade levels, multiple subject areas, students’ expectations, and high-pressure teacher responsibilities and requirements. The researchers emphasized the need to hold teachers accountable when students do not meet standards when the teachers lack of background knowledge, skills, and instructional practices which might be used to meet students’ needs (Dieker& Murawski, 2003, p. 3; Cole & McLeskey, 1997). Similarly, teachers expressed their lack of understanding of RTI’s system and their need for more
improvement to ensure proper RTI implementation in their classrooms (Castro-Villarreal, Rodriguez & Moore, 2014).

Likewise, students who benefit from RTI’s interventions had a positive attitude toward RTI’s support. Positive attitudes lead to a positive outcome from support provided to them by teachers and administrators who offered RTI time to impact students’ academic needs significantly. One of the new findings revealed in this study relates to student perspective. According to teachers interviewed, some students perceive RTI as a punishment. Driven by a negative attitude toward RTI, these students miss school intentionally to avoid going to RTI plus time. Thus, these students miss needed supports. Despite several supports provided to them, students’ unwillingness to work hard and make the best of interventions caused barriers to their success. In terms of administrators’ attitudes toward RTI, the present study showed that administrator support took different forms. To administrators, RTI can be a hand-off approach which gives teachers trust and freedom to rely on their own judgment and benefits their students as much as possible. It can be about involvement and awareness of the RTI implementation process. For some, it can be about informing teachers about RTI and allowing them to meet as a professional learning community within the school. This permits teachers’ growth through learning from each other. On the other hand, some administrators were described as uncooperative in terms of RTI. When intervening, these administrators are motivated by the achievement of good grades and passing rather than upholding RTI practices intended to meet students’ deeper needs. Some perceive RTI plus time as optional and/or disposable and choose to use it as a wild card when scheduling other programming and activities, such as statewide testing. Students in need suffer when administrators discard RTI time to schedule other activities without consideration for the valuable support time lost.
Third Research Question: What are teachers’ perceptions of the overall impact of Response to Intervention (RTI) on co-taught secondary level, general education classrooms?

In the present study, teacher responses regarding the overall impact of RTI incorporation into co-taught classrooms fell under two main categories including positive impacts, which permit teachers to advocate for RTI, and ways to make RTI and co-teaching more efficient.

Positive Impact of RTI Incorporation into Co-Taught Classrooms

All teachers spoke to the positive impact of RTI incorporation into co-taught classrooms. These positive impacts were described as: allowing teachers to recognize what is helpful to students and what is not; being able to reach students who need support; helping students meet their learning targets and becoming better teachers. Teachers emphasized that it is much easier to incorporate RTI into co-taught classrooms through the co-teacher approach than it is to apply RTI in an individually taught classroom. Teachers indicated that RTI allowed them to closely monitor students’ progress by identifying their needs and providing appropriate support as needed. Likewise, in co-taught classrooms where RTI is implemented, there is little to no stigma attached to students who receive extra support (Walther-Thomas, 1997). This is especially true when all students in the classroom benefit from RTI and co-teaching. This includes students who are identified as having special needs, students served under section 504, and students who have not been identified as having special needs. Thus, from the implementation of RTI framework in co-taught classroom, everyone in the classroom can benefit and realize enhanced success from the instruction provided. Similarly, teachers advocated for the benefits of the RTI-based data collection process which positively impacts decision-making about the supports needed to meet students’ needs.
The main goal of RTI is providing high-quality, differentiated instruction that meets students where they are and steers them toward achievement. Co-teaching possesses the capacity to energize RTI in general education classrooms as teacher partners combine their skills to mindfully meet student needs. The combination of skills and integration of general and special education teaching practices empowers teachers with stronger opportunities to assess, recognize, and react to the individualized needs of their students. Co-teaching offers a flexible model that allows teachers to purposefully group and regroup their students as needs dictate. (Villa & Thousand, 2011). This flexibility and its focus on meeting student needs makes it a natural partner to RTI.

**Ways to Make RTI and Co-Teaching More Efficient**

Teachers discussed different ways of making RTI more efficient in co-taught classrooms. Strategies identified included such practices as common planning time, having a good relationship with one’s co-teacher, having background knowledge related to specific content areas addressed in the co-taught class, and providing teachers with more time to analyze data. A special education teacher suggested that in order to have a better co-teaching experience, in lieu of placement in multiple content areas and departments—which requires diverse content comprehension and background knowledge—special education teachers should be assigned to co-teach within one department so they can become familiar with the content. This more focused placement permitted special education teachers to gain the expertise required for them to comfortably engage students and co-teach a subject area. The teacher also added that the approach of assigning special educators to co-teach permitted them to be a part of Professional Learning Community (PLC) within the same department instead of attending PLC meetings only within special education department. Participants suggested special education teachers be
assigned to one department so they can be become familiar with the content. Teachers pointed to the use of a common language, having the same goals, and sharing at every level in which students perform as additional ways to make RTI more efficient in co-taught classrooms. Likewise, having planning time permits teachers to be on the same page and aware of their students’ needs. A general education teacher expressed the desire to “come up with a plan of action that you can really itemize for RTI” for use during the planning time if it exists. Another way to ensure the effectiveness of RTI incorporation into co-taught classrooms, according to teachers interviewed, is through the data collection element. As an essential component of RTI system, data collection allows teachers to determine if the assessment aligns with the curriculum, or if there is a gap in the curriculum which needs to be addressed. Data collection permits teachers to get a hold on problems and seek to support students with interventions that lead to the meeting of learning goals. From a special education teacher point of view, having general education teachers understand how to accommodate, modify, progress monitor, and develop an assessment that reflects the actual content can make RTI more efficient. As he reflected on his co-teaching experience, another special education teacher revealed how much he desired to become a better teacher by adding value to the co-taught classroom by being “more present”. He perceived keeping himself motivated as that which moves his teaching practice toward efficiency. Teachers interviewed also named the provision of a range of services for students as a means to increasing RTI efficacy in co-taught classrooms. This proves especially beneficial when a teacher has too many responsibilities outside of teaching to sufficiently intervene. Finally, teachers suggested additional staffing as a possible solution to the high volume of time-consuming, required paperwork associated with RTI. Teachers proposed that efficiency would be increased if the paperwork became more manageable. For example, a special education teacher
suggested that the school consider hiring a staff person to help facilitate the paperwork requirements. This solution would give the special education teacher more time to effectively engage with and intervene in co-taught classrooms.

**Summary**

The incorporation of RTI into co-taught classrooms at the high school level is a challenging process. Two factors play significant roles in facilitating its positive impacts. First, teachers’ years of experience impacts their ability to do their best to support students in need. Second, administrators’ knowledge, awareness, and support of RTI and co-teaching are game changers for successful RTI and co-teaching implementation in high schools. Thus, teachers and administrators’ knowledge of RTI and co-teaching could lead to successful implementation of both practices toward supporting students’ success. Working to achieve the desired goals of both practices can successfully unite RTI and co-teaching and make high school a better and more efficient place for all learners. Administrators have the ability to support teachers at different levels to have positive outcomes by building a solid stage that supports teachers at different angles. Great RTI and co-teaching achievement is within reach when teachers can demonstrate incredible performance in their classrooms and move students toward success. Administrators can support teachers with scheduling, by providing planning time, and permitting a slower RTI implementation process. They can do so by training and informing teachers about RTI and co-teaching practices and by following up with teachers to address their needs. Thus, there is no doubt that RTI implementation at the high school level is a challenging process as other studies confirmed in the field. Demanding administrative support can make the process less challenging for teachers. Administrators can ensure teachers co-teach with the same partner, teach the same content area, and work with the same group of students in order to have better outcomes from
RTI and co-teaching support. Certainly, the struggles that teachers face are understandable. At the same time, these challenges can be addressed by administrator involvement hand in hand with teachers. Through teacher interviews, a positive example demonstrated how a special education teacher went above and beyond to support students. She received support from the administrator’s office to assist her throughout the challenges she faced. Administrators were fully aware of what was going on at their school and they strove to serve students as much as possible toward achievement. Success follows when teachers and administrators work hand in hand and believe in a shared educational philosophy. They believe that students should be given the time they require to acquire and comprehend what they need to learn according to their needs.

Small school districts faced more funding issues than larger school districts. A lack of funding significantly impacted the implementation of RTI and co-teaching in a negative way. Special education teachers were spread thin between several general education teachers. Students were not able to attend additional classes after school due to the lack of transportation. Due to a shortage of teachers, teachers were burdened by a plethora of responsibilities beyond meeting the needs of students, such as responding to piles of administrator assigned paperwork. These examples emphasize the significance of preserving and protecting a co-teacher’s time to collaborate and intervene enough to meet learners’ needs.

Moreover, teaching and learning philosophies impacted teachers’ RTI and co-teaching implementation. This finding is based on the comments made by three teachers who shared their positive philosophies of teaching and learning. The researcher noticed that these teachers were caring, loving, and do whatever it takes to support their students to ensure their success. Their philosophy could be seen in their vision of teaching, each combining positivity, hard work, and
belief in their students. Theses teachers can go above and beyond to ensure no one left behind in the learning process.

Speaking of students’ issues, eighty-eight percent of the teachers expressed that some students’ academic performance was significantly lower than their peers in RTI-based co-teaching classrooms. Thus, students’ placement has to be addressed in order to provide appropriate support to all learners. Inappropriate placement leads to struggles and failure not only for students as they try to respond adequately to the interventions provided, but it also limits the teacher’s ability to meet the students’ needs to ensure their success. According to teachers interviewed for this study, their students were placed with them toward earning a high school diploma. This meant they were placed as level one students despite their abilities. This did not serve as the best placement for these students according to their ability. Consequently, students expressed their frustration in the classroom due to their lack of ability to comprehend often intense high school content. One student told the special education teacher interviewed that he had not taken a math class during middle school. According to the teacher, her student confessed, “I just do not get this” expressing his inability to comprehend algebra. She added that the student informed her that the last skills he learned were addition, subtraction, and multiplication, and “now we’re asking him to solve absolute value equations,” she added. Thus, it is necessary for professionals to be involved in the best placement for a student.

Another interesting discovery was the issue of over-support. This takes place when students are supported to the level that one teacher interviewed described as a “spoon feeding.” It is the act of providing what may be seen as too much support to a student with special needs. An example of over-support is when a teacher opens his or her student’s backpack to address homework issues. Some teachers raise concerns about student future after high school when all
supports are pulled out from under them. Thus, teachers must remain alert and sensitive to the level of support provided to students. Teachers should strike a healthy balance between classroom-based student support and helping the students find the tools needed for future independent achievement.

RTI was not implemented to its full potential at the schools where the research took place. A previous study indicated that when RTI is not implemented effectively, the outcomes do not positively affect all students, particularly students served at the third tier who do not show improvement after a year of intensive support (Denton, Fletcher, Anthony, & Francis, 2006).

At Schools B and C, co-teachers were assigned to co-teach with general education teachers based on their background knowledge, expertise, and students’ needs in classrooms. However, at School A, teachers were assigned to co-teach based on grade level, teaching all core subjects. Thus, it could be argued that with the lack of background knowledge, the special education teacher was not a value added to the co-taught classroom environment.

Interestingly, the use of evidence-based practices did not emerge during the teacher interviews, but some evidence-based practices were observed at the time of the observation. The use of evidence-based practices or intervention is a key element of the RTI system. Thus, the researcher may launch an additional investigation into teachers’ experiences of the use of evidence-based practices in their co-taught classrooms where RTI is implemented.

As a result of intense document review, the researcher found that the lack of having a policy for RTI and co-teaching implementation in secondary level caused a backlash for teachers who were trying to do their best to meet learner needs. Many aspects related to these obstacles
were out of their hands. Thus, it is not unreasonable for stakeholders and school administrators not to take action and meet teachers’ needs.

Finally, RTI and co-teaching are two powerful practices which can play a perfect duet if both implemented with fidelity. RTI and co-teaching create a “logical combination for successful systemic change” as Murawski and Hugs (2009) described. By taking into consideration all barriers that teachers shared and addressing them, general and special education teachers will be able to have successful experiences that benefit all learners in the classroom.

**Implications for Practice**

Educators have the opportunity to improve the quality of education through the implementation of RTI and co-teaching. First, due to the lack of documentation available at each school district and in the literature review, stakeholders must develop clear policies and guidance for methods of RTI and co-teaching implementation designed specifically for the secondary level. Not only it is essential to have direction for RTI implementation procedures as well as co-teaching practices guidance, but also, there is need to have a policy of incorporating both practices into one general education classroom at the secondary level. Second, School administrators have to be knowledgeable of both practices in order to support teachers as it should be to assist RTI and co-teaching implementation with fidelity. Third, administrators should take into consideration several aspects before assigning special education teachers to co-taught classrooms. Among these aspects, background knowledge, a good working relationship, number of general educations teachers who will be co-teaching together, and scheduling special education teachers to co-teach based on the department instead of co-teaching across different subjects prove essential in co-teaching effectiveness. Administrators should be consistent when assigning two teachers to co-teach together. They should not change the partner every year.
because that is not helping to build up their relationship and ability to be knowledgeable about the content area. Teachers’ opinions must be kept in mind to ensure the existence of the harmony among co-teachers. Also, for better outcomes of co-teaching and RTI, planning time must be scheduled into the master schedule to provide the teachers appropriate discussion and decision-making time and ensure the effectiveness of both practices. Classroom homogeneity must be considered when scheduling students in a classroom by limiting the class to a realistic number of students with special needs who have IEPs and all students who receive special education services under Section 504 administrators and general education students (Murawski, 2008). Administrators should take into account Murawski and Dieker (2013) warned the Administrators to have 30% of the classroom designated to students with special needs. General and special education teachers will benefit from continuing professional development in addition to PLC. It is recommended that administrators provide a variety of motivational speakers to high school students to teach them to value their education, the services provided to them, and to take advantage of them. Such speakers can encourage students to be ready to become good citizens and independent as they move toward their futures. It would be highly recommended for special education teachers to have a minor in another subject area. It is also necessary for teachers to feel confident and competent enough, to be able to collaborate during the instructional time, have input, and perceive themselves as an added value to the classroom. Similarly, general education teachers need to have special education courses, too, that focus on instructional teaching methods, accommodation, and modification during their teaching preparation in college. Thus, both teachers will be one powerful force that can intervene, teach, assist, and move students toward success.
Limitations

Several limitations impacted the overall finding of the study, including:

1- The finding of the study cannot be generalized due to the small number of participants involved in this qualitative research.

2- Due to the teachers’ schedule, the researcher was not able to observe three teachers during their co-teaching time in general education classroom.

3- The lack of documents related to the incorporation of RTI and co-teaching at the secondary level limited the researcher from reviewing more documents related to the high school level.

4- Some teachers showed hesitation when encouraged to express themselves fully and with confidence regarding their experience (especially related to barriers) limited their ability to express their thoughts clearly about the phenomenon under investigation. This may be the result of their choice to undertake the interview process within their own classroom. It could be argued that the familiar environment may have limited their ability to be more open and talk more about their experience and explain the barriers they have faced.

Questions for Future Studies

Further research could include the following questions:

1- How can administrators improve the incorporation of RTI and co-teaching at the secondary level?

2- What do stakeholders have in plan for policy that would be used to assist RTI and co-teaching implementation at the secondary level?
3- What are high school students’ attitudes toward Response to Intervention support? It is highly important to develop a deep understanding of the reasons behind negative attitudes from students’ perspectives in order to address their issues and allow them to benefit from RTI support.

4- In what ways does the level of administration required to support appropriate RTI implementation at the high school level prove beneficial? The current study showed different levels of administrator involvement throughout RTI implementation by focusing on their roles in relation to the implementation process and how they follow up with schools to ensure smooth implementation for all members involved in the process.

5- The literature would benefit from a qualitative case study to compare the implementation of RTI in high schools. This study showed a positive example of RTI implementation at the high school level.

6- What are stakeholders’ perceptions about and recommendations for better RTI implementation at the high school level? As the current study showed, it is difficult to implement RTI at a high school level. Administrators’ involvement throughout the implementation process can be make the implementation more manageable.

7- During the present study, teachers interviewed did not mention evidence-based practices, even though they used some of them during the observation. Therefore, it would benefit the field to investigate specific instructional quality in more depth through the lens of RTI incorporation into co-taught classrooms in a qualitative study.
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Ross, B. A. NASET LD Report# 25


Appendix A

Human Subject Institutional Review Board Approval
Appendix A

Human Subject Institutional Review Board Approval

Date: April 5, 2018
To: Elizabeth Whitten, Principal Investigator
    Hawazen Alasiri, Student Investigator for dissertation
From: Darylle Gardiner-Borneau, Ph.D., Vice Chair
Re: HSIRB Project Number 18-03-21

This letter will serve as confirmation that your research project titled “Teachers’ Use and Perceptions of the Impact of Response to Intervention (RTI) on Co-Teaching in Secondary Level General Education Classrooms” has been approved under the expedited category of review by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board. The conditions and duration of this approval are specified in the Policies of Western Michigan University. You may now begin to implement the research as described in the application.

Please note: This research may only be conducted exactly in the form it was approved. You must seek specific board approval for any changes in this project (e.g., you must request a post approval change to enroll subjects beyond the number stated in your application under “Number of subjects you want to complete the study”). Failure to obtain approval for changes will result in a protocol deviation. In addition, if there are any unanticipated adverse reactions or unanticipated events associated with the conduct of this research, you should immediately suspend the project and contact the Chair of the HSIRB for consultation.

Reapproval of the project is required if it extends beyond the termination date stated below.

The Board wishes you success in the pursuit of your research goals.

Approval Termination: April 4, 2019
Appendix B

Observation Checklist
## Appendix B

### Observation Checklist

### Observation Components Checklist

Teachers name: ______________________  Subject: ______________________  Grade: ______

School: ___________________________  Time: ______   Date: _________________

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Observation Components/Essentials</th>
<th>Present/Yes</th>
<th>Not present/No</th>
<th>Notes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Highly qualified teachers deliver instruction.</td>
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<td>2. Support is provided to all students.</td>
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<td>3. Teachers use research-based instruction.</td>
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<td>4. Teachers use several evidence-based instructional strategies.</td>
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<td>5. Teachers use differentiated instruction.</td>
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<td>6. Teachers use large group instruction in general education classroom.</td>
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<td>7. Teachers use flexible small group instruction in general education classroom.</td>
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<td>8. Instruction is based on student need.</td>
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<td>10. Interventions are taught by the general/special education teacher.</td>
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<td>11. Interventions are taught by a specialist as a part of RTI team.</td>
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<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Tier I instruction was observed in general ed classroom</td>
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<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>Tier II instruction was observed in general ed classroom</td>
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<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>Two professional teachers work in one classroom.</td>
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<td>15.</td>
<td>Both professionals work collaboratively</td>
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<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>Both teachers were in the classroom for entire period</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td>All students were supported by both teachers.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.</td>
<td>Both teachers were responsible for students’ behavioral management.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.</td>
<td>One co-teaching model was used.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.</td>
<td>More than one co-teaching model was used.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22.</td>
<td>It is easy to determine who is the special ed teacher and the general ed teacher (Murawski &amp; Lochner, 2011)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23.</td>
<td>It is easy to determine who are the special ed students and the general ed students (Murawski &amp; Lochner, 2011)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Additional notes:
Appendix C

Interview Protocol
Appendix C

Interview Protocol

Project: Teachers’ use and perceptions of the impact of Response to Intervention (RTI) on co-teaching at the secondary level general education classrooms

Time/Date of interview:
Location:
Interviewee:
Interviewer:

Thank you for consenting to participate in this study. The interview will be recorded. You can stop the interview and the recording at any time.

Before we start the interview, I would like to introduce the co-teaching and Response to Intervention definitions

- Response to Intervention RTI refers to multi-tier approach, prevention, identification and support system for students who are at risk for poor learning outcomes or behavioral problems. RTI tiers allow for the provision of services for all students regardless of their needs (Center on Response to Intervention, 2007).
- Co-teaching refers to two professional, certified teachers working together (usually a general education teacher and special education teacher) sharing the responsibility of delivering instruction for all students in general classrooms, including students with special needs, using flexible approaches to meet individuals’ needs (Friend, 2008).

Interview Questions

Please introduce yourself, and include your name, level of education, special or general education expertise, specialty area, experience with Response to Intervention (RTI), experience working as a co-teacher, your role as a partner in the classroom, and the grade level(s) you have taught and are currently teaching.

11. How does RTI benefit your ability to work collaboratively with your colleague?
12. How does RTI benefit the instructional quality of your co-taught classrooms?
13. How do you employ RTI in your co-teaching practices to benefit your students’ academic and behavioral success?
14. It is essential that administrators provide support to co-teachers incorporating RTI into their co-taught classrooms. In what ways does administrators support benefit you as an RTI-practicing co-teacher?
15. What barriers have you faced throughout the implementation of RTI?

16. Are there any barriers related to RTI and co-teaching which lead to failure of student academic and behavioral success?

17. Do you believe that there are students who are too low for co-teaching? In other words, that their performances are significantly lower than their peers to successfully participate in your RTI-based co-teaching practices?

18. In what ways does administrators’ support or lack of support cause barriers to you as an RTI-practicing co-teacher?

19. From your perspective, how can co-teaching make Response to Intervention (RTI) more efficient in general classrooms?

20. Overall, do you believe RTI has a positive or negative impact? Please explain how and why.

Thank you for participating. If necessary, may I contact you to clarify some of your responses?
Appendix D
Informed Consent
Appendix D
Informed Consent

Western Michigan University
Department of Special Education and Literacy Studies
Principal Investigator: Dr. Elizabeth Whitten, Ph.D.
Student Investigator: Hawazen Alasiri

Title of Study: Teachers’ use and perceptions of the impact of Response to Intervention (RTI) on co-teaching at the secondary level general education classrooms.

You have been invited to participate in a research project titled “Teachers’ use and perceptions of the impact of Response to Intervention (RTI) on co-teaching at the secondary level general education classrooms.” This project will serve as Hawazen Alasiri’s dissertation research for the requirements of doctoral degree in special education. This consent document will explain the purpose of this research and will go over all of the time commitments, the procedures used in the study, and the risks and benefits of participating in this research project. Please read this consent form carefully and completely and please ask any questions if you need more clarification.

What are we trying to find out in this study?
The goal of this study is to explore, describe, and interpret the lived experiences of co-teachers including general and special education teachers who have co-teaching experience in general classrooms where Response to Intervention (RTI) implemented, meaning integrating special education students into their classroom, which includes how RTI is integrated and employed. The research focuses on the benefits and barriers of co-teaching in general classrooms.

Who can participate in this study?
You can participate in this study if you are a general or special education teacher with at least one year of co-teaching experience teaching students with special needs in a general education classroom, at the secondary level specifically grades 9 to 12, where RTI is implemented.

Where will this study take place?
The interviews will be conducted in a private, safe, comfortable place based on the convenience of the researcher and participant.

What is the time commitment for participating in this study?
The total amount of time for the interview will be approximately 45-60 minutes. During that time, the researcher will engage you in a conversation about your experiences with and perspectives on the impacts of RTI and its benefits and barriers on co-teaching in general classrooms. You will have an opportunity to review the transcript of your interview and clarify or add to the transcript if you feel you want to explain more. Also you will asked to be observed for one class period during co-teaching.

What will you be asked to do if you choose to participate in this study?

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If you agree to participate, you will be asked to take part in a 45-60 minutes interview with the researcher. During that interview, you will be asked to answer different in-depth, open-ended questions. You will also be asked to share your thoughts and attitudes toward your perceptions of the impact of RTI on your co-teaching experience. The interview will be recorded and later transcribed. You will be provided with a copy of your transcript to add or clarify whatever you feel necessary.

**What information is being measured during the study?**
Semi-structured, in-depth, open-ended question-based interviews will be used to collect data, and the data will be analyzed using a qualitative method. The interview will contain questions designed for general and special education teachers who have co-teaching experience in general classrooms, where RTI implemented. Your interview transcript will be compared with those of other study participants to come up with some common themes in which teachers’ perceptions differ from one another. The information will not include your name or other identity information that could be attributed back to you.

**What are the risks of participating in this study and how will these risks be minimized?**
There is no known risk for your participation this study. The topic requires you to share your attitudes about and perceptions toward RTI impact on co-teaching. At your request, the researcher will stop the interview at any time and for any reason. The participant has the right to stop the interview under any circumstance with no penalty.

**What are the benefits of participating in this study?**
There are no direct benefits to you for participating in this study. This study has been established to interpret some co-teacher perceptions of the impact of Response to Intervention (RTI) on co-teaching. This study may serve as a resource for stakeholders who can address the barriers that teachers face in an inclusive environment. Through this study, special and general education teachers may find valuable knowledge and guidance for use in their inclusive classrooms. This study may benefit the special education field by adding more awareness of co-teachers’ needs and perceptions toward RTI impacts on co-teaching, which may help inclusion to be a successful placement for all learners.

**Are there any costs associated with participating in this study?**
There will be no monetary cost for participation.

**Is there any compensation for participating in this study?**
There will be no compensation for participation.

**Who will have access to the information collected during this study?**
The principal investigator and student investigator are the only people who will have access to the collected information. The data will be saved and stored in a locked computer file. After the interview recording is transcribed, the researcher will destroy the recording files. All information will be treated with high confidentiality. You will be assigned an alternative name (of your choice) to protect your identity.

**What if you want to stop participating in this study?**
You can choose to stop participating in the study at any time for any reason. You will not suffer any prejudice or penalty by your decision to stop your participation. There will be no consequences either academically or personally if you choose to stop participation. The investigator can also decide to stop your participation in the study without your consent.

Should you have any questions prior to or during the study, please contact the student investigator at 269-548-6365 or via email hawazenahmadm.alasiri@wmich.edu, or call the primary investigator, Dr. Elizabeth Whitten at (269)-387-5940, or contact her via email elizabeth.whitten@wmich.edu. You may also contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board at 269-387-8293 or the Vice President for Research at 269-387-8298 if questions arise during the course of the study.

This consent document has been approved for use for one year by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (HSIRB) as indicated by the stamped date and signature of the board chair in the upper right corner. Do not participate in this study if the stamped date is older than one year.

I have read this informed consent document. The risks and benefits have been explained to me. I agree to take part in this study.

Please print your name

Participant’s signature Date
Appendix E

Letter of Invitation to Directors of Special Education
Appendix E

Letter of Invitation to Directors of Special Education

Date:

Dear,

I am writing this letter to request your permission to invite co-teachers in Kalamazoo Public Schools to participate in my dissertation research study titled “Teachers’ use and perceptions of the impact of Response to Intervention (RTI) on co-teaching in secondary level general education classrooms”. I am interested in interviewing 8 general and special education teachers with co-teaching experience at the secondary level, specifically working with students in grades 9-12 in general classrooms where RTI is implemented. Will you help me find potential participants for this study? Would you be willing to reach out to your school administrators to provide me with contact information, whereby I might provide a recruitment letter featuring advisement and details of this opportunity via email?

The purpose of the study explores teachers’ use of and perceptions about the impacts, of Response to Intervention (RTI) on co-teaching as an instructional strategy to meet students with disabilities’ needs in general classrooms. This study seeks to identify the benefits of RTI incorporation into co-teaching. Moreover, the study intends to explore barriers that teachers face during the implementation of RTI in co-taught classrooms, which may impact the quality and effectiveness of co-teaching practices in general classrooms.

The participants will be permitted to choose the interview location, at their convenient. The interviews will take 45-60 minutes. Each participant will be asked open-ended questions and interviews will be audio recorded. The interviews will not occur during school hours. Teachers will sign a voluntary consent form and be informed of the research study purpose, confidentiality aspects, and any participant questions will be addressed. Confidentiality of the participants and the school district will be respected. The school district and teachers will be assigned pseudonyms to protect their identities. I appreciate your consideration of my request to help locate research study candidates and possible contribution to the research study.

Sincerely,

Hawazen Alasiri

Doctoral Candidate

Special Education Department and Literacy Studies

Western Michigan University
Appendix F

Interview Invitation Letter to Teachers
Appendix F

Interview Invitation Letter to Teachers

Dear teachers,

My name is Hawazen Alasiri, a doctoral student from the Special Education Department and Literacy Studies at Western Michigan University. I am conducting a research study, which is a part of my dissertation titled "Teachers’ use and perceptions of the impact of Response to Intervention (RTI) on co-teaching in secondary level general education classrooms".

It is a phenomenological study which is designed to investigate co-teacher perceptions of the impact of Response to Intervention (RTI) on co-teaching as an instructional strategy to meet students with disabilities’ needs in general classrooms. This study seeks to identify RTI benefits and barriers that teachers face during the implementation of co-teaching, which may impact the quality and effectiveness of co-teaching practices in their classrooms. Moreover, the study seeks to explore teachers’ use of and perceptions toward Response to Intervention incorporation into co-teaching.

Study participants must meet the following criteria:

- Be a general or special education teacher with co-teaching experience
- Co-teaching experience with secondary level students, specifically grades 9 to 12
- Have co-teaching experience in an inclusive setting where Response to Intervention is implemented.
- Agree to be recorded (audio taped).

The study will take place at WMU in Kalamazoo. Interviews will be conducted on campus in a private conference room, or in a safe, comfortable room based on the participant’s and researcher’s convenience. The interview process takes from 45-60 minutes. Your identity will remain confidential and participants will be known using alternative names based on your choice.

If you are interested in learning more about participating in this research study, please contact:

Dr. Elizabeth Whitten, principal investigator, WMU Special Education and Literacy Studies
Email: elizabeth.whitten@wmich.edu
Cell phone: (269) 387-5940

Hawazen Alasiri, Research Assistant: Ed. candidate in special education, concentration: Learning Disabilities.
email: hawazenahmadm.alasiri@wmich.edu
Cell phone: (269) 548-6365

If you have questions regarding the HSIRB approval letter, you can contact the researchers, or the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board at (269) 387-8293.

Thank you for considering this request. Your cooperation would be highly appreciated.
Appendix G

Observation Invitation Letter to Teachers
Appendix G

Observation Invitation Letter to Teachers

Dear…

I want to thank you again for your participation in my interview process. The quality of your responses and the themes they helped me identify added real value to the study.

As an important step in my study, I would be grateful for the chance to conduct an observation of your co-teaching practice. Observation of your lived experience with co-teaching will help me better disseminate insights drawn from your interviews and further strengthen the study findings. This will help ensure the accuracy of the interview outcomes as well. I am seeking your agreement to come and observe you during co-teaching. The observation will require only time period.

The observation is connected to my dissertation research study titled “Teachers’ use and perceptions of the impact of Response to Intervention (RTI) on co-teaching in secondary level general education classrooms”

Thank you so much for your time. I look forward to sharing the study results with you after my defense in Summer I 2019.

Sincerely,

Hawazen
Appendix H

Data Trustworthiness Letter
Appendix H

Data Trustworthiness Letter

Dear, ….

I want to thank you again for your participation in my interview process. The quality of your responses and the themes they helped me identify added real value to the study. Attached to this email, please find a copy of your transcript for your review and a brief note about the themes.

As an important voice in my study, you are given the opportunity to examine your interview transcription and to review the major and common themes that emerged. This will help ensure the accuracy of the study outcomes.

This essential step is taken because interpretation of the data must be reliable and trustworthy. Marshall and Rossman (2014) indicated that “in qualitative inquiry, where the researcher is “the instrument,” calling herself “reliable” isn’t enough. Instead we distinguish the traits that make us personally “credible” and ensure that our interpretations of the data are “trustworthy” (P.44). In other words, it is not enough for me alone to claim accuracy of the data—my participants must also be informed of and able to review the data collected.

I would appreciate your prompt review of your transcription, for I await your reply before I may start the data analysis. You may add or change any of your responses if you would like to; just make those changes using a different text color. If you like what I sent to you as it is, just email me back with “APPROVED”.

Thank you so much for your time. I look forward to sharing the study results with you after my defense in spring 2019.

Sincerely,

Hawazen