

# **Foundation phase teachers' viewpoints on the viability of response to intervention in their school context**

**Miché Conway**

**2020**

# **Foundation phase teachers' viewpoints on the viability of response to intervention in their school context**

by

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Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree

## **MAGISTER EDUCATIONIS**

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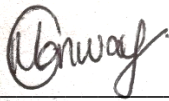
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**APRIL 2020**

## DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

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I, Miché Conway (student number 25144813), declare that the dissertation, which I hereby submit for the degree Magister Educationis in Educational Psychology at the University of Pretoria, is my own work and has not been previously submitted by me for any degree at this or any other tertiary institution.



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Miché Conway

April 2020

## ETHICS CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE



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Faculty of Education

### RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

**CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE**

CLEARANCE NUMBER:

EP 18/07/01

**DEGREE AND PROJECT**

MEd

Foundation phase teachers' viewpoints on the viability of response to intervention in their school context

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**APPROVAL TO COMMENCE STUDY**

21 August 2018

**DATE OF CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE**

16 March 2020

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**CC**

Ms Bronwynne Swarts

Dr Suzanne Bester

This Ethics Clearance Certificate should be read in conjunction with the Integrated Declaration Form (D08) which specifies details regarding:

- Compliance with approved research protocol,
- No significant changes,
- Informed consent/assent,
- Adverse experience or undue risk,
- Registered title, and
- Data storage requirements.

## ETHICS STATEMENT

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The author, whose name appears on the title page of this dissertation, has obtained, for the research described in this work, the applicable research ethics approval. The author declares that she has observed the ethical standards required in terms of the University of Pretoria's *Code of ethics for researchers and the Policy guidelines for responsible research*.



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Miché Conway

April 2020

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I would not have achieved this significant milestone in my life without the support of significant role-players that guided me in this venture. I would like to express my sincerest gratitude to the following people who contributed towards me completing this mini-dissertation:

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## ABSTRACT

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### Foundation phase teachers' viewpoints on the viability of response to intervention in their school context

by

**Miché Conway**

Supervisor: Dr Suzanne Bester

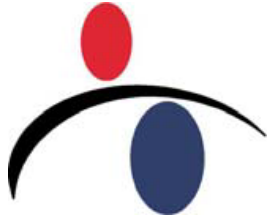
Degree: M. Ed. (Educational Psychology)

The purpose of this exploratory case study was to explore and describe foundation phase teachers' viewpoints on the viability of response to intervention (RTI) in their school context. The conceptual framework supporting this study was guided by sociocultural and social constructivist perspectives on learning and included the concepts of *mediation*, *zone of proximal development*, *scaffolding* and *differentiated instruction* which are concepts that underpin an RTI approach. Guided by an interpretivist paradigm, this qualitative case study provided insight into the viewpoints of nine foundation phase teachers on whether they believed an RTI approach could be viable within their own school context. The findings suggest that the participants envision numerous challenges in the implementation of RTI in their school context. They believe that a lack of resources and challenges associated with the curriculum could potentially prevent the effective implementation of RTI components and therefore decrease the viability of RTI in their school context. The participants believe that if certain challenges, such as a lack of time and a lack of qualified teaching staff, could be addressed and overcome, then an RTI approach could become viable in their school context. They believe an effective RTI implementation could yield benefits associated with improved overall learning in the classroom. Furthermore, the participants believe that RTI could potentially result in a reduced need for financial resources to pay for referrals to learner support specialists, which they currently perceive as a challenge in their learner support practices.

Key words:

- Response to intervention
- Foundation phase teachers
- Differentiated instruction
- Learning difficulties
- Diagnostic measure
- Inclusive education
- Learner support
- Dynamic assessment

## DECLARATION – LANGUAGE EDITOR



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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 INTRODUCTION AND RATIONALE

In South Africa, the Department of Education (DoE) envisions that high-quality education is provided equally to all learners regardless of whether learners experience barriers to learning or not (Department of Basic Education [DBE], 2010a; Department of Education [DoE], 2002). Adopting a philosophy of inclusivity, the Department of Basic Education (DBE) aims to avoid the unnecessary placement of learners in special schools by trying to develop and enable mainstream schools to be inclusive and to accommodate individual learner needs (DBE, 2014). Despite inclusive education policies, teachers are experiencing challenges in implementing inclusive practices. Specific challenges reported include the lack of clear, detailed, practical approaches to identify and support learners with learning difficulties (Donohue & Bornman, 2014; Geldenhuys & Wevers, 2013; Du Plessis & Marais, 2015; Nel et al., 2011; Nel et al., 2016; Ladbrook, 2009).

Internationally, response to intervention (RTI) has been recognised as a useful and practical approach in assisting teachers with the identification and support of learners who experience learning difficulties in inclusive education (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2007). RTI, as an approach to assessment and intervention, aims to address learning difficulties early on to prevent the onset of more substantial learning challenges for learners (Vaughn & Fuchs, 2003). As a form of dynamic assessment (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2007), RTI uses assessment and intervention strategies dynamically to inform decisions regarding instructional support for individual learners' needs (Bouwer, 2016). Frequent screening and progress monitoring within the RTI process can potentially inform and improve teaching practices to accommodate for all learner needs (Vaughn & Fuchs, 2003).

Emerging evidence suggests that RTI may be effective in the early identification and support of learners with learning difficulties and also has the potential to improve the learning outcomes of all learners in inclusive education contexts (Fox et al., 2010; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006; Fuchs et al., 2003; Greenfield et al., 2010; Hughes & Dexter, n.d.; Hughes & Dexter, 2011; Jimerson et al., 2016; Murray et al., 2010; O'Connor et al., 2005; Van Der Heyden et al., 2007; Wise, 2017). Furthermore, RTI potentially offers a more accurate approach than the IQ-discrepancy model to identifying learning disabilities and thereby avoids inappropriate referrals to special education (Fuchs, Fuchs & Vaughn, 2014). Numerous policies, professional organisations and advocacy groups in the USA have provided support for the implementation of RTI and its viability in improving learners' outcomes in education (Greenwood et al., 2011).

The aforementioned evidence suggests the potential benefit of implementing RTI in South Africa. Such an approach could similarly assist teachers in South Africa to effectively identify

and support learners with learning difficulties in inclusive education. RTI could additionally assist in the appropriate referral of learners to special education services and avoid the unnecessary placement of learners in special schools. Furthermore, RTI's systematic approach in frequently collecting data on learners' progress (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006), could potentially be used to support the implementation of the Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (SIAS) policy in South Africa (DBE, 2014).

International research suggests that although teachers believe RTI yields potential benefits for the education system, the implementation thereof has been problematic and challenging (Greenfield et al., 2010; Murphy, 2015). Teachers believe that contributing challenges to the implementation of RTI include: a lack of resources to implement such a model; a lack of knowledge on how to implement an RTI model; a lack of evidence-based curricula and intervention strategies necessary for the model; and a lack of sufficiently trained school personnel to implement RTI (Greenwood et al., 2011). These findings suggest that systemic variables need to be carefully considered for the effective implementation of RTI and its consequent potential benefits of improving learners' academic performances (Tyre et al., 2012).

As a relatively new concept internationally, RTI literature is by no means complete and research exploring its implementation is still emerging (Greenfield et al., 2010; Hughes & Dexter, 2011). Due to this early stage of RTI research, there are currently no research efforts related to RTI and its implementation in a South African context. The rationale to conduct this research study was therefore to initiate research on RTI in a South African context due to the potential benefits RTI may have for the education system. In order to initiate research efforts on RTI, the unique features of a school system need to be considered (Fuchs & Deshler, 2007; Tyre et al., 2012). Since teachers have a central role in implementing inclusive education in school systems (Forlin et al., 2010), exploring their viewpoints on the viability of RTI presented a feasible starting point for this research study.

Furthermore, RTI was initially developed for implementation in the earlier grades (in the USA classified as kindergarten through to third grade) (Fuchs & Vaughn, 2012). The premise behind an RTI approach lies on early intervention to prevent the onset of more substantial learning difficulties which can hinder later development (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2007; Fuchs & Deshler, 2007; Greenwood et al., 2011). This premise, therefore, provides strong support for RTI's implementation in the foundation phase (Grades R - 3) in South African education. It was consequently important for this research study to explore foundation phase teachers' viewpoints as they would presumably have the relevant teaching experience to add valuable insight into the viability of RTI in inclusive foundation phase classrooms. Furthermore, the viewpoints of teachers are argued by Greenfield et al. (2010) as being a crucial component if

any efforts for school reform are to be effective. The beliefs and perceived skills of teachers play a vital role in effectively implementing new practices such as RTI (Castillo et al., 2015).

## **1.2 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of this exploratory case study was to explore and describe foundation phase teachers' viewpoints on the viability of response to intervention (RTI) in their school context. For the purposes of this study, RTI was generally defined as “a framework for providing high-quality instruction and intervention matched to students' individual needs” (Reutebuch, 2008, p. 126). RTI generally relies on high-quality classroom instruction within an inclusive education classroom; frequent assessment and monitoring of individual learners' progress and growth; and specialised, research-based interventions which are differentiated to meet individual learner needs (Ardoin et al., 2005).

## **1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

### **1.3.1 Primary Research Question**

The primary research question of this study is: “What are foundation phase teachers' viewpoints on the viability of response to intervention in their school context?”

### **1.3.2 Secondary Research Questions**

The study also posed the following sub-questions:

- How viable do teachers in this study believe RTI is in their school context?
- What strengths or benefits do teachers in this study believe can come from implementing RTI in their school context?
- What challenges do the teachers in this study foresee with the implementation of RTI in their school context?

## **1.4 WORKING ASSUMPTIONS**

This study was based on the following assumptions:

- Foundation phase teachers will be able to understand what RTI entails when presented with the relevant information about RTI during a semi-structured interview.
- Foundation phase teachers will be able to describe their viewpoints regarding the viability of implementing RTI in their school context when provided with the relevant information about RTI.
- Based on research, RTI is an intervention strategy that will not harm learners and which could promote inclusive practices.



## 1.5 CONCEPT CLARIFICATION

Response to Intervention (RTI) underpins the focus of this research study. Since it is a relatively new concept, many people in a South African context may not be familiar with it. As such, RTI is clarified in this section.

RTI typically refers to a multi-tiered instructional approach which relies on the frequent assessment of learner abilities and the adjustment of instruction and intervention according to individual learner needs (Castro-Villarreal et al., 2014). For this study, I refer to a three-tiered model of RTI which is currently most commonly implemented and researched (Castro-Villarreal et al., 2014). The three *tiers* refer to the different levels of instruction and intervention provided within an RTI process (Gersten et al., 2008).

The first tier of RTI includes high-quality, scientifically based classroom instruction provided by a teacher in a general classroom setting (Gersten et al., 2008). During this tier, systematic, universal screening and progress monitoring is used to obtain information about a learner's level of achievement and learning rate to assist in the identification of learners who require further assistance to learning (Castro-Villarreal et al., 2014).

Tier 2 provides targeted interventions for learners who are unable to make adequate progress and meet the suggested outcomes in response to the instruction provided in Tier 1 (Castro-Villarreal et al., 2014). These interventions generally consist of small-group interventions (Fuchs & Vaughn, 2012), and are more intensive and specialised than instruction in Tier 1. Tier 2 interventions function as additional support beyond the core curriculum (Fox et al., 2010). Learners who continue to experience challenges and do not progress sufficiently at this level of intervention are then considered to require more intensive and individualised interventions which comprise of Tier 3 (Castro-Villarreal et al., 2014).

Tier 3 provides learners with more intensive and individualised interventions usually entailing a variety of instructional approaches to address individual learner needs (Gersten et al., 2008). If the learner does not indicate progress during these interventions, then referral for a comprehensive evaluation for possible special education services is necessary (Gersten et al., 2008). Comprehensive evaluations, along with data collected during the RTI process, are then used to make decisions regarding the referral of learners to special education services (Gersten et al., 2008). RTI is discussed in more detail in Chapter 2.

## 1.6 INTRODUCING THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK SUPPORTING THE STUDY

The conceptual framework for this research study is guided by sociocultural and social constructivist perspectives on learning. It includes the following concepts: *mediation*, *zone of proximal development*, *scaffolding* and *differentiated instruction*. Theorists such as Vygotsky and Feuerstein have contributed towards the development of socio-cultural and social

constructivist theories of learning which highlight the reciprocal role that teachers and learners take in facilitating the learning process (Feuerstein, Hoffman, & Miller, 1979; Vygotsky, 1978).

In Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, learning is believed to be the result of a social process whereby it is mediated by others and by the cultural context within which it takes place. Similarly, Feuerstein's theory of mediation and mediated learning experiences (Feuerstein et al., 1979) highlights the importance of the role of a mediator, being a more skilled individual, who engages in a reciprocal learning relationship with the learners in an attempt to modify or improve their cognitive abilities (Grigorenko, 2009). The construct of mediation supports the guiding principles of an RTI approach.

Vygotsky's (1978) zone of proximal development (ZPD) is another construct providing support for an RTI approach. The ZPD indicates the distance between what learners can learn by themselves and what learners can achieve when given some assistance from adults (Kanevsky & Geake, 2004; Vygotsky, 1978). This construct supports the premise of inclusive education and the principles supporting RTI approaches by assuming that all learners have the potential to learn with appropriate instruction and intervention strategies which are tailored to individual learner needs. ZPD provides for the assumption that the improvement of cognitive skills can be achieved within a context of scaffolding which assumes that skills, knowledge and competencies are initially acquired by learners through their interaction with experienced others (Grigorenko, 2009).

Within the process of RTI, a differentiated instruction model is promoted as an instructional guide to facilitate the improvement of learners' cognitive abilities in the learning process (Subban, 2006). Differentiated instruction accounts for a teacher, being a trained mentor, to use appropriate instructional techniques to facilitate the learner's development towards their learning potential (Tomlinson, 2004). The construct *differentiated instruction* provides support for the construct of *tiered instruction* which underpins RTI.

The conceptual framework supporting this research study is discussed in more detail in Chapter 2.

## **1.7 OVERVIEW OF THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

Table 1.1 provides an overview of the underlying paradigm and research approach guiding this research study. The table also outlines the research process and includes a summary of the following: the research questions; the research design; the selection of case and research participants; data generation; data documentation; data analysis and interpretation; criteria and strategies to ensure trustworthiness; and ethical considerations.

The research methodology, approach and process is discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.

**Table 1.1**

<b>Overview of research methodology, approach and process</b>							
<b>RESEARCH QUESTIONS</b>							
<b>Primary research question</b>							
What are foundation phase teachers' viewpoints on the viability of response to intervention in their school context?							
<b>Secondary research questions</b>							
How viable do teachers in this study believe RTI is in their school context?							
What strengths or benefits do teachers in this study believe can come from implementing RTI in their school context?							
What challenges do the teachers in this study foresee with the implementation of RTI in their school context?							
<b>OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH METHODOLOGY, APPROACH AND PROCESS</b>							
Paradigm and research approach	Research design	Selection of case and participants	Data Generation	Data documentation	Data analysis and interpretation	Trustworthiness of the study	Ethical considerations
- Interpretivism - Qualitative research	- Single, exploratory case study design.	- Purposive and convenient selection of case. - Purposive selection of participants.	- Semi-structured, focus group interview. - Follow-up interview.	- Audio data documentation - Field notes - Reflective Journal	- Inductive thematic analysis following phases prescribed by Braun and Clarke (2006).	- Credibility - Transferability - Dependability - Confirmability - Authenticity	- Ethical clearance to conduct research. - Permission to conduct research at site. - Voluntary participation and informed consent. - Privacy, confidentiality and anonymity. - Respect, integrity and truthfulness.

## 1.8 CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I introduced the study, providing the rationale behind the study as well as the purpose of the study. The chapter includes the research questions and the conceptual framework guiding the study as well as key conceptual clarifications of the study. The chapter furthermore provides an overview of the research methodology, approach and process followed throughout the study.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

The chapter commences with an overview of inclusive education practices and policies that guide planning, organisation and teaching at all schools in South Africa. Such an overview contextualises the necessity for effective and appropriate teaching, assessment and support practices which address the individual needs of all learners, regardless of the type of learning difficulty or disability they may face. The chapter then focuses on the challenges experienced by teachers in implementing inclusive education policies which guide the identification and support of learners with barriers to learning. Such a discussion highlights the necessity for a practical approach to assist teachers in optimising the learning achievements of all learners, including those with learning difficulties, in inclusive education environments.

The chapter continues by introducing RTI and exploring it as an approach which can potentially provide teachers with a comprehensive framework to effectively teach, assess and support all learners within inclusive educational contexts in South Africa. The potential advantages of implementing RTI are explored, and reference is made to evidence from international studies that have found RTI to be effective in improving learning outcomes and supporting the process of special education referrals. Such evidence indicates the potential value of implementing RTI in South Africa; however, limitations to its implementation also need to be addressed to provide a holistic understanding of RTI. Therefore, the chapter continues with a discussion on the limitations of RTI as explored in international studies. The rationale behind further research into the viability of RTI in South Africa is discussed with reference to the fact that current research is predominantly internationally based. The chapter continues by explaining the importance of commencing research efforts in South Africa by exploring foundation phase teachers' viewpoints on the viability of RTI in their school context.

The chapter concludes by discussing the conceptual framework underlying this research study. Social constructivist learning theory is briefly discussed and concepts such as: *zone of proximal development*; *scaffolding*; *mediation*; and *differentiated instruction* are integrated into a conceptual framework for RTI.

#### 2.2 EDUCATIONAL INCLUSION IN SOUTH AFRICA

Educational reform has been the driving force behind the development of several policies in a post-apartheid South Africa (Gumede & Biyase, 2016). Following an international trend, the DoE has adopted a philosophy of inclusivity which should inherently guide planning, organisation and teaching at all schools in the country (DBE, 2010a; DoE, 2002). A philosophy

of inclusive education requires that high-quality education is provided equally to all learners and that the diversity of learners is responded to effectively (Swart & Pettipher, 2016).

Inclusive education prevents the segregation of learners according to varying abilities (Swart & Pettipher, 2016) and as such, the DBE avoids the unnecessary placement of learners in special schools (DBE, 2014). An inclusive philosophy aims to develop and enable mainstream schools to become more inclusive in accommodating diverse learner needs to ensure no learner is excluded from the learning process (DBE, 2014; DoE, 2001). Inclusive education classrooms therefore require teachers to identify learners experiencing barriers to learning and to provide such learners with appropriate support interventions to ensure they access learning fully in order to reach their individual learning potential (DoE, 2001; Swart & Pettipher, 2016). To achieve this goal, teachers need to employ appropriate teaching and assessment strategies which include the use of curriculum differentiation techniques (DBE, 2010b; DBE, 2010c); adaptations to the learning environment; and differentiation in assessment methods (Bouwer, 2016; Wium & Louw, 2015). The role of instruction and assessment is vital in helping teachers to identify learners with barriers to learning; to select appropriate learning support interventions; and to make appropriate decisions regarding referrals to special education services (Bouwer, 2016).

To advance these aims of inclusivity, policies such as the Education White Paper 6 on Special Needs Education (EWP6); the Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support Policy (SIAS); and the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS) have been developed. Despite the implementation of the aforementioned policies, the vision of inclusive education has not yet been fully achieved (DBE, 2010b, Nel et al., 2014; Wium & Louw, 2015). Many learners experiencing learning difficulties or disabilities are being retained, drop out of high school, are being unnecessarily placed in special education or lose confidence in their abilities (Rossi & Stuart, 2007).

The limited number of Special Schools as Resource Centres (SSRCs) available within all school districts contributes to challenges for learners to access appropriate support services (Nel & Grosser, 2016). Many learners with learning disabilities need to be accommodated in mainstream schools and with a lack of resource centres in every district, many mainstream schools are unable to access additional support resources for such learners. (Nel & Grosser, 2016). Such learners, requiring additional learning support, are then often required to pay for additional class assistants or extra remedial services (HRW, 2015). Limited financial resources may therefore result in these learners not being able to access additional learning support services and accordingly may be prevented from accessing optimal learning experiences.

Another potential reason contributing to the poor implementation of inclusive education has been identified as a lack of detail and clarity on the means through which the goals for inclusion

can be achieved (Donohue & Bornman, 2014). Although the EWP6 outlines a clear goal to identify learners with learning difficulties early on (DoE, 2001), policies lack practical and specific strategies on how to accomplish this (Donohue & Bornman, 2014). Geldenhuys and Wevers (2013) found that teachers did not perceive CAPS as supporting the EWP6 as it lacked the necessary guidelines or structure to promote curriculum and assessment differentiation as endorsed by the EWP6 (Geldenhuys & Wevers, 2013). Consequently, teachers indicated that they seldomly use alternative assessment approaches and do not differentiate teaching techniques to respond to diverse learning needs (Geldenhuys & Wevers, 2013). Du Plessis and Marais (2015) similarly found that teachers in their study believed that CAPS lacks detail on how teachers can adjust and improve teaching and assessment activities to optimise learning.

In a study by Nel et al. (2016), teachers also reported that a lack of practical strategies prevents them from effectively supporting learners with learning difficulties. Ladbrook (2009) reported that primary school teachers have a limited understanding of how the curriculum could be adapted to support learners and that teachers and management believe learners are achieving lower levels of competencies within the current curriculum. Findings furthermore reveal that although many teachers attempt to fulfil the technical requirements of assessments, as outlined in CAPS, assessments rarely result in constructive feedback and targeted interventions (Umalusi, 2009). Teachers often experience challenges in understanding how to use assessment results to guide differential teaching techniques and to respond to diverse learning needs (Du Plessis & Marais, 2015; Geldenhuys & Wevers, 2013; Kanjee & Molo, 2014).

Challenges are furthermore being experienced with the implementation of SIAS documents (Du Plessis, 2013). Geldenhuys and Wevers (2013) revealed that teachers lack an understanding of their responsibilities and roles regarding the SIAS process and do not often comply with the SIAS strategy. Most teachers struggle to follow SIAS guidelines in identifying learners with barriers to learning and are furthermore unable to sufficiently follow procedures to support such learners or access the necessary support structures (Nel & Grosser, 2016). When supportive processes offered by the DBE are not accessed, many schools and parents that have the financial capability often consult with private health care professionals to assist with support services (Nel & Grosser, 2016). These services are typically expensive and not as easily accessed by schools and learners from poorer socio-economic backgrounds.

Based on aforementioned evidence, there appears to be a need for a structured, practical approach to guide teachers in their teaching and assessment approaches to support individual learner needs appropriately. RTI is a structured approach to assessment and intervention that offers the potential to assist teachers in inclusive education classrooms.

### 2.3 RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION (RTI) AS A POTENTIAL PRACTICAL APPROACH TO ASSIST IN THE IDENTIFICATION AND SUPPORT OF LEARNERS WITH LEARNING DIFFICULTIES

RTI is a promising approach for assessment and intervention which has been implemented internationally and which holds the potential to improve learning outcomes of all learners in inclusive educational settings (Fuchs et al., 2003; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006; Fox et al., 2010; Hughes & Dexter, n.d.; Hughes & Dexter, 2011; Jimerson et al., 2016). RTI has been a driving force of educational reform in the United States of America (USA) by being integrated into the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA, 2004). The integration of RTI into this policy has resulted in all 50 American states permitting the use of RTI in the identification of learning disabilities and referrals to special education (Fuchs & Vaughn, 2012). Numerous policies, professional organisations and advocacy groups in the USA support the implementation of RTI and its viability in improving learners' outcomes in early childhood (Greenwood et al., 2011).

RTI is an approach to assessment and intervention that offers an alternative method to the IQ-achievement discrepancy model for identifying learners with learning disabilities (Fuchs, Fuchs & Compton, 2004; Hughes & Dexter, 2011). The IQ-achievement discrepancy model has been critiqued as a *wait to fail* approach (Ardoin et al., 2005; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006; NJCLD, 2010). This model requires that a learner show severe learning challenges before being diagnosed with a specific learning disability and becoming eligible for intervention (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006). This often results in the widening of academic gaps to such an extent that learning challenges become more difficult to overcome once the late intervention is finally offered (Huguenin, 2012).

Another critique of the IQ-achievement discrepancy model arose from its use of standardised, static achievement tests to diagnose learning disabilities (Grigorenko, 2009). The use of such assessments does not always account for the effects of diverse educational experiences and cultural circumstances on cognitive development and learning (Grigorenko, 2009). As a result, many learners can be misidentified as experiencing learning disabilities when learning difficulties are better attributed to systemic or other extrinsic factors (Dednam, 2011). Such learners may be referred for special education services unnecessarily when appropriate support measures may have prevented severe learning challenges (Grigorenko, 2009). Conversely, many learners can be unidentified as needing special education services when they do indeed need such services (Grigorenko, 2009).

In response to critiques of the IQ-achievement discrepancy model, RTI was conceptualised as a preventative model aiming to identify and provide intervention for learning difficulties early on in childhood education to prevent developmental delays and challenges associated with



learning in later years (Fuchs & Deshler, 2007; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2007; Greenwood et al., 2011). RTI attempts to accomplish this goal by outlining a process which focuses on frequent assessment and monitoring of learners' rates of learning (Fox et al., 2010). These measures of progress are used to help guide appropriate, specialised interventions which vary in levels of intensity and focus on meeting individual learner needs (Fox et al., 2010).

RTI aims to acknowledge the role that extrinsic factors such as inadequate instruction, cultural circumstances or socio-economic backgrounds may have on learners' learning performances (Hagans, 2008). As such, teaching instruction and intervention are adjusted throughout the RTI process in response to diverse learner needs which can help provide a more accurate reflection of a learner's abilities (Greenfield et al., 2010). By addressing various factors influencing the learning process and adjusting teaching and intervention accordingly, RTI attempts to avoid inappropriate referrals of learners with learning disabilities to special education services (Greenfield et al., 2010)

RTI aims to support all children in school systems (Fuchs & Deshler, 2007; Greenwood et al., 2011), and is, therefore, an approach that supports inclusive education practices as outlined in South African policies (DoE, 2001). Exploring the viability of RTI in a South African context may be beneficial as it could reveal insights into RTI's use as a practical approach to assist teachers in identifying and supporting learners with learning difficulties in inclusive education classrooms. If RTI holds the potential to support teachers in improving learner outcomes in South Africa, then further research into how RTI could be implemented in the South African educational context could be explored.

The following section explains the dynamic assessment approach and multi-tiered instructional approach of RTI. The potential benefits of implementing such an approach are then outlined, and results from various international studies are examined to provide insight into the effectiveness of RTI in improving learners' learning outcomes. Furthermore, the potential value of research on RTI within a South African context is proposed.

### **2.3.1 RTI as a Form of Dynamic Assessment**

RTI is considered to be a form of dynamic assessment (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006). Dynamic assessment shifts away from static, achievement-orientated assessment approaches to a focus on the effects that the mediation of skills and content will have on learning ability (Bouwer, 2016). Dynamic assessment, therefore, relies on a test-teach-retest process (Bouwer, 2016). As such, through this process, valuable information about a learner's strengths, challenges and potential for learning can be obtained to provide a helpful guide on how a learner learns optimally (Bouwer, 2016). Such information is invaluable as it can inform the selection of appropriate support or intervention strategies which can enhance a specific learner's learning performance (Bouwer, 2016).

Dynamic assessment, therefore, integrates instruction into an assessment to evaluate the type of instruction that is most valuable at improving a learner's learning ability (Grigorenko, 2009). RTI similarly integrates assessment and instruction to inform what type of intervention strategy will be most appropriate to respond to a learner's needs (Grigorenko, 2009). It focuses on how learners are progressively coping with newly taught skills by monitoring their rate of learning in response to specialised instructions or interventions that are adjusted to meet individual learner needs (Fox et al., 2010). As such, RTI provides a formative assessment on a learner's progress in learning and on their use of individual learning strategies to improve learning (Gillies, 2014).

In contrast to formative assessments, summative assessments measure an outcome of learning reached at the end of a learning cycle without investigating how the use of alternative learning strategies could impact a learner's learning ability (Gillies, 2014). Formative assessment approaches, such as RTI, can, therefore, provide more comprehensive information on the educational profiles of learners, including their strengths and challenges (Grigorenko, 2009). Teachers can then use this information to determine how to change instructional strategies and to help identify learners with learning disabilities (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006).

The process of gathering information or data, to inform how instruction and intervention can be tailored to individual learner needs, is structured within a multi-tiered instructional framework (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006). RTI relies on this multi-tiered instructional approach, discussed next, to guide interventions with struggling learners and to assist in identifying learners who require placement in special education (Hughes & Dexter, 2011).

### **2.3.2 RTI as a Multi-Tiered Instructional Approach**

RTI provides a framework for supporting learners experiencing learning difficulties by adjusting instruction and intervention according to specific learners' learning needs (Greenfield et al., 2010). This approach aims to provide specialised interventions to accommodate individual learners' needs early on before, or in place of, the need for referral to special education (Fox et al., 2010).

The RTI process is a multi-tiered instructional approach which typically refers to different levels of intervention as *tiers* (Gersten et al., 2008). Within these tiers, RTI generally relies on: high-quality classroom instruction within an inclusive education classroom; frequent assessment and monitoring of individual learners' progress and growth; and specialised, research-based interventions which are differentiated to meet individual learner needs (Ardoin et al., 2005). Within this process, learners who do not obtain the expected scores of short-term learning progress are identified as needing more intensive intervention strategies and are monitored

for progress during such interventions to inform decisions about more targeted interventions or referrals for special education (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2007).

RTI is a relatively new concept in the research field and literature exploring its implementation internationally is still in development (Greenfield et al., 2010; Hughes & Dexter, 2011). As such, no single *model* of RTI has been thoroughly researched and extensively practised (Hughes & Dexter, 2011). For my study, I refer to the three-tier or three-step model of RTI, which is currently most commonly implemented and researched (Castro-Villarreal et al., 2014). In the following section, I outline the main components of a general RTI approach within each tier and provide a visual representation of this model in Figure 2.1.

### **2.3.2.1 Tier 1**

Tier 1 is generally defined as high-quality, scientifically based classroom instruction which is provided by a teacher in a general or inclusive educational classroom. Within this tier, research-based teaching strategies, including differentiation as needed (Shepherd & Salembier, 2011), are used to instruct a scientifically based curriculum to all learners while their progress is monitored (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006). Universal screening measures, targeted progress monitoring of learners and other standardised measures of achievement are used to obtain information about a learner's level of achievement and learning rate to assist in identifying learners who require further assistance to learning (Castro-Villarreal et al., 2014). If a learner fails to respond to this high-quality, universal instruction and falls below a predetermined benchmark standard of achievement, then only these learners are identified as needing more intensive, specialised interventions which are provided in Tier 2 (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2007; Fuchs & Vaughn, 2012).

Although there are different screening approaches to identify learners for Tier 2, researchers recommend that one-time universal screenings be combined with short-term progress monitoring strategies to ensure that Tier 2 specialised interventions are only provided to those learners who need it (Compton et al., 2010; Fuchs & Deshler, 2007; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2007). This means that initial universal screening measures will help identify learners at-risk of learning difficulties early on, but such learners will only be provided Tier 2 interventions if they show poor rates of improvement to Tier 1's universal instruction (McMaster & Wagner, 2007). Rates of improvement in learning will be evidenced through short-term measures of progress monitoring which typically occur over an eight to ten-week period (McMaster & Wagner, 2007).

### **2.3.2.2 Tier 2**

Tier 2 provides targeted interventions to learners who are unable to make adequate progress and meet the suggested learning outcomes in response to universal instruction provided in Tier 1 (Fuchs & Vaughn, 2012). Tier 2 is typically defined as supplemental interventions that

are provided additionally to regular classroom instruction. These interventions generally consist of small-group interventions, based on research, which occur 3 to 5 days a week and focus on strengthening specific skills the learners may experience challenges with (Fuchs & Vaughn, 2012).

Learners' progress is continually monitored during Tier 2, and if a learner is found to demonstrate a prevailing lack of progress, they are identified as requiring more intensive and individualised interventions which are provided during Tier 3. Alternatively, if a learner demonstrates sufficient progress of learning outcomes in Tier 2, and the decision is made that the learner no longer requires specialised interventions, then that learner is moved back to Tier 1 (Greenwood et al., 2011).

Two general models of intervention can be used in RTI approaches. A problem-solving model uses interventions in Tier 2 that are selected by instructional groups or educational teams, such as a School-Based Support Team (SBST), and are tailored to an individual learner's needs (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2007). These interventions are often directed at improving a learner's performance on existing skills and commonly focus on challenges associated with behaviour and motivation (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2007). A standard protocol model is a more standardised approach to intervention which uses preselected, evidence-based interventions that are focused on improving the acquisition of new skills necessary at the relevant grade level of the learner (Fuchs & Vaughn, 2012). Fuchs and Fuchs (2007) recommend a combination of the two approaches, favouring standardised approaches for academic learning difficulties and problem-solving approaches for behavioural and motivational difficulties.

The integration of a problem-solving model relies on instructional groups or educational teams within a school to make decisions regarding the learning challenges of individual learners (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2007). Such teams engage in decision-making processes about whether to move learners between the tiers of an RTI approach or whether more comprehensive evaluations are needed to determine referrals to special education (Shepherd & Salembier, 2011). Data collection is crucial for such educational teams to engage in RTI decision-making processes (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006).

Since teachers play a critical role in instruction at Tier 1 and often in interventions in Tier 2 (Stuart et al., 2011; Sullivan & Long, 2010), the information they gather is crucial for informing educational teams. In the South African context, RTI decision-making processes would fall on the SBSTs and District-Based Support Teams (DBSTs). SBST's and DBST's will function collaboratively to make decisions regarding the teaching and support of all learners, including those with barriers to learning (DoE, 2001). A SBST may assist a teacher during Tier 2 in the selection, implementation and monitoring of instructional and intervention strategies (Fuchs &

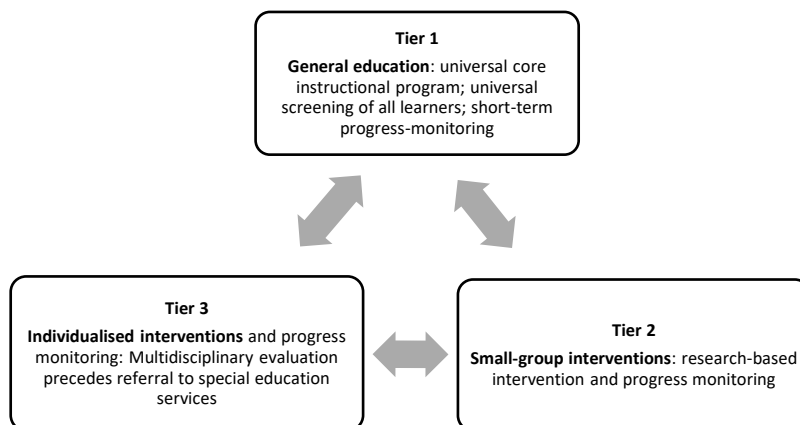
Fuchs, 2006). If learners fail to respond to Tier 2 interventions, a SBST may then decide to move a learner to Tier 3.

### 2.3.2.3 Tier 3

Tier 3 interventions are reserved for learners who continue to lack progress in response to Tier 2 interventions after a reasonable amount of time (Gersten et al., 2008). Tier 3 provides learners with more intensive and individualised interventions usually entailing a variety of instructional approaches to address individual learner needs (Gersten et al., 2008). Ongoing progress monitoring and systematic data collection on specific learner abilities are vital in Tier 3 (Gersten et al., 2008). Individual learners' successes and failures in instruction are identified (Gersten et al., 2008). If sufficient learner progress is achieved in Tier 3, then the learner may be moved to Tier 2 or Tier 1 depending on the level of progress achieved (Greenwood et al., 2011).

If, however, the learner still experiences learning challenges in response to Tier 3 intensive interventions, then a referral for a comprehensive evaluation for possible special education services is necessary (Gersten et al., 2008). Comprehensive evaluations, along with data collected during the RTI process, are then used to make decisions regarding the referral of learners to special education services (Gersten et al., 2008). The SBST and DBST would collaboratively decide if referrals for special education evaluations are necessary (DoE, 2001).

Figure 2.1 below illustrates a sample of the RTI model as adapted from Fuchs and Fuchs (2007). The figure shows the typical three-tier model and of what each tier is comprised. Movement between each tier of RTI is dynamic and based on progress data collected through assessment and intervention strategies (Greenwood et al., 2011).



**Figure 2.1: Sample of RTI model (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2007).**

The process of progress monitoring throughout the tiers of RTI allows instruction and intervention to be tailored to individual learner needs (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006). Teachers use data obtained throughout the tiers to determine how they can adjust curricula, materials or strategies for instruction to meet diverse learner needs (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006). Progress monitoring can also provide diagnostic information to help make decisions regarding special education referrals (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006). The process of RTI can, therefore, provide an array of potential advantages in inclusive education environments, as discussed in the next section.

### **2.3.3 Potential Value of RTI in South Africa**

Teachers in South Africa are experiencing challenges in implementing inclusive education practices, with specific reference to the lack of clear, detailed, practical approaches to identify and support learners with learning difficulties (Donahue & Bornman, 2014; Geldenhuys & Wevers, 2013; Du Plessis & Marais, 2015; Nel et al., 2011; Nel et al., 2016; Ladbrook, 2009). The introduction of RTI in South Africa could potentially assist teachers in identifying and supporting learners with learning difficulties in inclusive education schools.

Emerging evidence reveals that RTI has the potential to improve academic performances of all learners, including those at-risk of learning difficulties, in a general education classroom (Fox et al., 2010; Hughes & Dexter, n.d.; Hughes & Dexter, 2011). Primarily, RTI aims for earlier identification and intervention for learners with learning difficulties and therefore has a strong focus in preventing the onset of more substantial learning challenges (Vaughn & Fuchs, 2003). Additionally, RTI potentially offers a more accurate approach than the IQ-discrepancy model to identifying learning disabilities and thereby avoids inappropriate referrals to special education (Fuchs et al., 2014). It furthermore offers a structured approach to assessment and intervention, which can provide clear implications for academic planning (Vaughn & Fuchs, 2003).

As a form of dynamic assessment (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006), assessment and intervention in RTI can dynamically influence decisions regarding instructional support for individual learners' needs (Bouwer, 2016). RTI's focus on screening and frequent progress monitoring can potentially result in teachers becoming accustomed to using data collected on learner progress to help inform and improve teaching practices to accommodate for all learner needs (Vaughn & Fuchs, 2003). Teachers can use learner progress results to gauge whether their teaching and instructional techniques are effective or whether they need to be adjusted to meet the needs of individual learners (Hughes & Dexter, 2011). RTI, therefore, provides a framework which is more flexible and supportive in addressing learner difficulties than the traditional IQ-discrepancy model (Bradley et al., 2007).

RTI implementation in early childhood education (Fox et al., 2010) aims to identify and provide interventions for learning difficulties early on to prevent developmental delays and learning

challenges in later years (Fuchs & Deschler, 2007; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2007; Greenwood et al., 2011). Through continuous assessment and monitoring of learners' rates of learning (Fox et al., 2010), RTI can provide information to teachers about suspected learning difficulties and guide appropriate support interventions (Fox et al., 2010). Following RTI's multi-tiered approach and providing early and specialised interventions, can allow for learning difficulties to be addressed timeously and can lessen the potential for learning regression and loss of ability over time (Greenwood et al., 2011). Since RTI focuses on adjusting teaching instruction and intervention in response to diverse learner needs (Greenfield et al., 2010), it has the potential to support all learners within mainstream classrooms (Fuchs & Deschler, 2007; Greenwood et al., 2011). As such, RTI could potentially improve the academic performances of all learners (Fox et al., 2010; Hughes & Dexter, n.d.; Hughes & Dexter, 2011).

Due to the systematic approach of frequently collecting data on learners' progress (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006), RTI could potentially be used to support the implementation of the SIAS policy (DBE, 2014). To appropriately identify learners with learning difficulties, and consequently access learning support, specific forms formulated in the SIAS policy need to be completed (DBE, 2014). Teachers, however, often struggle to follow SIAS guidelines and do not follow procedures effectively to help access the necessary support for learners who struggle (Geldenhuys & Wevers, 2013; Nel & Grosser, 2016). RTI provides a multi-tiered framework which relies on continuous progress monitoring to help guide intervention and instructional strategies (Gersten et al., 2008). Information gathered from this type of formative assessment approach (Gillies, 2014) can provide a comprehensive image of a learner's educational profile (Grigorenko, 2009) which can be valuable in completing the SIAS forms necessary to inform support decisions. As such, RTI could potentially support teachers in identifying learners with learning difficulties; accessing appropriate support interventions for such learners and making appropriate referrals for special education services when necessary.

RTI is furthermore an approach that can help differentiate between learners with specific learning disabilities and those who may have other learning difficulties that can be resolved with appropriate support interventions (Ardoin et al., 2005; Knudson, 2008). RTI aims to achieve this by addressing diverse factors, such as cultural circumstances and socioeconomic backgrounds, which can impact how a learner learns (Hagans, 2008). Teaching and intervention throughout the RTI process are therefore adjusted to account for these diverse learning needs and ensure that instructional strategies match a learner's needs (Grigorenko, 2009). Addressing such factors appropriately through support interventions may improve a learner's performance if those factors are primarily the cause of their learning difficulty (Dednam, 2011).

However, if learners fail to make adequate progress after personalised and specialised interventions have been implemented, teachers and support staff can be confident in ruling out factors such as inadequate instruction, socio-economic disadvantage or other relevant influences addressed as causing learning difficulties (Hagans, 2008). The possibility of a learner experiencing a specific learning disability is then considered, and such a learner should then be referred for more comprehensive evaluations to determine if they should be enrolled for special education (Gersten et al., 2008).

In South Africa, pedagogical barriers to learning can often result in learners being misidentified as experiencing learning disabilities and consequently being incorrectly referred for special education (Kerfoot & Van Heerden, 2015; Nel & Theron, 2008). Pedagogical barriers to learning can be experienced when, for example, curriculum materials, teaching strategies and assessment approaches are not adjusted to accommodate for learners' diverse needs (Prinsloo, 2016). Learners may, for example, experience barriers to learning because their first language differs to their school's language of learning and teaching or because their cultural background differs to the predominant culture of the school (Prinsloo, 2016). If such learners cannot access the curriculum due to such differences, they may experience challenges in participating in learning (Prinsloo, 2016). RTI's structured process of responding to diverse learners' needs (Hagans, 2008) could potentially address such pedagogical barriers to learning and prevent the inappropriate referral to special education of learners who underachieve due to inadequate instruction or other extrinsic factors (Ardoin et al., 2005). This can help reduce the global trend where there is an overrepresentation of linguistically and culturally diverse learners misidentified as having specific learning disabilities (Artiles et al., 2004; Van Der Heyden et al., 2007).

RTI, therefore, has the potential to become a more cost-effective approach to assessment and intervention in the long term (Huguenin, 2012). As an early intervention strategy, which addresses learning difficulties early on (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2007; Fuchs & Deshler, 2007; Greenwood et al., 2011), RTI could reduce costs for more prolonged interventions that often accompany late diagnoses of learning challenges (Huguenin, 2012). Furthermore, RTI has the potential to reduce the amount of financial resources which are allocated to unnecessary evaluations for special education (Van Der Heyden et al., 2007). Since RTI potentially leads to more accurate identifications of learning disabilities, inappropriate referrals to special education can be avoided (Fuchs et al., 2014). These findings suggest that implementing an RTI approach in South Africa could be financially beneficial as the country experiences many challenges with learners and schools not having enough financial resources or support staff to refer learners for special education evaluations or provide appropriate support for such learners (Nel & Grosser, 2016).



The aforementioned evidence suggests that RTI could potentially assist teachers in identifying and supporting learners with learning difficulties in South African classrooms. Research into the effectiveness of an RTI approach predominantly emerged around 2003 with a focus on the effect of RTI on early reading skills (Hughes & Dexter, 2011; Hughes & Dexter, n.d.). Evidence shows that an RTI approach has been successful in: (a) improving the academic performance of all learners, including those who are at-risk (Ardoin et al., 2005; Hughes & Dexter, 2011; Hughes & Dexter, n.d.; Fox et al., 2010); (b) decreasing retention rates (Murray et al., 2010); and (c) reducing the number of inappropriate referrals to special education (Greenfield et al., 2010; O'Connor et al., 2005; Van Der Heyden et al., 2007; Vaughn et al., 2008; Wise, 2017).

RTI is a relatively new concept internationally, and therefore literature and research exploring its implementation is still emerging and by no means complete (Greenfield et al., 2010; Hughes & Dexter, 2011). Current research has been conducted in the USA and has predominantly focused on early reading and math skills with fewer studies examining the effectiveness of RTI on higher-level math or reading skills, writing or learning areas such as social studies or science (Hughes & Dexter, 2011). Due to RTI research still being in its early phases, there is currently no research on RTI implementation being conducted in South Africa.

Although numerous RTI reviews and studies suggest that RTI is effective in supporting the early identification and intervention of learners with learning difficulties (Fox et al., 2010; Fuchs et al., 2003; Greenfield et al., 2010; Hughes & Dexter, n.d.; Hughes & Dexter, 2011; Jimerson et al., 2016; Murray et al., 2010; O'Connor et al., 2005; Van Der Heyden, et al. 2007; Wise, 2017), findings need to be critically interpreted to identify a causal relationship between the RTI approach used and the outcomes achieved. Before research into RTI can commence in a South African context, it is, therefore, important to note the shortcomings in current research on RTI implementation as well as current limitations experienced in its implementation. The following section discusses these limitations.

#### **2.3.4 Limitations to the Implementation of RTI**

Since 2003, research has portrayed a relatively optimistic view of RTI, however the research base for RTI is still emerging and needs to be expanded to address a broader range of learning areas and grade levels (Fuchs & Vaughn, 2012; Hughes & Dexter, 2011). Furthermore, there needs to be more focus on longitudinal efficacy research and research on factors affecting the implementation of RTI (Hughes & Dexter, 2011). Fox et al. (2010) similarly report that there is not enough rigorous research on systemic variables that affect RTI implementation and that such research is necessary to indicate the fidelity and sustainability of RTI implementation. If systemic variables are not considered in the implementation of RTI, the model may be ineffective in addressing all learner needs, despite its potential in improving learners' academic performances (Tyre et al., 2012).

Existing research that does focus on factors affecting RTI implementation suggests that the most common challenges to implementation include: a lack of evidence-based curricula for Tier 1 instruction as well as a lack of evidence-based intervention strategies for Tiers 2 and 3 (Fuchs & Deshler, 2007; Greenwood et al., 2011). Furthermore, a lack of resources needed to implement an RTI model and a lack of knowledge on how to implement such models are contributing challenges to RTI's implementation (Greenwood et al., 2011). Another predominant challenge is the lack of sufficiently trained school personnel (Greenwood et al., 2011). This is problematic as engaged administrators and effective district level support structures need to be in place to help embrace RTI principles (Fuchs & Deshler, 2007). Furthermore, highly trained early childhood teachers are vital for the successful implementation of differentiated instruction within RTI components (Fuchs & Vaughn, 2012).

The aforementioned challenges to RTI implementation must be carefully considered before RTI can be implemented in a South African context. South Africa is challenged by a lack of funding and insufficient physical and human resources, which contributes to preventing the effective implementation of inclusive education policies (Savolainen et al., 2012). Furthermore, limited understanding and insufficient professional training in inclusive education practices also minimise the success of teachers implementing fully inclusive classroom environments (Nel et al., 2014). High-quality professional development is vital for the successful implementation of any RTI model (Fuchs & Deshler, 2007), but such efforts are typically challenging and expensive (Fuchs & Vaughn, 2012). As such, before the implementation of an RTI approach in South Africa can be investigated, these contextual challenges would need to be fully explored and considered.

There is also a continued need to explore the thoughts and beliefs about RTI implementation of practitioners at grassroots levels (Fuchs & Deshler, 2007). Teachers' views are particularly important to explore as they play an integral role in the RTI process (Stuart et al., 2011; Sullivan & Long, 2010). Due to this need, there is a growing body of international research exploring teachers' views on RTI implementation (Castillo et al., 2018; Castro-Villarreal et al., 2014; Cowan & Maxwell, 2015; Greenfield et al., 2010; Pyle, 2011). These viewpoints need to be considered before RTI implementation can be explored in a South African context.

According to international research on teachers' perceptions of RTI, there is a popular acceptance that RTI is a viable method to assist learners with learning difficulties (Cowan & Maxwell, 2015). Teachers have, however, reported that RTI implementation can be overwhelming with too much paperwork and not enough time and resources to implement specialised interventions (Castro-Villarreal et al., 2014; Cowan & Maxwell, 2015; Pyle, 2011). Research indicates that teachers' beliefs and skills regarding an RTI implementation is largely influenced by their level of knowledge of RTI (Castro-Villarreal et al., 2014; Castillo et al.,

2018). Furthermore, studies have revealed that the lack of knowledge and training in RTI can impact teachers' views on RTI implementation negatively (Castro-Villarreal et al., 2014; Cowan & Maxwell, 2015). With no research on RTI in a South African context, it is important to engage with South African teachers' viewpoints about the potential viability of RTI in their school context by providing them with sufficient information on RTI.

Teachers' beliefs are influenced by the wider systems within which they function (such as school districts, provinces and communities) which all impact the potential for change and reform efforts such as RTI (Fullan, 2010). Teachers could, therefore, hold vital information about systemic variables which may affect RTI implementation within a South African context. Exploring teachers' viewpoints could assist in formulating how to specifically implement RTI components optimally in a South African context and if optimal implementations could render beneficial outcomes in learner performances. A feasible starting point for research could, therefore, be to explore foundation phase teachers' viewpoints on RTI's viability within their school context. The next section discusses the implications of this starting point for research in South Africa.

### **2.3.5 Implications for Research in South Africa: The Need to Explore Foundation Phase Teachers' Viewpoints on the Viability of RTI in their School Context**

If implemented in a South African context, RTI has the potential to provide the following benefits: (a) improve the academic performances of all learners in a mainstream classroom (Hughes & Dexter, n.d.; Hughes & Dexter, 2011; Fox et al., 2010); (b) prevent the onset of more substantial learning challenges (Vaughn & Fuchs, 2003); and (c) avoid inappropriate referrals to special education (Fuchs, Fuchs & Vaughn, 2014). As such, RTI could potentially assist teachers in identifying and supporting learners with learning difficulties in South African classrooms.

However, before attempts can be made to effectively implement an RTI model, the unique features of a school system need to be considered (Fuchs & Deshler, 2007; Tyre et al. (2012). A crucial element of a school system is the teachers since they have a central role to play in implementing inclusive education (Forlin et al., 2010). Exploring foundation phase teachers' viewpoints on the viability of RTI in their school context is, therefore, a feasible starting point to gauge whether future research endeavours into the implementation of RTI in South Africa could be valuable.

RTI was initially developed for implementation in the earlier grades (in the USA classified as kindergarten through to third grade) (Fuchs & Vaughn, 2012). The premise behind the RTI approach lies on prevention and early intervention to prevent the onset of more substantial learning difficulties which can hinder later development (Fuchs & Deshler, 2007; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2007; Greenwood et al., 2011). This premise, therefore, provides strong support for

RTI's implementation in the foundation phase (Grades R - 3) in South African education. Kotzé (2015) confirms the importance of investing in children as early as possible in education to support any children with learning difficulties as these learning difficulties may hinder academic success by the time they reach Grade 12. Spaul (2015) furthermore highlights that high school dropout rates are often attributed to learners not obtaining the necessary foundational skills accessible from earlier grades.

Therefore, it is valuable to explore foundation phase teachers' viewpoints as they would presumably have the relevant teaching experience to add valuable insight into the potential viability of RTI in inclusive foundation phase classrooms. Furthermore, given teachers' integral role in instructing at Tier 1 and occasionally at Tier 2 during the RTI process (Stuart et al., 2011; Sullivan & Long, 2010), it would be important to explore their viewpoints regarding the viability of this RTI process. Furthermore, the viewpoints of teachers are argued by Greenfield et al. (2010) as being a crucial component if any efforts for school reform are to be effective. The beliefs and perceived skills of teachers also play a vital role in effectively implementing new practices such as RTI (Castillo et al., 2015).

It is therefore important to explore foundation phase teachers' viewpoints on the viability of RTI in their school context to ascertain whether they believe it has potential value in identifying and supporting learners who have learning difficulties. The conceptual framework, which furthermore supports the inquiry for this research study, is discussed next.

## **2.4 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK SUPPORTING THIS RESEARCH STUDY**

The conceptual framework for this research study is guided by socio-cultural and social constructivist perspectives on learning. Social constructivist theories challenge the assumption that ability, or disability, is located exclusively within an individual learner or group of learners (Vygotsky, 1978). Such theories account for the interdependence of individual and social processes in the advancement of cognition and learning (Palincsar, 1998). Furthermore, a sociocultural perspective stresses the integral role that social interaction plays within the learning process (Vygotsky, 1978). Rather than looking for learner impairments or deficits, sociocultural theories suggest that exploring the intersection of the individual and environment is necessary to understand how they reciprocally construct each other. Theorists such as Vygotsky and Feuerstein have contributed towards the development of socio-cultural and social constructivist theories of learning which have provided constructs underlying the conceptual framework for this study (Feuerstein et al., 1979, Vygotsky, 1978).

In Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (1978), learning is believed to be the result of a social process whereby learning is mediated by others and by the cultural context within which it takes place. Vygotsky (1978) believed that the process of mediation makes learning more meaningful to learners and that interacting with more knowledgeable people provides the

opportunity for learners' cognitive development to be enhanced. Similarly, Feuerstein's theory of mediation and mediated learning experiences (Feuerstein et al., 1979), highlights the importance of the role of a mediator, being a more skilled individual, who engages in a reciprocal learning relationship with the learner in an attempt to modify or improve their cognitive abilities (Grigorenko, 2009).

The construct of *mediation* supports the guiding principles of an RTI approach which stresses the central role of accountability of teachers in using data collected by screening and progress monitoring measures to inform them on how to improve instructional and intervention strategies to enhance individual learners' performances. The notion that learning is the result of reciprocal interactions between individuals and their environment or cultural context provides impetus to explore how foundation phase teachers see the potential viability of an RTI approach in a unique South African context.

Vygotsky's (1978) *zone of proximal development* (ZPD) is another construct providing support for an RTI approach. The ZPD indicates the distance between what learners can learn by themselves and what learners can achieve when given some assistance from adults (Kanevsky & Geake, 2004; Vygotsky, 1978). This construct supports the premise of inclusive education and the principles underlying RTI by assuming that all learners have the potential to learn with appropriate instruction and intervention strategies which are tailored to individual learner needs.

ZPD provides for the assumption that the improvement of cognitive skills can be achieved within a context of *scaffolding* which assumes that skills, knowledge and competencies are initially acquired by learners through their interaction with experienced others (Grigorenko, 2009). Scaffolding often refers to a kind of interaction whereby a more knowledgeable other controls elements of a learning activity, within a learner's range of learning, to improve particular areas of growth for the learner (Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976). Within the process of RTI, instructional differentiation used throughout the various tiers account for the process of scaffolding and hold the potential to improve the cognitive skills of learners with learning difficulties. The goals of RTI align with the process of scaffolding whereby teachers can guide learners, according to their rate of learning, to improve their cognitive abilities.

The constructs *mediation*, *ZPD* and *scaffolding* highlight the important role of teachers in the learning process and as such support RTI which requires teachers to be accountable for instruction at Tier 1 and occasionally at Tier 2 (Stuart et al., 2011; Sullivan & Long, 2010). Accordingly, teachers play an integral role in the RTI process, and it is, therefore, important to explore their viewpoints regarding the viability of RTI in their school context.

Within this conceptual framework, a differentiated instruction model is promoted as an instructional guide to facilitate the improvement of learners' cognitive abilities in the learning

process (Subban, 2006). *Differentiated instruction* accounts for a teacher, being a trained mentor, using appropriate instructional techniques to facilitate the learners' development towards their learning potential (Tomlinson, 2004). This instructional approach is flexibly based on a learner's response to the teacher's instruction.

Differentiation techniques can create a balance between the learning needs shared by all learners and those needs specific to individual learners (Tomlinson, 2004). While the teacher focuses on the same goals or objectives for all learners, they also adjust the pace and techniques of instruction to account for individual learners who may face challenges (Tuttle, 2000), thus facilitating all learners to achieve their individual learning potentials. This differentiated instruction model provides support for the construct of *tiered instruction* which underpins RTI. *Tiered instruction* focuses on providing high-quality instruction methods and includes continuous monitoring of learners' progress to make educational decisions about appropriate levels of intervention which will focus on facilitating individual learners' needs (Reutebuch, 2008).

As such, this research study is guided by sociocultural and social constructivist perspectives on learning with the particular concepts of *mediation*, *ZPD*, *scaffolding* and *differentiated instruction* underlying the conceptual framework for this study. This conceptual framework highlights the reciprocal role that teachers and learners take in facilitating the learning process and the importance of teachers in mediating the learning process to enhance the learning abilities of all learners in inclusive education contexts.

## 2.5 CONCLUSION

In this chapter, an overview of the South African education system, along with important inclusive education policies, was provided to build a comprehensive background to particular challenges experienced by teachers in the implementation of such policies. A specific challenge highlighted by the literature was the lack of clarity in an approach to aid in the identification and support of learners with learning difficulties. RTI was introduced and explored as a potential approach to assist teachers in identifying and supporting all learners within inclusive educational contexts in South Africa. Evidence from international studies paint a promising picture of the potential effectiveness of RTI in improving learning outcomes and supporting the process of special education referrals. Limitations to current RTI research were addressed to propose implications for further research into the implementation of RTI in South Africa. Particular reference was made to the importance of exploring foundation phase teachers' viewpoints on RTI's viability.

## CHAPTER 3

### RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I describe the underlying meta-theoretical and methodological paradigms that guided this research inquiry. Furthermore, I provide detailed descriptions of the research methodology I followed in terms of research design, selection of the case and participants, and the procedures I used to generate and document the data of the study. I additionally provide a clear explanation of the approach I used to analyse and interpret the data and highlight reasons and benefits to the choices made throughout the research process. I furthermore discuss how I addressed criteria of trustworthiness for this particular study. The chapter concludes with the ethical considerations I adhered to throughout the research process and explains how I addressed these ethical issues. In order to align with the limited scope of this study, I used tables throughout this chapter to represent information in a concise manner.

#### 3.2 UNDERLYING PARADIGM AND RESEARCH APPROACH

The meta-theoretical and methodological paradigms of the study are discussed in the next section. Paradigmatic perspectives guide our assumptions and our thinking about how the world functions (Cooper & White, 2012). In this study, I used a qualitative methodological paradigm and a single exploratory case study design, embedded in an interpretivist meta-theoretical paradigm, to guide my actions and decisions throughout the research process.

##### 3.2.1 Meta-Theoretical Paradigm

I used interpretivism as a meta-theoretical paradigm to guide my research inquiry. Table 3.1 provides an overview of interpretivism and how this paradigm guides research. The table includes the ontological and epistemological assumptions of interpretivism and addresses criticism against interpretivist research inquiries.

**Table 3.1**

**Overview of interpretivism and how this paradigm guides research**

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF INTERPRETIVISM	ONTOLOGICAL ASSUMPTIONS	EPISTEMOLOGICAL ASSUMPTIONS	ADDRESSING CRITICISMS OF INTERPRETIVISM
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interpretivism (occasionally referred to as constructivism) is also known as an “anti-positivist” paradigm (Mack, 2010).</li> <li>• Interpretivism emerged predominantly through influences from hermeneutics and phenomenology (Mack, 2010).</li> <li>• A hermeneutic understanding acknowledges that readers produce their own knowledge and make meaning of reality through the interaction between individuals, cultures, texts, and historical processes which are embedded within the particular social context in which the knowledge was produced (O’Reilly, 2009).</li> <li>• Phenomenology advocates that the subjective interpretations and individual perceptions of people about their world provide the basis of understanding social reality (Mack, 2010).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ontology refers to how one views reality and includes: the assumptions and claims about the nature of social reality; what exists; what such an existence looks like; the units comprising social reality and how such units interact with each other (Grix, 2004).</li> <li>• Interpretivists value subjectivity and believe that reality is constructed through individual interpretations whereby people construct their own meaning of events (Mack, 2010).</li> <li>• Interpretivists, therefore, view events as distinctive phenomena which cannot be generalised and includes the acceptance of multiple perspectives and experiences of one incident (Mack, 2010).</li> <li>• The researcher in this paradigm seeks to understand social phenomena by interpreting the meaning and symbols that</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Epistemology refers to the way one acquires knowledge and includes how a researcher goes about collecting data and making sense of such data to guide their findings (Weber, 2004).</li> <li>• Interpretivists believe that in the process of knowledge acquisition, a researcher should respect the uniqueness of human experience to fully understand the subjective meaning attached to social action (Grix, 2004).</li> <li>• Researchers within this paradigm, therefore, explore real-world situations unfolding naturally while being unobtrusive, non-controlling and non-manipulative (Tuli, 2010).</li> <li>• The purpose of an inquiry is to provide a deeper understanding of a particular phenomenon, and therefore knowledge is believed to arise from specific situations and through personal experience (Mack, 2010).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Although critics argue that interpretivism is too subjective, Mack (2010) and Weber (2004) believe that all research is to some extent subjective and that researchers cannot fully divorce themselves or their perspectives, as researchers, from the study in which they are involved.</li> <li>• Researchers in interpretivist paradigms recognise that their own personal, historical and cultural experiences can shape their interpretations of phenomena, but state that they can still treat data objectively when they collect it by acknowledging their assumptions and ensuring that the data collected informs the research findings rather than the researcher’s own preconceptions (Mack, 2010).</li> </ul>



BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF INTERPRETIVISM	ONTOLOGICAL ASSUMPTIONS	EPISTEMOLOGICAL ASSUMPTIONS	ADDRESSING CRITICISMS OF INTERPRETIVISM
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interpretivism incorporates contributions from hermeneutics and phenomenology and understands reality as being socially constructed (Willis, 2007).</li> <li>• Interpretivists believe that people construct reality through their lived experiences and that one needs to consider the context within which research is conducted to interpret data accurately (Willis, 2007).</li> <li>• Unlike the positivist researchers, who believe that social reality can be objectively observed and explained by causal links between phenomena, interpretivists believe social reality is better understood through understanding peoples' direct experiences (Mack, 2010).</li> </ul>	<p>different individuals attach to the phenomena, rather than attempting to explain the phenomena objectively (Mack, 2010).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Such an approach to inquiry recognises the cultural and historical settings of participants.</li> <li>• It can, therefore, lead to a deeper understanding of phenomena being studied and the social context within which it occurs (Willis, 2007).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knowledge about particular phenomena is thus generated inductively, within the social context, to create theory from experience and cannot be reduced to simplistic generalisations about the phenomena (Mack, 2010).</li> <li>• Interpretivist inquiries are less concerned with generalisability and more oriented about process and discovery and providing a rich understanding of a research problem in its unique social context (Ulin et al., 2004).</li> <li>• Researchers, therefore, rely as much as possible on the viewpoints of participants by asking open-ended questions, listening carefully to their constructed meanings of a particular situation, and observing discussions and interactions between people to understand socially constructed realities (Creswell, 2014).</li> </ul>	

The following section discusses the methodological paradigm used for this research study.

### 3.2.2 Methodological Paradigm

The methodological paradigm for this study was qualitative. Table 3.2 provides an overview of qualitative research and includes the common characteristics that guide this type of research inquiry.

**Table 3.2**

#### Overview of qualitative research

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF QUALITATIVE RESEARCH	COMMON CHARACTERISTICS OF QUALITATIVE RESEARCH
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Qualitative approaches are generally preferred methods of inquiry within an interpretivist paradigm (Thomas, 2003; Willis, 2007).</li> <li>• Such approaches often yield rich information necessary to form an accurate understanding of specific contexts (Willis, 2007).</li> <li>• Qualitative research is an exploratory approach to inquiry that aims at understanding the meaning that individuals or groups assign to social phenomena (Creswell, 2014).</li> <li>• It is an approach that seeks to provide holistic, detailed accounts that attempt to reflect the social world in its complicated, interactive, contextual and interpretive nature (Staller, 2012).</li> <li>• Denzin and Lincoln (2000) state that qualitative researchers focus on the belief that reality is socially constructed and that inquiry is shaped by “the relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraint” (Denzin &amp; Lincoln, 2000, p. 8).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Data collection tends to occur in a natural setting where researchers talk directly to people and observe interactions between people within the real context in which participants experience the issue under study (Creswell, 2014).</li> <li>• Qualitative researchers are considered a key instrument in research as they collect data themselves, over time, through observing behaviour, interviewing participants, or examining documents. Such researchers rely less on standardised questionnaires or instruments and are more directly involved in gathering data (Creswell, 2014).</li> <li>• Qualitative researchers rely on multiple sources of data rather than a single source of data. Such researchers review data across documents, audio-visual information, observations, and interviews and integrate common information across data sources into themes or categories for analysis. Such themes or categories are often built inductively by identifying common abstract trends in the information collected and establishing comprehensive themes to represent the data. A deductive process often follows this inductive data analysis by re-examining if the evidence from data supports the themes constructed or whether additional data or information is needed (Creswell, 2014).</li> <li>• The qualitative research process is based on understanding the meaning that participants ascribe to a particular problem or issue under study rather than focusing on the meaning that literature or the researcher ascribes to that particular problem or issue (Creswell, 2014).</li> <li>• It follows an emergent design which is more flexible. This means that various aspects of an initial research plan may need to change as</li> </ul>

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF QUALITATIVE RESEARCH	COMMON CHARACTERISTICS OF QUALITATIVE RESEARCH
	<p>data collection begins if it is found that alternative or additional strategies may enhance learning about a problem from participants' perspectives (Creswell, 2014).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reflexivity is another key feature in qualitative research as inquirers need to reflect on how their own background can potentially shape the research process and interpretations of data collected (Creswell, 2014).</li> <li>• Qualitative research aims to provide a holistic account of the particular problem or issue under study. This means that multiple perspectives are considered, various factors contributing to a situation are identified, and multiple facets of the problem are presented (Creswell, 2014).</li> </ul>

The following section presents the justification for my selection of the aforementioned paradigms to guide this research study.

### 3.2.3 Justification for the Interpretive Paradigm

Table 3.3 presents justification for the meta-theoretical and methodological paradigm selected for this study. The table includes the paradigmatic assumptions and how they were applied to this study.

**Table 3.3**

**Justification for the paradigms selected for this research study**

<b>ASSUMPTIONS OF INTERPRETIVE AND QUALITATIVE INQUIRY</b>	<b>APPLICATION TO THIS STUDY</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interpretive researchers value subjectivity and believe that reality is constructed through the multiple perspectives and experiences of people (Mack, 2010).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Similarly, in this study, I believed that each participant had varying real-life teaching experiences that could influence their viewpoints about the viability of RTI.</li> <li>• Since teachers play an integral role in providing instruction and facilitating the process of learning (Tomlinson, 2004), I believed that the personal viewpoints of teachers would inform the purpose of this study in gaining insight into the viability of RTI.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interpretive researchers believe that it is important to interact with insiders to obtain their personal perspectives from first-hand experience in the social context being studied (Merriam, 1998).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Similarly, I believed that foundation phase teachers' first-hand experience of teaching would accurately inform their viewpoints about RTI's viability in their school context.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interpretive researchers accept multiple realities as important to obtain a rich understanding of the phenomena under study (Mack, 2010).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• By adopting the interpretive view of accepting multiple realities, I believed that the multiple experiences of teachers would contribute to a more in-depth and insightful understanding of the viability of RTI in their own school context.</li> <li>• I believed that engaging directly with participants and listening carefully to their personal experiences and viewpoints, would allow me to obtain detailed and meaningful data.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Qualitative researchers collect data in a natural setting where researchers can talk directly to people within the real context within which they experience the issue under study (Creswell, 2014)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Through qualitative inquiry, I was able to ask broad, open-ended questions which allowed the participants to respond freely and to reflect on their real-life experiences within teaching, and attitudes and feelings towards the viability of RTI.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Qualitative researchers aim to provide a holistic account of the particular problem or issue under study. This means that multiple perspectives are considered (Creswell, 2014).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I provided multiple perspectives from teachers who reflected a holistic account of their own interpretations on the viability of RTI in their school context.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• According to Ulin et al. (2004), qualitative approaches are concerned with discovery and process.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• By exploring the teachers' viewpoints, new ideas about RTI within a unique context were explored with implications for further research.</li> <li>• This approach was beneficial for this study which aimed to introduce research on RTI in South Africa.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reflexivity is important in qualitative research as inquirers need to reflect on how their own background can potentially shape the research process and interpretations of data collected (Creswell, 2014).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Throughout the study, I was aware that my own personal perspectives and experiences might have influenced the interpretation of the data.</li> <li>• To account for potential researcher bias, I revealed my assumptions at the onset of this study and I collected and analysed the data thoroughly and objectively, acknowledging my potential preconceptions of the data collected.</li> </ul>

The following section discusses the design followed in conducting this research study.

### 3.3 RESEARCH DESIGN

A single exploratory case study design was used for this research. A case study can be defined as an experiential research approach that explores a contemporary phenomenon, using multiple sources of data, within its real-life context (Yin, 1984). Such an approach to inquiry consists of a detailed, in-depth exploration of one relevant issue or a few cases of a relevant issue with a small group of participants (Blatter, 2012).

A case study design allows researchers to engage with participants within their social and cultural contexts in an attempt to provide a holistic investigation into the issue being studied (Putney, 2012). Case study designs are therefore well-suited to interpretivist research paradigms as they present opportunities to engage with individual perceptions through in-depth interviews which can provide thick, context-dependent descriptions of phenomena being studied (Blatter, 2012). A case study design was, therefore, an appropriate approach to use for this study that aimed to explore foundation phase teachers' viewpoints on the viability of RTI in their school context.

Case study designs are flexible with regards to data collection as initial plans may change due to new-found needs identified as data collection begins (Willis, 2007). This flexibility of case study approaches enables a researcher to capture issues related to the study in a holistic manner and allows for the development of new matters not originally included in the researcher's goals (Timmons & Cairns, 2012). Furthermore, cases studies typically involve the researcher entering into the environment being studied and calls for the ability of the researcher to establish and maintain rapport with participants within research environments to ensure truthful and forthcoming perceptions are documented (Willis, 2007). Data collection, data analysis, and the reporting of findings are not reflected as a linear process in case study designs, but rather understood as integrated into the direction of the research process (Willis, 2007).

This particular study involved a single case study design that was exploratory. A single case study design focuses on one case only, and an exploratory case study approach aims to explore and learn more about a particular phenomenon which is of interest to a researcher (Zainal, 2007). Exploratory case studies provide opportunities to propose further research (Putney, 2012) and are beneficial when investigating a relatively new field of study (Streb, 2012). This approach was, therefore, an appropriate design to use for this study which aimed to explore foundation phase teachers' viewpoints on the viability of RTI, which is a new area of research in South Africa. A single exploratory case study design allowed for a flexible and intuitive research process (Streb, 2012) in which in-depth information about RTI could be gathered from complex interactions with teachers within their local context. This approach allowed me to obtain more detail about an issue through prompting participants with additional

questions which could reveal different patterns not initially apparent through original questioning (Timmons & Cairns, 2012). As such, a case study design allowed for a dynamic research process which developed new and detailed information about RTI, providing implications for future research endeavours into the viability of RTI in South Africa.

A common challenge associated with case study designs is the belief that its flexible nature and a small sample size can limit the generalisability of results since findings are deemed only relevant to that particular phenomenon studied within that particular context. The purpose of this study, however, was not concerned with generalisation but rather providing an in-depth understanding of foundation phase teachers' viewpoints on the viability of RTI within their school. Furthermore, Timmons and Cairns (2012) argue that with appropriate analysis and supporting research, the detail obtained from a particular case study can be used to make relevant generalisations and form a basis from which further research can be conducted. The trustworthiness of this study, discussed in Section 3.8, was addressed carefully in the research process to allow for the findings of this case study to form a basis for further research endeavours.

### **3.4 SELECTION OF CASE AND RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS**

Purposive selection was used to select the case and the participants for this case study. Purposive selection is often used when a researcher has a specific goal in mind and requires a group of participants, meeting relevant criteria, who can represent diverse perspectives on a particular issue (Maree & Pietersen, 2010). Purposive selection is well-suited to exploratory research as it allows for the selection of a case and participants which can provide rich information necessary for the aims of an in-depth exploratory case study (Fletcher & Plakoyiannaki, 2012). The purposive selection of cases or participants is non-random and allows for the selection of those who can potentially provide the best data in understanding the research problem (Creswell, 2014).

For this study, I purposefully selected nine foundation phase teachers from one primary school in the Pretoria region. My selection of the case was purposive and convenient. Convenience selection is a process of selecting a case and participants that are readily available (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). An independent primary school was selected conveniently based on my knowledge of and easy accessibility to the school. This primary school was selected purposively based on the knowledge that it contained diverse learners and I assumed that teachers within such a school would have the relevant experience of the education system to add valuable insight into the potential viability of RTI within their school context.

The nine teachers were purposively selected for this study with the goal of involving participants that could contribute valuable insight to fulfil the purpose of this study which was

to explore foundation phase teachers' viewpoints on the viability of RTI in their school context. The nine teachers of this particular study were selected based on the following criteria:

- Teachers at the onset of the study taught in any grade in the foundation phase in the selected school.
- Teachers were able to communicate in English.
- Teachers were available and willing to participate in generating data outside of school hours.
- Teachers were voluntary participants who provided informed consent for their participation.

I used purposive selection of a case and participants for this study as it was beneficial in allowing the involvement of participants who could offer knowledgeable insights for this study. I do, however, acknowledge that this technique can also pose challenges which include the lack of control over variability and bias as well as the lack of generalisability of the data collected from the sample (Acharya et al., 2013). To address the potential limitations of purposive selection, I remained aware of the knowledge and abilities of the participants during the research process (Doleres & Tongco, 2007) and took note of any observed potential biases from participants (Seidler, 1974). I provided detailed observations in my field notes; specific information regarding protocol and documentation of procedures employed (Creswell, 2014); and relied on continuous collaboration and debriefing with my supervisor. It is also important to note that the purpose of this case study was to investigate the research problem within a real-world context to allow for the analytical generalisation of such an issue to the proposed conceptual framework suggested for this study (Fletcher & Plakoyiannaki, 2012). As such, the findings of this study could lead to new discoveries which could be transferable to similar contexts for further research endeavours.

### **3.5 DATA GENERATION**

I conducted a focus group interview to generate qualitative data for this study. I furthermore conducted a follow-up interview to verify the main findings of this study. Table 3.4 provides an overview of the procedures I used to generate data through the focus group interview. The table furthermore outlines the benefits of using a semi-structured focus group interview to generate data. Table 3.5 provides an overview of the procedures I used to verify the findings of the study through a follow-up interview. Both tables provide clear descriptions of how I employed each procedure of data generation in this study.

**Table 3.4**

**Overview of procedures used to generate data through a focus group interview**

PROCEDURE USED	BRIEF DESCRIPTION
Focus group interview.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A focus group is a group of participants who discuss a specific topic and are facilitated and guided by a researcher (Kitzinger, 1994; Morgan, 1998).</li> <li>• Focus groups typically consist of six to eight participants (Creswell, 2014).</li> <li>• The interview requires a researcher to ask the group a few, generally open-ended questions with the aim of eliciting opinions and viewpoints from participants (Creswell, 2014).</li> </ul>
Accessing the participants for the focus group.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I communicated with the principal of the school, via telephone and email, to discuss the research study and gained permission to conduct the research at the school<sup>1</sup>.</li> <li>• I sent brief information about the study as well as the informed consent letter, via email, to all the foundation phase teachers of the school.</li> <li>• Teachers who were willing to participate in the study responded to me, via email and telephone, and a time convenient to all participants, outside of school hours, was arranged for the focus group interview.</li> <li>• Willing teachers were asked to complete and hand in the informed consent letters<sup>2</sup> at the first arranged meeting for the focus group interview.</li> <li>• The focus group consequently consisted of nine participants who taught at the selected primary school.</li> </ul>
Conducting the focus group interview.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The interview took place at the selected primary school.</li> <li>• At the onset of the interview, I verbally discussed the information contained in the informed consent letter with the participants after which I received verbal and written consent for voluntary participation.</li> <li>• I then built rapport with the teachers by initiating small talk.</li> <li>• After this, a brief synopsis of the research process was provided to put the teachers at ease.</li> <li>• Issues of confidentiality, anonymity and voluntary participation were discussed with the teachers.</li> <li>• An opportunity for asking questions was presented before commencing with the interview.</li> <li>• The focus group interview was conducted over two sessions, outside of school hours, lasting 45 minutes each.</li> <li>• The two sessions were conducted over two consecutive days. The focus group interview therefore took 90 minutes to complete in total.</li> </ul>

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix B for the permission letter to conduct research at the school and the sample of the informed consent form for the School Management Board.

<sup>2</sup> See Appendix C for information letter and sample of informed consent form for participants.



PROCEDURE USED	BRIEF DESCRIPTION
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The interview was semi-structured, consisting of six key questions which were open-ended<sup>3</sup>.</li> <li>• I asked teachers to elaborate on their responses when more clarity was needed or when additional information was needed from their responses.</li> <li>• I ensured that I listened carefully to each participant's response and clarified my understanding of their responses.</li> <li>• I observed the participants to ensure they were comfortable in the research process and not experiencing any distress.</li> <li>• To minimise researcher bias, I was aware of the need to encourage the participants to engage in discussions, but to avoid influencing specific responses to reinforce my expectations of viewpoints (Sim, 1998).</li> </ul>
<b>BENEFITS OF CONDUCTING A SEMI-STRUCTURED FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW</b>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A semi-structured interview allowed me to have some control in guiding the areas that needed to be explored through using a specific list of questions (Creswell, 2014; Gill et al., 2008); whilst allowing for the flexibility to explore participants' viewpoints in more detail by asking further questions in response to participants' comments (Creswell, 2014).</li> <li>• The procedure allowed for new discoveries to be made which may have been pertinent to the participants but were not previously considered by me, the researcher (Gill et al., 2008).</li> <li>• Using a focus group interview allowed rich information to be captured based on the collective views of teachers' experiences and viewpoints (Morgan, 1998).</li> <li>• The interactive context allowed a dynamic approach to providing information (Gill et al., 2008) whereby the teachers in the group could provide a wide range of viewpoints in an economical manner (Krueger, 1994) and wherein any differing perspectives amongst the teachers could be illuminated (Rabiee, 2004).</li> </ul>

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<sup>3</sup> See Appendix A for semi-structured interview schedule

**Table 3.5**

**Overview of the procedure used to verify the findings of the study through a follow-up interview**

PROCEDURE USED	BRIEF DESCRIPTION
Follow-up interview.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A follow-up interview provides an opportunity for the participants of a study to comment on the final findings of a study and raise any concerns about the findings (Creswell, 2014).</li> <li>• This allows an opportunity for member checking which is a process used to determine if the final findings of a research study accurately reflect the participants' thoughts and feelings (Creswell, 2014).</li> </ul>
Conducting the follow-up interview.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Following the completion of the data analysis process, I communicated the findings of this study, via email, with the participants.</li> <li>• Following the emailed communication, I arranged for a telephonic follow-up interview with one of the participants who served as a representative for all of the participants.</li> <li>• This follow-up interview was arranged at a convenient time for the participant, after school hours, and provided an opportunity for the participant to communicate feedback from all the participants regarding the findings of the study.</li> <li>• The follow-up interview allowed the participant to comment on the final themes identified from my data analysis and address any further questions about the research and related issues.</li> <li>• The participant verified the final findings of the study on behalf of all the participants.</li> <li>• The follow-up interview lasted 20 minutes.</li> </ul>

The following section outlines the procedures I used to document the data generated.

### **3.6 DATA DOCUMENTATION**

In this study, I used an audio-recording of the focus group interview to keep a verbatim record of the data generated. Table 3.6 provides an overview of the various methods used for data documentation which includes: the transcription of the audio-recording; field notes; and a reflective journal. The table provides a description of how I used each method of data documentation in this study as well as the benefits of using such methods to document my data.

**Table 3.6**
**Overview of the various methods used for data documentation**

PROCEDURE	BRIEF DESCRIPTION	BENEFIT
Audio data documentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A voice recorder was used, with the consent of the participants, to make an audio-recording of the focus group interview.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This provided a verbatim account of the focus group interview which contributes to the credibility of a study (McMillan &amp; Schumacher, 2010) and allowed me to focus my attention on engaging with the participants and making observations during the interview (Sim, 1998).</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The audio-recording was transcribed<sup>4</sup> for data analysis using a smooth verbatim protocol.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This allowed for a word-for-word transcription but articulated into an easy-to-understand transcript (Mayring, 2014).</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I checked the completed transcript against the original audio-recording</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This was done to ensure the transcription was completed accurately (Braun &amp; Clarke, 2006).</li> </ul>
Field notes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Field notes are recordings of what a researcher observes and reflects on during the data capturing process (McMillan &amp; Schumacher, 2010). Observations include: all verbal and non-verbal communication between participants; issues of the group dynamic; and exchanges and views of particular individuals (Kitzinger, 1994).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Field notes allow for a richer data analysis to take place (Kitzinger, 1994) ensuring that all variables contributing to the findings are included.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• My field notes included descriptions of observations of the participants, the context, and responses of the participants (Merriam, 1998).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• These observations were necessary as they guided me in prompting the participants to elaborate on responses and assisted in the development of new lines of questioning (Merriam, 1998).</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I allowed my field notes<sup>5</sup> regarding the participants to be generated by their interactions and responses in the focus group.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This allowed me to avoid imposing predetermined categories from theoretical standpoints into my field notes to ensure they reflected data accurately (Schensul, Schensul &amp; LeCompte, 1999).</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I compiled my field notes during and directly after the focus group interview.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This helped to ensure accurate field notes.</li> </ul>
Reflective journal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A reflective journal can be described as a subjective document that a researcher uses to engage in self-observation. It can be used by a researcher to record</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This can help a researcher make meaning of the data generated (Flick, 2009).</li> </ul>

• <sup>4</sup> See Appendix F for my transcript of the focus group interview (including initial coding for data analysis)

• <sup>5</sup> See Appendix D for my field notes (including initial coding for data analysis)

	<p>personal perceptions and reflections during the entire research process (Flick, 2009).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It can be useful in showing transparency with regards to a researcher's values and experiences throughout the research process.</li> <li>• Transparency attempts to control researcher bias by making it visible to the reader to account for a researcher's role in shaping the outcome of the study (Denzin, 1994).</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I engaged in reflexive processes throughout the research process and regularly engaged in reflective discussions with my supervisor.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This allowed me to minimise my own subjective biases from influencing the outcomes of the study by acknowledging my own preconceptions.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I documented my personal reflections in a reflective journal<sup>6</sup>.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This allowed me to critically evaluate the research process as well as my own insights and biases. I could also identify personal areas of growth in conducting research.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I documented my understanding of teachers' subjective viewpoints and revealed transparency by stating my own values and experiences throughout the research process.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• These reflections enabled me to clarify ideas and make connections between various stages of the research process (Lamb, 2013) and furthermore assisted me in connecting practice to theory.</li> </ul>

The following section outlines the process I followed to analysis and interpret the data generated.

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• <sup>6</sup> See Appendix E for my reflective journal

### 3.7 DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Inductive thematic analysis was used to analyse and interpret the data generated in this case study. Thematic analysis is a systematic method used to identify, analyse and report on trends or patterns found across data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It is a method for data analysis and interpretation which allows data to be organised into smaller units (themes) which can then be described, interpreted and given rich detail (Vaismoradi, Turunen, & Bondas, 2013). Themes or trends across data are typically identified either inductively or using a deductive or theoretical approach.

For this research study, an inductive approach to thematic analysis was used whereby the identification of themes is driven by data rather than by a researcher's theoretical standpoint on the research topic, as in deductive or theoretical thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Inductive thematic analysis is thus defined by Braun and Clarke (2006) as "a process of coding the data without trying to fit it into a pre-existing coding frame, or the researcher's analytic preconceptions" (p. 83). Table 3.7 shows the six phases that I followed to analyse my data, as described by Braun and Clarke (2006).

**Table 3.7**

#### **Six phases of thematic data analysis**

<b>PHASE</b>	<b>DESCRIPTION OF PROCESS</b>
1. Familiarisation with the data.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Using the transcribing process to note down initial ideas.</li> <li>• Carefully reading through and re-reading all documented data to identify relevant ideas.</li> </ul>
2. Developing initial codes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identifying interesting aspects and repeated patterns across data items.</li> <li>• Coding highlighted data in a systematic way.</li> </ul>
3. Searching for themes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organising different codes into potential themes.</li> <li>• Integrating all relevant data into each potential theme.</li> </ul>
4. Reviewing identified themes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Checking that data within themes is meaningful and coherent.</li> <li>• Checking that there are distinctions between themes.</li> <li>• Checking for potential additional themes overlooked in earlier coding stages.</li> </ul>
5. Defining and naming themes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identifying essential elements of what a theme captures.</li> <li>• Ongoing reflection on how themes relate to the research question of the study.</li> <li>• Developing clear definitions and names for themes.</li> </ul>
6. Producing the final report.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Analysing themes for the final time.</li> <li>• Selecting convincing extract examples and analysing selected extracts.</li> <li>• Relating analysis to research question and literature.</li> <li>• Verifying analysis through consulting with supervisor and through member checking.</li> </ul>
Adapted from Braun and Clarke (2006)	

Inductive thematic analysis was appropriate for this particular study as it is known to be compatible with constructionist or interpretivist paradigms (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It is considered to be a useful and flexible research tool which has the potential to yield a rich and detailed analysis of complex data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Developing themes inductively from the concrete data is a useful approach to data analysis when there is little existing knowledge about phenomena being studied (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). This approach was, therefore, appropriate for this study since RTI is a new area of research in South Africa. Inductive thematic analysis was beneficial in identifying key themes from teachers' viewpoints and assigning meaning to those findings to explore the potential viability of RTI.

### **3.8 TRUSTWORTHINESS OF THE STUDY**

Various frameworks can be used to assist qualitative researchers in their attempt to ensure the trustworthiness of their work (Silverman, 2001). Trustworthiness is important in qualitative research as it indicates the degree of rigour in a particular research study. Five criteria of trustworthiness were addressed in this research study to ensure the rigour of its findings. These criteria are credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability (Guba, 1981; Lincoln & Guba, 1985) as well as authenticity (Seale, 2000). Table 3.8 includes descriptions of these criteria and how I addressed each one to ensure the trustworthiness of this study.

**Table 3.8**

**Overview of how the trustworthiness of this study was ensured**

CRITERIA	BRIEF DEFINITION OF CRITERION	HOW CRITERION WAS ENHANCED
Credibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Credibility implies that an inquiry's findings are congruent or correlate with reality (Merriam, 1998).</li> <li>• A credible qualitative study should report research findings that accurately represent participants' original data as well as the correct interpretation thereof (Lincoln &amp; Guba, 1985).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Before commencing with the process of data generation, I became familiar with the research field by consulting appropriate documents and engaging with my supervisor.</li> <li>• I employed triangulation (the use of various methods of data generation and documentation) (Shenton, 2004). This assisted me in verifying the accuracy of data generated across data sources and helped me to seek consistencies and inconsistencies across participants' viewpoints.</li> <li>• In an attempt to elicit honest responses from genuinely willing participants, I presented my participants with the opportunity to refuse participation or withdraw from participation at any point in the research process (Shenton, 2004).</li> <li>• I established rapport with participants and encouraged them to express their honest viewpoints throughout data generation.</li> <li>• I engaged in regular debriefing sessions with my supervisor throughout the research process and noted my reflections in my reflective journal to help widen my insights about the research study and to guard against potential bias regarding the findings of the study (Creswell, 2014).</li> <li>• I included member checking for the participants of the study to verify that their viewpoints were accurately captured and that the inferences made from the data analysis and interpretation represented their perceptions coherently (Shenton, 2004).</li> </ul>
Transferability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transferability refers to the extent to which a study's results can be applied to other situations and populations that are similar (Shenton, 2004) or to other studies that have a similar focus in research (Marshall &amp; Rossman, 1999).</li> <li>• To enhance the transferability of a qualitative study's findings, sufficient contextual detail about the study needs to be provided (Firestone, 1993).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I provided rich and detailed descriptions of the phenomenon under study (Lincoln &amp; Guba, 1985).</li> <li>• I employed purposive selection and included detailed information for the inclusion criteria of participants (Lincoln &amp; Guba, 1985; Bitsch, 2005).</li> <li>• My use of a reflective journal (to provide transparency) and triangulation (to verify findings across data) was furthermore beneficial in providing contextual detail necessary for establishing the transferability of this research study.</li> </ul>



CRITERIA	BRIEF DEFINITION OF CRITERION	HOW CRITERION WAS ENHANCED
Dependability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dependability refers to the extent to which a study would yield similar results if repeated over time (Bitsch, 2005).</li> <li>• A qualitative study would enhance its dependability if its research process is well documented, logical and traceable (Lincoln &amp; Guba, 1985) thus enabling another researcher to replicate the research process (Shenton, 2004).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I provided for an audit trail (Krefting, 1991; Lincoln &amp; Guba, 1985) by documenting my entire research process, including the research problem; data generation and documentation; data analysis and interpretation; as well as the process of writing up the report.</li> <li>• I used triangulation (Krefting, 1991; Lincoln &amp; Guba, 1985) and included my field notes (illustrating my observations while conducting the research); verbatim evidence of participants' responses during data generation; as well as a reflective journal presenting my perceptions and thoughts throughout the research process.</li> <li>• I discussed my reflections and experiences throughout the research process with my supervisor to check the coherence and logical progress of this particular research process.</li> </ul>
Confirmability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Confirmability is the qualitative researcher's equivalent concern to achieving objectivity in quantitative research (Shenton, 2004).</li> <li>• Confirmability is ensured if a qualitative study's findings are based on the experiences and perceptions of the participants, rather than being influenced by the preferences and characteristics of the researcher (Shenton, 2004).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I employed triangulation to limit the effect of researcher bias (Shenton, 2004).</li> <li>• I provided an audit trail detailing the processes of data generation and data analysis and interpretation in this particular study (Lincoln &amp; Guba, 2004; Shenton, 2004).</li> <li>• I remained transparent regarding my decision-making processes and personal perceptions during the research process by documenting my reflections in a reflective journal.</li> <li>• I used member checking to help verify that the final findings of this study were accurate according to the participants' viewpoints and not simply a reflection of my own perceptions.</li> </ul>
Authenticity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The authenticity of a qualitative study represents the degree to which the various realities of the participants are reflected fairly and accurately and not as a product of the subjective views of the researcher (Seale, 2000).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I provided thick and detailed descriptions of the viewpoints offered by participants as well as their verbatim responses during data generation (McMillan &amp; Schumacher, 2010). Verbatim responses and descriptions of participants' viewpoints are presented in Chapter 4.</li> <li>• I made use of an audio-recording to ensure I captured the exact words used by participants to express their viewpoints.</li> <li>• To account for my position within the research process, I revealed and reflected on observations documented in my field notes and perceptions expressed in my reflective journal.</li> <li>• I employed member checking to verify if the participants believed the final results of this study accurately reflected their viewpoints.</li> </ul>

The following section outlines the ethical guidelines I considered to conduct this research study.

### **3.9 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

Creswell (2014) proposes various ethical guidelines to consider before conducting research to ensure quality ethical standards are upheld. I adhered to Creswell's (2014) ethical guidelines as well as ethical norms imposed by the University of Pretoria and the Health Professions Council of South Africa to conduct this research study. Table 3.9 provides an overview of the ethical norms I adhered to and how I ensured ethical principals were considered.

**Table 3.9**

**Overview of ethical norms adhered to in this study**

ETHICAL NORMS	BRIEF DESCRIPTION	PROCEDURE TO ENSURE ETHICAL PRACTICE
<p>Permission to conduct research, informed consent, and voluntary participation.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A relevant Institutional Review Board (IRB) or an overseeing committee needs to review a researcher’s research plans to ensure ethical principles have been considered and integrated within the entire research process (Creswell, 2014).</li> <li>• Researchers must obtain the necessary permission from individuals of authority to receive access to their site and study participants within that site (Creswell, 2014). Authorities need to provide their informed consent before research can commence.</li> <li>• An informed consent letter includes all the specific details of how the research process will be conducted during the time of data generation as well the potential impact and outcomes of the research (Creswell, 2014).</li> <li>• Participation in a research study should be voluntary and participants should not be deceived in the process of providing their informed consent to participate (Creswell, 2014).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Before conducting this research study, I submitted my research plans to the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Education at the University of Pretoria and obtained ethical clearance to conduct this research study.</li> <li>• I presented an informed consent letter and discussed the purpose and the process of this particular study with the principal of the selected school and was granted permission to conduct this research at the school.</li> <li>• Before commencing with data-generating activities, I obtained informed consent from the participants of this study by providing them with all the necessary information about this study and what would be expected of them in a verbal and written format.</li> <li>• I also requested consent for an audio-recording to be used during our contact sessions.</li> <li>• Voluntary participation, including the opportunity for participants to withdraw from the study at any stage, was emphasised in the detailed consent letter and expressed verbally by me.</li> <li>• Willing participants completed and signed the written informed consent letters before data generation began.</li> </ul>
<p>Privacy, confidentiality, and anonymity.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Researchers need to respect participants’ right to privacy by not invading domains of participants’ private life that they deem too intimate (Allan, 2016).</li> <li>• Any private information about participants should only be obtained with their consent, but such information should not be disclosed to protect their right to confidentiality (Allan, 2016).</li> <li>• Ensuring the anonymity of participants requires researchers to protect the identities of their participants which can be</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Throughout this study, I maintained confidentiality by protecting the private identities of research participants as well as their personal contributions.</li> <li>• I ensured that all sources of data documentation were secured in a safe place to which only my supervisor or I had access.</li> <li>• I informed the participants that their identities would not be anonymous to the other participants partaking in the focus group interview and that their views would be shared openly with the participants and myself as the researcher.</li> </ul>

ETHICAL NORMS	BRIEF DESCRIPTION	PROCEDURE TO ENSURE ETHICAL PRACTICE
	<p>achieved through the use of pseudonyms in the dissemination of research findings (Creswell, 2014).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Confidentiality within the confines of the focus group was therefore not guaranteed, but the participants agreed that any private information or contributions made during the research study would be kept confidential.</li> <li>• The participants were informed that their identities would not be disclosed to the School Management Board or any other colleagues.</li> <li>• The participants were informed of their right to use a pseudonym for the dissemination of the research results to maintain the anonymity of their views when released publicly.</li> </ul>
<p>Respect, integrity and truthfulness.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The principles of respect, integrity and truthfulness ensures that decisions are made in the best interests of the participants (HPCSA, 2008).</li> <li>• Participants' human rights and autonomy need to be respected (HPCSA, 2008).</li> <li>• Tolerance and justice need to be practised throughout a research process to make sure that all participants are treated equally and fairly, especially when accommodating differences in opinions or insights (HPCSA, 2008).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I ensured that I was open and honest with the participants throughout the research process.</li> <li>• I provided them with truthful and detailed information about the purpose as well as the process of this research study and made myself available to address any questions or concerns they had throughout the study.</li> <li>• I acknowledged the participants' human rights and autonomy and functioned with integrity and professionalism throughout the research process, being honest and truthful with the participants.</li> </ul>

### **3.10 CONCLUSION**

In this chapter, I reviewed the meta-theoretical and research paradigms underlying this research study as well as the research design and methodology on which the study was based. I provided a detailed description of the research process and highlighted the reasons for and the benefits of the different choices that were made throughout the process. I furthermore discussed the ways that I attempted to address the trustworthiness of this study and presented the ethical considerations that I followed throughout this research process.

## CHAPTER 4

### FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

#### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I report on the findings of the study. The chapter covers three themes and seven sub-themes. Theme 1 relates to how the participants feel RTI compares to their current support practices. Theme 2 relates to their views on how the current challenges they face in their school context may decrease the viability of potentially implementing RTI in their school or potentially in a South African context in general. Theme 3 relates to their perceived potential benefits of RTI if it were to be implemented effectively.

For ease of reference, an overview of the three broad themes and their related sub-themes is given in Table 4.1 below.

**Table 4.1**  
**Overview of themes and sub-themes**

THEMES	SUB-THEMES
Theme 1: Comparison between RTI and current support practices	Sub-theme 1.1 Tier 1 comparisons
	Sub-theme 1.2: Tier 2 comparisons
	Sub-theme 1.3: Tier 3 comparisons
Theme 2: Envisioned challenges with implementing RTI	Sub-theme 2.1: Lack of resources
	Sub-theme 2.2: Curriculum challenges
Theme 3: Potential benefits of RTI	Sub-theme 3.1: Cost-effectiveness for parents
	Sub-theme 3.2: Improved learning efficacy

The following section provides a discussion on the results that emerged from data analysis. Thereafter, Section 4.3 presents the findings of this study, based on the results, within the context of literature.

#### 4.2 RESULTS OF THE STUDY

Definitions for each theme and sub-theme that emerged from the data are discussed in this section. The inclusion and exclusion criteria for each sub-theme is presented as well as excerpts from the data sources to support the results.

##### 4.2.1 Theme 1: Comparison between RTI and Current Support Practices

Participants in this study were asked to share their viewpoints about RTI and whether they believed it would be viable to implement in their school context. Since the participants were not familiar with RTI, a brief overview of an RTI process was first provided. Thereafter, the participants began reflecting on their current learner support practices and compared such support practices to the three tiers of RTI. Although I did not ask participants to compare an

RTI approach with the current learner support processes in their school, participants regularly referred to such comparisons to help them evaluate the viability of RTI. Research shows that the process of comparison is often used by people when any type of judgement is needed (Mussweiler & Posten, 2012).

This section discusses the three sub-themes of Theme 1, presenting data that relates to how the participants believe their current learner support practices compare to Tier 1, 2 and 3, respectively.

#### 4.2.1.1 Sub-theme 1.1: Tier 1 comparisons

Table 4.2 provides a working definition of Tier 1 comparisons, as well as the inclusion and exclusion criteria I used for sub-theme 1.1.

**Table 4.2**

#### **Working definition and inclusion and exclusion criteria for sub-theme 1.1**

<b>WORKING DEFINITION: TIER 1 COMPARISONS</b>	
Tier 1 of the RTI process requires a teacher to provide high-quality and differentiated instruction to learners in a general or inclusive educational classroom whilst monitoring learner progress and identifying those learners who struggle to achieve learning outcomes (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006, 2007; Fuchs & Vaughn, 2012).	
<b>INCLUSION CRITERIA</b>	<b>EXCLUSION CRITERIA</b>
Any reference made to similarities or dissimilarities to Tier 1 of RTI, including instruction and intervention strategies used in the mainstream classroom and current forms of progress monitoring used to identify learners who require further assistance to learning.	Any reference made to similarities or dissimilarities to RTI related to Tier 2 or Tier 3 implementations of the RTI process or similarities or dissimilarities not related to the RTI process at all.

Three participants believed that they followed a similar procedure to Tier 1 of RTI, which entails a process of identifying learners with learning difficulties, who need additional support, within the mainstream classroom. The following excerpts illustrate this:

- *It's very similar because<sup>7</sup> we also have a few kids that we identify as having problems and then we do interventions... (P3, L14 – 15)<sup>8</sup>.*
- *Because what we do is, we've got an intervention committee and then each teacher identifies how many kids they have in their class at the beginning of the year (that*

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• <sup>7</sup> Data is reported mostly verbatim but light editing was used to facilitate an understanding of the data captured whilst preserving the authenticity of the data.

• <sup>8</sup> After every quote, in brackets, the letter "P" followed by a number indicates which participant expressed the response. After the comma, the letter "L" followed by a number range indicates the line reference as presented in the transcription of the focus group interview (refer to Appendix F).

*struggle). We give them that 8 – 10 week period to suss them out (P1, L237 – 241) (also refer to P3; P2 and P1, L9 – 12; L23; and L519 - 520)<sup>9</sup>.*

Five participants indicated that similar to Tier 1, they monitor learners' progress within the mainstream classroom. They referred to the use of assessments, observations and learner profiles to keep track of learners' progress and any difficulties experienced by learners in the classroom.

- *We observe and do assessments (P5, L525) (also refer to P1; P2 and P8, L522; L524; and L530 – 531).*
- *...we have a tick list so we tick, is it behavioural, is it emotional, is it academic, what is the problem... (P5, L542 – 544) (also refer to P1, L532 - 534).*
- *We do have learner profiles at our school... So, we try to do that thoroughly (P3, L45 – 49) (also refer to P2, L571).*

Participant 5 indicated that they provide additional support or interventions to learners who struggle to achieve learning outcomes by providing those learners with additional examples in the mainstream classroom.

- *...it's like, the intervention, you make an extra book for the child, and do extra exercises... (P5, L541 – 542) (also refer to P5, L572 - 576).*

Participant 5 also indicated that if learners continue to struggle after receiving additional support in the mainstream classroom, then such learners are referred for extra classes.

- *If that does not work (referring to additional support in the classroom), then they need to go to the extra classes... (P5, L548 - 550) (also refer to L579 - 580).*

The participants' viewpoints regarding Tier 2 comparisons is discussed next, in sub-theme 1.2.

#### **4.2.1.2 Sub-theme 1.2: Tier 2 comparisons**

Table 4.3 provides a working definition of Tier 2 comparisons, as well as the inclusion and exclusion criteria I used for sub-theme 1.2.

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• <sup>9</sup> For brevity, I present the best samples of data that illustrate the results that emerged and thereafter provide reference to additional data samples which furthermore support the results (refer to Appendix F). The participant and line references are presented respectively.



**Table 4.3**

**Working definition and inclusion and exclusion criteria for sub-theme 1.2**

<b>WORKING DEFINITION: TIER 2 COMPARISONS</b>	
Tier 2 of the RTI process makes provision for targeted interventions for learners who are unable to make adequate progress in response to universal instruction provided in Tier 1 (Fuchs & Vaughn, 2012). Support interventions provided in this tier are supplemental or additional to general classroom instruction, are generally provided in small-group contexts a few days a week and focus on strengthening specific skills learners experience challenges with (Fuchs & Vaughn, 2012).	
<b>INCLUSION CRITERIA</b>	<b>EXCLUSION CRITERIA</b>
Any reference made to similarities or dissimilarities to Tier 2 of RTI, including: types of support interventions provided at the school, which are additional to regular classroom instruction and targeted to support learners experiencing specific learning difficulties in the mainstream classroom context.	Any reference made to similarities or dissimilarities to RTI related to Tier 1 or Tier 3 implementations of the RTI process or similarities or dissimilarities not related to the RTI process at all.

Participant 3 believes that they follow a similar process to Tier 2 of RTI because they identify learners who struggle to make adequate progress in the mainstream classroom and try to provide additional support interventions to such learners.

- *It's very similar, we also have a few kids that we identify as having problems and then we do interventions... we try to do that T2 (P3, L14 – 15 and L22).*

Participant 1, however, had a different view and felt that they only implement Tier 1 and Tier 3 at their school and do not really implement Tier 2 interventions.

- *You know what we do, we do T1 and T3, we don't actually do (T2)... (P1, L264 and L266).*

Three participants disagreed with participant 1 and said that they do try to implement Tier 2 interventions. They stated the following:

- *No, we try, we try (to do T2) (P2; P3 and P4, L266 – 267).*

The participants spoke about extra classes that are provided, after hours, at the school for learners who are identified as not progressing in the mainstream classroom. Participants indicated that learners who struggle could receive additional specialised support in the form of extra classes that are provided by participant 5.

- *...(Participant 5) provides extra maths classes... (P1, L29)...And Afrikaans and English (extra classes) (P5, L30) (also refer to L548 – 550).*

Participants 5 and 3 indicated that the foundation phase teachers at the school do not all provide additional interventions but rather refer learners who are struggling to participant 5 for extra classes.

- *...the teachers don't give extra lessons. That's where they immediately start to refer... (P5, L557 – 558)*
- *Teachers refer (learners who struggle) to (participant 5) for extra maths or extra English (P3, L559).*

Participant 5 said that extra classes at the school are paid for by the parents as the additional classes are considered to be an additional responsibility for a teacher after school hours. After asking for clarification that extra classes need to be paid for, participant 5 said:

- *Yes, because it's after school (P5, L592).*

The participants indicated that although they try to implement similar interventions expected for a Tier 2 implementation of RTI, they often end up referring learners with learning difficulties externally to specialists to provide additional support to such learners.

- *We do identify kids, we do, we really try to help them and if we can't then we... (refer) (P2, L23 – 25) (also refer to P3, L22).*
- *But it's easier to refer... (P3, L26).*

The participants' viewpoints regarding Tier 3 comparisons is discussed next, in sub-theme 1.3.

#### **4.2.1.3 Sub-theme 1.3: Tier 3 comparisons**

Table 4.4 provides a working definition of Tier 3 comparisons, as well as the inclusion and exclusion criteria I used for sub-theme 1.3.

**Table 4.4**

**Working definition and inclusion and exclusion criteria for sub-theme 1.3**

<b>WORKING DEFINITION: TIER 3 COMPARISONS</b>	
Tier 3 of the RTI process provides learners, who continue to lack progress in response to Tier 2 interventions, with more intensive and individualised interventions that address their specific learner needs (Gersten et al., 2008). Progress monitoring and systematic data collection is necessary in Tier 3 to determine if the learner should be referred for comprehensive evaluations for possible special education services (Gersten et al., 2008).	
<b>INCLUSION CRITERIA</b>	<b>EXCLUSION CRITERIA</b>
Any reference made to similarities or dissimilarities to Tier 3 of RTI including: types of intensive individualised interventions which are targeted to help learners experiencing learning difficulties; and types of intensive individualised interventions offered to learners not responding to additional interventions offered at the school or interventions related to Tier 2.	Any reference made to similarities or dissimilarities to RTI related to Tier 1 or Tier 2 implementations of the RTI process or similarities or dissimilarities not related to the RTI process at all.

Two participants believe that they follow a similar process to Tier 3 of RTI. They indicated that they have access to various specialists at their school and often refer learners with learning difficulties to specialists for assessments or to provide more specialised interventions required at Tier 3. The participants indicated that learners with learning difficulties are also able to consult with external or private specialists for assessments or specialised interventions.

- *Well (we do) T3 as well because we have occupational therapists that come to school, play therapists on the premises... so we have a lot of therapists available that come to school or some of the kids maybe go privately before school or after school... (P1, L227 – 231).*
- *And we've got the educational psychologist... (P5, L235) ... (also refer to P1, L236 – 237).*

Participant 5 said that learners with more significant learning difficulties, who do not respond to additional support offered during extra classes, are consequently referred to specialists for assessments or intensive and individualised interventions.

- *... if that doesn't work (referring to extra classes), then we send them for assessment or (they) try speech therapy or occupational therapy... (P5, L550 – 552).*
- *... the child has been with me for a month now (referring to a learner attending extra classes), nothing I'm going to do is going to help him. I'm not going to waste your money, please refer your child or take your child to a... specialist (P5, L584 – 587 and L589).*

Participant 1 indicated that teachers typically refer learners that they have identified as struggling to respond to universal classroom instruction to specialists for individualised support

interventions. This participant indicated that they do not typically first implement Tier 2 additional support interventions at the school, but alternatively implement support practices that relate to Tier 3 implementations of RTI.

- *You know what we do, we do T1 and T3, we don't actually do...(T2). It's mainly like T1 then refer (P1, L264 - 265 and L267).*

In comparing current learner support practices to the principles of RTI, participants began identifying numerous challenges that they believe may prevent the effective implementation of RTI within their school context. As such, the participants' envisioned challenges with the implementation of RTI is discussed in the next section, under Theme 2.

#### **4.2.2 Theme 2: Envisioned Challenges with Implementing RTI**

This theme captures the participants' experiences of challenges which they encounter in their current learner support practices. When asked to relate such experiences to an RTI approach, the participants indicated that such challenges could transfer to the implementation of RTI in their school context. As stated in Chapter 2, systemic variables need to be considered if the implementation of an RTI model were to be effective in addressing all learner needs (Tyre et al., 2012). The participants regularly referred to systemic challenges that they believe could prevent the effective implementation of RTI and thereby decrease the viability of RTI. This section discusses the two sub-themes of Theme 2, presenting data that relates to the participants' envisioned challenges to RTI implementation.

##### **4.2.2.1 Sub-theme 2.1: Lack of resources**

Table 4.5 provides a working definition of a lack of resources, as well as the inclusion and exclusion criteria I used for sub-theme 2.1.

**Table 4.5**

**Working definition and inclusion and exclusion criteria for sub-theme 2.1**

<b>WORKING DEFINITION: LACK OF RESOURCES</b>	
<p>In the context of education, resources can refer to all the assets (material or non-material factors) that are necessary in order to achieve educational goals. As such, a lack of resources refers to the lack of human, organisational and/or financial assets or strategies that are necessary to optimally support learning within the education process (Usman, 2016).</p>	
<b>INCLUSION CRITERIA</b>	<b>EXCLUSION CRITERIA</b>
<p>Any reference made to a challenge that relates to the lack of resources, including: a lack of time available for teachers to implement supplemental support interventions; a lack of appropriately qualified teachers and teaching assistants available to enhance learning and support practices within school contexts; a lack of financial resources for schools to pay for additional teaching staff and learning support specialists to provide specialised learner support services within a school context; and a lack of parental involvement in the education process.</p>	<p>Any reference to a challenge that does not relate to a lack of resources that are necessary to optimally support learning within the education process.</p>

Whilst comparing current learner support practices with the principles of RTI, participant 3 expressed a personal challenge in finding time to implement additional support interventions consistently and indicated that this inconsistency in providing additional support to learners who struggle would render Tier 2 interventions ineffective.

- *... we have to do (additional support interventions) on a weekly or continual basis and that's a problem... I struggle to get to it, I've done it a few times but I really struggle on a daily basis, like every one o'clock to two o'clock we'll do it... (but sometimes) you can't get to T2 and then you don't implement it immediately...you can't (implement T2) like once a term... That will not work either... (P3, L184 – 190).*

Participant 3, as well as participants 2 and 4, indicated that they experience a lack of time as a challenge in currently providing instructional and support practices and as such envision this to be a challenge in implementing the supplemental support interventions and progress monitoring required during an RTI process. The participants believe that there is not enough time within a teacher's scope of responsibilities to implement supplemental interventions. They think that an overload of teacher responsibilities prevents the allocation of additional time to implement interventions after school hours.

- *...time...it's so difficult to do that (referring to identifying and providing interventions to learners who struggle) within our time frame (P3, L16) (also refer to P2, L7).*

- *And then after hours...we leave here at 3 o'clock, and we have a 9 hour day already (other participants agree), it's difficult to implement that (P3, L19 – 21) (also refer to L199 – 202; L205 – 208; L252 – 254; and L361 - 362).*
- *... we don't have time for T2 that's why (referring to why they often refer learners with learning difficulties after Tier 1) (P4, L268).*

Participants expressed the view that due to a lack of time, they often refer learners who struggle to remedial teachers or learning support specialists to implement supplemental, specialised interventions.

- *But it's easier to refer, it doesn't take time from us, in a sense of time we don't have (P3, L26 – 27)... (also refer to P4, L28).*
- *When (names a remedial teacher) was with him and she did extra lessons with him (referring to a learner with learning difficulties), it was going better, but then he came to me in Grade 2 and I couldn't help him because I don't have the time... and it just went back down... (P7, L1011 – 1014) (also refer to P3, L20 – 22).*

Additional to the lack of time, the participants indicated that the ratio of learners to teaching staff might be a challenge in implementing an RTI process. They believe that a lack of teaching staff to instruct a larger number of learners within a class would be problematic for RTI. The participants furthermore referred to the South African context in general and said that public schools typically have larger numbers of learners in classrooms which could contribute to challenges in implementing RTI in the South African context.

- *... (the RTI process) could work here (referring to their school context) but what about (other government schools) ... (where) they have more kids... (P1, L340 – 342).*
- *20 (learners in a class) is more manageable... (P7, L374)... Other schools can have like 42 kids (P1, L375).*
- *... the more kids you have in a class is a problem (P2, L615) (also refer to L148 – 151).*

Participant 3 believes that it could be a challenge for teachers in their school to implement the supplemental interventions required for Tier 2 or Tier 3. This participant indicated that within their school, they have a large number of learners with learning difficulties and that providing supplemental interventions to such a large number of learners who need additional support is challenging.

- *The thing is that we are a new school, we were the feeding school of children that couldn't belong in the system and now we're sitting with a lot of T2 and T3 children... even though we are a mainstream school... (P3, L255 – 258)... it's very hard to (achieve) T2 and assist them in the (best) manner, but we try our best (P3, L262 – 263).*

Upon clarification that an RTI process requires teachers to identify potential learning difficulties, plan and implement support interventions, and monitor learner progress in response to intervention, participants 1 and 2 indicated that one teacher in a classroom would not be able to implement such practices and would need aid from a teacher assistant.

- *...I don't think that one teacher alone can do that... (P1, L606 – 607)... (In the American system), they have (teacher) assistants (P2, L608) (also refer to L609 – 610).*

Participant 8 furthermore indicated that it would be challenging for one teacher to monitor the progress of learners and complete learner profiles effectively in classrooms with a large number of learners in it.

- *... in the public or government schools, you sit with 40 kids in a class... So the learner profile is not going to be up to standards (P8, L149 – 150 and L152).*

Initially, the participants perceived that Tier 2 supplemental support interventions would occur during class time and did not, from the outset, refer to these interventions as occurring after school hours (in addition to regular classroom instruction). As such, four participants indicated that a lack of teacher assistants in a classroom would be a significant challenge to attaining Tier 2 of an RTI process (in other words, providing specialised, supplemental support interventions during regular class time). The following excerpts illustrate this:

- *It's not very often possible in South Africa to even get to stage 2 (referring to Tier 2) on your own. They (referring to the United States) have two or three assistants in the class and they can really take a group out and do intensive (support)... (P2, L4 – 7).*
- *Yes, we have 25 kids... (P1, L153) ... And (we) have no assistants (P8, L154)... You can't do T2 (P4, L155).*

Two participants furthermore believe that it would be difficult for a teacher to manage learners in a mainstream classroom and maintain discipline while providing specialised, supplemental support interventions to learners who struggle, during regular class time.

- *And you know to have 5 children excluded to do something different while keeping the others busy and trying to help them. It is hard (P3, L17 – 18).*
- *Your biggest thing with that (referring to providing supplemental support interventions during class time) is your discipline has to be so strong that you can go with the T2 kids and leave the T1 kids (P1, L182 – 183).*

The participants potentially perceived the need to implement Tier 2 interventions during the class time due to their envisioned challenge of a lack of time to implement supplemental support interventions after school hours. The participants began referring to the potential of teachers implementing supplemental support interventions after school hours when some

participants addressed the possibility of their school adjusting their current compulsory school hours. The following excerpts illustrate this:

- *... maybe if our school carried on until 14:00, we could maybe assist the 5 children in the class that struggle (P2, L269 – 271).*
- *If school ended at 13:45, we could do T2 until 15:00 (P1, L294)... Yes, give them a 15 minute break and then at 14:00 we could start T2, 14:00-15:00 (P5, L295 – 296) (also refer to L273 – 276).*

Participant 2 indicated that the possibility of their school adjusting the school hours in the future could potentially provide additional time for more consistent supplemental intervention implementation. The participants also indicated a willingness to implement such interventions if the additional time were to be made available.

- *So they did actually say next year we would look at our time slots of when school ends, so then I think we could better implement T2 and at more of a regular basis, let's say twice a week (P2, L278 – 280)... Your T2 and T3 yes! (P3, L281) (also refer to L297 – 304).*
- *We want to do that actually (P1 with confirmation from other participants, L305 - 306).*

The participants furthermore believe that if they had additional time to implement support interventions, they would be able to focus on providing differentiated instruction through support interventions more effectively. They suggested that teachers providing supplemental interventions could be rotated amongst learners with learning difficulties to expose such learners to different teaching styles. Two participants indicated that differentiated instruction offered by different teachers might support learners with learning difficulties more effectively according to their learning styles.

- *(We could) ...rotate (the teachers) a bit, every term (P1, L794) (also refer to L790 – 795).*
- *Or (rotate) the subjects, I have the mathematics kids, you help the English kids that struggle or something like that (P5, L796 – 797).*
- *Because some kids respond better to certain teachers (P8, L798)...Yes and different too...audio-visual (learning) or hands-on (learning) or whatever... (P1, L799 – 800).*

Although the participants indicated that additional time could better enable them in implementing supplemental support interventions, they believe that a lack of appropriately qualified teaching staff may provide further challenges in effectively identifying and providing support interventions. Participant 8 felt that a lack of training amongst teaching staff in some schools would present a challenge with implementing RTI as unqualified teachers would not be able to understand the principles underlying RTI.



- *Okay, so this is not true of our school, but I have seen other schools where the management appoints unqualified teachers... and so, the problem is, if people are employing uneducated, unqualified teachers, then (RTI) will never work because they don't understand anything (P8, L142 – 148).*

The participants felt that although they have appropriate formal qualifications to teach, they are not adequately trained to identify learners with learning difficulties, to accommodate for different learner needs in the classroom, or to provide effective learner support interventions to learners with learning difficulties.

- *Another thing with T2, with the remedial work, I know there's a section when we study, we do a bit of remedial work and overcoming barriers... but sometimes it's difficult... Sometimes you question whether you have the right material to help the child... how do you accommodate them... do I have the right equipment to help the child regarding the certain remedial work... (P3, L165 – 181) (also refer to P7, L261).*
- *Not even to mention, (it is difficult) to identify (referring to identifying learners with learning difficulties without sufficient training or qualifications) (P2, L348) (also refer to L349 – 351).*

Participant 7 indicated that formal training at a tertiary institution may not always include practical training that is necessary to instruct learners effectively.

- *... the stuff that I learnt when I was first here (referring to being a teacher at XXX School), I (realised that) I didn't learn anything about this (at the tertiary institution). For the amount of time that I studied, I never...learnt practical (skills)... (P7, L831 – 835).*

Participants indicated that they receive in-service training at their school, which has been beneficial in enhancing their own skill sets with regards to learner support.

- *The thing is also, (XXX School) I must say invests a lot of money in teacher training (P1, L636 – 637) (also refer to L640 – 641).*
- *I've learnt so much through (names specific workshop provider)... you take the things (you learn from them) to class with you and you realise... I am now maybe on the right track ... (P2, L836 – 842) (also refer to P1 and P2, L843 – 848).*

However, participant 7 indicated that, according to her knowledge, teacher training is not available to all teachers.

- *... not all of the schools send teachers to training...(P7, L826).*

Participants indicated that the teaching assistants available within their school context are also not adequately trained to aid the teachers optimally with teaching responsibilities in the classroom. Participant 1 said that even though teacher assistants within their school do have

access to training courses at the school, it is not adequate to support teachers in the classroom.

- *... we're lucky enough to have (teaching) assistants but then again... they (are) not educated, some of them are, some are busy studying, some of them have been working with kids their entire lives... but if they don't have the ability to...shadow the teacher, then all they do the whole day is sweep the floor... then they are just glorified assistants (P1, L618 – 624) (also refer to P2, L368 – 369).*
- *...the assistants also go (to teacher training), but it's not equally spread. Or maybe it's once a year (P1, L638 – 639)... overall (teacher assistants) haven't all been exposed to help them be more qualified (P1, L642 – 643).*

Two participants indicated that practical skills should be taught at a university level to equip teaching staff with the abilities to identify learning difficulties and provide support to learners who struggle.

- *But they need to do it more at university level to teach teachers how to handle these things (referring to learner support) (P2, L822 – 823).*
- *... (the universities need to) teach (teachers) things that they can use practically (P2, L827 – 828)... Practical things that people can use... (P2, L827 – 828 and L836) (also refer to P4, L824 and L829).*

Participant 2 believes that providing specialised support interventions is not currently in an area of teacher competence and that access to learning support specialists within the school context is, therefore, necessary to implement effective support interventions. Participant 5 similarly indicated the need for learner support specialists within school contexts.

- *(supplemental support interventions are) above our abilities... then you have a system or a group of people that you can send the kids to (referring to a group of learning support specialists), because it's all from speech therapists, trauma therapists, occupational therapists, all in one spot... (P2, L856 – 859).*
- *I think it depends from school to school because (names a private school) has got a remedial centre. It's like a little building on its own... there's a speech therapist, occupational therapist, a reading remedial area...so if you can have a centre like that at a school... (then) it's not just your SBST support file, (but) there's (also) a support centre (P5, L899 – 906).*

Based on the participants' perceived need for additional qualified teacher assistants and access to learning support specialists within schools, they identified an additional resource that they believe is lacking. Participants believe that a lack of financial resources is a challenge for

schools to pay for sufficient teaching staff, including teaching assistants, to assist with instructing and supporting the large number of learners found in classrooms.

- *Financially as well though... (P1, L613)... the more kids you have in a class is a problem... (P2, L615)... Because if your school cannot afford two assistants per class or per grade, then that's another financial issue for the actual school (P1, L616 – 617) (also refer to P1, L755 – 756 and L758).*

The participants believe that schools need access to additional financial resources to pay for specialised learner support services. Participant 5 believes that RTI would be more viable in a school that can pay for additional teaching staff as well as learner support specialists to be accessible on the school premises to support learners with learning difficulties.

- *I think it depends from school to school because (names a private school) has got a remedial centre (where) there's (a) speech therapist, (an) occupational therapist, (a) reading remedial area, like 3 or 4 classes where teachers do extra reading... if you can have a centre like that at a school, (then) it's not just your SBST support file, (but) there's a support centre (as well)... (P5, L899 – 906).*

The participants believe that private schools may be better equipped than government schools to implement RTI as private schools have access to additional financial resources. Participants felt that additional funding, made available by the school or by parents paying tuition fees, is necessary to enable an RTI process within schools.

- *Look I think RTI might work in private schools (P8, L727)... But not in public schools (all participants agree), not at all (P2, L728) (also refer to P8, L870).*
- *(Government schools) don't have the funds (P4, L871) (also refer to P8 and P1; L892 - 894 and L872 – 874).*

When asked what participants believe would be the biggest challenge to implementing RTI in South Africa, participant 1 indicated that it would be financial resources and suggested that the unequal access to financial resources between private and public education would be problematic.

- *Financial resources. And the massive gap and difference between private and government (schools). Because now you're getting half of the country or province... that can afford private schooling... it's just going (to result in) a (lot) of other problems (P1, L918 – 922).*

An additional resource to education that participants believe is lacking and is presenting a challenge within their current learner support processes is the lack of parental involvement in

the education process. Participant 2 believes that parental involvement would be necessary for the effective implementation of any learner support process, including RTI.

- *You need the parents...parent support (P2, L463).*

As previously indicated in Theme 1, participants currently typically refer learners with learning difficulties to learning support specialists for assessments and supplemental support interventions. Participants believe that these learning support services are important in the education process, and they, therefore, experience challenges when parents do not access such services for learners with barriers to learning. The following excerpts illustrate this:

- *... I had a situation with one of my kids in Grade R, the whole year we had meetings to ask the mom to... refer him to get medication. She was totally against it (for) a whole year and now (only) in Grade 1, he has gone onto medication (P7, L133 – 136) (also refer to P1 and P2, L120 – 121; L568 – 570; and L105 – 109).*

Participants indicated that parents often do not access learning support services due to a lack of funding to pay for such services.

- *...I think the biggest barrier for us as teachers is that the parents say we don't have the funds, we can't pay for (learning support services) (P1, L1 – 2) (also refer to P5 and P7, L404 – 413 and L963 – 967).*

Participants felt that parents often deny that their children experience barriers to learning which contributes to a lack of parental involvement in accessing learner support. Participants believe this is a significant challenge in providing supplemental support interventions to learners who struggle.

- *Because if we have to tell the parents, listen your child is partaking in T2, we'll get, "NO, WHY?"... (P1, L119 – 120) (also refer to P7 and P2, L98 – 99; L100; L452 – 454; and L108 – 109).*

Participants indicated that they experience a further challenge with a lack of parental involvement as many parents do not provide additional learning support at home which participants believe is necessary for learners who struggle to enhance their learning performance.

- *(The parents) feel they don't have to do additional work because it's our job to do it (P3, L322 – 324) (also refer to P7 and P2, L316 – 317; L432 – 436; and L429 – 431).*

Participants further indicated that parents are often unaware of additional support interventions provided by teachers and are not always in communication with teachers about support interventions.

- *There are still parents I haven't met and we're in September and I don't know who they are. So I don't know, how do you get them here (P1, L511 – 513) (also refer to P7; P2 and P1, L131 - 132 and L509 – 510).*

In addition to a lack of resources, the participants also envisioned that curriculum challenges may prevent the effective implementation of RTI. This is discussed in the next section under sub-theme 2.2.

#### **4.2.2.2 Sub-theme 2.2: Curriculum challenges**

Table 4.6 provides a working definition of curriculum challenges, as well as the inclusion and exclusion criteria I used for sub-theme 2.2.

**Table 4.6**

#### **Working definition and inclusion and exclusion criteria for sub-theme 2.2**

<b>WORKING DEFINITION: CURRICULUM CHALLENGES</b>	
This refers to the application of a curriculum which does not provide teachers with a clear guideline to implement high-quality teaching practices, that realistically enhance optimal learning for all learners at each grade and ensure a continuity of learning outcomes between grades.	
<b>INCLUSION CRITERIA</b>	<b>EXCLUSION CRITERIA</b>
Any reference made to a challenge that relates to: the lack of a curriculum that ensures high-quality learning outcomes from pre-school through to foundation phase; the lack of clarity provided by CAPS; the lack of consistency in teaching and learning associated with applying CAPS guidelines; and the unrealistic time limits enforced by CAPS.	Any reference to a challenge that does not relate to curriculum challenges.

The participants indicated that the CAPS curriculum is a significant challenge currently affecting teaching instruction and learning in the classroom. As indicated below, participant 2 believes that the CAPS curriculum does not aim for high-quality learning, especially with regards to pre-school education.

- *CAPS is so low in standard... the main thing with (CAPS), (in) kindergarten or Grade R or lower, (is) that (children) need to be fed... be cleaned and (need) emotional support... Nothing else matters. You don't stimulate them, it's really... just to... have a safe haven for that child to come to school ... nothing to stimulate their brains (P2, L927 – 935 and L938 - 940).*

Participant 1 also spoke about low educational standards prescribed by the CAPS curriculum for Grade R and indicated that the educational standards are inconsistent between grades, with higher, unrealistic learning outcome expectations from older grades such as Grade 2.

- *So, where CAPS will say count to 3 by term...(two)..., we're at 50. But now, as (participant 7) said with Grade 2's, they don't have enough time for a topic, so why is the Grade R CAPS level so low and pathetic but then with Grade 2, it's way too much again...(P1, L942 – 948).*
- *Even Grade 3, it's a lot...(P4, L949).*

Three participants indicated that the curriculum lacks clarity which results in the instruction being implemented inconsistently between teachers. As indicated below, participants believe that a vague CAPS curriculum and inconsistent teaching instruction between teachers result in inconsistent learning outcomes between learners. As such, according to the participants, this inconsistency in learning can contribute to some learners falling academically behind other learners in the classroom.

- *And (CAPS is) too wide. One teacher will do the minimum... and another teacher will go all the way (P2, L950 – 951) (also refer to P8 and P2, L952 and L953).*
- *(At our school) we get feeder schools for Grade 1, but then our two Grade R classes go into the Grade 1. Then the Grade 1 teachers are like, "Gees, but half of the kids are way above (the other learners) but the other half are completely struggling. Now you've got a year backlog. Get through Grade 1, (then) there's a backlog, get to Grade 2 and there's still a backlog... it's not (the learners') fault...(P1, L954 – 960)...It's CAPS' (fault) (P8, L961).*

In this theme, participants related the challenges they currently experience in learner support processes to the potential viability of implementing RTI in their school context as well as in a South African context in general. They considered the potential of addressing some of these challenges within their school context to enable the implementation of RTI better. Through considering a few systemic changes within their school context, the participants indicated the potential benefits of RTI if it were effectively implemented. These potential benefits are discussed in Theme 3.

#### **4.2.3 Theme 3: Potential Benefits of RTI**

Theme 3 includes two sub-themes which capture the participants' views on the potential benefits of RTI if it were effectively implemented within their school context.

##### **4.2.3.1 Sub-theme 3.1: Cost-effectiveness for parents**

Table 4.7 provides a working definition of cost-effectiveness for parents, as well as the inclusion and exclusion criteria I used for sub-theme 3.1.

**Table 4.7**

**Working definition and inclusion and exclusion criteria for sub-theme 3.1**

<b>WORKING DEFINITION: COST-EFFECTIVENESS FOR PARENTS</b>	
This refers to the potential benefit of RTI saving money for parents in comparison to the usual costs involved in paying for additional support interventions and referrals to learning support specialists.	
<b>INCLUSION CRITERIA</b>	<b>EXCLUSION CRITERIA</b>
Any reference made to the potential benefit of RTI saving money for parents who ordinarily need to pay for additional support interventions or services.	Any reference made to the potential benefit of RTI that is not related to saving costs for parents.

As discussed in sub-theme 2.4, the participants indicated that a significant challenge for them in learner support processes is that parents often lack financial resources to access specialised support services for learners who struggle. This results in learners not receiving the support necessary to advance in the education process. As indicated below, the participants believe that if schools could effectively provide specialised supplemental support interventions within the school context, then RTI would have the potential to save costs for parents.

- *And the thing is, the parents would have to fall for it (referring to T2 and T3 interventions provided at the school). They'd love it because then it's eliminating referrals and you don't have to pay for T2 (P1, L282 – 284) (also refer to L285).*

As discussed in the next section, the participants also indicated a potential benefit of RTI as being improved learning efficacy in the classroom.

**4.2.3.2 Sub-theme 3.2: Improved learning efficacy**

Table 4.8 provides a working definition of improved learning efficacy, as well as the inclusion and exclusion criteria I used for sub-theme 3.2.

**Table 4.8**

**Working definition and inclusion and exclusion criteria for sub-theme 3.2**

<b>WORKING DEFINITION: IMPROVED LEARNING EFFICACY</b>	
This refers to the process of learning outcomes being achieved more efficiently and effectively with all learners accessing learning at similar levels and improving academic performances.	
<b>INCLUSION CRITERIA</b>	<b>EXCLUSION CRITERIA</b>
Any reference to the potential benefit of RTI enhancing academic performances of learners or any reference to learning in the classroom being enhanced due to all learners, including those who usually struggle, being able to understand and learn the required learning outcomes at similar levels or within the same time period.	Any reference to the potential benefit of RTI not related to improved learning for all learners.

Participant 1 believes that a potential benefit, if RTI were to be implemented effectively, would be an improved pass rate. An improved pass rate may imply that the academic performance of learners may be improved as a result of an effective RTI process. Participant 1 also indicated that learners' self-image might improve. This may potentially be linked to improved academic performances of such learners.

- *What do you believe could be beneficial about it (RTI)? (Researcher, L643)... Your pass rate, kids' self-image... (P1, L644).*

Participants indicated that learners with learning difficulties could benefit from RTI if it were effectively implemented as RTI may prevent such learners from falling behind academically. According to participant 1, if learners received Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions, then learning efficacy in the classroom could be improved overall as all learners could access learning at similar levels within the classroom. The other participants agreed with participant 1, and participant 2 indicated that learners who struggle could potentially progress better academically with additional support offered within an RTI process.

- *Because if (the learners who struggle) get T2 and T3 (participant 2 agrees) in that week... (P1, L683)... would they not then maybe ... be on par (with learners who do not struggle) (P1, L685 – 686).*
- *Yes (with support), (the learners would be) more on track (P2, L684 and L687).*

Participants believe that RTI could potentially improve the learning experience for all learners in the classroom. As indicated below, participants believe that it is not fair on learners who do not struggle to delay learning while teachers provide additional support to learners who do struggle. They believe that RTI could potentially allow all learners to access learning at equal levels and may result in learning progressing at a quicker pace in the classroom.

- *I think also the A student, the star student, you know sometimes we need to keep them busy, to attend to the student that struggles. So... I think it will be more fair to them as well (P5, L654 – 656)... Yes, equal (L657)...*
- *Yes, because... sometimes (you) get annoyed with the A student, ...(because the A student) is finished first again, (and you say), "Just go get an extra workbook – just go read a book..." because the rest of them are all struggling... (P1, L658 – 661) (also refer to P2, L662).*

Three participants also indicated that teacher stress levels would be improved. This may potentially link to improved learning efficacy within the classroom and improved academic performances of learners.

- *Teacher stress (P4, L651)... Teacher stress, yes, number one (benefit) (P1, L652).*



In the next section, based on the results from each theme and sub-theme, I present the findings of this study within the context of the literature.

#### **4.3 PRESENTING THE FINDINGS OF THE STUDY WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF LITERATURE**

It was evident from the onset of site research that the participants were not familiar with an RTI approach. However, after providing a brief overview of the RTI process, participants began a process of comparative thinking by identifying how their current learner support processes compare to Tiers 1, 2 and 3 of an RTI approach. The process of comparison is often used by people when any type of judgement is needed and may have been central to the participants' decision-making about RTI (Kahneman & Miller, 1986; Mussweiler & Posten, 2012).

The participants believe that they currently implement a similar process to Tier 1 as they monitor all learners' progress in the mainstream classroom and identify those learners who struggle to achieve learning outcomes. They indicated that they use learner profiles, assessments and observations to keep track of any academic or behavioural difficulties experienced by learners in the mainstream classroom. The participants believe that similar to Tier 1, they provide a form of differentiated support in the mainstream classroom by implementing what they regard as an intervention with learners they identify as struggling to make progress. This support intervention is usually in the form of extra practice examples or exercises. The participants indicated that similar to Tier 1, they track learner progress. When learners do not make sufficient progress, with additional practise examples in the mainstream classroom, then such learners are referred for supplemental support interventions.

The participants accurately compared their current learner support practices to components of Tier 1 as they implement progress monitoring similarly to assist them in identifying learners who require further assistance to learning (Castro-Villarreal et al., 2014). According to the participants' responses, their instructional practices in the mainstream classroom; however, do not compare closely with the high-quality classroom instruction required during Tier 1. The participants did not indicate that they implement differentiated instruction which is required for high-quality instruction in RTI (Shepherd & Salembier, 2011). To differentiate instruction is to use appropriate techniques to accommodate for differences in learners' interest levels, readiness levels and learning profiles (Tomlinson, 2005). Differentiation requires a teacher to apply the same key principles of learning to all learners in a classroom while adjusting instructional techniques and instructional pace to accommodate for individual learner needs (Tuttle, 2000).

Although the participants regard their practice of providing extra exercises to learners as a form of intervention, such extra examples demonstrate providing additional work using the same type of teacher instruction. Extra examples or exercises, therefore, do not represent

differentiated instruction. The lack of reference to the use of differentiated instruction may indicate that participants are not familiar with and do not readily implement differentiation within classroom instruction. High-quality instruction, including differentiation, is integral to Tier 1 and necessary during Tier 2 and Tier 3 for an RTI process to be effective (Ardoin et al., 2005). As such, a lack of knowledge or training on differentiated instruction may present a significant challenge in enabling an RTI process altogether.

There was some disagreement amongst participants about whether their current practice of providing supplemental support interventions more accurately compared to Tier 2 or Tier 3 of an RTI process. Some participants believe that they currently try to implement support interventions comparable to Tier 2 as they refer learners who are not progressing in the mainstream classroom to one of the foundation phase teachers for extra classes in the afternoons. Although these extra classes provide an opportunity for learners to receive supplemental support, additional to regular classroom instruction, the participants did not indicate if the instruction is differentiated within these support sessions and how learner progress is monitored in response to such instruction (Fuchs & Vaughn, 2012). Participants indicated that only one foundation phase teacher provides extra classes for which parents are required to pay tuition fees.

As such, the foundation phase teachers do not individually undertake the responsibility to implement targeted, supplemental support interventions and monitor how learners with learning difficulties respond to such interventions (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2007). Furthermore, based on the participants' responses, the opportunity for learners to receive supplemental support in the form of extra classes may be influenced by the availability of funding to pay for such classes as well as the availability of the one teacher to provide extra classes. There is, therefore, the potential that supplemental support interventions are not being consistently implemented with learners who experience learning difficulties. The participants' implementation of supplemental support practices thus does not currently accurately compare to Tier 2 of RTI.

Some participants indicated that their current supplemental support practices more accurately compare to Tier 3. These participants indicated that they predominantly implement practices similar to Tier 1 and Tier 3 as they typically refer learners they identify as struggling to progress in the mainstream classroom externally for additional support interventions. Participants indicated that learners with learning difficulties are either referred to specialists (such as Occupational Therapists, Play Therapists and Educational Psychologists) that are accessible within the school context or that need to be accessed by parents in a private capacity. Referrals to specialists can occur in conjunction with referrals for extra classes, or in response to extra classes not adequately supporting a learner's progress.

As such, according to the participants' responses, learners are referred for specialised learning support services before accommodating for systemic or other extrinsic factors that may be impacting their learning (Dednam, 2011). An authentic RTI process requires that teaching instruction and intervention should be adjusted throughout the various tiers to provide an accurate reflection of a learner's true abilities (Greenfield et al., 2010). Instruction and intervention need to be adjusted to accommodate diverse factors, such as cultural circumstances and socioeconomic backgrounds, which can impact how a learner learns (Hagans, 2008). By addressing these factors effectively in the learning process, RTI aims to avoid inappropriate referrals of learners with learning difficulties to special education services (Greenfield et al., 2010) which can be very costly and time-consuming.

The participants' practice of referring learners for additional learning support services is a common practice in South Africa where learners who struggle to progress in mainstream schools are often required to pay for additional class assistants or extra remedial services (HRW, 2015). Nel and Grosser (2016) report that it is also common in South Africa for schools or parents who have the financial capability to consult with private health care professionals to assist with support services to learners. These services are typically expensive and not easily accessed by schools or learners from poorer socio-economic backgrounds. As such, an effective RTI approach could be beneficial in South Africa to reduce costs associated with unnecessary referrals of learners to specialists (Van Der Heyden et al., 2007). RTI would, however, require teachers to implement the high-quality instruction and intervention required during the various tiers, with which the participants envisioned there could be challenges.

In relating their current learner support practices to the potential of implementing RTI principles, the participants associated the challenges they currently face to a potentially challenging implementation of RTI. The participants envisioned that a lack of resources could provide a challenge in the implementation of RTI in their school context as well as in other South African schools. Greenwood et al. (2011) similarly report that a contributing challenge to implementing an RTI model effectively in the international context is the lack of resources which are necessary to develop an infrastructure which can effectively support RTI.

With regards to the resources, participants envision that a lack of time, qualified teaching staff, financial resources as well as a lack of parental involvement could contribute to an ineffective implementation of RTI. The participants indicated that they currently have long working hours and many teaching responsibilities that prevent the allocation of additional time to implement the components required of RTI. They believe that with the large number of learners often found in mainstream classrooms, one teacher would struggle to instruct learners, monitor individual learner progress and implement specialised support interventions. The participants indicated that a lack of time furthermore presents a challenge in implementing supplemental

support interventions consistently, especially after school hours. As such, the participants believe that referring learners for supplemental support interventions is easier for teachers to implement than to provide supplemental support interventions themselves.

Findings from international research on RTI similarly found that teachers reported RTI implementation as involving too much paperwork and that there was not enough time and resources to implement specialised interventions (Castro-Villarreal et al., 2014; Cowan & Maxwell, 2015; Pyle, 2011). If teachers in other school contexts similarly experience a lack of time and an overload of teaching responsibilities, the implementation of RTI components may present a challenge and render an RTI approach ineffective. Time as a resource must be carefully considered in evaluating the viability of RTI implementation.

In conjunction with a lack of time, the participants envision that a lack of teaching staff may present a challenge to the implementation of RTI. The participants believe that teaching assistants would be necessary to support teachers in implementing Tier 1 components with a large number of learners in the mainstream classroom. This finding is consistent with continuing challenges identified as preventing the effective implementation of inclusive education in general in South Africa, which includes the lack of physical and human resources (Savolainen et al., 2012). One participant further indicated that they experience challenges in supporting all learners because they have a large number of learners within their school who require additional, specialised support interventions. This finding aligns with Nel and Grosser (2016) who report that a lack of specialised schools in all school districts results in many learners with learning disabilities needing to be accommodated in mainstream schools. A lack of teaching staff may, therefore, present a challenge in implementing the components of RTI, especially when needing to accommodate a large number of learners within mainstream classrooms.

Furthermore, the participants referred to the prospect of providing supplemental support interventions, required during Tier 2 and Tier 3, simultaneously with regular classroom instruction within school hours. In response to this prospect, the participants indicated that it would be challenging to implement supplemental support interventions with learners who struggle while maintaining classroom management and discipline with those learners who are not struggling. As such, they indicated that teaching assistants would also be necessary to assist with classroom management while teachers provided supplemental support to learners, separate from the rest of the class.

It is unclear whether the participants misunderstood the components of RTI when they referred to the prospect of implementing Tiers 1, 2 and 3 simultaneously. However, based on their responses, this prospect may have been influenced by their perception of a lack of time. When the participants considered the potential of adjusting compulsory school hours to free up extra

time in the afternoons, they indicated a willingness to implement supplemental support interventions after school hours. They indicated that with additional time made available, teachers could more consistently implement support interventions. The participants further indicated that with the additional time available for all teachers to implement support interventions, learners could be exposed to different forms of teaching instruction by rotating through different teachers during such interventions. According to these responses, the participants did not demonstrate knowledge of differentiated instruction which requires individual teachers to be competent in adjusting teaching instruction to accommodate for diverse learner needs (Tuttle, 2000).

Greenwood et al. (2011) report that a predominant challenge to RTI implementation internationally has been the lack of sufficiently trained school personnel. If teachers do not have adequate knowledge of differentiated instruction, this may contribute to challenges in RTI implementation since it is integral to an RTI process (Shepherd & Salembier, 2011). Furthermore, the participants indicated that they envision a lack of training, in general, for teaching staff to be a challenge to the implementation of RTI at some schools. They believe that unqualified teachers, who they think are employed at some schools, would not be able to implement RTI as they would not understand its principles. This finding aligns with Castillo et al. (2018) who stated that for RTI to be implemented with accuracy, teachers need to enhance their capacity to implement the practices associated with RTI. The participants believe that although they have formal qualifications to teach, they still lack practical skills to provide support effectively to learners with different learning needs.

The participants indicated that they receive in-service training at their school, which has been beneficial in enhancing their skill sets regarding learner support but believe that not all teachers have access to in-service training. Even with access to in-service training, it was evident from the study that participants still doubt their competency to implement specialised support interventions effectively with learners. One participant indicated that specialised supplemental support interventions are not within an area of teacher competence, and there is, therefore, a need to refer learners with learning difficulties to specialists for support interventions. Furthermore, the participants regularly referred to the need to have access to learning support specialists within schools to provide specialised support to learners with learning difficulties.

For RTI to be effective, teachers need to be competent in applying the assessment, instructional, and decision-making skills that underlie RTI (Fletcher & Vaughn, 2009; O'Connor & Witter Freeman, 2012). A perceived level of incompetency may challenge the ability of teachers to implement an RTI process effectively before seeking the need to refer learners for special education services. The participants additionally believe that teaching assistants in their school context are not adequately qualified to assist teachers in providing instruction and

support to learners in the classroom. Skill development would be crucial to enhancing the capacity of all teaching staff to implement RTI effectively (O'Connor & Witter Freeman, 2012).

Castillo et al. (2018) state that teachers need to engage with effective preservice training and in-service professional development to enhance their capacity to implement RTI. The participants in this study similarly indicated that to consider the potential viability of RTI, formal teacher training programmes at tertiary institutions would first need to be improved to provide teaching staff with the necessary practical skills to implement learner support principles effectively.

In conjunction with the perceived need for qualified teaching assistants and learning support specialists to enable RTI within schools, participants envision that a lack of financial resources would be a challenge in accessing these needs. Participants believe that private schools would be better equipped than public schools to implement RTI as they have access to additional funding to establish learning support centres which have specialists on-site to aid with interventions. As discussed previously, RTI has the potential to reduce the costs necessary for referrals to specialists (Van Der Heyden et al., 2007). RTI can potentially help differentiate between learners with specific learning disabilities and those who may have other learning difficulties that can be resolved with appropriate support interventions (Ardoin et al., 2005; Knudson, 2008). As such, learners from different socio-economic backgrounds can potentially be accommodated equally in receiving the support they need to develop. This can avoid the inequality in the provision of support services accessible between private and public schools, as indicated by the participants.

An additional resource lacking that the participants envision may be a challenge in RTI implementation is the lack of parental involvement in learners' education. Participants indicated that they currently experience challenges in providing learner support when parents lack involvement in their child's education. The participants indicated that it is particularly challenging for them when parents do not access additional, specialised learning support services that they are referred to by the teachers. They indicated that this challenge could potentially be due to parents not having the financial resources to access such services. Participants believe that a potential benefit of RTI, if it were to be implemented effectively, would be its cost-effectiveness to parents. The participants indicated that if supplemental, specialised support interventions could be provided, free of charge, within the school context, then the referral to specialists could be minimised. Research supports this finding outlining RTI's potential to reduce the amount of financial resources which are allocated to unnecessary referrals for special education services (Van Der Heyden et al., 2007).

The participants furthermore experience challenges with a lack of parental involvement when parents deny that learners experience barriers to learning; when parents do not provide

additional learning support in the home context; and when parents are not in communication with teachers about learner support needed. Research shows that increased parental involvement in their children's education contributes to improved learner achievements whatever the parents' level of education, ethnic background, or socio-economic status (Khosa, 2013). Participants in this study similarly indicated that parental buy-in and input is necessary to provide effective learner support practices to learners who struggle. As such, a lack of parental involvement may contribute to challenges in RTI implementation.

In addition to the perceived lack of resources, the participants envision challenges with the curriculum as preventing the effective implementation of RTI. Current research indicates that the lack of clarity and detail from the CAPS curriculum is contributing to the ineffective implementation of inclusive education in South Africa (Du Plessis & Marais, 2015; Geldenhuys & Wevers, 2013; Ladbrook, 2009; Nel et al., 2016; Van Staden & Motsamai, 2017). The participants similarly believe that the CAPS curriculum lacks clarity which results in teachers applying the curriculum inconsistently. As such, instruction and assessment are not implemented optimally across teachers, and learners consequently access learning at different levels, contributing to some learners falling behind academically.

Furthermore, Ladbrook (2009) found that teachers and management believe learners are achieving lower levels of skills or competencies within the current curriculum. The findings of this study correlate with this finding, as participants also indicated that the curriculum contributes to a low achievement of educational outcomes. Participants believe that the CAPS does not promote high-quality learning in pre-school education and is inconsistent in learning expectations as the grades progress. The curriculum challenges are important to consider in evaluating the potential viability of an RTI approach, as RTI requires high-quality instruction according to a scientifically-based curriculum (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006). The most common challenge to the implementation of RTI internationally has been identified as a lack of evidence-based curricula for Tier 1 instruction as well as a lack of evidence-based intervention strategies for Tiers 2 and 3 (Fuchs & Deshler, 2007; Greenwood et al., 2011). As such, the findings of this study suggest that curriculum challenges may prevent the effective implementation of an RTI approach.

Research indicates that RTI holds the potential to improve academic performances of all learners, including those at-risk for learning difficulties, in a general education classroom (Fox et al., 2010; Hughes & Dexter, n.d.; Hughes & Dexter, 2011). The participants similarly believe that if RTI were effectively implemented, the pass rates of learners would improve, implying improved academic performances of all learners. Furthermore, RTI has a strong focus on early intervention to prevent the onset of more substantial learning challenges (Vaughn & Fuchs, 2003). Due to the provision of early and specialised intervention, RTI can potentially lessen

the likelihood for learning regression and loss of ability over time (Greenwood et al., 2011). The participants similarly believe that an RTI approach can potentially assist struggling learners to improve in achieving learning outcomes to such an extent that they progress at similar learning levels as other learners in the class. As such, there would be less risk of learning slowing down in the classroom due to struggling learners and learning efficacy could, therefore, be enhanced.

The findings of this study indicate that there are numerous systemic challenges that participants believe may prevent the effective implementation of RTI in their own school context as well as in other South African schools. Despite these envisioned challenges, the participants believe that RTI holds potential benefits for overall learning if such challenges can be overcome to allow for an effective RTI implementation.

In the next section, I readdress the conceptual framework for this study.

#### **4.4 REVISITING THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK SUPPORTING THIS STUDY**

The conceptual framework for this research study is guided by sociocultural and social constructivist perspectives on learning and includes the following concepts: *mediation*, *zone of proximal development*, *scaffolding* and *differentiated instruction*. These concepts provide support for the *tiered instruction* construct which underpins an RTI model and further guides the enquiry of this study. The participants in this study acknowledged the importance of mediated learning experiences and the role of teachers as mediators, engaging in a reciprocal learning relationship with a learner to help modify or improve their cognitive abilities (Grigorenko, 2009). The participants in this study indicated their willingness and desire as teachers to function as mediators to learners but envisioned that systemic challenges might hinder their ability to fulfil the mediator role required within an RTI model optimally. The participants indicated that due to challenges currently experienced with learner support, mediation usually occurs in settings where learners with learning difficulties are referred to learning support specialists who then function as more skilled mediators.

Similarly, challenges experienced by participants make it difficult for scaffolding to occur optimally in the classroom. Classrooms accommodating a large number of learners with diverse learning needs make it difficult for teachers to provide effective scaffolding if they do not have assistance from a qualified teaching assistant. Furthermore, participants indicated challenges with the perceived lack of competence of teaching staff not being skilled enough in providing appropriate scaffolding, mediation, and differentiated instruction strategies. As such, participants identified a need for improved professional training and development for teachers to be better equipped to implement components of an RTI model.



The participants believe that their envisioned challenges need to be addressed to evaluate the viability of an RTI model. Participants identified the potential value of an RTI model in improving learning overall in a classroom if it were to be effectively implemented and acknowledged the facilitative role they would need to fulfil in such a process.

#### **4.5 CONCLUSION**

In this chapter, I reported on the findings of the study and provided a detailed discussion of the themes and sub-themes that emerged from the study. I also discussed the findings of each theme in relation to the existing literature that correlated with the findings of this study. Chapter 5 reiterates the findings presented in this chapter and discusses the findings in relation to the research questions posed in Chapter 1.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this exploratory case study was to explore and describe foundation phase teachers' viewpoints on the viability of response to intervention (RTI) in their school context. The literature reveals that teachers in South Africa experience challenges in implementing inclusive education policies, in part due to the lack of clear, detailed and practical guidelines in identifying and supporting learners with learning difficulties (Donahue & Bornman, 2014; Du Plessis & Marais, 2015; Geldenhuys & Wevers, 2013; Ladbrook, 2009; Nel et al., 2011; Nel et al., 2016). RTI, as a systematic approach to assessment and intervention, could potentially be used by teachers to inform and improve teaching practices to accommodate all learner needs (Vaughn & Fuchs, 2003).

International research reveals positive results that RTI is an effective approach used in the early identification and support of learners who experience learning difficulties (Fox et al., 2010; Fuchs et al., 2003; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006; Greenfield et al., 2010; Hughes & Dexter, 2011; Jimerson et al., 2016; Wise 2017). However, research is still emerging and by no means complete (Greenfield et al., 2010; Hughes & Dexter, 2011). Due to RTI being a relatively new concept, there is currently no research on its implementation in South Africa. As such, through conducting a focus group interview with foundation phase teachers, this study aimed to explore their viewpoints on the viability of implementing RTI to guide future research endeavours into RTI. In this final chapter, I answer the primary research question posed in Chapter 1. Furthermore, I reflect on the contributions, challenges and limitations of the study and make recommendations for future research.

#### 5.2 REFLECTING ON THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In answering the primary research question, "What are foundation phase teachers' viewpoints on the viability of response to intervention in their school context?", I first considered the secondary research questions that guided this study. I will address the secondary research questions in the same order that the participants addressed them in their viewpoints. This contributes to the logical progression of the participants' thinking process in evaluating the viability of an RTI approach. I therefore first address the third secondary question; followed by the second secondary question; and conclude with the first secondary question.

## 5.2.1 Secondary Research Questions

### 5.2.1.1 Secondary research question three

What challenges do the teachers in this study foresee with the implementation of RTI in their school context?

The participants in this study envision various challenges in the implementation of RTI. These include a lack of resources necessary to develop an infrastructure to effectively support RTI as well as curriculum challenges which may undermine an effective RTI approach. With regards to resources, the participants believe that a lack of time, a lack of highly qualified teaching staff, a lack of financial resources, as well as a lack of parental involvement could all contribute to an ineffective implementation of RTI.

The participants believe that a lack of time could provide a challenge for them in implementing the necessary RTI components effectively. The participants indicated that they currently have long working hours, many teacher responsibilities, and classrooms that contain a large number of learners with learning difficulties. As such, they believe that it would be challenging to effectively instruct learners, monitor learner progress, provide the necessary support interventions. In particular, the participants envisioned that they would not have enough time to implement supplemental support interventions, required during Tier 2 or Tier 3, especially after school hours.

In conjunction with a lack of time, the participants envision that a lack of teaching staff may contribute to challenges in the implementation of RTI in their school context. They believe that additional teaching assistants would be necessary to implement RTI in mainstream classrooms that contain a large number of learners with learning difficulties. They believe that additional teaching assistants would need to assist teachers in effectively implementing RTI components necessary during Tier 1. Along with this perceived need however, the participants identified that schools may lack the financial resources to access additional teaching staff to support an RTI approach.

The participants furthermore envision that a lack of training for teaching staff, including teaching assistants, could present a challenge to the implementation of RTI in their school context. Despite their formal training in teaching and valuable in-service training they receive at their school, the participants still doubt their competency to provide specialised support interventions. They believe they lack the necessary practical skills to identify and effectively support learners with learning difficulties. In addition, the participants believe that teaching assistants available in their school are often not adequately trained to assist teachers in learner support processes. The participants' responses furthermore indicated that they might potentially lack knowledge of what differentiated instruction entails and how to implement

differentiated instruction effectively. Adequate knowledge of differentiated instruction and the competency to adjust teaching instruction to meet diverse learner needs are integral to an RTI approach. As such, a lack of high-quality training, which includes training in differentiated instruction, may present significant challenges in the implementation of RTI.

Due to their perceived lack of time and lack of qualified teaching staff, the participants indicated a need to refer learners with learning difficulties to specialists to receive specialised support interventions. Along with this perceived need however, the participants identified that a lack of financial resources available to schools and parents may prevent access to such specialised learning support services. The participants additionally envision that a lack of parental involvement in learners' education may provide a challenge to RTI implementation in their school context. They believe that any learner support process, including an RTI approach, would be ineffective if the parents are not involved in the process of accessing or providing additional support to learners who struggle.

In addition to the perceived lack of resources, the participants envision that curriculum challenges may hinder the effective implementation of an RTI approach in their school context. They believe that the CAPS curriculum lacks clarity which results in teachers applying the curriculum inconsistently. As such, the participants indicated that learners may access learning at different levels, resulting in some learners falling behind academically. Furthermore, participants believe that the current curriculum does not promote high-quality learning consistently throughout the grades. Since RTI requires high-quality instruction according to a scientifically-based curriculum, the aforementioned curriculum challenges may prevent the effective implementation of an RTI approach.

The participants believe that if specific challenges could be overcome and RTI were effectively implemented, then RTI could render potential benefits within their school context. These benefits are indicated in answering the next secondary research question.

#### **5.2.1.2 Secondary research question two**

What strengths or benefits do teachers in this study believe can come from implementing RTI in their school context?

The participants believe that if RTI were to be effectively implemented, the pass rates of learners would improve, implying improved academic performances of all learners. Furthermore, the participants believe that RTI can potentially assist struggling learners to improve their learning ability to such an extent that they can progress at similar learning levels as other learners in the class. As such, the participants indicated that this could lessen the potential of learning slowing down in the classroom, due to struggling learners, which could enhance learning efficacy overall. The participants indicated that RTI could be more cost-

effective for parents. The participants believe that if RTI were effectively implemented, then the provision of supplemental, specialised support interventions, free of charge, within the school context, could reduce costs associated with referrals to specialists for specialised support services.

The participants, therefore, believe that RTI holds potential benefits for overall learning and the opportunity to access learner support, regardless of the availability of financial resources. The viability of RTI implementation is addressed in the next secondary research question.

### **5.2.1.3 Secondary research question one**

How viable do teachers in this study believe RTI is in their school context?

The participants of this study believe that if the challenges they envision with the implementation of RTI could be overcome in their school context, then RTI may become a viable approach to implement. They indicated that RTI may become more viable in their school context if their compulsory school hours were adjusted to free up additional time in the afternoons. They believe that if additional time were made available to them, they could implement supplemental support interventions more effectively and consistently, after school hours, which could allow Tier 2 and Tier 3 implementations to become more viable within their school.

Additionally, the participants believe that they could implement RTI components more effectively within a mainstream classroom if they had access to additional, qualified teaching assistants. Furthermore, the participants believe that all teaching staff would need to have access to high-quality training opportunities to equip them with the necessary practical skills to effectively identify and support learners with learning difficulties. They believe that increased access to such training, via tertiary institutions and in-service training, would be necessary to enable the viability of RTI in their school context.

The participants believe that RTI could potentially be a viable approach to implement in their school context if envisioned challenges in its implementation can be overcome and effectively addressed.

## **5.2.2 Primary Research Question**

In this section, I present my conclusions relating to the primary research question, as stated in Chapter 1: “What are foundation phase teachers’ viewpoints on the viability of RTI in their school context?”

The participants envision that various systemic conditions may provide challenges to the implementation of RTI and as such, hinder its viability in their school context. A lack of valuable resources such as time, an adequate number of teaching staff, high-quality training of teaching

staff, financial resources, and parental involvement may prevent the effective implementation of RTI components and therefore decrease the viability of RTI in the participants' school context. Additionally, curriculum challenges provide a significant systemic barrier in implementing an effective RTI process and can therefore decrease the viability of RTI within the participants' school.

The participants believe that if systemic challenges, such as a lack of time and a lack of qualified teaching staff, could be addressed and overcome, then an RTI approach could become viable in their school context. The participants believe that if RTI could be effectively implemented, it could yield benefits associated with improved learning at school and a decrease in financial resources necessary for referrals to learner support specialists.

### **5.3 POTENTIAL CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE STUDY**

This study provided insight into the viewpoints of nine foundation phase teachers, from one particular school, on the viability of RTI in their school context. It is the first qualitative study on the subject in South Africa. It can serve as a starting point to guide further research endeavours into the potential viability of implementing RTI in a South African context. The foundation phase teachers' viewpoints in this study offered an insight into systemic conditions that could potentially provide challenges to the implementation of RTI in their school context. Exploring and describing their viewpoints may initiate further research endeavours into similar systemic conditions that may impact other school contexts and as such, could potentially affect the implementation and viability of RTI within those schools. Furthermore, the foundation phase teachers' viewpoints in this study offered an insight into what they perceive may be strengths or benefits to an effective RTI implementation in their school context. Exploring and describing their perceived benefits may initiate further research into other teachers' perceived benefits of RTI and as such the potential viability of implementing an RTI approach in a South African context.

The findings of this study, although limited in scope, suggest that RTI could potentially be a viable approach to implement in South Africa if various systemic conditions can be addressed effectively. The findings of this study furthermore have the potential to raise awareness among educational professionals on the potential value of applying the principles that guide an RTI approach.

### **5.4 CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

An unforeseen challenge in this study was the difficulty I experienced in accessing the School Management Team and the participants of the research site I had initially chosen purposively and conveniently for this study. Due to the difficulty in obtaining consent to conduct this study at the site, I had to change my research site to a different school. Although my knowledge of

the newly selected school was more limited than that of my original site selected, it still met the criteria for my purposeful and convenient selection of participants and site. The new site was also easily accessible to me and was similarly an independent school that contained diverse learners. Therefore, the change in site did not affect the protocol of the study and the participants selected still fulfilled my criteria for purposive selection.

A limitation of this study concerned the unforeseen challenge in ensuring the participants acquired a comprehensive enough understanding of RTI to enable informed viewpoints on its viability. I provided an overview of an RTI approach at the onset of the focus group interview as well as an opportunity for the participants to check their understanding of RTI by asking questions. The participants appeared to have an understanding of RTI, and I continued with the focus group interview assuming the participants had enough knowledge to formulate informed viewpoints. However, unfamiliarity with RTI and its principles may have impacted a limited understanding from participants about RTI. It was only during the data analysis process that I identified, within the participants' responses, that there may have been potential misunderstandings of an RTI process.

A lack of knowledge on RTI may have impacted the participants' viewpoints on the implementation of RTI and as such may have limited the results of this study. Nonetheless, the findings of the study are an accurate reflection of the participants' thoughts and feelings, as clarified in the follow-up interview that I conducted. As such, although this study may be limited in scope, its findings may still be valuable as a starting point to initiate further research on RTI in South Africa.

## **5.5 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR RESEARCH**

To gain further knowledge on the potential viability of RTI in a South African context, further research could include the following:

- A survey study to examine teachers' viewpoints about the viability of RTI in a South African classroom. Such a study could elicit a variety of views, from a large sample of teachers from different school contexts. If the findings from such a study reveal similarities in teacher perceptions or experiences across school contexts, then such findings could indicate common variables that may impact the viability of RTI in South Africa.
- A comparative study to examine the potential variability in teachers' viewpoints about the viability of RTI within different school contexts. Such a study could potentially indicate similar viewpoints across settings that may provide insight into common challenges and/or benefits that teachers perceive RTI may provide in its implementation. A comparative study could furthermore reveal different or additional insight into RTI's implementation in different school contexts. As such, a comparison of

teachers' viewpoints across school contexts could contribute to the overall evaluation of RTI's viability in a South African context.

- A pilot study implementing an RTI approach within a particular school context over a prolonged period. Such a study can be used to evaluate the effectiveness of an RTI implementation and to offer insight into challenges experienced as well as potential benefits gained from its implementation. The findings from such a study could be used to guide further research into the implementation of RTI and its potential viability in a South African context.

## **5.6 CONCLUDING REMARKS**

The purpose of this exploratory case study was to explore and describe foundation phase teachers' viewpoints on the viability of RTI in their school context. Although this study was limited in its sample and scope, it is the first qualitative study on RTI in South Africa, and its findings can be used to guide further research endeavours into the viability of an RTI approach in South Africa. The participants of this study's viewpoints revealed similar envisioned challenges to RTI implementation, as international research indicates. Furthermore, the participants' envisioned challenges relate to similar experiences reported by teachers in South Africa regarding inclusive education implementation in general. The participants' viewpoints also indicated similar perceived benefits of an RTI implementation as indicated through international research. As such, the findings of this study can be regarded as a valuable starting point in RTI research in South Africa.



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## APPENDICES

Appendix A:

Semi-structured Interview Schedule

Appendix B:

Permission letter to conduct research at XXX Preparatory School and Sample of Informed Consent Form: School Management Board

Appendix C:

Information letter and Sample of Informed Consent Form for Participants

Appendix D:

Field Notes Including Initial Coding

Appendix E:

Reflective Journal

Appendix F:

Transcript of Focus Group Interview Including Initial Coding

## 8.1 APPENDIX A: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW SCHEDULE



### SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Foundation phase teachers' viewpoints on the viability of response to intervention as a diagnostic measure

#### INTERVIEW GUIDELINE:

- I am here to find out about your viewpoints on whether you believe a response to intervention approach would be viable as a diagnostic measure in South Africa.
- I will provide you with some information regarding response to intervention as an assessment and intervention approach and then ask your opinions about it by following a question guideline (*see below*).
- Please be open and honest in sharing your own opinions and provide as much detail as possible.
- Please feel free to respond to the other participants' opinions but please do so in a respectful manner.
- Please ask if you have any misunderstandings or need more clarity on any question being asked.
- Sometimes I may ask you to elaborate on an answer, provide reasons for an answer or respond to another participant's opinion.
- Are there any questions before we begin?

#### QUESTION GUIDELINE:

1. Is anyone familiar with Response to Intervention (RTI)?
  - If yes, what do you know about RTI?
  - I can provide a brief overview of RTI and potential benefits thereof (*guideline on next page*).
  - Is there anything about RTI that you are unsure of or need clarification on?
2. What are your opinions about RTI?

3. Do you believe that using RTI could be beneficial in South African classrooms?
4. Do you believe there might be challenges in using RTI in South African classrooms?
5. Is there anything further you would like to add about the potential use of an approach like RTI in South Africa?
6. Would you like to know anything further about RTI or this research study?

### **Introductory discussion on Response to Intervention (RTI)**

RTI is a structured approach to assessment and intervention which can potentially help teachers to identify and support learners with learning difficulties. It has shown positive results in improving learning outcomes of learners in inclusive educational settings internationally, including those at-risk of more severe learning difficulties.

RTI focuses on frequently assessing and monitoring learners' rates of learning and then using this information to guide appropriate interventions which are specialised to meet individual learner needs.

To achieve this, RTI follows what is known as a multi-tiered instructional approach. This means that there are different levels, or "tiers", of intervention.

The first level, or Tier 1, refers to the general instruction provided by a teacher in the classroom. During this tier, teachers need to use research-based teaching strategies, including the use of differentiation, to instruct a scientifically based curriculum to all learners. The progress of learners during this universal instruction needs to be monitored and any standardised measures of achievement can be used to help identify learners who are not responding adequately. Progress should be monitored over an 8-10 week period to help identify if any improvement to learning occurs. If learners do not meet the expected scores of short term learning progress, then these learners are identified as needing more intensive, specialised interventions which are provided in Tier 2.

Tier 2 provides supplemental interventions that are additional to regular classroom instructions. For grades R-3, these are generally interventions in reading and math. These interventions are usually small-group interventions which occur 3 to 5 days a week and focus on strengthening specific skills that learners may have experienced challenges with during Tier 1. Learners' progress is continually monitored during Tier 2 and if learners still show a lack of progress then they are identified as needing more intensive and individualised interventions



which are provided during Tier 3. If a learner does however show progress in Tier 2 and no longer requires specialised interventions, then that learner is moved back to Tier 1.

Tier 3 interventions are provided to learners who continue to lack progress in response to Tier 2 interventions after a reasonable amount of time. Tier 3 provides these learners with more intensive and individualised interventions which include a variety of instructional approaches to address individual learner needs. Progress is monitored throughout and information about specific learner abilities is gathered systematically to help identify an individual learner's successes and failures to instruction. If sufficient learner progress is made in Tier 3, then the learner may be moved to Tier 2 or Tier 1 depending on the level of progress achieved. If the learner still experiences learning challenges in response to the intensive interventions during Tier 3, then there is a possibility that such learners are experiencing learning disabilities and therefore a referral for a comprehensive evaluation for possible special education services is necessary.

The systematic collection of information on a learner's abilities throughout the different tiers of intervention helps provide a comprehensive image of a learner's educational profile. This can support the SIAS process which helps access appropriate learning support, including concessions, for learners who struggle. Combined with more comprehensive evaluations, this educational profile can also help schools and teachers to make appropriate referrals for special education services when necessary.

RTI integrates assessment and instruction to inform what type of intervention strategy will be most appropriate to respond to a learner's needs. Through its process of continuous assessment and progress monitoring, RTI can help track how learners respond to different instructions or interventions. This can help teachers to become more familiar with using information gathered from regular assessments to inform and improve teaching practices. It can help guide teachers on how to adjust curricula, materials or strategies for teaching to meet diverse learner needs based on information obtained throughout the tiers.

As a structured approach to assessment and intervention, if successfully implemented in the foundation phase, RTI can function as a preventative model by helping teachers to identify learners with learning difficulties early on and providing them with appropriate support interventions. This can help prevent developmental delays and challenges with learning in later years.

RTI can also help differentiate between learners with specific learning disabilities and those who may have other learning difficulties that can be resolved with appropriate support interventions. This can prevent the inappropriate referral to special education of learners who underachieve due to inadequate instruction or other extrinsic factors.

Overall, RTI can save costs in the long term if learners are provided with appropriate early interventions which could prevent substantial learning challenges requiring more prolonged interventions later on. It can also reduce costs for unnecessary evaluations for special education if learners are appropriately supported according to their learning needs throughout the RTI process.

RTI has the potential to function as a diagnostic measure to help identify and support learners with learning difficulties or disabilities. If incorporated into South African education policies, it may help support inclusive education and policies such as SIAS which help access appropriate learning support for learners.

## 8.2 APPENDIX B: PERMISSION LETTER TO CONDUCT RESEARCH AT PREPARATORY SCHOOL AND SAMPLE OF INFORMED CONSENT FORM: SCHOOL MANAGEMENT BOARD



### REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT A RESEARCH STUDY

#### XXX PREPARATORY SCHOOL

Dear School Management Board

I am currently registered as a student at the University of Pretoria and am completing a Master's programme in Educational Psychology. As part of my degree requirements I need to conduct a research study which I wish to conduct at your school. I hereby request your permission to conduct my research study at your school with about seven of your teachers. The topic I am conducting my research on is:

“Foundation phase teachers’ viewpoints on the viability of response to intervention as a diagnostic measure”.

The purpose of this study is to explore and describe foundation phase teachers’ viewpoints on the viability of using response to intervention (RTI) as a diagnostic measure in South Africa. RTI is currently being used internationally as an approach to assist teachers in the identification and support of learners who experience learning difficulties. The knowledge obtained from this study could be beneficial for future research endeavours into the implementation of RTI into South African policies which could provide teachers with a practical tool to help them identify learners with learning difficulties early on and guide them on how to assist such learners effectively. Teachers will benefit from partaking in this study by gaining new knowledge about RTI as a possible diagnostic measure and by gaining valuable insights through shared knowledge about current issues surrounding the support of learners with learning difficulties. Specific definitions and information about RTI will be supplied at the onset of this research study.

This research study will be in the form of a focus group interview with about seven foundation phase teachers from your school. The questions which will be addressed during the focus group interview are attached to this letter for you to review. The interview will take place on your school premises at an arranged time, outside of school hours, that will be convenient to

all the teachers involved. The duration of the interview will be approximately 90 minutes in which teachers will be encouraged to share their viewpoints on the viability of RTI with each other and with me, the researcher. There will be one more meeting session with all the participants once the researcher has analysed the findings from the interview. This session should last approximately 30 minutes and will be conducted at your school at an arranged time, outside of school hours, convenient to all the participants. This session will simply require the participants to check that the findings were correctly interpreted. The final results, as presented in my mini-dissertation, will be made available to the teachers and to your School Management Board.

Teachers who participate do so voluntarily and are allowed to withdraw from the study at any stage if they wish to do so. Issues of confidentiality and anonymity will be discussed with the teachers. Ground rules will be established to ensure that information shared within the focus group interview will remain confidential amongst all the participants and the researcher. This means that their identities and information shared may not be shared with anyone outside of the focus group interview. The group of research participants will be debriefed regarding this matter at the end of the research process again. To ensure their identity is protected when the results of the research study are disseminated, the teachers will have the opportunity to use a pseudonym which will be linked to their personal opinions and demographic information.

Your permission to conduct this research at your school will be highly appreciated and the contribution of your teachers will be of great value. Please complete the form below if your permission is granted. Thank you for your consideration of this request.

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Mrs Miché Conway (Researcher)

Telephone number:

083 882 7976

Email: [miche.moll@gmail.com](mailto:miche.moll@gmail.com)

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Dr Suzanne Bester (Supervisor)

Email: [suzanne.bester@up.ac.za](mailto:suzanne.bester@up.ac.za)

**INFORMED CONSENT**  
**SCHOOL MANAGEMENT BOARD**

Title of research project: Foundation phase teachers' viewpoints on the viability of response to intervention as a diagnostic measure.

I, \_\_\_\_\_ the undersigned, in my capacity as a representative of the School Management Board at \_\_\_\_\_ (Name of school) hereby grant permission for Miché Conway to conduct the above-mentioned research.

Signed at \_\_\_\_\_ on \_\_\_\_\_ 2019.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Representative of  
School Management Board

\_\_\_\_\_  
Researcher

### 8.3 APPENDIX C: REQUEST FOR PARTICIPATION AND INFORMED CONSENT TEACHERS



#### REQUEST FOR PARTICIPATION AND INFORMED CONSENT TEACHERS

Dear Sir/Madam

I am currently registered as a student at the University of Pretoria and am completing a Master's programme in Educational Psychology. As part of my degree requirements I need to conduct a research study. I hereby request and invite you to participate in this study. The topic I am conducting my research on is:

“Foundation phase teachers’ viewpoints on the viability of response to intervention as a diagnostic measure”.

The purpose of this study is to explore and describe foundation phase teachers’ viewpoints on the viability of using response to intervention (RTI) as a diagnostic measure in South Africa. RTI is currently being used internationally as an approach to assist teachers in the identification and support of learners who experience learning difficulties. It is a tiered instructional approach to assessment which could provide teachers with a practical tool to help them identify learners with learning difficulties early on and how to assist such learners effectively. Specific definitions and information about RTI will be supplied at the onset of this research study.

This research study will be in the form of a focus group interview with seven foundation phase teachers who will be familiar to each other. The questions which will be addressed during the focus group interview are attached to this invitation letter for you to review. The interview will take place at your school at an arranged time, outside of school hours, that will be convenient to all the participants. The duration of the interview will be approximately 90 minutes in which you will be encouraged to share your viewpoints on the viability of RTI with each other and with me, the researcher. There will be one more meeting session with all the participants once the researcher has analysed the findings from the interview. This session should last approximately 30 minutes and will be conducted at your school at an arranged time, outside of school hours, convenient to all the participants. This session will simply require the participants to check that the findings were correctly interpreted. The final results, as presented in my mini-dissertation, will be made available to you and to your School Management Board.

Your identities will be known to the other participants partaking in the focus group interview and your views will be shared openly with the other participants and the researcher. Ground rules will be established to ensure that information shared within the focus group interview will remain confidential amongst all the participants and the researcher. This means that your identity and information shared will remain confidential and may not be shared with anyone outside of the focus group interview. The group of research participants will be debriefed regarding this matter at the end of the research process again. To ensure your identity is protected when the results of the research study are disseminated, you will have the opportunity to use a pseudonym which will be linked to your personal opinions.

Your participation in this research study is completely voluntary and you are allowed to withdraw from the study at any stage if you wish to do so. If at any stage of the research you wish to withdraw, please inform the researcher timeously. The data collected from you up until the point of withdrawal will be incorporated into the overall findings of the study.

If you are willing to participate in this study, please complete the form below. Thank you for your consideration of this request.

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Mrs Miché Conway (Researcher)

Telephone number:

083 882 7976

Email: [miche.moll@gmail.com](mailto:miche.moll@gmail.com)

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Dr Suzanne Bester (Supervisor)

Email: [suzanne.bester@up.ac.za](mailto:suzanne.bester@up.ac.za)

## INFORMED CONSENT

### TEACHERS

Title of research project: Foundation phase teachers' viewpoints on the viability of response to intervention as a diagnostic measure.

I, \_\_\_\_\_ the undersigned, in my capacity as a teacher at \_\_\_\_\_ (Name of school) hereby agree to participate in the above-mentioned research study. I furthermore give my permission for the research session to be audio-recorded. I understand that my contribution will be treated as confidential and anonymous within the limitations discussed above. I would / would not like to use a pseudonym to be linked to my responses once the results of the study have been disseminated. I understand that I may withdraw from the study at any time if I wish to do so and will inform the researcher in a timeous manner of this decision.

Signed at \_\_\_\_\_ on \_\_\_\_\_ 2019.

Participant name: \_\_\_\_\_

Contact number: \_\_\_\_\_ Researcher

Email address: \_\_\_\_\_



8.4 APPENDIX D: FIELD NOTES INCLUDING INITIAL CODING

Field Notes
4 SEPTEMBER
SESSION 1

- Teachers arrive from 07:00 - 07:15; Prompt; friendly

START:

- Icebreaker: Favorite thing career/accomplishment.  
(positive attitudes; good dynamic)

Names: (L→R)

██████ - Grd 2     ██████ - Grd 2     ██████ - Grd 3  
██████ - Grd R     ██████ - Grd 2     ██████ - Grd R  
██████ - Grd 3     ██████ - Grd 1     ██████ - Grd 3

- RTI: consent; process

- lack teaching assistants → many participants express this!
- No time → BIG Problem.
- learning support structure in place!
- Refer for interventions
- Give extra classes (██████)
- learner profiles
- Every teacher must ID early (teacher responsibility = NB to participants!) → emphasise this!
- ↳ must be taken seriously - DETAIL learner profile)
- Try to ID & support learners with difficulties!
- Parents a problem (different understanding of difficulties - cultural; educational)
- ↳ Not supporting intervention suggestions (finances; denial)
- ↳ Don't know about interventions

S.T. 2.1

S.T. 2.2

S.T. 1.1, 1.2, 1.3

S.T. 1.1

S.T. 1.1

S.T. 1.1

S.T. 1.1

S.T. 1.1

S.T. 2.4

S.T. 2.4

show genuine concern!

Theme 1: Identified	Sub-theme 1.1 comparisons	Tier 1	Theme 2: Challenges to RTI viability	Sub-theme 2.1: Lack of sufficiently trained teaching staff
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comparisons to RTI	Sub-theme 1.2: Tier 2 comparisons		Sub-theme 2.2: Lack of time
	Sub-theme 1.2: Tier 3 comparisons		Sub-theme 2.4: Lack of parental involvement

.....

- Unqualified teachers problem. → S.T. 2.1
- Big classroom sizes (gov) problem. → S.T. 2.1
- Remedial support → problem  
(don't know enough for T2 interventions) → S.T. 2.1
  - ↳ teacher discipline? ⊕ identify
  - ↳ not continuous - won't work.
- School ends @ 15:00 - extra curriculum (extra work - "TIRED" → "frustrated" ↓) → S.T. 2.2
  - see concern. CAPS hours over!
- T3 - external - specialist interventions (referral base) → S.T. 1.3
  - Intervention committee → S.T. 1.1
  - (track learner progress/difficulties) → S.T. 2.2
- ⊕ TIME! again! - Problem → S.T. 2.1
- Training in remedial - problem. → S.T. 2.1
- School time shorter - T2 interventions in afternoon. → S.T. 3.1
  - ⊕ (T3) free! → Excited about this. → S.T. 4.1
  - (better for parents) ↓ expect teachers to do add. work.
- ⊕ No admins. → S.T. 2.2
- Teaching aids limited - NOT trained → S.T. 2.1
- 25 learners (±) in school per class.

Theme 1: Identified comparisons to RTI	Sub-theme 1.1 Tier 1 comparisons	Theme 2: Challenges to RTI viability	Sub-theme 2.1: Lack of sufficiently trained teaching staff
	Sub-theme 1.3 Tier 3 comparisons		Sub-theme 2.1: Lack of time
Theme 3: Systemic changes to enhance RTI viability	Sub-theme 3.1: Addressing time frames	Theme 4: Potential benefits of RTI	Sub-theme 4.1: Cost-effectiveness for parents

→ all participants arrive promptly!

Field Notes

5 SEPTEMBER

SESSION 2:

- Plan: ①
- Round up challenges from yesterday
    - ↳ Clarify what was meant by [redacted] → financial challenges? (how would it relate to RTI?)

↳ refers to financial probs + to refer to specialist interventions

S.T. 2.3

- ↳ Clarify what meant by parents uneducated.

↳ refers to not knowing how to ADDITIONALLY support → want interventions AT school (not home)

- Plan: ②
- Run through current process to ID & support? (relate to RTI viability)

- ↳ Identify, assess, observe (booklet) ⊕ baseline

need parental support. (+) management

S.T. 2.4

- ↳ Track behaviour @ school

- ↳ Intervention; extra work (book)

S.T. 1.1

- ↳ Parents (extra work @ home + school)

- ↳ Refer for specialised intervention / assessment

S.T. 1.2.1.2

Track record; learner profile (Tier one intervention; some Tier 2 but mainly refer out for additional support interventions) (need to pay extra classes)

S.T. 1.2.1.2

- Relate to RTI (viability within school)

- ↳ Need support staff - assistance!

S.T. 3.2

- ↳ Financial problems (to pay support staff/teachers)

S.T. 2.3

- ↳ Big classroom sizes - problems.

S.T. 2.2

Theme 1: Supporting the premise behind RTI	Sub-theme 1.1 Tier 1 comparisons	Theme 2: Systemic conditions challenging the viability of RTI	Sub-theme 2.3: Lack of financial resources
	Sub-theme 1.2 Tier 2 comparisons		Sub-theme 2.4: Lack of parental involvement
	Sub-theme 1.3 Tier 3 comparisons		

Theme 3: Systemic changes to enhance RTI viability	Sub-theme 3.2: as a diagnostic measure	Additional support	
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↳ lack of training - problem

↳ Need teaching assistance! (again!) (qualified!!) → S.T. 2.1

↳ Need MONEY for teacher training (workshops) → S.T. 3.2

↳ Need MONEY for teacher training (workshops) → S.T. 3.3

Plan<sup>3</sup>: • Beneficial in South Africa? → "MIGHT work" (system changes)

• Effectively implemented?

↳ YES (participants seem eager about potential)

↳ pass rate; image; home life; teacher stress (emphasized) → S.T. 4.2

↳ overall better in class (equal) → S.T. 4.2

↳ Work load too much; T2 & T3 support → equal level in class! → S.T. 2.2

↳ End school earlier → S.T. 4.2

↳ 14:00 - 15:00 (T2 & T3 interventions) → S.T. 3.1

↳ Idea to SEPERATE learners according to ability (disagreements amongst participants)

↳ Back to RTI - Private schools (✓) not public schools (✗)

↳ unorganised management (DoE)

↳ Financial problems, resources! → S.T. 2.3

↳ Practical learner support training needed → S.T. 3.3

↳ Resource centres; specialists needed. → S.T. 3.2

↳ Funding (school fees) needed. → S.T. 3.2

↳ CAPS curriculum problems → S.T. 2.5

↳ CAPS curriculum problems → S.T. 2.3

*bring back to inclusivity*

*special services, interventions*

Theme 2: Challenges to RTI viability	Sub-theme 2.1: Lack of sufficiently trained teaching staff	Theme 3: Systemic changes to	Sub-theme 3.1: Addressing time frames
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	Sub-theme 2.2: Lack of time	enhance RTI	Sub-theme 3.2: Additional support staff
	Sub-theme 2.3: Lack of financial resources	viability	Sub-theme 3.3: Professional development and training
	Sub-theme 2.5: Inappropriate curriculum	Theme: 4: Potential benefits of RTI	Sub-theme 4.2: Improved learning efficacy

## 8.5 APPENDIX E: REFLECTIVE JOURNAL

20 August 2019:

I struggled for over a month to arrange a meeting with the School Management Board of my first choice of site to ask permission to conduct my research there. Meetings were cancelled and I did not receive an opportunity to introduce my research or ask for permission to conduct it. I therefore decided to contact a second choice of site to ask permission to conduct research there. I observed a group of teachers from this site at an educational workshop about 3 months prior. The workshop was about supporting learners with learning difficulties and the fact that about 10 teachers from the chosen site attended the workshop as well as their high level of engagement in the workshop motivated me to choose the selected site as I believed the teachers there may have valuable insight to contribute to my research study and I assumed they may be willing to engage with me and contribute to a research study.

29 August 2019:

The principal of my second choice of site was eager to grant permission for me to conduct my research at the site. The school has allowed various researchers on previous occasions to conduct research at the school. Staff members from the school have also expressed interest in learning and/or adopting new or international approaches in education if there is a potential of such approaches to improve learning and success at the school. The process of gaining access to the participants ran smoothly and participants who were willing to participate responded promptly, providing consent to participate in the study. Although indicating that I would only require about seven foundation phase teachers for the study, nine out of the eleven foundation phase teachers at the school volunteered to participate. The prompt response from nine volunteered participants suggests to me that teachers at this site may be as willing as the principal to advance learning and development within the school. I communicated further with one participant who served as a representative of the group to arrange a time and place to meet for the focus group interview. During this communication, this representative participant further indicated that the teachers were eager to learn about and talk about a new approach to assisting learners with learning difficulties as this was something of concern to the teachers. Upon discussing the most convenient time to conduct the focus group interview, [participants requested to meet in 2 sessions of 45 minutes each before school started. The participants indicated that this would be more convenient for their time as school only ended at 15:00, after which various participants had varying responsibilities and were concerned they would not have enough time to meet then. \[S.T. 2.1\]](#)

4 September 2019:

Upon entering the school I was greeted by one of the participants who had agreed to meet me and show me to the venue where the focus group interview would take place. Walking to the venue, many foundation phase learners were already at school and playing in the secure playground facilities. I observed learners from diverse racial backgrounds playing and many of the learners greeted the participant I was walking with excitedly. The venue was one of the participants' classroom. I observed a clean classroom environment equipped with desks and chairs for learners, a teacher's desk and chair, a whiteboard, stationery accessible around the classroom and additional cupboard space, chairs and a computer in the class. There were also various displays of learners' work around the classroom. From the appearance of the classroom environment, as well as the facilities I observed entering the school, I assume that this school has sufficient resources to support an effective learning environment. It appears as though the teachers have access to resources to provide a conducive environment for learning.

Participants arrived punctually to start the session at 07:15. I observed teachers smiling and greeting one another, and myself, in a friendly manner as they entered the venue. Based on this observation, I assume that there is a general positive attitude and sense of cohesion amongst participants. I believe this allowed for a positive group dynamic during the session. As various participants arrived, before the session was due to begin, they discussed teaching plans amongst each other and provided ideas to each other about various teaching materials that they found and which were useful to them. From this observation, I assume that there is a sense of collaboration amongst participants, as teachers, and I assume that they readily have access to resources (including teaching materials) which can aid them in supporting learning in their classrooms.

As the focus group interview started, once I had outlined the RTI approach, I observed that one participant was [oppositional towards RTI, initially indicating that there are not enough teaching assistants \(such as America has\) for such an approach to work](#). Her body language that I observed (she shook her head and crossed her arms) also suggested to me that initially she was not convinced about the viability of RTI ([due to a lack of teacher support in the classroom as well as a lack of time - as she verbally expressed](#)). A discussion naturally progressed about the [difficulties that the participants](#) at the school face with time and it appeared as though the participants perceived that RTI as a process would [increase teacher responsibilities which they believed were already being stretched to the limit](#). They often came back to expressing concern over a [lack of time and effective support to provide specialised interventions with learners](#)[S.T. 2.1].

Participants spoke a lot about the current process they follow in identifying and supporting learners with learning difficulties [S.T. 1.1]. It appeared as though the participants were trying



to find similarities between their own process and the RTI approach to help them relate their experiences to the potential of RTI being a viable approach within their own school context. The discussion regularly circulated back to challenges the participants experience as teachers in their current learner support processes. I tried to find ways to link what the teachers were expressing about their current challenges to how they believe such current challenges could relate to the viability of RTI but I believe additional clarifications and questions (on my part as researcher) may have drawn these comparisons a bit more clearly.

Some participants made assumptions about reasons why there is not enough involvement from parents in a learner support process. I will look at lack of parental involvement (in supporting additional or specialised interventions) as a possible theme or sub-theme during my data analysis if it is extensively brought up because participants indicated it as a barrier to supporting learners in specialised interventions and it may therefore potentially prevent success of Tier 2 and Tier 3 specialised interventions [S.T. 2.4]. A few teachers also had a viewpoint that some employed educators in South Africa are unqualified and that this would hinder the implementation of RTI. I did some research and found a statistical study released by the Department of Education in 2016, which does indicate that various schools around South Africa indeed had unqualified or under-qualified teachers employed at the schools. Unqualified or under-qualified teachers was identified by the participants as a challenge to identifying and providing support to learners with learning difficulties at various points of this session and I will therefore consider this as a theme or sub-theme (if it comes up extensively) during the data analysis process [S.T. 2.2].

I believe this first session often came back to current problems faced by participants in supporting learners with difficulties in their school. In the next session, I believe I should try revert back to how their experiences are relevant to their beliefs about whether RTI would be a viable approach to implement in their school. Although relating to current challenges, I believe that these are the experiences of the participants and that comparisons can be drawn between these experiences and their relevance to RTI. For tomorrow's session, I could ask participants to summarise their current experiences in their current learning support process that they follow in a way to concretely link these experiences to an RTI approach and try to elicit more explicit viewpoints on the viability of RTI more specifically.

5 September 2019:

Participants were once again punctual for session 2 of the focus group interview. Early-comers once more had brief discussions about plans for the day and shared resources (teaching materials) that certain participants found beneficial. As the session commenced at 07:15, participants still appeared eager to engage with each other and me, as the researcher, on the topic. I tried to recap a few viewpoints expressed at the end of the previous session to gain

clarity on what the participants' viewpoints were. I tried to focus on how participants' experiences could relate to the viability of RTI by asking various clarification questions but I believe I could have asked for more elaborations on certain viewpoints (for example, why participants believe the CAPS curriculum would be a barrier for RTI).

16 September 2019:

Whilst going through the transcripts of the focus group interview, commencing the data analysis process, I question whether participants had a comprehensive understanding of the RTI approach and its potential value. [Participants predominantly focused on giving viewpoints on the difficulties associated with providing specialised support interventions and finding time to provide support to learners struggling \[S.T. 2.1\].](#) They often referred to difficulties associated with providing Tier 2 and 3 interventions during class time – I question whether they misunderstood RTI or simply thought this would be their [only time](#) available to implement additional interventions. I believe the latter may be case because as they suggested a solution to freeing up time in the afternoons, then they reflected on providing supplemental interventions after hours. During the focus group interview, I think I should have provided more clarity on the link between intervention and continuous progress monitoring/assessment used to determine a learner's ability to "respond to intervention". I am not sure if this clarification may have yielded any additional viewpoints to RTI's viability and is therefore something to consider if this research endeavour is ever repeated in a different site with different participants. [The observation that participants were fixated on practical challenges associated with providing specialised interventions potentially suggests that such challenges would need to be overcome before considering the implementation of RTI in a South African context. Many challenges identified by participants as challenges that may prevent the implementation of specialised interventions are similar systemic challenges that I also identified as systemic challenges that teachers in other research studies identified as preventing the effective implementation of inclusive education practices in South Africa. A preliminary finding that I am identifying is that systemic conditions need to be addressed in order to consider the viability of RTI in a South African context \[Theme 2 in general?\].](#)

Participants appeared to be more focused on Tier 2, specialised group interventions, and not as much on specialised individual interventions needed in Tier 3. I question whether participants didn't possibly misinterpret Tier 3 as only referring learners out to specialists, without considering the initial individual interventions that comprise Tier 3. Perhaps the practical challenges that participants identified as preventing the provision of Tier 2 group interventions were so significant that participants did not even consider that individual interventions would be possible and therefore simply discuss referring learners who reach Tier 3 out to specialists. I should have asked for clarification from participants on this matter to

ensure that participants did have sufficient knowledge on RTI to provide informed viewpoints. This should be taken note of for future research endeavours into this topic.

Near the end of the 5 September session, participants discuss a particular learner who has severe learning difficulties (identified by one participant as having “big learning disabilities”). Participants once again focus on the intervention aspect of RTI and express that interventions with the RTI process would not be beneficial for the learner. The participants fail to mention how the RTI process may have helped to identify that this particular learner may have a learning disability due to a lack of responsiveness to intervention. The discussion of this learner may have been a good opportunity for me to elaborate on and clarify the RTI process to ensure participants comprehensively understood RTI, including its potential in aiding in the identification of learning disabilities. I could also have used the opportunity to clarify the need for specialised, research-based interventions within RTI to eliminate quality of instruction as a cause of learning difficulties (I explained this at the start of the focus group interview when explaining RTI, but I believe clarification at this point may have been necessary). [The discussion from participants did once again highlight the challenges they believe may prevent the viability of RTI as including the lack of time and resources to implement specialised interventions as part of tier 2 and 3 instructional support.](#) Potentially seeking more clarification in the data generation process may have elicited different insights from participants and needs to be noted in the case of future research endeavours. In general, the limited scope of this study initiated relevant viewpoints from the participants, but I believe further research into this subject can yield additional insights to add value to this topic.

31 October 2019:

The data analysis process was tedious and required me to re-read the transcription over and over again. Developing initial codes was a lengthy process and then trying to organise the codes into themes, re-check data, name and define themes and then re-check that the data within themes was meaningful was a challenging process. I will shortly engage in discussions with my supervisor to affirm whether she believes I have analysed, organised and interpreted my data accurately. Pre-liminary discussions though have made us discuss, in-depth, the focus of the research study – participants did not really relate to the use of RTI as a diagnostic measure in South Africa but rather focussed on the practicalities and difficulties in implementing an RTI process in their school context. The focus of this study therefore looks at their viewpoints of its viability in their own school context. I believe the findings of this study can propose that further research compares different contextual experiences of teachers to find similarities or differences across South African schools.

27 November 2019:

Some of my themes have been reworked as some data was co-occurring within more than 1 theme or did not make sense within a certain theme. My supervisor and I believe the themes now more accurately and meaningfully represent the data. Chapter 4 has been challenging to write and I've had to continually remind myself to focus on the data and not impose my own judgements or interpretations on what the participants are "trying" to say. I am currently struggling to integrate the results with literature to draw up conclusive findings to the study.

11 February 2020:

The findings of the study have finally come together with the guidance and support from my supervisor and I can see how the findings link with literature and can be used to propose further research. I have submitted the findings to the participants for member checking. Due to busy schedules for the start of the year, the participants agreed to review the findings individually and then to discuss any concerns with each other in a meeting for a representative of the participants to report back to me.

17 February 2020:

Chapter 4 is finally complete with affirmation from the participants that they agree with the findings and do not have any concerns. I am beginning Chapter 5, I believe that I have been able to answer my primary and secondary research questions. I will address the challenges and limitations to this study (as outlined in previous journal entries) and recommend further research. Once my Chapter 5 has been approved, I can put everything together and submit to my language editor and technical editor. Near to completion.

## 8.6 APPENDIX F:TRANSCRIPT OF FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW INCLUDING INITIAL CODING

### 4 SEPTEMBER: Session 1 (45 minutes)

Researcher introduces herself; participants introduce themselves and informed consent form is verbally explained, including research process, issues of confidentiality and group engagement guidelines.

After informed consent is verbally given to proceed, an explanation of RTI follows (see Appendix C for guideline followed).

Upon discussing the potential of RTI saving costs in the long run by preventing unnecessary referrals to special education services, Participant 1 begins commenting:

	LINE		CODE
Participant 1:	1 2	Ya cause I think the biggest barrier for us as teachers is the parents say we don't have the funds, we can't pay for this	CO1.1: Lack of funds for special education services or referrals
Upon completing explanation of RTI:			
Participant 2:	3 4 5 6 7	With this structure (referring to RTI), I have a problem because I was in the United States. It's not very often possible in South Africa to even get to stage 2 (referring to tier 2) on your own. They have two or three assistants in the class and they can really take a group out and really do intensive... where we...time is really a factor	CO2.1: Challenge - lack of teaching assistants (to assist with specialised interventions) CO2.2: Challenge - lack of time (to implement specialised interventions)
Other participants agree and say "Mmmm"			
Participant 1:	8	Ya because you'll sit here until 6 o'clock at night and I mean...	CO2.2: Challenge - lack of time (to implement specialised interventions)
Participant 3:	9 10 11 12	So tier 1 (T1) is your normal kids, tier 2 (T2) is your remedial children and tier 3 (T3) are your specialists...cause we try do our remedial in class time. We don't really have a structure like THAT (RTI) but we more or less follow the same thing...	CO3.1: Comparison to RTI

Participant 1:	13	Ya, it's very similar	CO3.1: Comparison to RTI
Participant 3:	14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22	It's very similar cause we also have a few kids that we identify as having problems and then we do interventions but yet again...time...it's so difficult to do that actually within our time frame. And you know to have 5 children excluded to do something different while keeping the others busy and trying to help them. It is hard. And then after hours, I mean we leave here at 3 o'clock, and we have a 9 hour day already (other participants agree), it's difficult to implement that, unless we have like a remedial teacher that can assist us. But we try to do that T2 (other participants agree)	CO3.1: Comparison to RTI (ID and intervene) CO2.2: Challenge - lack of time CO2.8: Challenge – classroom management CO2.1: Challenge - lack of learning support teachers CO3.1: Comparison to RTI (attempt T2 interventions)
Participant 2:	23 24	We do identify kids, we do, we really try to help them and if we can't then we...	CO3.1: Comparison to RTI (identify in T1; try intervene but refer to external specialist interventions if more significant)
Participants 1&2:	25	...refer....	
Participant 3:	26 27	But it's easier to refer, it doesn't take time from us, in a sense of time we don't have.	CO2.2: Challenge - lack of time (to implement specialised interventions)
Participant 4:	28	Ya we don't have that time	
Participant 1:	29	But I mean like (participant 5) gives like extra maths classes...	CO3.1: Comparison to RTI (extra classes compared to T2 interventions)
Participant 5:	30	And Afrikaans and English	
Participant 1:	31 32 33	Wow you are on the ball hey. But like, you're not allowed to teach your own students hey, I mean what was the school's thing about that?	
Participant 3:	34 35	No that was amanuensis, amanuensis you not allowed to do with your own kids	
Researcher:	36 37	Yes, we will come back to all the things you are raising, but just concerning amanuensis while you have brought it up, RTI can also	

	38 39 40 41 42 43 44	be beneficial as it can provide a track record of a learner's profile so that when learners can apply for concessions and all these things, you've got the record, because one of the biggest challenges that teachers face when applying for concessions is, I mean if you only identify difficulties later on, to try and develop this profile of a learner's abilities to then submit to apply for concessions is extremely difficult (other participants agree)	
Participant 3:	45 46 47 48 49	We do have learner profiles at our school so we do it on a yearly basis, starts from observations, meeting with the parents, what we pick up in class, so obviously that's confidential the parents don't see it, so that goes, if they leave the school it goes with them. So we try to do that thoroughly.	CO3.1: Comparisons to RTI (Monitor learner performance – progress monitoring; keep track)
Researcher:	50 51 52 53 54	It would be extremely helpful if you can maybe each just think of something that you believe could work with the approach and something you think could be the biggest challenge with the approach. I just want to make sure I hear everyone's different viewpoints...	
Participant 2:	55	...input	
Researcher:	56 57	Yes input on how you think this approach may work so maybe take a few seconds...	
Participants talk amongst each other in Afrikaans – something about preparation and going back and forth.			
Participant 1: (to other participants)	58	And I mean the funds, I don't make enough money to do all of that.	CO2.10: Challenge - financial (lack of compensation/salary for additional teacher responsibilities)
Participant 1: (to researcher)	59 60 61	You see that's the thing also, because every teacher needs to be on the ball because if you in Grade 2 and you pick up but why did you not pick it up, why is it only being picked up now...	CO2.3: Teacher inconsistency (in monitoring progress and identifying difficulties)
Participant 3:	62	Ya why is it only being picked up now	
Participant 2:	63	Exactly	
Participant 1:	64	And it's happened a few times amongst us (other participants agree)	

Researcher:	65 66	Okay, please catch me up quickly, what were you all saying there a moment ago, I missed some of it.	
Participant 1:	67 68 69 70 71 72 73 74 75 76	The learner profiles have to be so...and I'll get one out the office to show you, it really has to start from the time that child comes in where I need to take responsibility to detail, to fill that form out so that when it gets to Grade 2 and (participant 4) says gees but hypothetically now I suspect this child is being molested, why hasn't it maybe been picked or maybe you did pick it up but it hasn't been written down, whatever, or if I maybe just write "sweet child" but (participant 4) writes an essay, you know what I mean, it kind of needs to be on the same standard that each teacher fills a profile (participants comment indiscriminately)	CO2.3: Teacher inconsistency (in monitoring progress and identifying difficulties)
Researcher:	77 78 79	So am I right in saying, from your school, they do place a high responsibility on you as teachers in every single grade to make sure that you...	
Participant 2:	80	Have a profile	
Participant 1:	81	Yes..	
Participant 2:	82	And a detailed profile!	
Participant 6:	83 84	The problem is sometimes when the kids come from other schools we sometimes only receive the learner profile in June...	
Participant 1:	85	Or not at all (participants agree)	
Participant 4:	86	And there's no information inside	
Researcher:	87	Ya it's difficult if your school...	
Participant 6:	88	We try our best but others don't	
Participant 1:	89	And it's very demotivating at the end of the day as well	
Researcher:	90	Because then...	
Participant 4:	91	Because then we need to start from scratch	
Researcher:	92 93	Ya it becomes difficult when you receive a learner profile in high school and when there is just no information about a child	
Participant 1:	94 95	Ya and often it's those kids who need the most help (other participants agree) who...	
Participant 4:	96	That's why they away from the previous school	
Participant 1:	97	Or teachers are like I just don't even care, like this child	
Participant 7:	98 99	Ya but the parents are also like, we know there's nothing wrong with our child...	CO2.4: Challenge - lack of parental involvement
Participant 2:	100 101	We struggle, parents is our biggest thing because we have a lot of...how can I say...uneducated	



Participant 8:	102	Teachers?	
Participant 2:	103	NO....parents parents!	
Other participants also indicate no and laugh.			
Participant 2:	104 105 106 107 108 109 110 111	No, uneducated parents and in some ways very traditional. Also a thing in South Africa, for instance this week with me, I had a little boy I asked since the second week of January for eyes to be tested, he is totally, totally (indicating he can't see). So he got his glasses, end of August and his dad's response was for a long time, but there's nothing wrong with my eyes, why does he need glasses, because to him it's a reflection of my seed is not good enough and I won't take that failure, so there's a lot of cultural ...	CO2.4: Challenge - lack of parental involvement (in supporting additional interventions)
Participant 1:	112	That's the biggest challenge	
Participant 8:	113	Ya cultural	
Other teachers agree.			
Participant 1:	114	Biggest hurdle	
Researcher:	115 116	So just to double-check, you're saying cultural factors, socioeconomic, educational factors might...	
Participant 2:	117	ALL influence that most definitely, especially there at T3	
Other participants agree.			
Participant 4:	118	T2, T3	CO2.4: Challenge: lack of parental involvement (in supporting additional interventions)
Participant 1:	119 120 121	Because if we have to tell the parents, listen your child is partaking in T2, we'll get, "NO, WHY?". It takes us almost a year to just get a child to go to occupational therapy, or eye tests...	
Participant 2:	122 123	It might also be because of finances or just total (denial – translated), there's nothing wrong here	
Researcher:	124 125 126	So at the moment, you're mainly talking about referrals which is your T3 at the moment, but your T2 is where you're mainly doing interventions here at the school, do you think that's still okay?	
Participant 2:	127	It's...it's okay BESIDES	
Researcher:	128 129 130	Besides for the other factors you identified, we'll get to other challenges now, but are you saying that's okay with parents? It's just when you get to...	
Participant 7:	131	Well most of the time the parents don't know	
Participant 2:	132	We just implement it	
Participant 7:	133 134	So I had a situation with one of my kids in Grade R, the whole year we had meetings to ask the mom to take him, refer him to get	

	135 136	medication, she was against it totally, a whole year and now in Grade 1, only now he's gone onto medication	
Participant 1:	137 138 139 140	Ya they'll listen more to a Grade 2 teacher or a Grade 3 teacher before maybe Grade R or Grade 1 because... (another participant comments... "they hope it'll go away") which sometimes is the case...	
Participant 4:	141	Ya it happens	
Participant 8:	142 143 144 145 146 147 148 149 150	Okay, so this is not true of our school but I have seen other schools where the management appoints unqualified teachers as teachers and even in pre-school, this should already be implemented in pre-school already before they come to Grade R and one, and so, the problem is, if people are employing uneducated...that's why I said teachers (giggles), unqualified teachers, then this (refers to RTI) will never work because they don't understand anything and then also in the public, ag government schools, you sit with 40 kids in a class...	CO2.5: Challenge - unqualified teachers  CO2.6: Challenge – too many learners in a class (to maintain progress monitoring)
Participant 2:	151	Ya you can't...	
Participant 8:	152	So the learner profile are not going to be up to standards	
Other participants agree.			
Participant 1:	153	Ya we have 25 kids	CO2.6: Challenge – too many learners in a class
Participant 8:	154	And they have no assistants	
Participant 4:	155	You can't do T2	CO2.1: Challenge - lack of teaching assistants (to assist with specialised interventions/learner profile)
Participant 5:	156 157 158	You see, the government and private schools, you are not supposed to employ a teacher that can't show your SACE certificate and they employ teachers without SACE certificates.	CO2.5: Challenge - unqualified teachers
Participant 1:	159	(to participant 5) I'm telling you many have got fake SACE numbers	
Participant 5:	160 161	You must be able to show your SACE certificate, government school, privates school.	
Participant 1:	162 163 164	I agree with you but I'm sure if you can fake other documents you can fake this, why I'm not sure, cause you can't make a lot of money, I'm sure they do	

Participant 3:	165 166 167 168 169 170 171 172 173 174 175 176 177 178 179 180 181	Another thing with the T2, with the remedial work, um I know there's a section, when we study we do a tad bit of remedial work and overcoming barriers and all that but sometimes it's difficult because it's not something that we studied, sometimes you question whether you have the right material to help the child. I mean I think that's sometimes, I see the child struggle with addition, for example, so how many addition sums do we need to do, like I can't just give it to him and say listen dude, just do it, I have to sit with him one on one to explain but now the problem is we've got seven T2 children in our class so how do you accommodate them. So you know sometimes that's difficult, for me, personally, or like do I have the right material to assist the child. You know do I have the right equipment to help the child regarding the certain remedial work etc etc, cause you know if the child struggles with maths, there's going to be a lot of content he struggles with in maths, you know to catch up, we in Grade 3, to catch up like 3, 4 years of work from nursery school, it is difficult within a classroom, WITHIN a classroom, with kids.	CO2.7: Challenge - lack of adequate teacher training (for remedial interventions; lack confidence in support interventions and materials)  CO2.8: Challenge – classroom management
Participant 1:	182 183	Your biggest thing with that as well is your discipline has to be so strong that you can go with the T2 kids and leave the T1 kids.	CO2.8: Challenge – classroom management
Participant 3:	184 185 186 187 188 189 190	And not even just that, self-discipline regarding we have to do it on a weekly or continual basis and that's a problem, like I struggle to get to it, I've done it a few times but I really struggle on a daily basis, like every one o'clock to two o'clock we'll do it and I mean you can't get to T2 and then you don't implement it in the right now, you can't do it like once a term and then be like okay you've tried your best. That will not work either...	CO2.3: Teacher inconsistency (in providing interventions)
Researcher:	191	It's got to be a...	
Participant 3:	192	Consistent! (other participants agree)	
Researcher:	193 194	I just want to check, when you say leave the kids, the kids leave school here at?	
Participant 1:	195	3 o'clock	CO2.2: Challenge - lack of time (to implement specialised interventions; long
Researcher:	196	Is that when school formally ends?	
Participant 5:	197 198	Yes (other participants agree), we have 14:00-15:00 a homework period	
Participant 1:	199 200	And then we already have to catch up teaching and stuff, no we work!	

Participant 3:	201 202	But we've got extra mural activities within our school curriculum as well but that's only for half an hour each day	hours not viable for teacher/learner)
Researcher:	203 204	Okay so is that why you're saying it's difficult to do extra work in the afternoon cause you're already doing additional...	
Participant 1:	205 206 207 208 209	And we're tired and you can imagine the poor kid at half past three in the afternoon, he's frustrated, you're frustrated, we can at least as professionals say listen you can't do extra remedial classes at that time, it's not fair, then that child's self-image also goes out the window.	
Researcher:	210	Okay so this is at your school, not all schools end at...	
All participants:	211	No	
Participant 1:	212	No it's just at (XXX school)	
Participant 8:	213	No it's not just (XXX school), there are other schools as well	
Participant 1:	214	Til 3 o'clock?	
Participant 8:	215	Ya but then it's not for the kids, just the teachers	
Participant 1:	216 217	Ya but we saying kids are at school til 3, cause our CAPS hours are way over	
Researcher:	218 219 220 221	I'm just trying to determine, it seems like your school, by what you're saying, is doing additional things, by having a homework period at the end can provide an opportunity to provide extra T2 interventions to help in that sense...	
Participant 2:	222	Yes	
Researcher:	223 224 225 226	Whereas if other schools don't have that to incorporate something like you're doing, it might assist to get to T2 despite the other challenges that you've been talking about. From what you're saying, could you basically implement up until T2 with that additional time?	CO3.2: Potential viability – with access to specialists to support interventions
Participant 1:	227 228 229 230 231	Well T3 as well because we have occupational therapists that come to school, play therapists on the premises...(inaudible) so we have a lot of therapists available that come to school or then some of the kids maybe go privately before school or after school or whatever the case	
Participant 2:	232	Ya she pulls kids out of, to assess them	
Researcher:	233	Okay so that's an OT, speech therapist...	
All participants:	234	And play therapist	
Participant 5:	235	And we've got the educational psychologist...	

Participant 1:	236 237 238 239 240 241 242 243 244 245	Ya well she's the one we refer to, we have quite a strong referral base, ya we'll show you the forms and the intervention forms. Cause what we do, we've got an intervention committee and then each teacher identifies how many kids they have in their class at the beginning of year, well giving that 8-10 week period and sussing them out. Then each child has a plastic folder with all their forms in it so and also WhatsApp proof and emails so if the parents are...financially can't afford it or are reluctant to get help or whatever the case is, everything is in that folder so by the end of the day if that child either fails or we can't put them through we can still say...	CO3.1: Comparisons to RTI (8-10 weeks monitoring progress - T1 - and ID struggling learners; intervention forms; refer out)
Participant 2:	246	Well sorry we've tried	
Participant 3:	247 248 249 250 251	I must say the main reason why we got a committee is you can't just fail a child regarding government policy and the Department of Education, so you have to have subsequent evidence that why they failing. So that's why we started that (intervention committee) but as I'm saying, I'm struggling to maintain that	CO2.2: Challenge - lack of time (to implement specialised interventions)
Participant 1:	252 253 254	The thing is that there's not enough time, we try, these kids need to practice whatever the problem is daily like you've said but when when when	
Participant 3:	255 256 257 258	The thing is that we are a new school, we were the feeding school of children that couldn't belong in the system and now we're sitting with a lot of T2 and T3 children, I mean even though we are a mainstream school...	CO2.6: Challenge – too many learners in a class (including those with learning difficulties) CO2.7:
Participant 7:	259	...And not trained...	Challenge - lack of
Participant 3:	260	Ya	adequate teacher
Participant 7:	261	We're not all remedial teachers	training (for remedial
Participant 3:	262 263	Ya that's the thing, it's very hard to overcome T2 and assist them in the manner, but we try our best	interventions; lack confidence in support interventions)
Participant 1:	264	You know what we do, we do T1 and T3, we don't actually do...	CO3.1: Comparisons
Participant 2:	265	T2	to RTI (T1; try T2
Participant 1:	266 267	Ya we don't actually do T2 (participants 2,3 and 4 say, "No we try, we try") but, ya okay we do try, but it's mainly like T1 then refer	interventions and refer to specialists – no T3 interventions)
Participant 4:	268	Ya that's right, we don't have time for T2 that's why	CO2.2: Challenge - lack of time (for

			specialised interventions)
Participant 2:	269 270 271	But that's just within our school, let's say maybe if our school carried on until say 2, we could have maybe assisted the 5 children in your class that struggle for instance	CO3.3: Potential viability – additional time (allocated time slot in afternoon for support interventions)
Participant 1:	272	Keeping your “A” students busy though is the challenge	
Participant 2:	273 274	No but if our school was only open until 2 o'clock and the kids could go...	
	275 276	Participants all agree, one says “Then we could help them with extra work the last half an hour to hour”.	
Participant 1:	277	Oh we would have very clever kids	
Participant 2:	278 279 280	So they did actually say next year we would look at our time slots of when school ends so then I think we could better implement T2 and at more of a regular basis, let's say twice a week	CO3.3: Potential viability – additional time (allocated time slot in afternoon for support interventions – consistent interventions)
Participant 3:	281	Your T2 and T3 yes!	
Participant 1:	282 283 284	And the thing is the parents would have to fall for it, they'd love it because then it's eliminating referrals and you don't have to pay for T2.	CO4.1: Benefit of RTI: eliminate referrals to external support services – lowering costs
Participant 3:	285	It's for free	
Other participants agree.			
Researcher:	286 287	Okay so just to make sure I understand, if you had to make a solution to the situation...	
Participant 2:	288	Our situation	
Researcher:	289	You would end school earlier...	
A few participants:	290	Yes, two o'clock	
Participant 1:	291	13:45 even	CO3.3: Potential viability – additional time (allocated time
Participant 5:	292	Ya our school is going to end 13:45 probably next year	
Researcher:	293	So if school ended at 13:45...	
Participant 1:	294	If school ended at 13:45 we could do T2 until 15:00	
Participant 5:	295 296	Ya give them a 15 minute break and then at 14:00 we could start T2, 14:00-15:00.	

Researcher:	297 298	Okay so when school ends at 13:45 then learners who don't have learning difficulties can go home?	slot in afternoon for support interventions)
A few participants:	299	Yes, they can go home	
Researcher:	300 301 302	And then you focus on T2 or T3 with learners with learning difficulties until 15:00 and you think that that's a manageable state that you could do	
All participants:	303	Yes	
Participant 4:	304	Manageable for us and for them	
Participant 1:	305	We want to do that actually	
	306	All participants agree. A few say, "Yes, we want to do that".	
Participant 3:	307 308 309 310	Because now we understand that when they come to Grade 4 or Grade 5, we sit with a problem and the child can't do anything and now because of the system you can't fail a child twice, so now you have to put them through	
Participant 7:	311 312 313 314	So now you put the child through and scholastically they can't cope and then they just end up doing whatever after school and I mean then they don't have motivation to study because why do they need to study because they are going to be put through anyway	
Other participants agree			
Participant 7:	315 316 317	So I have a situation with a child in my class that I know at the end of the year I'm not allowed to fail, I've had meetings with the mom, I've sent work home with her...she doesn't do the work with him...	CO2.4: Challenge: lack of parental involvement (doing additional work)
Participant 3:	318 319	If that was implemented beforehand, it probably wouldn't have been the case (other participants agree)	
Participant 7:	320	...to assist him also at home, sometimes the homework is not done.	CO2.4
Participant 1:	321	But we parents as well, often we teachers and parents	
Participant 3:	322 323 324 325 326 327	But also regarding the parents, we teachers so we also need to do our job, cause they paying us to do it so they feel they don't have to do additional work because it's our job to do so. But if they can, that's their attitude towards teachers these days, they do pay us a fee every month so we supposed to teach their child, it's not their job to do that.	CO2.4: Challenge: lack of parental involvement (doing additional work)

Participant 8:	328 329 330 331	Ya because I do often see, a lot of the times, the kids are at home with aunts or nannies who don't necessarily help with extra work and by the time the mom gets home they've bathed and eaten, but maybe the whole afternoon they've just watched TV or ya	
Researcher:	332 333 334 335 336 337 338 339	Okay, sorry but for the sake of time, I need to wrap up for today, I think you've picked up a lot of challenges, I just want to quickly summarise what you've said and then tomorrow when I come in, there's a lot that you've touched on here that I want to go a little bit more into tomorrow. It's really important to get every bit of information and this is why we're saying South African context because you may be identifying challenges here that might not be specific to other contexts that have adopted this approach.	
Participant 1:	340 341 342	Sorry and it could work here but what about (names another school in Pretoria) for example, they have more kids there, or do you understand what I'm saying, the other government schools	CO2.6: Challenge – too many learners in a class
Researcher:	343 344 345 346 347	Okay so what I've picked up from you, one of the challenges that you've spoken about is training (participants agree), that there's a lot of teachers possibly in other schools that wouldn't have sufficient training or sufficient qualifications and so this would be difficult to implement RTI.	CO2.7: Challenge - lack of adequate teacher training (to ID and support)
Participant 2:	348	Not even to mention, to identify	
Researcher:	349 350	Yes, even qualified teachers, as you said, still can struggle to identify and implement remedial interventions.	
Participant 2:	351	Yes struggle...	
Researcher:	352 353 354	So you're saying, even qualified teachers could struggle, maybe not have sufficient remedial knowledge to implement T2 or T3 interventions...	
Participants agree.			
Researcher:	355 356 357 358	Okay, you also identified time (participants agree), time is specific in this school, but I'm sure in many schools time is difficult for many teachers, but you're saying you don't think you'll have enough time to...	CO2.2: Challenge - lack of time (for specialised interventions)
Participant 2:	359	For T2...	
Researcher:	360	...to implement specialised interventions...	
Participant 1:	361 362	Sorry just on top of that, we don't have any admins either. From 08:00 until 15:00 you are on duty permanently.	CO2.9: Challenge - lack of administrative assistance



Researcher:	363 364	And just to quickly ask, have you got teaching aids in the classroom?	
Participant 1:	365 366 367	Grade R has a full time one, Grade one shares, three Grade 1 classes share one class assistant so they all figure out their own schedules.	
Participant 2:	368 369	But the teaching assistants aren't educated to do this anyway, they just there to keep an eye, for discipline	CO2.7: Challenge - lack of adequate training
Researcher:	370	And then you said your classes have about 25 learners	
Participant 1:	371	Yes on average 25	CO2.6: Challenge –
Researcher:	372 373	But someone commented that that's even still a big class to implement RTI with and to be able to identify...	too many learners in a class
All participants agree			
Participant 7:	374	20 is more manageable	
Participant 1:	375	Other schools can have like 42 kids	
Researcher:	376 377 378 379 380	And then you spoke about discipline, you said in your situation if you still have the whole class in the afternoons, to try and take some kids out and leave other kids in is difficult. You've made a suggestion to allow other kids to go home and only focus on extra work but you might still have discipline within those few kids...	CO2.8: Challenge – classroom management
Participant 1:	381 382	But then you could have an educated teaching assistant or a student even, a good student...	CO3.2: Potential viability – additionally trained support staff
Participant 2:	383	But you're not allowed to leave a student with your class...	
Participant 1:	384 385	No but while I explain here (inaudible), you know what I mean, a little extra income, but a good student	
Researcher:	386 387 388 389	And then you've also identified parents as being barriers, and especially when it comes to referrals for support interventions (participants agree), to refer out and within your parents you identified cultural reasons...	CO2.4: Challenge: lack of parental involvement (in supporting additional interventions)
A few participants:	390	...and financial...	
Participant 2:	391 392 393	And uneducated, lots of children also live with grandparents who can't speak Afrikaans or English, and sometimes kids haven't been sent to pre-school or haven't been stimulated...	
Participants comment on language barriers making it difficult for learners to do speeches and learn; refer to English being a second or third language making it difficult for parents to assist			

Researcher:	394 395 396 397 398	So the last thing I'm picking up from what you're saying is that you're also working with parents from different backgrounds which also makes it challenging because some parents can assist in some ways, some parents can't assist in the same ways and working with this different dynamic is also a challenge.	
Participant 2:	399	Yes, ya	
Researcher closes the session. Intervention forms and checklist examples are given and explained by participants to researcher. Parent evening forms and extra classes are also explained.			
<b>5 SEPTEMBER: Session 2 (45 minutes)</b>			
Researcher does a quick recap of the previous day's session and introduces the current session as a continuation.			
Researcher:	400 401 402 403	We ended yesterday on recapping some challenges, you believed, to RTI implementation and (participant 5), I think you said something about a financial problem, so I just wanted to hear, what do you believe could be financial challenges?	
Participant 5:	404 405 406 407 408 409 410 411 412 413	Well children that need to go for therapy and we refer the children, we can't help them let's say like T2, I can't be like okay come for extra class and I'll explain it again and again and again and ah then the light goes on. They literally need to go to speech therapy or occupational therapy or they need to go for an assessment with an educational psychologist and then the parents literally just don't have the money. It's as simple as that. They don't have the money and then they just bypass the teacher or they make excuses or they get to a point where they'll go and ya they just make excuses cause they just don't have the money it's as simple as that.	CO2.10: Challenge – financial (lack of funds for special interventions to support learning difficulties)
Researcher:	414 415	So would you say it's at T3 and the referral stage, where financial challenges are there.	
Participant 1 and 5:	416	Yes	
Researcher:	417 418 419 420 421	I believe what the Education Department is trying to do is to avoid that by saying that through an inclusive education environment, and an RTI approach supports this, by saying let's intervene as much as possible in the beginning before we spend money to send kids for referrals	
Participants indicate that they agree			
Researcher:	422 423 424	But obviously we have the challenges we spoke about yesterday before we get to that referral stage in a South African context. Another thing that someone said yesterday was dealing with parents who	

	425 426 427	were uneducated, so why do you believe that is a challenge when implementing RTI? There may be a few repetitions today from yesterday, I'm just trying to clarify your viewpoints.	
Participant 5:	428 429 430 431	I think if they uneducated they don't always understand you know...you the teacher, you need to sort it out, they don't understand why, what's the problem, what's the issue, ya... why do I have to do homework	CO2.4: Challenge: lack of parental involvement (in doing additional work/providing additional support)
Participant 2:	432 433 434 435 436 437	Let's give an example, they will struggle with something and you will ask a parent to help or assist and we don't get that, we don't get for instance, very few will help you if a child struggles with cutting and they supposed to be cutting in Grade R already. And then you send homework home and nothing happens and it's a big cultural thing, they don't want to believe that there's something wrong.	
Participant 1:	438 439	And they think also their child's here until 3 o'clock, so what are you doing? You go cut with them.	
Participant 5:	440 441 442	Now I go home and my child needs to play soccer, they need to eat and sleep, he's tired, he's with you from 07:00 until 15:00, so you know, it's uneducated like, I don't understand.	
Participant 1:	443 444	And things done for them (the parents), for instance, in some families they do everything for the kids...	
Another participant:	445	...the aunties...	
Participant 2:	446 447 448 449 450 451	Yes the aunties, and it starts from early, the aunties look after them and it's watching TV, little development, no muscle strength, nothing, then they come to us and we literally have to teach them to sit up straight and they can't...they will tell you, I'm tired because they are used to sitting in front of the TV, they (inaudible), and they...it's just a big thing.	
Participant 8:	452 453 454 455 456 457	Um I don't know if this is applicable, but I just want to share, she also said now, the parents think there's nothing wrong with the kids. They will say but I was like that and so well look at me now (other participants agree; one participant says "they not informed"), so you know they will just throw that out quite a lot the whole time, I was like that, but ... so ya.	
Participant 3:	458 459	Or they will lie and tell you that you are the first teacher who has a problem	

Other participants agree and one says, "Ya, that's the truth".			
Researcher:	460 461 462	So are you saying you can support as much as you can in a school context, even with an RTI approach, but then that's where the limit comes? And you think to support further into the home...	
Participant 2:	463	You need the parents...parent support...	CO2.4: Challenge: lack of parental involvement (to support intervention)  CO3.2: Potential viability – with support from school management
Researcher:	464 465	So you need parent buy-in which you believe a lot of the time you don't have?	
Participant 1:	466 467 468 469 470 471 472 473 474 475	Yes, which I think then management must also get involved because if the parents are then not compliant with what the school sets up, the standards then sorry you need to leave. And I think lots of schools are like that, I don't know, but this definitely isn't. So maybe if we get more management support as well then, you know what we have now set up three meetings, you still haven't taken your child for eye tests, for example, you've got a month and after a month we're terminating your school contract. Or whatever, you know what I mean. It's kind of like, we can also only go so far. Like I know (participant 2) took one of her kids to the optometrist	
Participant 2:	476	I took him, it was so funny, it was so nice.	
Participant 1:	477 478	But you know what I mean, we can't all take all our kids that have problems to...to get help	
Another participant:	479	To therapists	
Participant 1:	480 481 482	So maybe if management can also step in and say you know what, these are the terms and conditions, if you don't comply with it, unfortunately you need to find yourself a new school. Possibly.	
Researcher:	483 484 485	So you're saying that another strategy to possibly look at for RTI, is that management should be involved when you're dealing with a support programme for kids at the school.	
Participant 1 and 2:	486	Yes	
Participant 5:	487	I think that's where SBST comes in but that's so slow these days.	
Participant 1:	488 489 490 491	Ya look I think management is involved, you can't also chase away half of the kids, I get that but I don't know, somehow there just needs to be like a you know what we've spoken about this child now for...3 times...it's now a strike, I don't know.	
Participant 2:	492	Three times is not a thing...sometimes 2 years	
Participant 1:	493	Ya	

Participant 8:	494 495 496	So at the previous school, the special needs school, I know we had a parent support structure that we had to inform, basically, that you train parents...	
Participant 2:	497	...how to..	
Participant 8:	498	How to look after their kids	
Participant 1:	499	But then they don't come	
Participant 2:	500	The special needs do	
Participant 1:	501	No I'm just saying. I think it's worth doing it, but um	
Participant 8:	502 503	Ya but then you can see, you can do as much as you can and if they don't	
Participant 1:	504	...then also...	
Participant 8:	505	We had a lot of social workers in there as well	
Researcher:	506 507 508	Okay yes, because it's a special needs environment. So do you think if you did something like that here, do you think it would work and the parents would come? If you had a parents support...	CO2.4: Challenge: lack of parental involvement (to support intervention)
Participant 1:	509 510	I think the parents are involved but it's also often the 2 kids in your class that need the most help, you'll never see their parents.	
Other participants agree			
Participant 1:	511 512 513	There's still parents I haven't even met and we're in September and I don't know who they are. So I don't know, how do you get them here.	
Researcher:	514 515 516	Could someone maybe just run me through the process you follow of how you identify and support learners with learning difficulties or disabilities.	
Participant 1:	517	So we each get a...the plastic flip file...	CO3.1: Comparisons to RTI (T1: assess and observe to identify difficulties, behavioural and scholastic)
Participant 2:	518	No first you identify	
Participant 1:	519 520	First you identify, then they'll come to the SBST team and say okay I've got 4 learners that I'm worried about, and it could be a variety...	
Researcher:	521	Can you quickly tell me how you identify learners?	
Participant 1:	522	Assessments...	
Participant 5:	523	We have that little booklet thing	
Participant 2:	524	And we observe	
Participant 5:	525	Ya observe and assessments	
Participant 1:	526	And as teachers we know	
Participant 5:	527 528 529	And we have a little booklet, we didn't do it this year but we're going to do it next year. I think we only received it like 2 months ago. So ya.	

Participant 8:	530 531	Every year we have a baseline assessment for all of the kids and then it's quite easy to see.	
Participant 1:	532 533 534 535 536 537	Then also if it's a behavioural thing though or play therapy, then you'll also obviously note in your own little journal whatever you want, um incident 1, incident 2 with a time and what happened, if it's you know molestation or divorced parents or whatever the case is. So you obviously first have to build up your own case study before you go to Mr X or the parents or whatever the case is.	
Researcher:	538	Okay so you identify and then?	
Participant 1:	539 540	And then for example, if you make an extra work booklet – (refers to participant 5)	
Participant 5:	541 542 543 544	Ya it's like, the intervention, then you make like an extra book for the child, you do extra exercises, you refer, we have a tick list so we tick, is it behavioural, is it emotional, is it academic, what is the problem. Well then we call a meeting...	CO3.1: Comparisons to RTI (T1 – continued progress monitoring)
Participant 2:	545	That's when we call the parents	
Participant 5:	546 547 548 549 550 551 552	That's when we call a parents meeting because I want the parent to know that I'm aware, are you aware, I'm aware, this is what I pick up. We need to start doing extra work at home, extra work in class, so you know you strategise. If that does not work, okay now we need to go to the extra classes and if that doesn't work, then we send them for assessment or let's try speech therapy, occupational therapy, you know so there's still... (inaudible)	(Tier 2 interventions – extra classes Tier 3 - external refer for specialist assessments or interventions)
Researcher:	553	Okay so do you keep a track record?	
Participant 5:	554	Yes	
Researcher:	555 556	Do you give extra lessons in the afternoon gap where you've got the...	
Participant 5:	557 558	No we don't do that, the teachers don't give extra lessons. That's where they immediately start to refer...	(Tier 2 interventions – extra classes)
Participant 3:	559	To (participant 5) for extra maths or extra English	
Participant 5:	560	Ya	
Participant 1:	561 562	So that extra workbook needs to be completed at home or in activity time or break or whatever	
Participant 5:	563 564 565	Or even just, if I can just quickly show you something, even in their workbooks...you can continue talking I just want to show you something	

Participant 1:	566 567 568 569 570	Also...um...if you are speaking to the parents then you need to print out WhatsApp conversations or emails, that will also go in there. Because I've been also begging this mom for speech therapy and her response on WhatsApp was if he's struggling, I guess he'll have to repeat next year.	CO2.4: Challenge: lack of parental involvement
Participant 5 shows an example of a child's workbook with extra examples and extra practice examples.			
Participant 2:	571	So ya there is a track record. And that all goes in the learner profile.	(Tier 1 progress monitoring)
Participant 5:	572 573 574 575 576	So we do with English for example, in their books, then you don't even have to go to the extra booklet, you just help them to practice the work, the words they struggle with in their book and you just put an intervention stamp and then that's part of the intervention, is practicing the work...	
Participant 1:	577	That's step 1 actually.	
Participant 5:	578	That's step 1	(Tier 2 interventions – extra classes PAID for)
Participant 1:	579	And then if that doesn't get better, then...	
Participant 5:	580	Extra class with me	
Participant 1:	581	...then parents	
Researcher:	582	And then you start referring out?	
Participant 5:	583 584 585 586 587	Ya like I have a child in my extra class now and I phoned the mom and I said listen here, I'm wasting your money, the child has been with me for a month now, nothing I'm going do is going to help him. I'm not going to waste your money, please refer your child or take your child to a...	
Another participant	588	Specialist	(Tier 3 specialist individual interventions)
Participant 5:	589	Ya specialist	
Researcher:	590	Okay so they pay for the extra classes?	
A few participants:	591	Yes yes	
Participant 5:	592	Ya because it's after school	
Researcher:	593 594 595 596	I'm just trying to compare where you're at, if we had to relate your approach to an RTI approach, you know it looks like T1 is there, teaching instruction in the classroom, you're identifying learners and you're monitoring their progress.	
Participants agree.			

Researcher:	597 598 599	T2, you give a little bit of extra work to struggling learners, but if there's anything more significant, there are a few extra classes and then you start referring out for T3.	
Participant 5 agrees.			
Researcher:	600 601 602 603 604	So going back to RTI, I think the aim is to do most work within the school system, in classrooms, teacher identifying and planning support, intervening and monitoring progress in response to support...and then we possibly get to the challenges you spoke about yesterday.	
Participant 2:	605	Yes	
Participant 1:	606 607	I'm sorry, I don't think that one teacher alone can do that. In the American system, do they have...	CO2.1: Challenge - lack of teaching assistants (to ID, monitor and intervene)
Participant 2:	608	They have assistants	
Participant 1:	609	Possibly more than one?	
Participant 2:	610	Ya	
Researcher:	611 612	I think it might be different in different schools and different areas there as well...	
Participant 1:	613	Financially as well though hey...	CO2.6: Challenge – too many learners in a class CO2.10: Challenge - financial (lack of funds for additional support staff) CO2.7: Challenge - lack of adequate teacher assistant training
Participant 5:	614	And how many children you have in a school	
Participant 2:	615	Because the more kids you have in a class is a problem	
Participant 1:	616 617 618 619 620 621 622 623 624	Because if your school cannot afford two assistants per class or per grade, so that's also another financial issue is the actual school. Because we're lucky enough to have assistants but then again like someone said yesterday, they not educated, some of them are, some are busy studying, some of them have been working with kids their entire lives so they've got you know more of an educational background but if they don't have the ability to...shadow the teacher then all they doing the whole day is sweeping the floor, then they just glorified assistants.	
Researcher:	625 626	So are you saying that you believe to do RTI is too much for one teacher in a classroom?	CO2.1: Challenge - lack of support staff
Participant 1:	627	Yes	
Researcher:	628 629	And an ideal situation, you're saying, at least how many assistants in a classroom?	
Participant 2:	630	Just one	



Participant 1:	631	One per grade. Qualified!	CO3.2: Potential viability – additionally trained support staff
Participant 5:	632	Grade R has one per teacher but the rest has one per Grade	
Researcher:	633 634	Okay so one per Grade qualified assistant teacher and then you think a RTI approach like this...	
Participant 2:	635	MIGHT work.	
Participant 1:	636 637	The thing is also, (XXX School) I must say invests a lot of money in teacher training	CO2.7: Challenge - lack of adequate teacher assistant training
Other participants agree			
Participant 1:	638 639	And the assistants also go, but it's not equally spread. Or maybe it's once a year.	
Participant 5:	640	Especially for the assistants, we go a lot...	
Participant 1:	641 642 643	That's why I say, we go a lot - (says assistant's name) – has gone a few times, but in an overall basis they haven't all been exposed to help them be more qualified	
Other participants agree			
Researcher:	644 645	So overall, do you think an approach like RTI can be beneficial in South Africa?	CO4.3: Benefit of RTI: overall improved learning in class (struggling learners don't fall behind)
Participant 1:	646	Yes	
Participant 2 and 3:	647	Oh yes	
Participant 1:	648	If it's implemented properly	
Other participants agree			
Researcher:	649	What do you believe could be beneficial about it?	
Participant 1:	650	Your pass rate, kids' self-image, home life	
Participant 4:	651	Teacher stress	
Participant 1:	652	Teacher stress, gees number one	
Participant 2:	653	YES	
Participant 5:	654 655 656	I think also the A student, the star student, you know sometimes we need to keep them busy, to attend to the student that struggles. So you know I think it will be more fair to them as well.	
Another participant	657	Equal ya	
Participant 1:	658 659 660 661	Ya, because I also think you sometimes get annoyed with the A student, you know Petey is now again finished first, just go get an extra workbook – just go read a book, just go, because the rest of them are all struggling...	
Participant 2:	662	Struggling, so we must first finish with them...	

Participant 1:	663	So that's actually a good point	CO4.3: Benefit of RTI: overall improved performance in class for all learners – able to keep up with curriculum in class and won't be slowed down due to struggling learners
Participant 8:	664	Yes	
Researcher:	665	Okay, and just now (participant 1) said, RTI would be beneficial IF	
	666	ITS IMPLEMENTED PROPERLY. Do you think there is a way to	
	667	realistically implement it in a South African context? Or any extra	
	668	ideas? Because you've given some ideas already, about like getting	
	669	extra assistants in the classroom. Also thinking about the	
	670	challenges you've been picking up. With your practical knowledge, is	
	671	there a way it could be made to work or adjusted in South Africa. You	
	672	can take some time to think about it.	
Participant 7:	673	Once again the <b>work load is too much for the children</b> to handle	
Researcher:	674	Okay, so you're saying the work load for the CHILDREN is too	
	675	much?	
Participant 7:	676	Yes, definitely, because you work on one thing for a week and then	
	677	you need to move on. Otherwise you won't get through everything.	
Researcher:	678	So do you think you need a <b>longer period to work on...</b>	
Participant 7:	679	At least two (weeks), at least	
Participant 1:	680	But is that <b>because of the struggling kids?</b>	
Participant 2:	681	Ya	
Participant 7:	682	Ya that as well	
Participant 1:	683	<b>Because if they get T2 and T3 (participant 2 agrees) in that week...</b>	
Participant 2:	684	<b>Ya support!</b>	
Participant 1:	685	<b>...would they not then maybe jump, not jump ahead but be on par</b>	
	686	<b>(other teachers agree)</b>	
<b>Other participants agree</b>			
Participant 2:	687	<b>Ya more on track</b>	
Participant 1:	688	You see...	
Participant 4:	689	<b>That's where the extra classes from 14:00 to 15:00 will help</b>	CO3.3: Potential viability – additional time (allocated time slot in afternoon for support interventions)
Participant 1:	690	So it's maybe not necessarily the time	
Participant 7:	691	Well we've been working now on money forever and they still don't	
	692	understand. I think the lights only really went on now, like two	
	693	weeks, three weeks. And there are children that do understand it but	
	694	ya	

Participant 2:	<b>695</b> <b>696</b>	But because parents don't use cash anymore (other teachers agree), that's the big thing.	
Participant 1:	<b>697</b> <b>698</b> <b>699</b> <b>700</b> <b>701</b> <b>702</b>	Listen could you not maybe possibly, and I don't know how fair this is, because there's also another point of stronger kids pulling up the weaker kids. But then possibly say, you know this year, YOU get all the mediocre kids and (refers to participant 7) gets all the stronger kids and (refers to participant 8) gets all the slightly weaker ones. Then next year is your turn then...	
Participant 5:	<b>703</b> <b>704</b>	No you will resign before the end of the year if you have the weak kids	
Participant 7:	<b>705</b>	Your teachers will burn out	
Participant 2:	<b>706</b> <b>707</b>	It was like that when we were little. When we were in the school system...	
Participant 1:	<b>708</b>	Ya I remember it used to be like you're in the strong class	
Another participant:	<b>709</b>	Ah that was long ago	
Participant 5:	<b>710</b> <b>711</b>	And what did that do to your self-esteem knowing that you in class C?	
Participant 4:	<b>712</b>	Exactly it breaks kids up	
Teachers talking over one another – some disagreements on suggestion			
Participant 2:	<b>713</b> <b>714</b>	Can I tell you something, one teacher took those with the low IQ because we were IQ people. Look then you wrote that IQ test...	
Participant 4:	<b>715</b>	No but today that's discrimination	
Participant 2:	<b>716</b> <b>717</b> <b>718</b>	...then they would group the children and then they would tell those with the poor IQ, no you are the stars and that's how they would treat those kids and those kids would move through...	
Teachers talk over each other			
Participant 8:	<b>719</b> <b>720</b> <b>721</b>	But can I just say, if you have the weak class, it's fine, you can cope with that, I like to work with the lower functioning kids but you, they are all equal...	
Participant 7:	<b>722</b> <b>723</b>	And how are their parents going to respond to you putting their child in...	
Participant 2:	<b>724</b>	They don't know	
Teachers talking over each other, some disagreements			
Participant 7:	<b>725</b> <b>726</b>	Well then I would suggest that if a teacher work with the kids that struggle, then she should get a full time assistant	
Other participants agree			

Participant 8:	727	Look I think the RTI, might work in private schools.	CO2.10: Challenge – financial (lack of funds for teachers and support staff)
Other participants agree			
Participant 2:	728	But not in public schools (all participants agree), not at all.	
Participant 8:	729	I'm sorry, but the people that are running this educational system...	
Participant 2:	730	...department...	
Participant 8:	731	...are not well...organised. I'm sorry but I don't think it'll work in the	
	732	government schools.	
Participants say, "Be careful what you say".			
Participant 8:	733	No but I'm anonymous and I'm sorry, but I don't think it'll work in the	
	734	government schools.	
Researcher:	735	Okay, that's okay, you've previously bought in school management	
	736	as an influence and now you also bringing in the Department of	
	737	Education and the role they play in trying to implement something like	
	738	RTI. So are you saying that that is problematic?	
Participant 8:	739	Ya it is.	
Participant 1:	740	the thing is that they've already jumped to you can't fail a child	
Participant 8:	741	Yes exactly.	
Participant 1:	742	Before looking at RTI, or any, you know what I mean. So what is their	
	743	motivation behind it at the end of the day?	
Researcher:	744	Well I think the whole idea with the Department of Education rests on	
	745	inclusivity and the whole idea behind inclusive education, which was	
	746	also adopted from international policies...	
Participant 2:	747	And they've already left it again, look America doesn't do it anymore.	
	748		
Researcher:	749	What do you mean? Inclusive policies?	
Participant 2:	750	No, they started it with, we do group work, if you work on an	
	751	assignment there's five in a group and only the strong kids were...	
	752	and the rest just pull along.	
Researcher:	753	Okay, so not necessarily only a group work component, but the idea	
	754	that in one class you have learners with different learning abilities...	
Participant 1:	755	But that's when you need teaching aids, a personal teaching aid that	
	756	sits, not a class teaching aid, that child has someone.	
Researcher:	757	Ya so the aim of the department is to get there...	
Participant 1:	758	But the financial challenges...	
Researcher:	759	...to get to an inclusive environment that works, but do we have...	
Participant 2:	760	RESOURCES	
Researcher:	761	...the right factors to implement it...	

Participant 2:	762	No	
Researcher:	763 764 765 766 767	...and could RTI assist teachers... So just to come back to RTI, what do you believe could make it work, and (participant 4) said earlier, for example, and it was said yesterday, that if you do that period where you end school at 14:00 and then you have class until 15:00 for the kids that are struggling...	
Participant 1:	768	But now you looking at self-image again	
Researcher:	769	In what way?	
Participant 2:	770	No...	
Participant 1:	771	The clever kids get to go home and now I have to stay...	
Participant 2:	772	No but you don't say that to them...	
Participant 1:	773	They know...Grade 3	
Participant 2:	774	You don't make the distinction	
Participant 4:	775 776	They very clever, they identify, the kids that come to your class, they know that they struggle	
Participant 5:	777	But actually the kids that come to me, they...	
Participant 2:	778	...feel special because...	
Participant 5:	779 780 781	Ya they brag about it. I've heard them like I'm with (participant 5) and then the kids come to me like mam, do you have space for me, how much does it cost, I also want to come.	
Participant 2:	782	Ya	
Participant 1:	783 784 785 786 787 788	Now also look then at the whole class, staying in their class with their teacher, do you know what I mean, they not coming to you, say now (participant 4's) kids, the whole, say now my 10 kids, they not coming to you, (participant 7's) kids stay with her, her 10 struggling kids, do you understand what I'm saying. You stay with your teacher until...	
Participant 8:	789	Ya unless you swap it...	
Participant 7:	790	I get what you saying, the clever kids go home and...	CO3.3: Potential viability – additional time (allocated time slot in afternoon for support interventions; opportunity for teachers to rotate – differentiated instruction)
Participant 8:	791	...like (inaudible) and then her kids that struggle comes to you.	
Participant 1:	792	That might be a good idea as well.	
Participant 9:	793	I also thought about that.	
Participant 1:	794	Ya rotate them a bit, every term even.	
Participant 7:	795	Rotate the teachers	
Participant 5:	796 797	Or even the subjects, I have the mathematics kids, you help the English kids that struggle or something like that	
Participant 8:	798	Because some kids respond better to certain teachers	

Participant 1:	799 800	Ya and different too...audio-visual and hands-on, whatever, there's no an idea...		
Researcher:	801 802 803 804 805	Okay so just to check. You're saying an idea is that all schools end at 14:00 and until 15:00, you help the learners, that's your T2 or T3, the teachers help the learners who are struggling and teachers themselves can rotate the learners so that they experience different teaching styles, possibly, that's an idea?		
All participants agree				
Researcher:	806	Do you still see any challenges with that?		
Participant 8:	807 808	There will always be challenges. There will always be something that doesn't work but that's why you can just change it again.		
Participant 1:	809	Ya you have to kind of live through it, you have to try it out		
Participant 2:	810	You have to know, you can't know beforehand		
Participant 1:	811 812 813 814	And her problem might not be the same as my problem, but as foundation phase we need to sort of listen to everyone and say okay three out of the seven are really struggling with that then it's worth changing or looking at or...		
Researcher:	815 816 817 818 819	And just to revisit what you brought up yesterday and today is the training aspect. A few of you said, that you would need to do remedial work as teachers with those who struggle after school, and someone brought up yesterday that maybe not everyone would have the necessary training to do that.	CO3.4: Potential viability – with additional training (professional development and training - remedial training in tertiary education programmes)	
Participant 5:	820	Yes		
Participant 1:	821	But we go to (names training workshops) and everything.		
Participant 2:	822 823	But they need to do it more at university level to teach teachers how to handle these things.		
Participant 4:	824	Ya		
Participant 1:	825	Okay		
Participant 7:	826	And not all of the schools send teachers to training...		
Participant 2:	827 828	And stop teaching them about all the laws and (inaudible) and teach them stuff that they can use practically		
Participant 4:	829	Ya practical things		
Participant 1:	830	Ya I hear you.		
Participant 7:	831 832 833	Ya I think especially if you study education through (names tertiary institution), not in a class environment, like I did. It's very different, like the stuff that I learnt when I was first here, I was like okay, I		
				CO2.7: Challenge - lack of adequate teacher training

	834	didn't learn anything about this. For the amount of time that I	(practical training in learner support through professional development workshops)
	835	studied, I never you know...learnt practical, I don't know.	
Participant 2:	836	Practical things that people can use. I can't tell you guys, I've now	
	837	been teaching for many years and this year I've learnt so much	
	838	through (names specific workshop provider), and in the mornings	
	839	they have something here and they've been with us for as long as	
	840	you've been here and you know you take the things (you learn) to	
	841	class with you and you realise, gees I am now maybe on the right	
	842	track or I'm completely missing it or...	
Participant 1:	843	What's nice as well, she says (referring to workshop provider), red	
	844	flags...here's your activities, right there. So in that paper, if you	
	845	missed it or you were late or whatever, she gives you a handout and	
	846	she says this is your red flags and here is the activities that you do...	
Participant 2:	847	Here is how you cope with it	
Participant 1:	848	So that's nice	
Researcher:	849	Okay so do I understand you correctly? If RTI were to be	
	850	implemented, if you could end school at 14:00 and you had extra	
	851	classes until 15:00, you would need places like (names workshop	
	852	provider) coming in on a regular basis and doing training with you	
	853	teachers to be able to identify and support learners...	
Participant 2:	854	Yes (other participants indicate yes)...because it's above our...	
Participant 1:	855	Pay grade	
Participant 2:	856	No man nothing to do with our pay grade...above your abilities, then	CO3.2: Potential viability – with access to specialists to support interventions
	857	you have a system or a group of people that you can send the kids	
	858	to, because it's all from speech therapists, trauma therapists,	
	859	occupational therapists all in one spot and they very close to us	
	860	(referring to the group involved with providing training to teachers).	
Researcher:	861	Okay, so that would work for your school?	
Participant 1:	862	Well come back next year and we'll tell you, apparently that's	
	863	happening.	
Researcher:	864	So for your school, you think RTI could work and be beneficial, if	CO3.1 – potential viability
	865	certain changes were made.	
Participant 2:	866	Very much so (other participants also agree)	CO2.10: Challenge – financial (lack of funds)
Researcher:	867	How about other schools in the country?	
Participant 1:	868	It depends what schools you looking at.	
Participant 4:	869	Private schools	
Participant 8:	870	I don't think government schools	

Participant 4:	871	They don't have the funds (referring to government schools)	
Participant 1:	872 873 874 875	But then again most of the private schools have more than enough funds. They have either everything on campus or the parents have all the money, if you looking at the (names a few private schools in Pretoria).	
Researcher:	876 877	So are you saying you it will work in private schools because they have the resources?	
Participant 4:	878 879	(names the one school participant 1 identified as being a private school) is actually a government school hey...	
Participant 1:	880	Really (another participant also expresses a surprised reaction)	
Participant 8:	881 882 883 884 885 886	That's what I wanted to say, some government schools are still fantastic, but they are semi-private, like I know (names government school in Pretoria) is semi-, like they are on their own government, they do their own thing but they, they keep the government happy but they are a government school, so ag ya, it's a very strange thing...so I think it might work in those government schools	CO3.2: Potential viability – with access to FUNDS for support specialists and staff CO2.10: Challenge – financial (lack of funds)
Participant 1:	887 888	But also management wise, I think those teachers or principals will say, Petey hasn't reached his...whatever...	
Participant 2:	889	...potential...	
Participant 1:	890	...you haven't taken him to speech therapy, take your bag and go.	
Participant 4:	891	Okay but listen...	
Participant 8:	892 893 894	Those parents are...look we are paying school fees, whereas most government schools don't pay that, so the moment you pay school fees...that can work.	
Researcher:	895 896 897	So are you talking about resources again? Because school fees is extra money that goes in to the school, whereas if it's a purely government school...	
Participant 2:	898	Not going to work	
Participant 5:	899 900 901 902 903 904 905 906	I think it depends from school to school because (names semi-private government school) has got a remedial centre. It's like a little building on its own. You walk in there, there's your speech therapist, there's your occupational therapist, there's your reading remedial area, like 3 or 4 classes where teachers sit and they just do extra reading, remedial, it's called extra remedial centre. You know so if you can have a centre like that at a school, I think it's like your, it's not just your SBST support file, there's a support centre.	



Participant 2:	907 908	But remember (names a person), his wife who was at a government school (names school)...	
Participant 4:	909	Yes but that's different, there's nothing	
Participant 2:	910	Nothing. 42 kids. His wife is second grade?	
Participant 4:	911	No third grade	
Participant 2:	912	42 kids in her class.	
Participant 4:	913	It's all about the total number of kids you have in your class.	
Participant 5:	914	And some kids can't speak English	
	915	Participants talk amongst themselves. One participant says, "Ya no, I'm fine here thank you."	
Researcher:	916 917	Okay so what do you believe the biggest challenge to implementing RTI in South Africa could be?	
Participant 1:	918 919 920 921 922	Financial resources. And the massive gap and difference between private and government. Because now you're getting half of the country or province or whatever that can afford private schooling, that, and then we go back to fees must fall and striking, you know what I mean, it's just going to give a bunch of other problems.	CO2.10: Challenge – financial (lack of funds)
Participant 2:	923	And our curriculum.	CO2.11: Challenge - CAPS curriculum
Participant 1:	924	Oh ya CAPS, we haven't even gotten to that one.	(inconsistent standards;
Participant 2:	925	CAPS	inappropriate curriculum;
Researcher:	926	Tell me a little bit about that.	inconsistent application of CAPS due to lack of clarity)
Participant 2:	927 928 929 930 931 932 933 934 935	CAPS, we are so low in standard. When I came back from the United States, I wanted to make sure before I started in South Africa again, on what level we are and where I am supposed to be. So I did like (names educational course) and like 2 other courses. And the main thing with, and I'm only talking kindergarten or Grade R or lower, that child needs to be fed, that child needs to be cleaned and emotional support. Nothing else. Nothing else matters. You don't stimulate them, it's really, it's just to keep that child, actually to just have a safe haven for that child to come to school.	
Researcher:	936 937	So are you saying that's just our education system, up until Grade R?	
Participant 2:	938 939 940	That's OUR education system. Just to nurture, take care, try to build emotional, manners, morals...nothing stimulating to stimulate their brains.	
Participant 1:	941 942 943	But then you also look at, because the Grade R CAPS, because we're private (refers to participant 2) and I do our own reports. So where CAPS will say count to 3 by term...	

Participant 2:	944	...two...	CAPS is limiting in terms of time CO2.2: Challenge - lack of time (to implement interventions)
Participant 1:	945	Two, we're at 50. But now you at what (asks participant 7) said with	
	946	Grade 2's that they don't have enough time for a topic, so why is the	
	947	Grade R CAPS level so low and pathetic but then with Grade 2, it's	
	948	way too much again...	
Participant 4:	949	Even Grade 3, it's a lot...	
Participant 2:	950	And it's too wide. One teacher will do the minimum, cases like that,	
	951	and another teacher will go out all the way	
Participant 8:	952	That's also what I wanted to say, it depends on the teachers	
Participant 2:	953	The CAPS needs to be more specific about the curriculum, I think.	
Participant 1:	954	Ya, here especially. Because now we get feeder schools for Grade	CAPS lacks clarity
	955	1, but then our two Grade R classes go into the Grade 1. So then	
	956	the Grade 1 teachers are like gees but half of the kids can and are	
	957	like way above but then the other half are completely struggling.	
	958	Now you've got a year backlog. Get through Grade 1, there's a	
	959	backlog, get to Grade 2 and there's still a backlog and it's not their	
	960	fault...	
Participant 8:	961	It's CAPS	
Participant 1:	962	It's CAPS. Or wherever they were before.	
Participant 7:	963	I think also with the T3 factor, it's also financial towards the parents	CO2.10: Challenge – financial (lack of funds for special interventions to support learning difficulties)
	964	because...you know when parents need to take them to therapists	
	965	and all that, I think also here, in South Africa, you get a lot of single	
	966	parents. I think that is a big factor, that they don't have financial	
	967	support to take them.	
Researcher:	968	So going back to financial challenges again	
Participant 7:	969	Ya like maybe there can be like a government centre for people who	
	970	can't afford it, to take kids that struggle to, because ya....	
Participant 9:	971	They also can't afford the remedial schools, specific schools.	
Participant 1:	972	Who can	
Participant 9:	973	So then they just keep them here	
Researcher:	974	And I think that's another reason the Department is trying NOT to	
	975	refer kids to remedial schools but to try and accommodate them in...	
Participant 2:	976	...mainstream...	
Researcher:	977	Ya in mainstream but...	
Participant 7:	978	But then you've got a child like I had two years ago (names child),	
	979	and you can't fail him like every year. So he just hops along with the	

	<b>980</b>	Grade and does whatever he has to and just gets along with his life.	
	<b>981</b>	But he's never going to do anything with his life...	
Participant 2:	<b>982</b>	He can't do anything, nothing	
Participant 7:	<b>983</b> <b>984</b> <b>985</b>	He can spell his name, that's it. So he doesn't belong in a mainstream school system but they can't afford to send him to another school.	
Participant 2:	<b>986</b> <b>987</b>	And my thing is, if they send him to another school now, where he could learn to do something with his hands	
Participant 7:	<b>988</b>	Like learn to be a chef or something like that	
Participant 2:	<b>989</b>	Ya	
Participant 7:	<b>990</b>	Teach him how to do life skills stuff, so at least he can make money	
Participant 1:	<b>991</b> <b>992</b>	Because from Grade 7 what's he going to do, is he going to go sit at home for the rest of his life.	
Researcher:	<b>993</b> <b>994</b> <b>995</b> <b>996</b>	So just to check, you're talking about a learner who really struggles and just continues to be at school and you're suggesting that he go to a school where he can hone in on learning specific skills that can help him	
Participant 2:	<b>997</b>	Ya any skill, to help to support him when he's an adult	
Researcher:	<b>998</b>	To help him because you believe he has learning disabilities?	
Participant 1:	<b>999</b>	Ya big learning disabilities	
Participant 2:	<b>1000</b>	Definitely	
Researcher:	<b>1001</b> <b>1002</b>	But you're saying he can't go to a special school and you can't help him how he needs to be helped in a mainstream school?	
Participant 2:	<b>1003</b>	Ya	
Participant 1:	<b>1004</b>	Ya so he sits here every day.	
Participant 7:	<b>1005</b> <b>1006</b>	I had to move him to the back of the classroom, I literally can't do anything with him, he copies off the board and that's it.	
Researcher:	<b>1007</b> <b>1008</b>	And if there were an effective RTI system in place, do you think it would have been beneficial in this case?	
Participant 2:	<b>1009</b>	No not for him	
Participant 1:	<b>1010</b>	Not for him, he needs...	
Participant 7:	<b>1011</b> <b>1012</b> <b>1013</b> <b>1014</b> <b>1015</b>	When (names remedial teacher) was with him and she did extra lessons with him, it was going better, but then he came to Grade 2 to me and I couldn't help him because I don't have the time etc etc, and it just went back down. So it can help, but not completely. But that's a very extreme case.	CO2.2: Challenge - lack of time (to implement specialised interventions)
Participant 1:	<b>1016</b>	And what about with (names someone different)?	

Participant 5:	1017	Well she is investing a lot of time with (the learner), he's doing okay.	CO3.1: Comparison to RTI (refer externally for support interventions)
Participant 4:	1018	But the point is he's still behind.	
Participant 5:	1019	Ya he's still behind.	
Participant 1:	1020	He's not even on a Grade R level.	
Participant 5:	1021	But remember he's got brain damage.	
Participant 2:	1022	But then why is he still in the school.	
Researcher:	1023 1024	But is he then not a referral case, to another school that can cater for his needs?	
Participant 7:	1025 1026	Definitely but then it again comes back to they don't have the finances.	
Participant 8:	1027	But there are government...	
Participant 1:	1028	...subsidies...	
Participant 8:	1029 1030 1031	No there are government special needs schools and they pay like R500 or R400 and they even get um if they can't pay they can apply for that and they go for free, so there are schools like that.	
Participant 1:	1032 1033	But didn't they also say the child is happy here and they don't want to upset him.	
Participant 7:	1034 1035 1036 1037	Yes and transport, transport will also be a problem for them. Regarding that, I also have another child who needs to be placed in another school but for them to apply, to get him into a special school, there's a waiting period of I think 6 months to 12 months	
Participant 1:	1038	Ya there is a waiting period	
Participant 7:	1039 1040 1041 1042	So now he's here for just like social, when he started here he was unable to do social things, but now he can interact, but at the moment he's here just for this, until he gets accepted at a school like that, because there's a waiting period unfortunately.	
Participant 8:	1043 1044 1045 1046 1047	Can I also say something about that, where the Department of Education comes in again, the government. We used to do it in the school system, we used to screen the kids and place them where they should be, but now the government is in charge of that and that is a mess up.	
Participant 1:	1048 1049 1050	Cause they aren't trained or educated to do it. You as a teacher are working with those kids daily. What do you know from your office there to come do the screening or placing or whatever.	
Participant 8:	1051	They don't know	
Researcher:	1052 1053	So just to clarify that, referral processes to special schools takes a long time?	

Participants agree.			
Researcher:	1054 1055 1056	And then you're also saying that dealing with these referrals and with the Department of Education in these referrals, is also a difficult process for you?	
Participants agree.			
Researcher:	1057 1058	Is there anything else anyone still wants to say about RTI, any extra ideas? Last thoughts?	
Participant 7:	1059 1060 1061 1062 1063	I think one more point, I think a lot of people, even those that don't have a financial background, are not always educated so like for example they might not know that there are even centres that you can go to in town for free, like OT, actually cause I know, the government hospital they've also actually got...	
Participant 1:	1064 1065	But then mommy works until 18:00 at night and can't drive there, that's where your parents come in again.	
Participant 2:	1066	Ya socio-economical	
Due to time, session is closed off and participants thanked for their participation.			

#### Initial Coding:

THEMES	SUB-THEMES
Theme 1: Identified comparisons to RTI	Sub-theme 1.1 Tier 1 comparisons [CO3.1]
	Sub-theme 1.2: Tier 2 comparisons [CO3.1]
	Sub-theme 1.3: Tier 3 comparisons [CO3.1]
Theme 2: Challenges to RTI viability	Sub-theme 2.1: Lack of sufficiently trained teaching staff [CO2.1;CO2.5;CO2.7;CO2.6; CO2.8; CO2.3]
	Sub-theme 2.2: Lack of time [CO2.2; CO2.9; CO2.3; CO2.11]
	Sub-theme 2.3: Lack of financial resources [CO1.1; CO2.10; CO2.1; CO2.6]
	Sub-theme 2.4: Lack of parental involvement [CO2.4]
	Sub-theme 2.5: Inappropriate curriculum [CO2.11]
Theme 3: Systemic changes to enhance RTI viability	Sub-theme 3.1: Addressing time frames [CO3.3]
	Sub-theme 3.2: Additional support staff [CO3.2]
	Sub-theme 3.3: Professional development and training [CO3.4]
Theme 4: Potential benefits of RTI	Sub-theme 4.1: Cost effectiveness for parents [CO4.1]
	Sub-theme 4.2: Improved learning efficacy [CO4.3]

