Response to Intervention for English Language Learners (ELLs): Using Data Collection, Goal Setting, and District Level Support for Instructional Improvement

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Abstract

Response to Intervention (RTI) has become a mandatory educational policy in many states. However, issues on how school districts use RTI to support English Language Learners (ELLs) has not been fully discussed in literature. In this study, artifacts including school RTI manuals and handbooks for instructing ELLs were analyzed. A survey with all school district ELL coordinators in one of the states where RTI is mandated in K – 12 was also conducted. The purpose of this study is to help educators and researchers in the field of language education understand how schools use RTI to support ELLs and how to maximize the value of RTI to reach diverse learners.

Introduction

ELLs remain "largely understudied, often excluded from studies of early learning and among the least understood from a policy perspective" (Gutierrez, Zepeda, & Castro, 2010). The Institute of Education Sciences' (IES) What Works Clearinghouse highly recommends using the "RTI components of screening, evidence-based intervention, and progress monitoring with ELLs" (Sun, Nam, & Vanderwood, 2010). RTI has the potential to help ELLs by requiring the use of research-based practices based on individual's specific needs, but a student's cultural background and linguistic proficiency must be considered (Brown & Doolitte, 2008). Specifically, the instruction and assessment of ELLs should take linguistic and cultural factors into account.

The aims of the study include discovering how school districts make RTI data part of instructional improvement as well as what support they provide schools concerning data collection of middle school ELLs. Additionally, the authors investigated how school districts assist middle school ELLs in understanding RTI data in order for students to set their own goals. Through a survey of thirty-three school district stakeholders, the authors explored how school districts are currently using the RTI model with English Language Learners (ELLs). School archives, such as RTI manuals, were examined for data triangulation. The purposes of this study are twofold. First, the authors investigated how school districts make RTI data part of an ongoing cycle of instructional improvement for middle school English Language Learners. Secondly., the authors explored how consistent RTI implementation with ELLs is among school districts and schools and to what extent the policies align with public RTI documents.

Existing documents (district RTI manuals and website archives) were examined statewide. In addition, school district stakeholders were surveyed

concerning middle school ELLs in one of the states where RTI is a mandatory educational policy. The survey addressed how school districts align the state policies, resources, and personnel responsibilities with the RTI model before putting it to use with ELLs in middle schools. To triangulate this data, the survey included open-ended items for Title III coordinators to get a deeper look at how the documents are actually put to use at the local level. The research questions were as follows:

1. How do school districts make RTI data part of an ongoing cycle of instructional improvement for middle school English Language Learners?
2. What supports do school districts provide to assist schools with collecting data concerning middle school ELLs?
3. How do school districts/schools assist middle school ELLs in understanding their RTI data in order to set their own goals?

This study is approached from a critical theory perspective because the ultimate goal is to raise critical consciousness and expose the power relations that exist in schools in relation to ELLs. Critical consciousness is an individual's ability to "perceive social, political, economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality" (Freire, 2005, p. 35). According to Patton (2002), what makes critical theory *critical* is that it "seeks not just to study and understand society but rather to critique and change society" (p. 131). Thus, the purpose is not merely to describe, as in an interpretivist perspective, but to bring about social change of improving the education experience of ELLs.

English Language Learners: An Opportunity for Impact

All teachers are certain to encounter increasing numbers of English Language Learners (ELLs) in their classrooms and, therefore, need to be prepared for children from non-English speaking home backgrounds. ELLs are students whose first language is not English and who are in the process of learning English (National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition/NCELA, 2006). ELLs made up over nine percent of total public school student enrollment in 2012 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2014). Fifteen percent of students in public schools have at least one parent classified as Limited English Proficient (Whatley Batalova, 2013). ELLs are the fastest growing student population in public schools (Jones, 2002) with their enrollment increasing at nearly seven times the rate of total student enrollment (NCELA). The total number of ELLs grew 81% from 1990 to 2011 (Migration Policy Institute, 2013). According to the Migration Policy Institute, Georgia in particular had a 52.1 percent increase its English language learner population between 2000 and 2010 and ranks 8 out of the 50 states for the largest sized ELL population (2013). In the 2012-2013 academic year, Georgia had an enrollment of over 94,000 ELLs, and Gwinnett County in Georgia ranks as one of the top 25 school districts for ELL enrollment in the nation (Migration Policy Institute, 2015). The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE, 2006) reported that the diversity of these students "continues to challenge teachers and schools" (p. 1). With increasing numbers of ELLs in schools, student demographics are changing. Teachers need to be primed for

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this new challenge and have a unique opportunity to improve the education of a large group of students by learning ways to improve instruction for ELLs. One way the needs of all ELLs can be met is through RTI. When referring to utilizing the structure of RTI with ELLs in this study, the authors are not referring to ELLs with learning disabilities. The RTI framework is for ALL students, and therefore, for ALL ESOL students. Different policies and practices must be implemented when a student is both an ELL and perhaps disabled, also. However, that is not the focus of the present study.

Response to Intervention

Response to Intervention (RTI) is an approach that aims at early identification, intervention, and prevention. Unlike the traditional wait-to-fail model, which largely relies on students' IQ-achievement performance outcomes, RTI ensures that all students receive high-quality instruction throughout their school years. The major components of RTI include universal screening, multi-tiered intervention, progress monitoring, and data based instructional decision-making (National Center on Response to Intervention, 2014).

Under the concept of RTI, when universal screening results indicate that students may have special needs, teachers in Tier 1 need to adjust their curriculum or activities to accommodate these students' needs in the general classroom. If students in the general classroom do not respond to the Tier 1 intervention adequately, supplementary tiered intervention (e.g., Tier 2 and/or Tier 3 intervention) will be provided. It is important to note that the multi-tiered intervention of RTI is not limited to particular sequences. If a student's diagnostic assessment records

have clearly indicated that the student needs the most intensive intervention, the school can provide the student with the Tier 3 intervention without requesting that the student go through the Tier 2 intervention.

The quality of RTI relies on valid data collection and high-quality fidelity of implementation. Leading scholars in RTI have suggested five recommendations for using student achievement data to support instructional decision-making. These recommendations are: making data part of an ongoing cycle of instructional improvement; teaching students to examine their own data and set their own goals; establishing a clear vision for school-wide data; providing supports that foster a data-driven culture within the school; and finally developing and maintaining a districtwide data system (Hamilton, Halverson, Jackson, Mandinach, Supovitz, & Wayman, 2009). While these recommendations are important, there is limited literature addressing how schools apply these recommendations to their implementation of RTI, particularly for ELLs.

Previous studies in RTI with ELLs have been almost exclusively at the elementary school level (Klingner, Soltero-Gonzalez, & Hoover, 2013; Orosco & Klingner, 2010; Rinaldi & Samson, 2008; Xu & Drame, 2007). Thorius and Sullivan's (2012) literature review exploring how research concerning RTI with ELLs show that none of the literature reviewed appears to include students beyond the second grade. The present study is important in that it examines RTI models for middle school ELLs and focuses on content area instructional improvement in addition to literacy achievement. Additionally, this

study also extends the research from the RTI Effectiveness Model for ELLs (REME) model by focusing more specifically on two of its six components: (1) research-based multi-tiered instruction for ELLs and (2) reflecting, revising, and applying RTI for ELLs (Klingner, Soltero-Gonzalez, & Hoover, 2013). In sharing our findings with educators and researchers in the field of RTI and ELLs, we introduce a path that maximizes the value of RTI for ELLs in middle schools.

Methods

The State of Georgia is purposefully selected for this study. The RTI approach in Georgia has subsumed and fitted to the state's Student Support Team (SST) policy mandated in every public school. The state has strived to find a system where the essence of RTI is functioning in each public school to meet the needs of today's diverse learning environment. English Language Learners, for example, are one of the focus groups emphasized in the implementation of RTI. Although this is not always implemented, according to the ESOL/Title III Resource Guide, students who receive English to Speakers of Other Language (ESOL) services are automatically at Tier 4 of the pyramid to receive the most intensive language support. As the state's RTI document says: "Although Tier 2 is a good entry level for many at-risk groups, the specially designed learning focus of Tier 4, with its emphasis on specialized programs and specialized instructional delivery and methodology, describes the basic tenets of English to Other Language (ESOL) instruction" (Georgia Department of Education (GADOE), 2011, p. 55). The ESOL program in Georgia is a "state funded instructional program for eligible ELLs in grades K-12 (Georgia School

Law Section 20-1-156 Code 1981, Sec. 20-2-156, enacted in 1985)" (GADOE, 2016). Since its inception, the ESOL program has "transitioned from a discrete skills curriculum to a standards-based curriculum" and expects educators in the state to use instructional practices to "accommodate the needs of Georgia's linguistically and culturally diverse student and parent populations" (GADOE, 2016).

Participants

The State of Georgia was chosen because the implementation of RTI has become mandatory in the state and thus we considered it important to examine how ELLs are served and how their eligibility for receiving tiered instructional support is determined. The questionnaire was emailed to all district English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) coordinators in Georgia, followed up with a reminder email. Thirty-three school districts in Georgia responded to our request and participated in our research. Participation was voluntary, and each participant signed a consent form approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) and received five dollars as an incentive for completing the questionnaire.

Data Sources

The sources of data are twofold; we conducted a survey, as well as analyzed existing school documents. The sections proceeding give details as to what was included in the survey questionnaire. In addition, specifics about the various school archives included in the study are provided.

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The Instrument: Survey Questionnaire

To enhance the reliability of the survey questionnaire, the questions were piloted to ensure that the questions on instruments are not ambiguous or unclear; the procedures of administration were standardized; and the length of the survey questionnaire was adequate to avoid participation fatigue. Each participant was able to complete the questionnaire in thirty minutes and could take a break when needed. The questionnaire consisted of two parts. The first part was multiple-choice to determine participants' background information and general information about their ESOL programs. The second part was open-ended to gain more in-depth responses about teachers' knowledge and experiences of providing services to ELLs through RTI. The questions are purposively general to allow participants the freedom to respond in a variety of ways. This questionnaire is an initial step in soliciting information from important stakeholders, and the questions are written so as to be applicable to other settings.

Background information:

Q1. Which ethnicity best describes you?
Q2. How many years have you served in the ESOL program?
Q3. What type of school district do you work for (rural, suburban, urban)?

General information about the ESOL program:

Q4. Approximately how many total students who receive ESOL services are in your school district?
Q5. How is the English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) program in your school district structured (pull-out intervention, in-class intervention, both)?

Q6. Is your school district currently implementing RTI?

Q7. Does your school district have any RTI manual and/or related documents concerning ELLs? If yes, please provide evidence.

Knowledge and experiences of providing services to ELLs through RTI:

Q8. How does your school district make RTI data part of an ongoing cycle of instructional improvement for middle school English Language Learners?
Q9. What supports does your school district provide to assist schools with collecting data concerning middle school ELLs?
Q10. How does your school district assist middle school ELLs in understanding their RTI data in order to set their own goals?
Q11. Please describe the training you've received related to teaching ELLs.
Q12. Please describe the training you have received related to RTI.
Q13. What additional supports or resources do you feel would benefit administrators and the teachers in your district in order to meet the needs of ELLs?

Electronic data collection through Survey Monkey (i.e., a computer-assisted survey application) and existing databases (i.e., website archives) was adopted in the present study. In terms of the electronic questionnaire, participants logged into a computer, opened a questionnaire from the Internet, completed the questionnaire, and submitted their completed questionnaires through Internet. In terms of the existing databases, archives were collected and reviewed through school district websites. Emails were sent to each participant to obtain documentation that was not available on websites. Triangulating evidence from different types of data resources enhances the accuracy of the study.

School District Archives

Documentary research was employed to examine the school district archives. This method has been recognized as a scientific research method in educational research, and its validity and value is well documented (Ahmed, 2010). All school districts in Georgia adopted its state RTI manual to serve ELLs. Some school districts develop their own documents that provide useful and specific information about their work with ELLs. The documentation includes ELL program handbooks that address the federal laws and the ELL, ELL programs, eligibility and ESOL delivery models, guidelines and practices, as well as assessment. Assessment for ELLs in Georgia include the WIDA-ACCESS Placement Test (W-APT), the Wide-Range Achievement Test (WRAT), and the Assessing Comprehension and Communication in English State-to-State (ACCESS). Student profiles are another important documentation, which document students' Criterion-Referenced Competency Tests

(CRCT), the Georgia High School Graduation Tests (GHSGT), Language Arts and Reading scores, testing accommodations provided for standardized assessments, Language Assessment Conference (LAC) records, RTI Pyramid of interventions utilized, student support team in progress, other special services ELLs receive, ESOL exit date, accommodations for ELLs in the classroom, and/or progress monitoring data.

Data Analyses

A mixed-method research design was adopted for the present study. The quantitative data (i.e., multiple-choice questions; Questions 1-7) was analyzed through descriptive statistics. The quantitative data include nominal values (i.e., ethnicity, district types, formats of ESOL programs, RTI in place, and district RTI manuals) and ordinal values (i.e., year of experience and number of ELLs). The quantitative data are presented with percentages (%) which shows how large or small one quantity is relative to another one.

The qualitative data (Questions 8-13) were analyzed by two researchers and an outside reviewer. Each of us developed our own codebooks based on the emergent themes from the data. After the first round of coding, the three codebooks were discussed and combined into an inclusive codebook. Using this inclusive codebook, the researchers and reviewer coded the data again. After the second round of coding, the codebook was compared, discussed, revisited, and revised until 100% agreement was reached across raters.

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Finally, the supplementary materials of school district archives were examined to triangulate the other data sources. For example, when participants mentioned in the questionnaires that their school districts had RTI manuals in addition to the state RTI manuals, an examination of their district archives took place to ensure the accuracy of the data.

Results

As this was a mixed-methods study, the results will be reported separately. The background information of participants and school districts will be presented in the quantitative results section. Next, the results concerning teacher training, as well as answers to the research questions will be reported in the qualitative results section.

Quantitative Results

Regarding background information, the findings show that the majority of the participants (73%) in the present study are white/Caucasian. There were also African Americans (15%) and Hispanic Americans (12%) participating in the study. Most of the participants (79%) were experienced ESOL teachers who had more than ten years of experiences in the field of ESOL. Additionally, 52% of the participants were from rural areas, 27% from urban areas, and 15% from suburban areas. A small percentage did not specify their school district type.

In terms of general information about the ESOL program, there is great variety in regards to the numbers of students served under ESOL programs, ranging from fewer than 100 students in one school district to thousands of students in another school district. All participants expressed that a mixed model of

instructional support had been provided to ELLs. That is, students whose first language was not English received both pull-out and push-in language support from specialists and regular classroom teachers. Moreover, although all participants indicated that RTI was in place in their school districts, only 39% of the participants' school districts had district RTI manuals, while 61% of them did not have district RTI manuals. Table 1 shows a summary of the quantitative data report.

Table 1

A summary of the quantitative data report

Survey Questionnaire	Percentage (n=33)
Q 1. Ethnicity	
White/Caucasian	73%
African American	15%
Hispanic American	12%
Q2. Years of Experience	
0~1 Year	6%
2~5 Years	3%
6~10 Years	12%
More than 10 Years	79%
Q 3. District Type	
Urban	27%
Suburban	15%
Rural	52%
Non-specified	6%
Q4. Number of ELLs	
Fewer than 100	36%
Between 101 and 300	21%
Between 301 and 500	9%
Between 501 and 700	9%
Between 701 and 900	9%
Over 900	15%
Q5. Format of Service	
Both pull-out intervention and in-class intervention are provided.	100%
Q6. RTI in placement	
Yes	100%
Q7. School district RTI manuals	
Yes	39%
No	61%

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It is important to note that while 39% of the participants indicated that they have school district RTI manuals, the archives showed that only 18% of the participants' school districts developed their own district RTI manuals and data collection systems; the rest of the school districts all directly adopted the state RTI manuscripts.

Qualitative Results

The results begin with the training received by the respondents, followed by the research questions, and conclude with themes that arose that were not pre-determined based on the questions asked. Open-ended item eleven on the survey reads, "Please describe the training you've received related to teaching ELLs." The results are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2
Training that participants received related ELLs

Types of Training	Frequency
ESOL endorsement	12
WIDA	7
Regional workshops/district wide classes/Title III Conference	7
State department of education meetings	6
The Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) Model	5
Coursework toward a degree	4
Assessing Comprehension and Communication in English State-to-State for English Language Learners (ACCESS for ELLs)	4
Webinars/online trainings	4
Regional Educational service Agency (RESA)	4
TESOL Conferences	3
Certified	3
National Board Certification in English as a New Language	1
Pre-planning	1
TransAct	1
ELL testing strategies training	1
RTI training in ELLs	1

Item twelve on the survey asks respondents to "Please describe the training you have received related to RTI." These responses fell into 4 main categories: school level training (11 responses), district level training (8 responses), conferences (8 responses), and webinars/online trainings (6 responses). In addition, 2 participants reported "none", and 1 respondent wrote "pyramid of intervention training."

Research question 1. When asked "How does your school district make RTI data part of an ongoing cycle of instructional improvement for middle school English Language Learners?" (Q8), thirteen participants reported using ongoing progress monitoring or data collection within a subject or across subjects. "Revising data and using it to inform instruction", as well as "providing additional instructional support" were often given as responses; they were mentioned 11 times each. Three participants either did not know how RTI was done in their school/district or claimed that RTI was not implemented or data was not collected. Teacher collaboration emerged as important theme in this category as well.

Research question 2. The participants' responses to the question, "What supports do school districts provide to assist schools with collecting data concerning middle school ELLs?" (Q9) are diverse. Many testing and technology programs were cited such as AIMSWEB, ACCESS data, MODEL scores, iCampus, Infinite campus W-APT, GRASP protocol, Read 180, and Elevation. Other data sources were semester grades, SLOs, attendance, Georgia Milestones, and development of a Comprehensive LEA Implementation Plan (CLIP). Two

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participations said the data collection is the same as for all other students, and one did not know.

A related question asked on the survey (Q13) was what additional supports or resources might be beneficial in order to meet the needs of ELLs. The overwhelming response was more training with fifteen responses. Two participants said "none," two said "more time," and three said "additional personnel." All the other supports received just one listing each: money, online resources, district support, tools, language course, collaborative planning time, district manual to share examples, high school resources, material for older English learners, interpreters, on demand training, need a full time ELL teacher, "person knowledgeable about the ELLs and the way they learn."

Those who wanted more training as reported in Q13 also listed more specifically the content they would like to know more about. These include: WIDA/can do descriptors, ACCESS data, RTI, strategies for teaching ELLs/sheltered teaching strategies, how to incorporate classroom modifications, data collection, what to do with data/ELL data analysis, relevance of language development and proficiency as part of data analysis, how to address ELL instructional needs, progress monitoring tools, concept of targeted remediation for skills, differentiation in instruction, assessment, grading, SIOP, instructional conversations, and thinking maps.

Research Question 3. Question 10 of the survey is "How do school districts/schools assist middle school ELLs in understanding their RTI data in order to set their own goals?" and produced a variety of responses. The most common

response was conferences (7 respondents), which included "one-on-one" and "talks to" and "meets with." However, close behind with 6 respondents was those that say they are not doing anything to assist ELLs in making their own goals. Other strategies for helping with goal setting included involving parents, viewing progress online, and ACCESS scores. The more specific ways that participants were helping the students set their own goals were the use of personal data folders and elementary student data notebooks.

Themes that emerged that were not directly elicited from survey questions included technology, treating ELLs like all other students through the RTI framework, and the number of different "players" mentioned throughout the responses. The different designations discussed through survey responses ranged from administration, counselor, and staff to ESOL teachers and classroom teachers.

In summary, the results of the qualitative data show that most ESOL coordinators have an ESOL endorsement or training in WIDA standards. Most of the ESOL training experienced has occurred at the regional level. In comparison, the majority of RTI training received by participants was at the school-level. Progress monitoring is the method of choice for making data part of an ongoing cycle for instructional improvement. Supports provided for data collection overwhelmingly involve technology and testing programs. Participants reported using informal methods such as conferences or nothing at all to assist ESOL students in setting their own goals. Finally, the qualitative data indicates that stakeholders desire more training in the area of RTI with ELLs.

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Discussion

Much can be learned from the results of this mixed method study. Perhaps most importantly, ESOL stakeholders would welcome training to improve practice. This belief is significant because having training has been found to be effective and the most consistent factor in influencing teachers' beliefs in a positive way toward ELLs (Pettit, 2011a & Pettit, 2011b).
Professional learning has been shown to have a positive impact on teachers of ELLs, particularly through the models of intercultural information, inquiry, and immersion (McLaughlin & Pettit, 2014). Additionally, Pettit (2011b) posited five beliefs necessary for successful in inclusion of ELLs in mainstream classrooms. One of the five is a desire for professional development in relation to ELLs when needed. The current study shows that the participants have satisfied this important belief. On comparison of the support desired from the ESOL coordinator participants in this study with actual classroom teachers in Georgia in a prior study, it is apparent that the teachers are more concerned with day-to-day resources such as bilingual textbooks and additional personnel trained in working with ELLs (Pettit, 2013) than the stakeholders in the current study.

Another important observation from the data shows that clearly, ELLs are not the sole responsibility of the ESOL teacher. The various roles associated with coordinating ESOL students in the various districts ranged from classroom teachers to counselors to administrators. Mainstream classroom teachers must accept responsibility for the ESOL students in their classrooms just as much as the ESOL teacher. Similarly, teachers and others should recognize the unique interpretation

of RTI that can be applied to ELLs. RTI shows great promise in that the process requires collaboration among multiple educators and allows for "true" peer comparisons rather than national norms (Brown & Doolittle, 2008). A common survey response to various questions was that RTI is in place for all students; therefore, no plans are in place for using RTI with ELLs specifically. Based on the investigations of school district websites and individual email communication, the data show that over 80% of the school districts adopted the state RTI manual to serve ELLs. However, only six school districts developed their own documents that provide useful and specific information about their work with ELLs. One exemplar from Colquitt County, Georgia can be found here: http://goo.gl/WgQOFs.

Interestingly, although twelve participants reported having training through an ESOL endorsement, only three said that they were "certified" in teaching ESOL. The ESOL endorsement is an add-on certification program in Georgia. Without further research, it is not clear whether those who reported being certified also had the ESOL endorsement, or if those who say they are certified have a degree in ESOL. Either way, it is shown that very few (if not zero) ESOL stakeholders in Georgia have a degree in ESOL, but rather an add-on certification.

As mentioned in the introduction, this study speaks to all ELLs, not those who might be on the path to special education qualification. Artiles (2015) writes, "The constructs of learning, ability, and culture get increasingly intertwined with damaging consequences that perpetuate historical injustices" (p.1).Certainly, some ELLs do have a

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disability, but care should be taken in identification. Difficulties in identification may exist because ELLs have had learning difficulties not due to a disability, but rather due to lack of access to culturally and linguistically relevant screening tools. It is important to note that RTI does not replace comprehensive assessments and instructional supports for ELLs. In other words, ESOL and/or bilingual programs are a necessary component working in conjunction with RTI.

It is also worth repeating that the RTI pyramid functions as a regressive model for ESOL students, rather than as a model of progressive interventions, as is the case for students not in the ESOL program. ESOL instruction is inherently a Tier 4 support, so students who qualify for that program begin at the top of the pyramid and hopefully work their way down the tiers as they progress in language proficiency. In analyzing both the survey responses and the local RTI and ESOL documents, it is apparent that some counties are in the developing stage of using the framework outlined by the state for implementing RTI with ELLs. For example, stakeholders reported that ELLs progress through the tiers, "just like all students" when in actuality, the state document states that ESOL students automatically begin in Tier 4. In a future study, it would be important to examine the reported RTI levels of ESOL students in various counties in Georgia to check for fidelity in implementation of state guidelines. Moreover, mainstream teachers of ESOL students need to be aware that Tier 4 interventions are supplements to tiers one through three supports, so mainstream teachers must provide interventions for ESOL students beyond their pull-out ESOL class. In other words, issues on what tiers one through three level supports are ESOL students getting

in their regular classes in addition to the Tier 4 support of the pull-out ESOL class should be explored.

Conclusion

To see how districts are using the RTI model with ELLs, district manuals and website archives were examined. Additionally, school district ESOL stakeholders were surveyed. The purpose of the current study is to bring awareness about the different implementation models of RTI with ELLs and discrepancies with state-level policies. Through the study, we explore how school districts make RTI data part of instructional improvement. This study extends the research from the RTI Effectiveness Model for ELLs (REME) model by focusing more specifically on two of its six components: (1) research-based multi-tiered instruction for ELLs and (2) reflecting, revising, and applying RTI for ELLs (Klingner, Soltero-Gonzalez, & Hoover, 2013). Despite the slight rise in RTI studies involving ELLs conducted recently, "how this model can best serve ELLs remains unknown" (Xu & Drame, 2007, p. 306). In sharing our findings with educators and researchers in the field of RTI and ELLs, we have introduced a path that maximizes the value of RTI for ELLs in middle schools. In applying an RTI framework with ELLs, the need for additional training is increased, particularly in the areas of screening and progress monitoring (Brown & Sanford, 2011). The current study participants are willing to participate in this necessary training. Utilizing interviews in future research would help strengthen the qualitative findings from this study.

In conclusion, this study presents findings from analysis of artifacts including school RTI manuals and

handbooks for instructing ELLs, as well as findings from a survey given to all school district ELL coordinators in a state where RTI is mandated in K-12. The purpose of this study is to help educators and researchers in the field of language education understand how schools use RTI to support ELLs and how to maximize the value of RTI to reach diverse learners. By showing how RTI needs to be implemented with ELLs, ESOL stakeholders should be encouraged about the possibilities for success for this growing population that is inherent in this approach. Furthermore, since many participants indicated that they could not distinguish the different supports of using RTI with struggling students versus ELLs, more training is needed to help teachers of ELLs tailor their instructional support to this group of students.

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