

50 Years of *Reading Research Quarterly* (1965–2014): Looking Back, Moving Forward

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ABSTRACT

This issue of *Reading Research Quarterly* (RRQ) marks the journal's golden (50th) anniversary and 200th published issue. Given this historic milestone, an understanding of the journal's content and impact might inform its readership about the field of literacy broadly and the contribution of RRQ in particular. This study reports a content and trend analysis using a convergent parallel mixed methods design to profile the content of 50 years of RRQ. Grounded in polysystem and cultural field theories, four parallel investigative tracks afforded a complementary understanding of what the journal has published over five decades and together highlight salient aspects of the journal's history. Analyses targeted the most frequently researched topics and populations, as well as trends in research and analysis types and most frequently cited articles. Bibliometric data add information about the status and online use of the journal as it celebrates its 50th year. In addition, a qualitative analysis of editorials complements the quantitative data to provide a panoramic retrospective that answers five research questions. Data led the researchers to identify trends that supported identification of five pillars that characterize the nature and impact of RRQ in the past and present. Recommendations are made about how RRQ might preserve its core strengths or pillars and develop new directions to expand its influence and impact.

In 1956, a merger of two national organizations took place: The International Council for the Improvement of Reading and Instruction joined with the National Association for Remedial Teachers. This merger created what we know today as the International Reading Association (IRA; Jerrolds, 1977), which will become the International Literacy Association in 2015. Nine years after the founding of IRA, a new journal, *Reading Research Quarterly* (RRQ), was approved to address the relatively new association's major goals: dissemination of research and improvement in the quality of research in reading. Theodore Clymer (a past president of IRA) and Ralph Staiger (then executive director) were to play a critical role in the establishment of RRQ. The first editors of RRQ, Theodore Clymer and Edward G. Summers, proclaimed in their inaugural editorial introducing the new journal to the Association that RRQ was "to report experimental, statistical, and technical articles, as well as integrative, critical, and comprehensive reviews of the literature" (Jerrolds, 1977, p. 135).

Twenty-five years later, in the silver anniversary issue, RRQ editors Gough, Hoffman, Juel, and Schallert (1990) celebrated the "wisdom and foresight of those who established it [RRQ]," and went on to note that RRQ was "recognized...not only as the preeminent research journal in the field of reading, but overall as one of the leading social

science research journals” (p. 255). Unlike *The Reading Teacher*, IRA’s longest-running journal, *RRQ* was envisioned by the early pioneers to provide a forum for lengthier research articles, critiques and reviews of research, and occasional updates and summaries of international and national research in the field of reading. For many years, the “Annual Summary of Investigations Related to Reading” had been reported in the *Elementary School Journal*, then in the *Journal of Educational Research*, and subsequently in *The Reading Teacher*. But with the launching of *RRQ*, it became the new repository for the annual research summaries in the field that would for years continue to expand the William S. Gray Memorial Collection of Scientific Studies in reading.

Fast-forward another 25 years, and *RRQ* is enjoying its golden (50th) anniversary issue and continued preeminence as one of the most highly ranked and regarded educational and social science research journals in the world. The current editors of *RRQ*, Linda B. Gambrell and Susan B. Neuman, issued an invitation for a study of the journal to be undertaken and reported in this issue to mark this milestone event.

For us, the invitation to conduct an integrative study of 50 years of research reported in *RRQ* was sufficiently daunting to nearly take our collective breaths away. We asked ourselves, How could we do justice to this exceptional journal, its editors, its past researchers and authors, and the field of literacy in a single article on the history and trends of *RRQ*? We mused early on that perhaps a book would have been a preferred venue for conveying the rich, broad, and deep history of the field of reading and literacy across 200 issues and thousands of pages of *RRQ* research, reviews, commentaries, and editorials published in this journal over five decades. But having accepted the charge and the challenge, we plunged into the task with enthusiasm and curiosity. We suspected that we would not only learn a great deal about the journal but also gain valuable insights into the historic development of the field of literacy itself. We are pleased to say that as we immersed ourselves into the rich and fertile contents of *RRQ*’s archive, we were not disappointed. So, we invite you, the readers, to take a journey with us as we assumed the multiple roles of researchers, journalists, archaeologists, and historians to portray the rich legacy left to us in the thousands of pages of research, critiques, editorials, articles, reviews, commentaries, and other features published in *RRQ* over the past 50 years.

A Brief History of the Beginnings of *RRQ*

In 1958, IRA President George Spache received five recommendations from the IRA Publications Committee, chaired by Nila Banton Smith. One of these recommendations

made at IRA’s Annual Conference, held in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, that year, was that IRA should publish a research journal instead of devoting an issue of *The Reading Teacher* each year to the reporting of reading research. Although *The Reading Teacher* was a fine professional journal aimed largely at translating research into practice for practitioners, it neither spoke directly to nor provided a forum for scholars and researchers (Jerrolds, 1977). Although this recommendation was not to become a reality for several more years, the seeds for *RRQ*’s inception had been sown. In 1964, Past IRA President Theodore Clymer once again urged the organization to publish a journal for “those on the frontier of scientific work in the field” (p.125). Apparently, he also recognized early on that the costs of publishing a new research journal would need to be highly subsidized by the Association for a period of time. Nevertheless, Clymer was a relentless force behind *RRQ*’s approval at the 1964 meeting of the IRA Board in Cherry Hill, New Jersey.

The first issue of *RRQ* was published in the fall of 1965. Clymer was the first editor and Edward G. Summers the first associate editor. In their first editorial, the new editors reiterated the major goals of the new journal: dissemination of research findings and improvement in the quality of research in reading. The first issue included an editorial and four articles authored by reading pioneers, including Harry Singer and Thomas Barrett. Thus, from its inception, the journal has provided its readership with notable content from critical voices in the field. Analyzing that content across five decades became our main objective.

Theoretical Framework

Polysystem theory (Even-Zohar, 1979) provided a framework for this content and trend analysis (Neuendorf, 2002). Polysystem theory analyzes the hierarchy between various competing subsystems or structures within a larger system. According to Dane, Ghonem-Woets, Ghesquière, Mooren, and Dekker (2006), every form of literature is a complex system with content and composition changed by internal and external factors. Polysystem theory asserts that every form of published work is the result of a dynamic sociocultural system. The status and value attached to any published work is “derived primarily from [a] relationship to other texts” (Dane et al., 2006, p. 710). *RRQ* can be described as a literary polysystem with changing and evolving aspects, including editorial team direction, available content, and dynamic developments in the field. Analysis of polysystems can focus on the pillarization and depillarization of open and heterogeneous subsystems. In this case, we sought to understand the pillars of the journal—the waxing and waning of topics, populations, methodologies, and features used to communicate with

reading researchers. A key query was, How have these pillars developed and diminished over time? We sought answers to this question not only in the contents of the journal itself but, also in a content review of inaugural and exit editorials authored by each new editorial team to provide us and readers with access to the internal metatexts that served to position, reposition, and modernize the journal (Even-Zohar, 1979).

Cultural products such as educational research publications compete with one another for status to gain external acclaim in a social arena known as a field of cultural production (Bourdieu, 1993). The notion of a cultural field emphasizes a link between educational research and the acquisition and retention of political and economic capital. Despite a sense of relative autonomy, published educational research texts are influenced by powerful groups in society. By analyzing societal trends and the activities of educational research publishers, one can gain interesting insights into the ideological connections, social forces, and published products because these typically co-occur during periods of intense pillarization but also struggle for status during periods of depillarization. Bourdieu describes publishers of educational texts as cultural bankers or businessmen who believe in their product and attempt to achieve a balance between culture and economics.

Using these twin lenses, polysystem and cultural field, for our analysis, we set off on our trek to rediscover the lessons that *RRQ* can teach us about the past 50 years of literacy history. Our collective goal was to use both descriptive and analytic approaches to provide a panoramic historical view of the journal's contributions to and shaping of the field of reading research. In order to do this, we relied on the following research questions:

1. What research trends are reflected in the contents and features found in *RRQ*'s first 198 issues over its 50-year history?
2. What research trends are reflected in the content and characteristics found in a stratified random sample of 200 of *RRQ*'s articles over its 50-year history?
3. Which articles published over the 50-year history of *RRQ* have been most influential as measured by citation rates?
4. Using a variety of metrics, what has been the relative standing of *RRQ* among internationally published educational and social science journals as indicated by editorial claims, rankings, Internet downloads, and other available impact data?
5. What were the goals, aspirations, and challenges communicated by the nine *RRQ* editorial teams as indicated in their inaugural and exit editorials?

Design

We used a convergent parallel mixed methods design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011) to conduct this retrospective trend analysis of *RRQ*'s past 50 years. The purpose of this design is to obtain different but complementary data on the same topic (Morse, 1991). We selected this design because it allowed us to directly compare and contrast quantitative and qualitative data for corroboration and validation purposes. We also selected this design because of the amount of data we had to analyze, the relatively brief timeline for doing so, and the relative strengths of our team in terms of using qualitative and quantitative methods.

When using a convergent parallel mixed methods design, researchers collect and analyze both qualitative and quantitative data simultaneously in multiple tracks. We collected data related to the past 50 years of *RRQ* along four parallel data collection and analysis tracks in this study.

The issue was the focus of track 1 data collection and analysis to address research question 1. As an initial step, we worked with two doctoral students in literacy education to develop a coding protocol for easily quantifiable issue features, such as number of contributions, number of pages per issue, and nations of authors' affiliations, to provide a consolidated picture of the journal over the years.

The four of us then analyzed every contribution published in *RRQ*, a total of 198 issues at the time of analysis of 1,370 articles and other special features. We focused this aspect of our analysis on topical content, populations studied, length of issue in terms of number of contributions and number of pages, and special features. After open coding by both of us, the variety of research topics addressed in *RRQ* was collapsed into 20 supercategories for convenience of coding and trend analysis. These categories are shown in Table 1.

We coded topics and populations collaboratively until we reached 100% agreement. Then, we both coded half of the remaining articles for primary topics and populations participating in the reported research. A Cohen's Kappa was calculated for the two researchers' coding of a randomly selected subset of 25 issues for the independently coded topic and population categories. Cohen's Kappas were calculated at .78 for the selected populations and .68 for the selected topic categories. Data collected in these processes were quantitative and qualitative and sorted by decade to detect broad historical/time-related trends, or pillarization and depillarization, in the contents of *RRQ* over its first five decades.

In track 2, we collected quantitative data about *RRQ* using article as the unit of analysis as related to research questions 2 and 3, as articles are the primary and dominant content of the journal. We analyzed only articles

TABLE 1
20 Topical Supercategories for Coding and Trend Analysis of Reading Research Quarterly Articles

Assessment
Beginning reading skills/word recognition
Comprehension
Disciplinary literacy
Environment
Family literacy
Fluency
Instructional programs/practices
Media/technology
Motivation
Oral language
Physiological/psychological
Psycholinguistics/linguistics
Reading research reviews/history/meta-analyses
Sociocultural perspectives
Text
Theories/models/processes
Vocabulary
Voluntary/volume reading
Writing

published in the journal that were identifiable as such by coders, and separated these from other types of published contributions colocated as content in the journal's issues (e.g., editorials, commentaries, letters to the editors, international reports). Next, we determined the special features or characteristics of the articles that we wanted to quantify, such as type of studies reported and analyses and assessments used. Subsequently, we randomly selected 200 articles (approximately 25% of the total) stratified by issue and year for the article analysis and coding. We developed a coding protocol for examining these 200 articles and applied this protocol to another set of 25 randomly selected articles. We coded this set of 25 articles independently and met to discuss and refine the coding protocol. This process continued for several iterations of discussing coding processes and results until we reached agreement or at least a .70 Cohen's Kappa for coding each article's research methods, analysis types, and assessments.

To code for research methods or types, we collapsed multiple research methods into four supercategories: descriptive, correlational, experimental, and synthesis. We

collapsed types of data collection and analyses reported in the 200 randomly selected *RRQ* articles into three categories: quantitative, qualitative, or mixed or multiple. Finally, we coded these 200 articles for the use of formal and informal assessment types. Formal assessments were defined as either norm or criterion-referenced measurements that used standardized administration protocols and also presented validity and/or reliability data. All other assessment tools or procedures were categorized as informal.

As part of the track 2 analysis, to answer research question 3, we collected quantitative data from *RRQ*'s current and first out-of-house publisher, Wiley-Blackwell, which resulted in a listing of the 25 most-cited articles published in the journal. This listing allowed us to describe which of the hundreds of articles published over the 50-year history of *RRQ* have evidenced the greatest access, impact, and influence in the field of reading.

In track 3 data collection and analysis, we found it challenging to identify sources and collect data to determine the results for answering research question 4, which focuses on the status of *RRQ*. An analysis of a contemporary journal necessitates consideration of its bibliometrics, which include data on how the journal is accessed and utilized by its readership. A key aspect of bibliometrics is citation analysis, and the aim is "to construct indicators of research performance from a quantitative statistical analysis of scientific-scholarly documents" (Moed, 2009, p. 13). Although evaluative bibliometrics have been a part of information science for nearly a century (see Narnin, 1976), computer-based technology has recently and significantly transformed publishers' capacity to understand a journal's circulation and impact. This aspect of our trend analysis required building background knowledge of bibliometrics and collaborating with IRA and Wiley-Blackwell to profile *RRQ*. Interestingly, the journal itself has published articles in the past focusing on the value and limitations of reading research bibliometrics, including an analysis by *RRQ*'s first associate editor, Summers (1983), of the retrieval of reading research journal literature, as well as an article with a focus on citation rates authored by Guthrie, Seifert, and Mosberg (1983). Both of these articles were published in the same issue in 1983, more than a quarter century ago.

Evaluative bibliometrics is a field of information sciences and encompasses a variety of analytics. Our primary goal was to determine the relative standing of *RRQ* among similar internationally published education and social science research journals. To achieve this goal, we sought information about impact factors, citation rates, circulation, and online hits and downloads. This process required an understanding of how publishers and editors can now utilize data collection to provide publication

information. Although some metrics were shared with us by the current editors, we also conferred with representatives at Wiley-Blackwell and IRA to better understand what data were available and which data served to best answer the question about *RRQ*'s relative standing. As a result, we examined and report citation rate metrics, such as impact factors, to describe *RRQ*'s relative standing among social science journals in the education and educational research categories. Impact factor data represent an attenuated citation rate metric in which citations per article are divided by the number of research articles published in the previous two years (e.g., 2011 and 2012) to calculate the average number of cites per article (Garfield, 1994). Past *RRQ* editorial teams have not collected most of these metrics systematically or consistently.

In the final parallel data collection and analysis process, track 4, we analyzed qualitative data from the published inaugural and retrospective editorials of the nine editorial teams, past and present, to determine and describe their editorial intents, purposes, and goals for *RRQ*. To accomplish the goal of understanding editorial intentions, we closely read the inaugural and exit editorials, where available, to code content for answers to the following two questions: (1) What were the goals and aspirations for *RRQ* held by each editorial team? and (2) What were some of the challenges faced by past and current editors of *RRQ*? As we initially read these editorials, we noted key points and intentions to get a sense of the content. Then, we individually open-coded the editorials before meeting to discuss the editorial content, our codes, and how they related to the overall trend analysis. In order for this qualitative component to complement the quantitative data in the parallel analysis, we collapsed the open-coding terms into categories that related to research question 5: What were the goals, aspirations, and challenges communicated by the nine *RRQ* editorial teams as indicated in their inaugural and exit editorials? The editorials were then reread, and comments were extracted to build a table for noting content by editorial team (see Table 2) using agreed-upon categories. Understanding the editorial intent as communicated by the editorial teams combined with the content analysis reported here afforded a complementary analysis that provides a more detailed and complex portrait of the journal's 50-year journey.

Results

Our purpose for this study was to provide a panoramic and historical view of *RRQ*'s contributions, which, using polysystem and cultural field theories, we refer to as pillars that have contributed to and shaped the field of reading research. We report results for each of the four

TABLE 2
Reading Research Quarterly Editorial Teams and Years of Service

Team number	Editorial team	Years of service
1	Theodore Clymer	1965–1967
	Edward G. Summers	1965–1969
	Roger Farr	1967–1969
2	Roger Farr	1969–1979
	Samuel Weintraub	
3	P. David Pearson	1979–1985
	S. Jay Samuels	
4	Philip B. Gough	1986–1991
	James V. Hoffman	
	Connie Juel	
	Diane L. Schallert	
5	Judith Green	1992–1995
	Robert J. Tierney	
	Michael L. Kamil	
6	John E. Readence	1996–2002
	Diane M. Barone	
7	Donna E. Alvermann	2003–2007
	David Reinking	
8	Ian A.G. Wilkinson	2008–2012
	David Bloome	
9	Susan B. Neuman	2013–present
	Linda B. Gambrell	

parallel tracks of data collection and analysis in this section. We begin by reporting results for track 1 focused on issue as the unit of analysis.

Parallel Track 1: RRQ Issues

The first parallel track of data collection in this study focused on issue as the unit of analysis. We treated issues for coding purposes as typically composed of two major components: full-length research articles and special features. We coded the topical content of each full-length article published in the journal over the past 50 years. We did not code topical content of *RRQ* special features in these issues (e.g., letters to the editors, commentaries) because these were often written in response to the content of articles published in previous *RRQ* issues. Similarly, we also coded the populations studied in each article published in each issue of the

journal, and then examined the length of each *RRQ* issue in terms of number of pages and numbers of special features and articles published per issue.

Topics

The open-coding process yielded more than two dozen topical foci addressed in *RRQ*. After much discussion and negotiation, we collapsed the initial list of open-coded topical foci into a more practical listing of 20 total axial codes, including comprehension, fluency, assessment, and instructional programs. We assigned a single topical focus code for each article. As expected, some research reports targeted more than one topic, and we acknowledge that the approach we used to code the topics addressed in *RRQ* for a single main focus results in a somewhat conservative view. However, we believe that the results present an interesting profile of the published research reports.

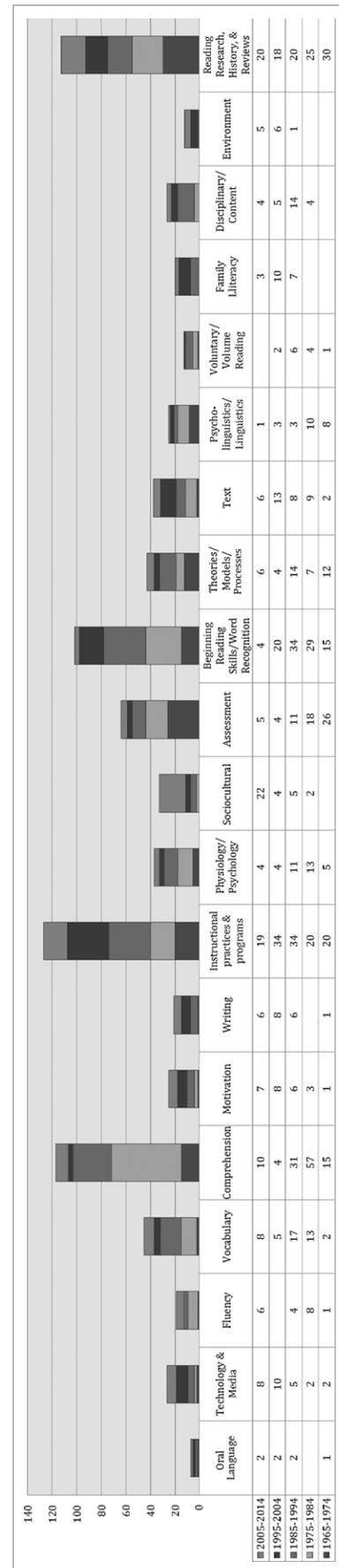
We then reviewed the frequency of topics across the five decades of publication. A total of 915 topical codes were tallied. The results of the coding of topical foci of *RRQ* articles in each issue and their frequencies are shown in Figure 1 by decade of publication (decade 1 = 1965–1974; decade 2 = 1975–1984; decade 3 = 1985–1994; decade 4 = 1995–2004; and decade 5 = 2005–2014).

Figure 1 shows that the most frequently studied topical areas reported in issues of *RRQ* were instructional practices/programs ($n = 127$), comprehension ($n = 117$), reading research reviews/histories ($n = 113$), and beginning reading/word recognition ($n = 103$). Among all of the remaining topical areas coded, reading assessment was the only focus of research with even half the frequency of these four leading topics. Together, these five most frequent codes characterize the topical focus of more than half of the published *RRQ* issues. Instructional practices/programs and beginning reading/word recognition skills have been the most consistently published topical areas in the journal across time, with assessment representing the most frequent topical focus in *RRQ*'s first decade and comprehension the most frequent topical focus among articles in *RRQ*'s third decade. Decades 2 and 3 generally paralleled similar general categories of topical foci as found in the overall 50-year trend.

Interestingly, decade 4 saw an uptick in studies focusing on technology, even though the first article coded as focusing on this topic was published in 1966, nearly 50 years ago. Decade 5 showed a decidedly sociocultural turn in articles published in *RRQ*. Other topical highlights include a dramatic drop-off in articles focused on beginning reading/word recognition skills and comprehension over the past two decades.

Surprisingly, oral language development has been the least frequently reported research topic of those tallied, with only seven articles across the 50-year history and more than 800 articles published in *RRQ*. Other minimally

FIGURE 1
Topical Foci of Research Reports Published in *Reading Research Quarterly* by Decade Over 50 Years



targeted topical areas of focus were reading environments (first coded in issue 27, 1992) and voluntary/volume reading. Indeed, at the time of our analysis, the latter topic had not been the core focus of any *RRQ* article since 1999. Reading fluency was most popular from 1995 to 2004 but has not been a strong topical focus of research published in the journal overall. As noted earlier, a once frequent topic, assessment, has also seen lesser focus in the last two decades. Another waning topic in *RRQ* is the psychology/physiology of reading, with only three articles coded as such in the last 10 years. To us, this finding seems incongruent with recent advancements in the fields of neurosciences and brain-based learning.

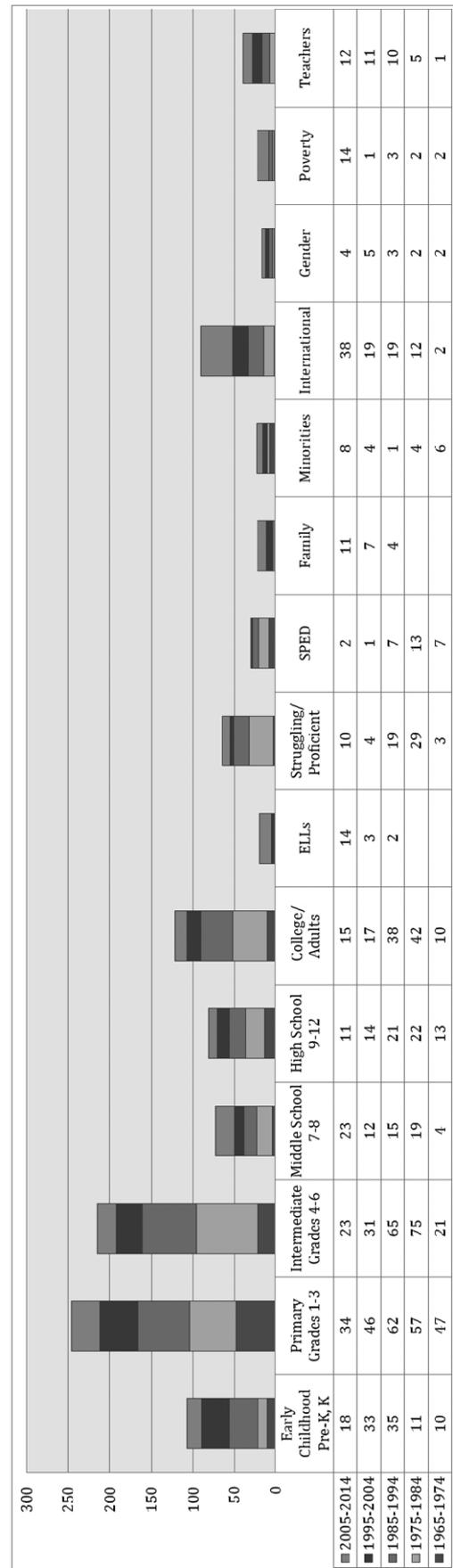
Populations

Our open-coding process also generated a considerable variety of target population codes addressed in studies reported in *RRQ*. These were grouped into axial codes that represented a consolidation of related population codes to just 15 population categories. In order to be consistent, we coded populations studied as reported in each article based on terms used in the title, identified in the abstract, or clearly delineated in the Subjects/Participants section of each research report. Population coding categories were not mutually exclusive because the populations studied also frequently represented more than a single population category. For example, a study could have focused on poor or struggling readers but involved mostly minority or special education students. In contrast, other studies targeted very specific populations, such as kindergarten English learners (ELs) in a Title I school. However, we restricted our protocol to allow coding for a maximum of two population codes for each research report. In the end, we decided to code for age/grade level as the primary code and then code other population characteristics using secondary coding categories, if applicable.

Figure 2 provides an overview by decade of the populations studied as reported in *RRQ* articles. The most frequently studied population was students in the primary grades (21% of population codes; $n = 117$), then students in the intermediate grades (18.4% of population codes) and college students and adults (10% of population codes). During decade 4, from 1995 to 2004, the early childhood years (pre-K and kindergarten levels) were well represented. The middle school and high school years were studied the least among student grade-level populations. Among special populations, international and struggling readers top the list. Comparatively few studies have addressed the special population categories of ELs (1.6% of population codes), special education, family, minority, gender (all <1% of population codes), poverty (2% of population codes), and teachers (3% of population codes).

These results show that some population categories have certainly received disparate attention in *RRQ*. No

FIGURE 2 Populations Studied in Research Reports Published in *Reading Research Quarterly* by Decade Over 50 Years



Note. ELLs = English-language learners; SPED = special education.

articles specifically focused on families or ELs were published in the first and second decades, but all other populations were represented at least once in the first 20 years of the journal. The first published article on family literacy was published in the spring of 1989, and the first to focus on ELs was published in 1991. Notably, the number of articles per population code ranged from a high of 75 articles focusing on intermediate grades to zero articles targeting families or ELs in the second decade. The most recent three decades included articles focused on all 15 population categories coded in this study, with a notable uptick in focus on ELs, poverty, and international populations. Interestingly, the most consistent growth in any population category was international readers, indicated by an increase from two articles in decade 1 to 38 in decade 5. Another recent and frequent population focus has been teachers, including studies of how teachers understand and facilitate the reading progress of students.

The mean number of special features (e.g., letters to the editors, IRA Outstanding Dissertation Award summaries, commentaries, snippets) comprising the contents of *RRQ* issues has ranged between 5.2 and 9.7 per issue,

which means that the journal has offered a fluctuating variety of special features, with a total of 18 different special feature categories across five decades and nine editorial teams. The editorial team of Pearson and Samuels (team 3; see Table 2) published the largest number of articles/features per *RRQ* issue, closely followed by the Green, Tierney, and Kamil (team 5) and Alvermann and Reinking (team 7) editorial teams, as shown in Figure 3.

The Green, Tierney, and Kamil team’s final issue was quite lengthy, with 20 articles and special features in a single published issue. The Clymer and Summers (team 1) and Wilkinson and Bloome (team 8) editorships published the fewest number of articles/features per *RRQ* issue. Clymer and Summers published fewer articles/features per *RRQ* issue primarily because of an a priori decision to publish the lengthier “Annual Summary of Investigations Related to Reading” in the third issue of each volume year, which continued through 1979.

In terms of length of issue in pages, Farr and Weintraub (team 2) published the lengthiest *RRQ* issues, with an average length of 153 pages over their tenure, as shown in Figure 4. The Gough, Hoffman, Juel, and

FIGURE 3
Average Number of Features/Articles per Issue of *Reading Research Quarterly* by Editorial Team

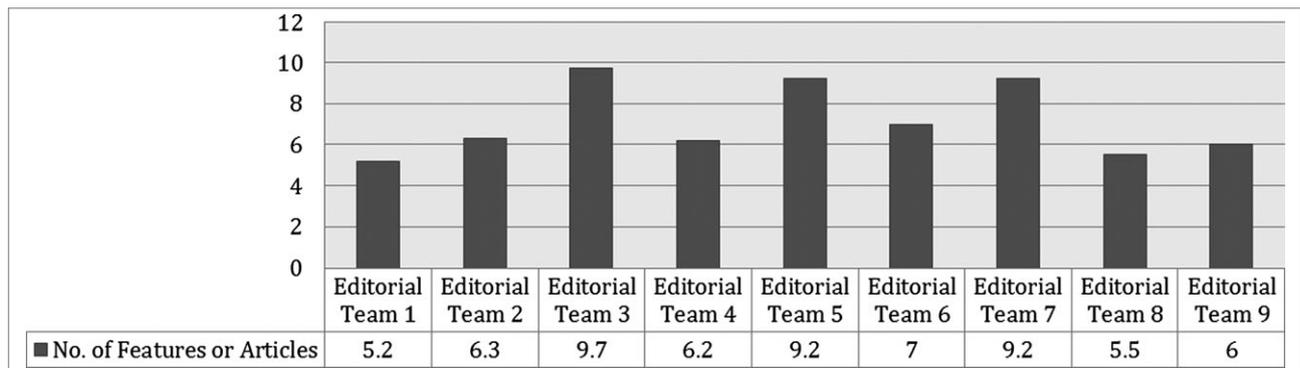
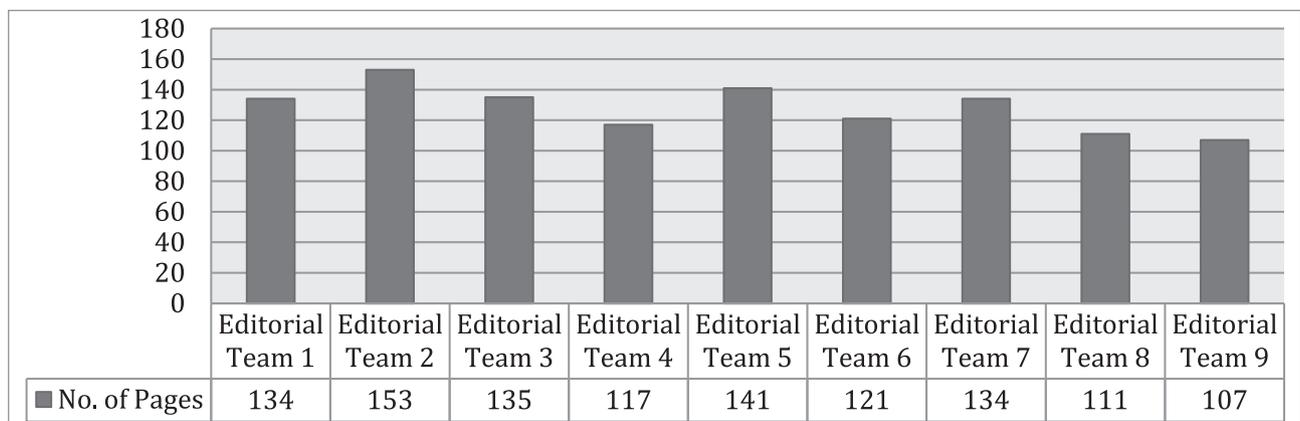


FIGURE 4
Length in Average Number of Pages per Issue of *Reading Research Quarterly* by Editorial Team



Schallert (team 4) and Wilkinson and Bloome (team 8) editorial teams, also shown in Figure 4, published the least lengthy issues in terms of average page length.

In Figure 5, the special features found in each *RRQ* issue are shown by decade. As noted previously, we coded 1,370 separate contributions and 18 different special features as the content over the 50-year history of the journal. Articles were the most frequently published feature in most issues (806 of 1,370, or 59%), with the greatest number of articles published in the second decade and the least in the first decade. Offsetting the number of articles published in the first decade, the editors wrote editorials for nearly every issue published (6% of total coded contributions). In the second decade, there was a noticeable spike in letters to the editors (7.5% of total coded contribution), primarily under the editorship of Farr and Weintraub (team 2). Commentaries (6% of total coded contributions) and book reviews were next in frequency.

Author responses and IRA Outstanding Dissertation Award summaries were the next most frequent categories of features published in *RRQ* in the recent past decade. International reports, book reviews, and other special features appeared for a time and then faded under new editorships. We found one reprint in the 50-year history of *RRQ*: Bond and Dykstra’s (1967) “The Cooperative Research Program in First-Grade Reading Instruction.”

Decades 4 and 5 evidenced the greatest diversity in content categories coded (16 out of 20) and special features (11 out of 18), such as snippets, conversations, and new directions. (Snippets were initiated in 2000 and defined as invited responses to questions posed by the editors, Readence and Barone, team 6.) There was also a noticeable uptick in numbers of book reviews published in decades 4 and 5. Thus, the track 1 coding and analysis processes evidence an undulating variety of topics and special features across *RRQ*’s 50-year publication history.

Track 2: RRQ Articles

The track 2 process analyzed a random sampling of 200 *RRQ* articles (approximately 25% of those published since 1965). In Figure 6, we present the trend for number of authors per article published in the journal by decade. Results show that the average number of authors per article published increased every decade from 1.78 to 2.78 during the first four decades and leveled off in the fifth decade at 2.76.

Results are shown in Figure 7 of coding four types of research reported in *RRQ* articles by decade: descriptive, correlational, experimental, and synthesis. The results show that the mean number of published research articles per year (39) is comparable across decades. In the journal’s first decade, the predominant type of research

FIGURE 5
Reading Research Quarterly Issue Features by Decade

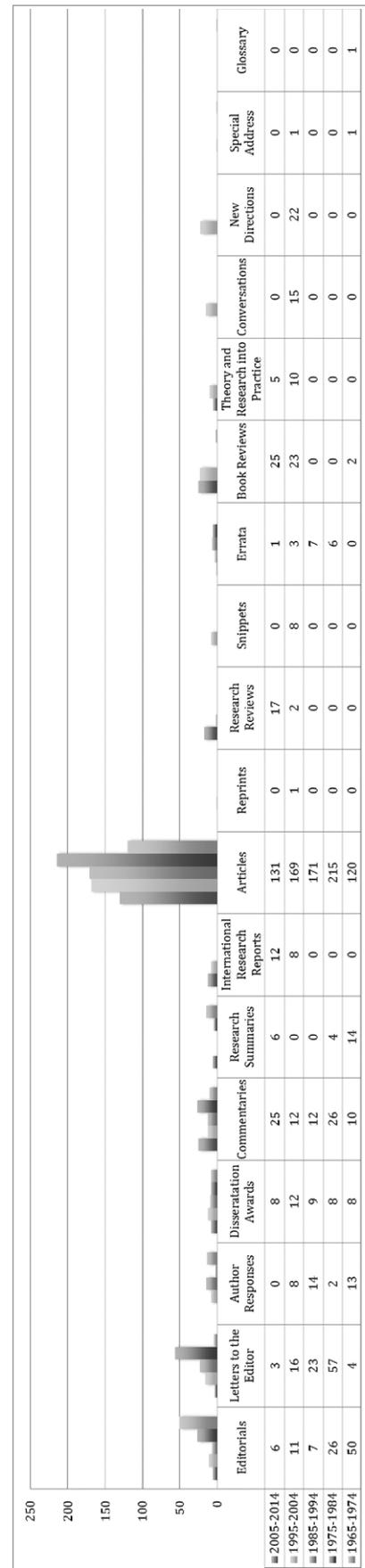


FIGURE 6
Mean Number of Authors of *Reading Research Quarterly* Articles by Decade

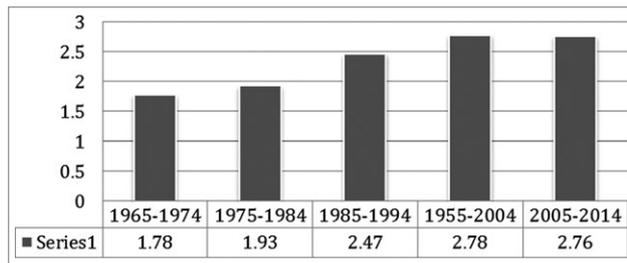
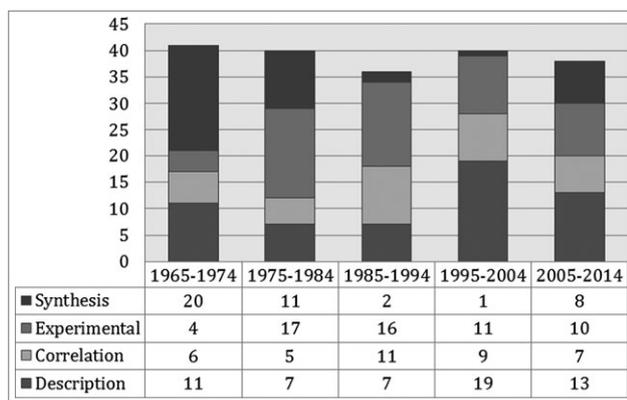


FIGURE 7
Research Types Reported by Decade in *Reading Research Quarterly*



reported was research reviews or syntheses. The comprehensive “Annual Summary of Investigations Related to Reading” published in the winter issues of *RRQ* were extensive, describing hundreds of research reports and often comprising the entire allotted issue. The last comprehensive review of reading research, known as the “Summary of Investigations Related to Reading,” was published in the third issue of *RRQ*, volume 15 (1978–1979). The editors at that time, Pearson and Samuels (team 3), decided to no longer publish the annual summary to allow more space for individual research reports. This decision corresponds with the article-per-issue increase shown in Figure 6. However, the stated goal to increase the annual article total to 32 was rarely achieved.

As shown in Figure 7, in decades 2 and 3, experiments became the dominant research type published in *RRQ*. In decade 4, descriptive research was the most frequently published research type. Also, in decades 3 and 4, as would be expected, the number of research reviews diminished in number rather noticeably in favor of reporting results from original descriptive, correlation, and experimental studies. In decade 5, the types of research reported in the

journal reflected a more balanced representation of the four major research types coded in this study.

The types of data analyses reported in *RRQ* articles are presented in Figure 8 by decade. Results indicate that quantitative data analysis was the dominant research analysis type reported in the journal in the first three decades, 1965–1994. In fact, the ratio of quantitative to qualitative research was at least 4:1 until *RRQ*’s fourth decade, beginning in 1995. In decades 4 and 5, the number of articles reporting qualitative data analysis nearly matched the number of quantitative articles in our random sample of 200 articles. It has not been until quite recently that multiple and/or mixed methods studies have begun to appear in the journal.

In Figure 9, the types of assessment tools and processes reported in *RRQ* articles are shown by decade. In decade 1, a nearly equal proportion of formal and informal assessment instruments or processes was reported. From 1975 to 2004, however, informal assessment instruments and processes were the most frequently reported tools in *RRQ* articles. In the fifth decade, the proportion of formal to informal assessments once again tended toward equal proportions. Notably, the data indicate that the number of studies reporting the use of assessments doubled from the first decade to the fourth.

FIGURE 8
Analysis Types Reported in *Reading Research Quarterly* by Decade

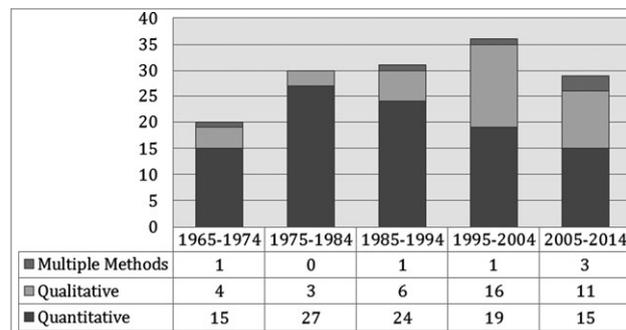


FIGURE 9
Types of Measurements Reported in *Reading Research Quarterly* Articles by Decade

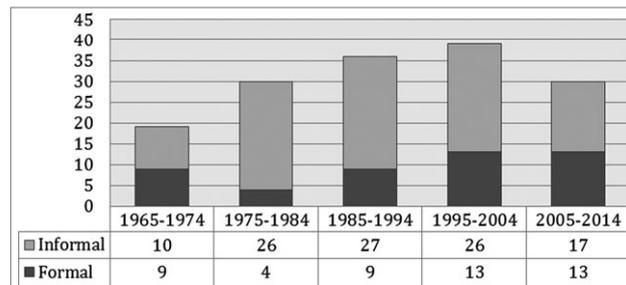


TABLE 3
Alphabetical Listing of Countries Represented in a
Random Sample of 200 Articles Published in *Reading*
***Research Quarterly* Over 50 Years**

Argentina	France	New Zealand
Australia	Germany	Nicosia
Belgium	Greece	Nigeria
Brazil	Hong Kong	Norway
Canada	Iran	Oman
Chile	Ireland	Portugal
China	Israel	Scotland
Colombia	Italy	Singapore
Cyprus	Japan	South Africa
Denmark	Korea	Spain
Egypt	Luxembourg	Sweden
England	Malaysia	Taiwan
Estonia	Mauritius	United States
Fiji	Mexico	Venezuela
Finland	The Netherlands	

The 200 randomly sampled articles originated mainly in the United States, but studies published in *RRQ* during this period also originated from 43 different countries around the world. The proportion of articles in our sample originating in the United States compared with those

articles from international origins was approximately 10 to 1, with a recent uptick of international studies published in the past decade. Table 3 shows, in alphabetical order, the countries represented in the 200 articles coded in this study.

Table 4 displays the top 25 *RRQ* articles evidencing the greatest impact as measured by citation rates over the 50-year history of the journal, ranked from high to low. Notably, Stanovich (1986) authored the most frequently cited article in *RRQ*, with 1,542 citations at the time we wrote this article. Stanovich (1980, 1984, 1989, 1991) also authored or coauthored four other articles in the top 25 most frequently cited *RRQ* articles. Anderson (1979, 1984, 1985, 1988) coauthored four of the top 25 publications, and Nagy (1984, 1985) and Ehri (1985, 2001) each coauthored two of the most frequently cited articles. Four of the top 25 most frequently cited articles deal with the topic of phonemic awareness training or assessment among young learners. Indeed, six of the top 25 articles report research on beginning reading, and six others deal with the psychology or physiology of reading, as can be noted from the titles listed in Table 4.

Over half of the top 25 most frequently cited articles (56%) were published in decade 3, between 1985 and 1994. Another 32% ($n = 8$) was published in decade 2, 1975–1984. Of the remaining articles among the top 25, three were published in decade 1, and three represent decade 4. It is perhaps too early to determine the impact of more recently published articles, but another listing of the top 50 articles cited in 2012 indicates that two articles (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006; Gutiérrez, 2008) are already highly cited.

TABLE 4
***Reading Research Quarterly's* Top 25 Most Frequently Cited Articles (1965–2014)**

Title	Author(s)	Cover date	Volume	Issue	Total citations	Average per year
"Matthew Effects in Reading: Some Consequences of Individual Differences in the Acquisition of Literacy"	K.E. Stanovich	Fall 1986	21	4	1,542	53.21
"Effects of an Extensive Program for Stimulating Phonological Awareness in Preschool Children"	I. Lundberg, J. Frost, and O.-P. Petersen	Summer 1988	23	3	577	21.37
"Toward an Interactive-Compensatory Model of Individual Differences in the Development of Reading Fluency"	K.E. Stanovich	1980	16	1	569	16.29
"Does Phoneme Awareness Training in Kindergarten Make a Difference in Early Word Recognition and Developmental Spelling?"	E.W. Ball and B.A. Blachman	Winter 1991	26	1	376	15.71
"The Validity and Reliability of Phonemic Awareness Tests"	H.K. Yopp	Spring 1988	23	2	367	13.59

(continued)

TABLE 4
Reading Research Quarterly's Top 25 Most Frequently Cited Articles (1965–2014) (continued)

Title	Author(s)	Cover date	Volume	Issue	Total citations	Average per year
"Phonemic Awareness Instruction Helps Children Learn to Read: Evidence From the National Reading Panel's Meta-analysis"	L.C. Ehri, S.R. Nunes, D.M. Willows, B.V. Schuster, Z. Yaghoub-Zadeh, and T. Shanahan	July–September 2001	36	3	327	23.36
"How Many Words Are There in Printed School English?"	W.E. Nagy and R.C. Anderson	Spring 1984	19	3	319	10.29
"Exposure to Print and Orthographic Processing"	K.E. Stanovich and R.F. West	Fall 1989	24	4	316	12.15
"Use of Top-Level Structure in Text: Key for Reading Comprehension of Ninth-Grade Students"	B.J.F. Meyer, D.M. Brandt, and G.J. Bluth	1980	16	1	298	8.51
"Learning Words From Context"	W.E. Nagy, P.A. Herman, and R.C. Anderson	Winter 1985	20	2	270	9.00
"Growth in Reading and How Children Spend Their Time Outside of School"	R.C. Anderson, P.T. Wilson, and L.G. Fielding	Summer 1988	23	3	249	9.22
"Naming Speed and Reading: The Contribution of the Cognitive Neurosciences"	M. Wolf	Spring 1991	26	2	225	9.38
"Differential Effects of Home Literacy Experiences on the Development of Oral and Written Language"	M. Sénéchal, J.-A. LeFevre, E.M. Thomas, and K.E. Daley	January–March 1998	33	1	213	12.53
"Predicting Dyslexia From Kindergarten: The Importance of Distinctness of Phonological Representations of Lexical Items"	C. Elbro, I. Borström, and D.K. Petersen	January–March 1998	33	1	209	12.29
"Intelligence, Cognitive Skills, and Early Reading Progress"	K.E. Stanovich, A.E. Cunningham, and D.J. Feeman	Spring 1984	19	3	209	6.74
"Metalinguistic Abilities and Beginning Reading"	W.E. Tunmer, M.L. Herriman, and A.R. Nesdale	Spring 1988	23	2	208	7.70
"Movement Into Reading: Is the First Stage of Printed Word Learning Visual or Phonetic?"	L.C. Ehri and L.S. Wilce	Winter 1985	20	2	207	6.90
"Children's Emergent Reading of Favorite Storybooks: A Developmental Study"	E. Sulzby	Summer 1985	20	4	204	6.80
"Discrepancy definitions of reading disability: Has intelligence led us astray?"	K.E. Stanovich	Winter 1991	26	1	197	8.21
"The Nonword Reading Deficit in Developmental Dyslexia: A Review"	J.P. Rack, M.J. Snowling, and R.K. Olson	Winter 1992	27	1	196	8.52
"The Cooperative Research Program in First-Grade Reading Instruction"	G.L. Bond and R. Dykstra	Summer 1967	2	4	193	4.02
"Vocabulary Acquisition From Listening to Stories"	W.B. Elley	Spring 1989	24	2	181	6.96
"A Cross-Cultural Perspective on Reading Comprehension"	M.S. Steffensen, C. Joagdev, and R.C. Anderson	1979	15	1	178	4.94
"Assessing Readability"	G.R. Klare	1974	10	1	170	4.17
"The Development of the Use of Graphic and Contextual Information as Children Learn to Read"	A. Biemiller	Fall 1970	6	1	169	3.76

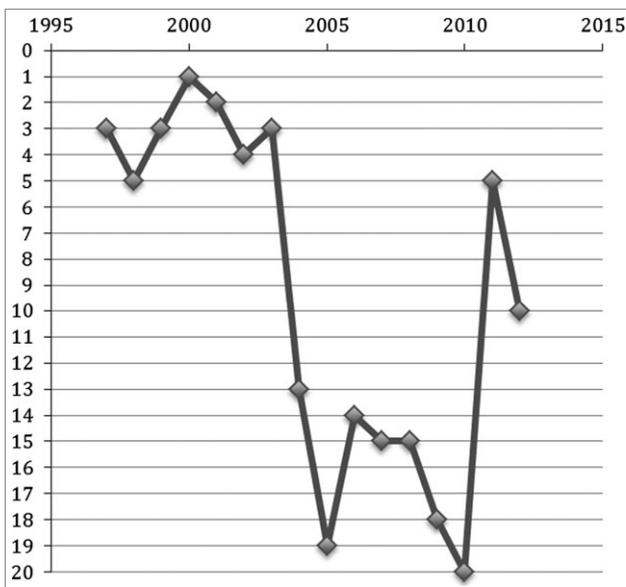
Track 3: RRQ's Relative Standing

In Figure 10, we display available impact factor data (citation rates per article/number of citable articles per issue) to rank RRQ's relative standing among more than 200 education and educational research journals from 1997 to 2012.

Although impact factor data represent only one of several currently available indexes of relative standing used to rank or rate journals in education and educational research, these data have become a relatively common means for describing the relative standing of education and social science journals (Scientific Journal Rankings; Thomson Reuters, 2012). Impact factor data demonstrate that RRQ has, for many years, consistently ranked among the top 10 journals in the education and educational research category. RRQ dropped from the top 10 for a few years (2004–2010) into the top 20 among more than 200 journals ranked in the education and educational research category by ISI's Web of Science Journal Citation Rates (Thomson Reuters, 2012). Recent data show RRQ once again trending in the top 10 education and educational research journals as indicated by impact factor.

From other available bibliometric data shared by Wiley-Blackwell, the number of Web downloads in recent years is approximately 292,000 per year, or about 800 per day. In conversation with Wiley-Blackwell representatives, we were given to understand that this represents a very strong competitive position among other comparable journals' downloads currently available in large databases tracked by education and social science research journal publishers.

FIGURE 10
Reading Research Quarterly's Ranking Among More Than 200 Education and Educational Research Journals From 1997 to 2012 Based on Impact Factor



Journal usage data also show that 77% of RRQ users live in predominantly English-speaking countries (i.e., United States, United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, South Africa). Another 6% of current users are from countries in Asia. Only one European country, the Netherlands, is represented in the top 10 nations accessing the journal, given current data.

Article submissions continue to be largely authored in the United States, but nearly half of the submissions for the current year originated from other countries. Although inconsistently reported, manuscript acceptance rates have fluctuated. Readence and Barone (1996) reported an acceptance rate of 8.1% upon the 30th anniversary of RRQ in 1995. The current editors (Neuman & Gambrell, 2013) report an acceptance rate of approximately 15%, which is the same as noted by Farr and Weintraub in 1974.

Track 4: RRQ Editorial Team Goals, Aspirations, and Challenges

To accomplish the goal of understanding editorial intentions as stated in research question 5, we closely read the inaugural and exit editorials, where available, to code content for answering two questions: (1) What were the goals and aspirations for RRQ held by each editorial team? and (2) What were some of the challenges faced by past and current editors of RRQ? In all, the nine editorial teams published 14 inaugural and exit editorials (the current editors have not yet written their exit editorial, of course) across the 50-year history of what they often called the *Quarterly*. Each editorial team published an opening editorial with the respective first issue. The two teams with the longest tenures as editors also published a retrospective editorial in their last issues (i.e., Farr & Weintraub, 1969–1979; Pearson & Samuels, 1979–1985). Additionally, the first editorial team of Clymer and Summers (1965) shared a “History of the Summary” to explain the inclusion of the “Annual Summary of Investigations Related to Reading” as the winter issue. Farr and Weintraub wrote a 10th-anniversary editorial, and the fourth editorial team of Gough, Hoffman, Juel, and Schallert (1990) included a survey of the field to mark the 25th anniversary of RRQ. This 50th-anniversary analysis is a departure from what has gone before in that the current editors, Gambrell and Neuman, still relatively new to their roles, requested a more comprehensive study of the journal's content and impact.

The nine editorial teams have included 13 men and seven women, a total of 20 editors, with team size ranging from two to four members. Their 14 inaugural and exit editorials provided the data content for the qualitative analysis of track 4 for this mixed methods study. The process began with repeated readings of the editorials and open coding of editorial content. However, the goal was to answer predetermined questions that included a few a priori codes (i.e., goals, aspirations, challenges). The preliminary coding generated 43 open codes, with several (e.g., goals, commentary, dialog, diversity,) used multiple times. In fact, 14 codes

were used more than once, indicating some overlap in the editorial content, in part due to the nature of editorials to include the goals and objectives of the publication process. Many codes were synonyms for fundamental ideas, which prompted grouping and consolidation into axial codes. For example, initial codes, such as annual summary, commentary, letter to the editors, book review, and conversation, all applied to the special features axial coding category, whereas various other open codes, such as forum for critique, plural perspectives, and professional dialog, were collapsed under the goals axial coding category.

For the most part, the initial open-coding categories represented the terms or wording of the editors, but commonalities among these allowed us to collapse these open-coding categories into the five axial coding categories:

1. *Goals*: Objectives for the journal noted by the editors, such as improving the quality of research and increasing the diversity of research methods represented in articles
2. *Aspirations*: Ways that editors proposed to respond to the times and move the journal forward, such as doubling the number of articles in each issue and increasing the level of international representation on the editorial review board
3. *Special features*: Planned components or content of the journal, such as book reviews, translated abstracts, and commentary

4. *Challenges/concerns*: Possible problems recognized by the editors, such as research funding restrictions and surviving the reading paradigm wars
5. *Sense of future*: Awareness of the field and its potentialities, including advancing technological options and increasing doctoral student involvement

These five axial coding categories and the corresponding open codes are shown in Table 5.

The editorials were reread to confirm the suitability of the codes and categories, and the respective codes were recorded under the finalized categories for each editorial team. The selected editorials varied in length and content, so the number of codes and categories varied by editorial teams. However, because the editorial genre is relatively narrow, the categories were deemed apropos and served to answer the research questions. The qualitative coding process allowed us to discern the trends and possible pillars evident across editorial teams. A discussion of the identified pillars is presented next.

Discussion

The major goals of this study were to summarize and identify trends—the waxing and waning of topics, populations, methodologies, analyses, assessments, and special journal features used to communicate with reading researchers—in

TABLE 5
Qualitative Codes Collapsed as Axial Coding Categories

Collapsed categories	Goals for <i>Reading Research Quarterly</i>	Editorial aspirations	Special features ^a	Concerns	Sense of future
43 codes assigned to five categories	Number of codes in this category = 13: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Goals/objectives • Dissemination of research • Improvement of research • Forum for critique • Dialog • Plural perspectives • Marketplace of ideas • Historical tradition • Archive • Past performance • 25th anniversary • International representation • Leading social science journal 	Number of codes in this category = 7: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Length of articles • Research problems • Research quality • Instructional problems • Variety • Diversity • Broadening the lens 	Number of codes in this category = 6: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual Summary of Investigations Related to Reading • Book reviews • Translations • Letters to the editors • Conversations • Commentaries 	Number of codes in this category = 10: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Editorial Review or Advisory Board • Moving forward • Politics • Research freedom • Funding restrictions • Social trends • Breadth and scope • Research goals • Dyslexia and disabilities • Metaphors 	Number of codes in this category = 7: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Future • Journal formats • New literacies • Online access • Technologies • Impact level • Wiley-Blackwell

^aVarious features have been used by different editorial teams but not specifically mentioned in the coded editorials, including snippets, international reports, theory to practice, research reviews, and (author) responses. Online access and technological resources might also be considered features of the journal in recent years.

50 years of *RRQ*. Analysis of these trends then led us to identify five pillars that have characterized the content, focus, purpose, and contributions of the journal. We discuss major historical trends and the identified pillars in what follows.

Trend 1: Research Topics

Although the range of research topics addressed in *RRQ* articles and issues has increased over time, the publication of research reviews has remained an *RRQ* tradition. Three other topics have dominated *RRQ* research: instructional practices and programs, comprehension, and beginning reading/word recognition. In recent years, beginning reading/word recognition as a topical focus in the journal seems to have fallen off dramatically. One wonders if this is yet another unintended consequence of the meta-analyses in the reports of the National Reading Panel (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2000) and the National Early Literacy Panel (2008). Up until the dissemination of these reports, early reading instruction dominated *RRQ* articles. Perhaps the publication of these reports has unintentionally given the field a false sense of closure around the questions and issues that remain unanswered in early reading instead of promoting and defining directions for further investigations.

Similarly, just as beginning reading/word recognition has waned as a topical focus for *RRQ* research reports, the focus on comprehension has decreased dramatically also, from 103 studies in the first 30 years of the journal to just 14 studies in the last two decades. However, the number of studies targeting comprehension has increased twofold from decade 4 to decade 5, showing a resurgence in this important topic. Here again, one must wonder what has occurred in the field that something as central to the act of reading as comprehension had been relegated to a position of near research neglect in the pages of *RRQ*.

The greatest variety of research topics occurred in decades 3 and 4. However, data for decade 5 indicate that the top five research topics are sociocultural studies, research reviews, instructional practices and programs, comprehension, and technology. As would be expected, due to a relatively recent explosion in access to a variety of digital technologies in schools and society, the topical focus of technology has and will likely continue to be on the rise.

Our analyses indicate that other language modes related to reading—oral language, writing, and listening—have received minor attention in *RRQ*. However, we note that volume 49, number 3 includes a study focused on the cognitive correlates of listening comprehension. Likewise, there have been few studies of the effects of reading and reading outside of an instructional context—voluntary, volume, and family literacy—especially among students in the secondary grades. Importantly, although research reported in *RRQ* in recent decades in psychology and physiology of reading is rare, it should be noted that these topics

characterized approximately 25% of the most cited *RRQ* articles in the past. This finding was also somewhat surprising in view of recent advances in neuroscience and cognitive sciences.

Despite the fact that assessment was a hot topic in *RRQ*'s first decade, it has been the focus of reading and literacy research far less in recent decades. We could expect to see assessment once again at the center of future reading research published in the journal given the recent emphasis placed on evaluating the Common Core State Standards, and new WIDA assessments of English learners. At this point, however, no study with a focus on the Common Core has been published in *RRQ*.

Trend 2: Research Populations Studied

With the strong topical foci on instructional practices and programs and beginning reading/word recognition, it makes sense that the most frequently studied populations in *RRQ* research reports focused on students in the elementary grades. Far fewer studies of special populations and secondary students have been published in the journal. However, specific segments of special populations, including English learners, poverty, and international populations, have been the subjects of increased research focus in *RRQ* in recent decades, and these populations span all grade levels. In this study, we coded studies focused on proficient or struggling reader populations in the same category. We did this because *RRQ* studies tended to compare proficient and struggling readers. Consequently, the journal has provided research reports giving comparative insight into how struggling and proficient readers learn and practice literacy, but few studies have focused on struggling (apart from dyslexics) or proficient readers as separate populations with unique characteristics to understand. This is unfortunate given research by Connor, Morrison, and Slominski (2006) showing clear Child characteristic × Instruction interactions.

With regard to trends in populations, the next decade may perpetuate the increased attention on some of the most challenging groups of readers: middle school students, English learners, minorities, and readers living in poverty. The *RRQ* publications targeting these groups and international readers have essentially doubled in the last decade.

Trend 3: Issue Contents

RRQ issues have trended over the years toward fewer pages and articles, whereas the number and variety of special features (e.g., editorials, commentaries, letters to the editors) have waxed and waned with each change in editorship. For example, our study shows that the number of book reviews increased as a proportion of *RRQ*'s content in more recent decades. It seems that alternating editorial teams have sought to include more special features, as seen

for teams 3, 5, and 7 and shown in Figures 3 and 5. These editorial teams envisioned the role and mission of the journal to be a nexus for dialog, conversations, debate, and so forth. Yet, adding special features, such as book reviews, author responses, and commentaries, either required increasing the page count per issue with an increase in cost and/or a reduction in the number of articles published in each issue. Because other editorial teams viewed *RRQ* primarily as a place for publication of research and not primarily as a location for communication among researchers in the field, special features were fewer and the number of research articles published was increased. This quandary was faced by each new editorial team and decided differently. In the future, the dominance of articles will no doubt continue, and other functions, such as reader response, may be promoted outside the cover of the journal.

We also found that the mean number of authors for each article published in *RRQ* has increased from 1.8 to 2.8, possibly indicating a trend toward more collaboration among researchers in the last three decades. Larger authoring teams may also reflect an increase in the size, scope, and complexity of research published in *RRQ*. Involving multiple authors on a single research project may also create positive conditions for improving the initial quality of studies and reports submitted to the journal for review. In its early years, *RRQ* authors were less able to communicate and collaborate with colleagues in other locations, and their work was more often vetted after review and publication, whereas with current technologies, researchers can now share their work with others and benefit from such input from colleagues in real time before the research is reviewed. We also found in our study that the trend toward larger authoring teams can result in greater interdisciplinarity among the members of *RRQ* authoring teams.

Trend 4: Research Methods, Analysis, and Assessment Types

Early in the history of *RRQ* (1965–1974), dissemination of research reviews, summaries, and syntheses constituted a consistent and sizable proportion of its publications. With the passing of time, a trend toward publication of fewer research reviews, summaries, and syntheses occurred, replaced with an increase in the number of original research studies published. During the period of 1975–1994, experimental research methods dominated the research published in the journal. Beginning in 1985, qualitative research methods in research reported in *RRQ* increased. In most recent years, the research methods used in research published in *RRQ* has approached a balance among research methods and paradigms. In recent years, mixed research methods have also been making their way into the research published in the journal.

Results of data analysis types have followed similar trends to those previously described for research methods.

This finding, of course, stands to reason because the research methods used to design and conduct research studies and the approaches used to analyze data from those studies should parallel each other. Quantitative research data analysis has been and continues to be a mainstay of research reported in *RRQ*, although qualitative data analysis approaches have steadily increased in proportion to quantitative data analysis approaches reported in *RRQ* since 1985. Today, the use of quantitative and qualitative data analysis approaches is fairly well balanced, having achieved a position of complementary rather than competing status among many researchers, as evidenced in the recent trend toward increasing use of multiple and mixed methods.

The types of assessments, formal or informal, employed in research published in *RRQ* have evidenced interesting trends as well. Over the history of the journal, studies have tended to report the use of a preponderance of informal assessment instruments and processes, often those designed by the researchers without providing evidence of validity and reliability. However, since 1995, trends have been shifting toward a more balanced selection and use of assessment types. We suspect that this shift has been substantially influenced by the scientifically based reading research era, in which assessments that did not provide evidence of reliability and validity were eschewed by many research-funding agencies, including the federal government, and by reviewers of research reports submitted for potential publication in research journals such as *RRQ*.

Trend 5: Relative Standing

Perhaps the most persistently articulated goal of editors of *RRQ* has been to publish high-quality research that would ultimately contribute to the journal being ranked as a premier reading research journal and among the top social science and educational research journals in the world. Determining the relative standing of *RRQ* in relation to this articulated goal was difficult for us. As we began our work in this parallel track of the study, we anticipated that we would be able to obtain vast amounts of historical data dealing with circulation and subscription rates, acceptance rates, and other bibliometrics archived by *RRQ* editorship teams with IRA. Instead, what we encountered was little or no systematic data collection or archival evidence to pursue the answer to this editorial goal and research question. Indeed, only occasional editorials reported information about circulation rates and/or acceptance rates for the journal. Because public reporting of current circulation and subscription rates could influence future market position, we also learned, via our requests, that publishers treat these as confidential. Thus, prior to 1997, there was no systematic collection or archiving of these types of bibliometric data about *RRQ*. Consequently, the perspective that we are able to share about *RRQ*'s relative standing throughout its history is largely confined to

data drawn from the past two decades. This relates to the rapid rise of computer technologies making collection, storage, and retrieval of bibliometric data much more efficient and cost-effective.

The data available to us suggest that the goal of becoming a top-tier research journal has been consistently achieved in the recent two decades. The rankings we report have shown *RRQ* to rank among the top 10 in a field of over 219 education and educational research journals as measured by annual impact factors, despite the fact that *RRQ* has a more narrow focus than many of its peer journals (Thomson Reuters, 2012). Although the journal fell out of the top 10 from 2004 until 2010, it has since regained top 10 status.

The most highly cited top 25 articles published in *RRQ* over its 50-year history have been cited nearly 8,000 times, with a range of 169–1,542 total citations per article. The most cited *RRQ* article, Stanovich's (1986) Matthew effects article, has been cited a mean of 53.21 times per year according to Wiley-Blackwell's historic bibliometric data. These data attest to the quality and impact of articles published in the journal.

Another source of evidence supporting *RRQ*'s top-tier status among other education and social science research journals nationally and internationally comes from a more recently accessible data source: Internet downloads/hits. Data reported in this study indicate that there were 280,460 full-text article downloads in 2013, equivalent to approximately 800 downloads per day. According to market researchers within Wiley-Blackwell, this represents a very strong competitive standing compared with requests levels for other education and social science journals' Internet downloads.

RRQ has also widened its readership to include many English-speaking countries and is making significant inroads into non-English-speaking countries, particularly in Asia. Editorial teams have noted that since 1995, 25% of the Editorial Review Board represents professionals outside the United States. These details reflect *RRQ*'s increasing recognition worldwide as a premier outlet for reading research and a source of cutting-edge research publications while continuing to be highly selective.

Identifying *RRQ*'s Five Pillars

The theoretical grounding for this study included a reliance on polysystem and cultural field theories. Therefore, the convergent parallel mixed methods design used in this study allowed us to identify five specific pillars that have characterized *RRQ*'s cumulative contributions over the past 50 years as well as the development or attenuation of these five pillars over time:

- *Pillar 1: A reading research armamentarium: RRQ* is more than a research repository; it is the go-to

venue for high-quality reading research, both historically and currently.

- *Pillar 2: A marketplace of ideas: RRQ* has been a place or nexus for carrying on professional dialog related to reading research and instructional practice and policy.
- *Pillar 3: Broadening the lens to move the journal forward: RRQ*'s content, format, and direction have reflected a broadening of the paradigms, theories, methods, policies, practices, and philosophical positions that have marked the evolution of the field (of reading specifically and society more generally), leading to an inclusive view of reading, literacy, and research.
- *Pillar 4: Top-tier education and social science research journal with global impact: RRQ* was envisioned to become and has largely instantiated itself as a premier research journal dedicated to reading research and is among the most highly ranked education and social science research journals in the world.
- *Pillar 5: Research that improves instructional practice: A recurrent theme articulated as the mission of RRQ* since its inception is to publish research that informs reading instruction.

Pillar 1: A Reading Research Armamentarium

In identifying the five pillars that characterize *RRQ*'s historic and contemporary contributions to the field, we struggled to find the best way to describe one of its primary contributions—that of being a repository of and a go-to venue for the highest quality reading research available. For over 50 years, influential reading researchers have published significant studies in *RRQ*, which are still commonly accessed by readers. Because the journal's influence is more than archival in nature, using terms such as *repository* and *archive* to characterize *RRQ*'s past and current contributions to the field seemed anachronistic. With its online accessibility and the current Wiley-Blackwell-based bibliometrics, marketing, and publishing resources, *RRQ* provides the field with an armamentarium—a depot of resources that can equip users to do important work. In choosing the term *armamentarium*, it is not our intent to sound pedantic or artificially erudite. Instead, we literally grappled with finding what we thought was the most suitable term to describe the past and current contributions of the journal.

The primary and overarching goal of all nine *RRQ* editorships was and continues to be to establish and preserve *RRQ* as the leading reading research journal that disseminates high-quality reading research. To achieve this goal, the first and subsequent editorial teams employed

several practical techniques. First, they deliberately decided not to impose page limits on articles to allow for detailed research reports. The inclusion of the “Annual Summary of Investigations Related to Reading” also reflected efforts by early *RRQ* editorial teams to disseminate research synopses, which in a sense allowed it to function as an original search engine for the field for many years prior to the advent of the Internet. With contemporary bibliometrics such as Altmetrics, the journal will likely expand its usefulness to readers. Even now, using Facebook and Twitter, users can instantly communicate their comments, questions, and concerns with professional colleagues about research published in *RRQ*.

Pillar 2: A Marketplace of Ideas

In addition to the legacy of publishing high-quality research since its inception, *RRQ* was also intended, as described by its earliest editors, to provide a marketplace of ideas for the profession. Via their editorials, past editorial teams used a variety of terms, including *professional dialog*, *pluralistic debate*, and *conversations*, to convey their intentions that the journal create a means for the community of reading professionals and researchers to communicate. Attempts to achieve this goal have varied greatly over time, as reflected by the inclusion of a wide-ranging variety of special features, such as commentaries, letters to the editors, conversations, international reports, new directions, and snippets, appearing and then disappearing in *RRQ* issues.

The pillarization and depillarization of the dialogic function of a marketplace of ideas envisioned for *RRQ* over time has been significantly affected by the increasing availability of other communications technologies. As a result, we suspect that with the number and variety of rapidly developing technologies, a substantial diminution or complete depillarization of the dialogic function of a marketplace for ideas envisioned for the journal will occur in the not-so-distant future. Many years ago, national professional dialog was facilitated by mailing letters to the editor to be published in traditional print journals or by meeting at annual conferences. In today’s social media environment of blogs, wikis, tweets, listservs, and Facebook, *RRQ*’s goal to support professional dialog and provide a marketplace for ideas will likely be a digital space if it continues to exist at all. This is not to suggest that research published in *RRQ* will not engender vigorous dialog, but this is more likely to occur outside the journal than within in it in the future.

Pillar 3: Broadening the Lens to Move the Journal Forward

Although manifested in various ways, the nine *RRQ* editorial teams shared a desire that the journal serve to move

the field forward in new directions while simultaneously working to preserve its strong research traditions. Each editorial team expressed a desire to expand the journal’s appeal, reach, and contents in some way. The qualitative data in our coding of inaugural and exit editorials indicate tension between broadening the lens to include a diversity of perspectives, authors, and methodologies while continuing to serve as an outlet and archive for the best available reading research. Past, and we suspect current, editors have wrangled with how much space to give to research reports and how many pages should be allocated to affect international outreach and interaction between authors and readers. Repeatedly, *RRQ* editorial teams sought to diversify the content and encourage research submissions from underrepresented populations, widely dispersed geographic locations, new theoretical frameworks, emerging methodologies, and on a variety of innovative topics related to reading. One of the most visible efforts in this regard has been the increasingly preferred use (since 1990) of the more inclusive term *literacy* over the more specific or narrow term *reading*.

However, in broadening the lens, past editors took some risks related to the relative standing, focus, and traditional readership of *RRQ*. For example, we noted that as the variety of special features increased, the space for original research articles decreased. We also noted a concomitant drop in *RRQ*’s impact factor rankings in more recent decades when fewer articles were published and more special features were introduced to broaden the lens of the journal.

RRQ competes rather directly with several social science journals for reading research submissions. Given increasing interdisciplinarity among literacy research teams, it may be time to promote the journal as a unique venue for research that connects to the work of nontraditional reading researchers, such as neuroscientists, engineers, and medical researchers. Such efforts to broaden the lens could profoundly influence the quality of research published in *RRQ* and serve to move the field forward.

Pillar 4: Top-Tier Education and Social Science Research Journal With Global Impact

Past and current editors of *RRQ* have frequently noted that the quality of the journal relies on the expertise of the members of the Editorial Review Board. In a very real sense, the reviewers have been and continue to be powerful gatekeepers in deciding which and how articles are shaped for publication. In recognition of this powerful influence exerted by members of the *RRQ* Editorial Review Board, the editorial teams have sought to diversify membership, soliciting service from reading professionals from around the world, doctoral students, and experts working in closely allied fields of inquiry.

The quality of the journal has been a major ongoing objective, which means attracting high-quality research reports to position *RRQ* as the recognized and preferred home for the best, most rigorous studies in reading. As Farr (1979) noted in his exit editorial, research is a process, one that can be honed and influenced by others (including expert reviewers). Some *RRQ* articles, such as Durkin's (1978) study of comprehension instruction in classrooms, were described by accepting editors as seminal—destined to change the field. Weintraub (1979), in his exit editorial, made note of Durkin's (1974) research, commenting specifically on her study of precocious readers:

The Durkin report is one that should be read by all neophyte researchers before attempting to conduct their initial studies. It will help them understand some of the frustrations of conducting research and how the best laid plans can go awry. Particular attention, too, should be paid to the critical analysis of previous literature that Durkin presents. (Weintraub, 1979, p. 477)

The goal of making *RRQ* a leading education and social science research journal with global impact has also included efforts by editorial teams to solicit more manuscripts authored by researchers outside the United States. The publication of international articles is now a bright spot for the journal. The current proportion of 10 to 1 is a substantial increase in manuscripts published from international origins and represents a good faith effort on the part of IRA and *RRQ* editors to increase the global reach and impact of the journal over the past five decades. Recent usage data, supplied by Wiley-Blackwell, also demonstrate a marked increase in the number of English-speaking and non-English-speaking countries accessing downloads from *RRQ* online.

Past editors' quest to increase the quality and reach of research submitted to and published in *RRQ* has driven each editorial team to handle submissions more efficiently. For example, the review process in 1996 averaged three months but now is half that, six to seven weeks in 2014, in part due to online management of manuscripts through the peer review process.

Pillar 5: Research That Improves Instructional Practice

Another pillar articulated by *RRQ* editors Farr and Weintraub that has been revisited by the current *RRQ* editors, Gambrell and Neuman, is the publication of research that has implications for improving reading instruction. Despite continuing tensions among theories, methods, and practices, there has been a long-standing desire among *RRQ* editors that reading research published in the journal influence, improve, or have implications for high-quality reading instruction. The most

frequently published topical focus of *RRQ* articles in our random sample and coding of 200 *RRQ* articles, instructional programs and practices, demonstrates clearly that the journal has carved out a somewhat unique niche among research journals over time, publishing high-quality research with implications for improving reading instructional practices and programs. Interestingly, this pillar has waned in recent years.

Looking to the Future

Although a very daunting task, this retrospective analysis of *RRQ*'s content, format, editorships, and bibliometric data represents only a partial view of the breadth and depth of the past 50 years of reading research and other special features published in the journal. What emerges from the interpretation of these data is a picture of *RRQ* as a premier research journal that has demonstrated sensitivity to the changing context of reading research. Given *RRQ*'s past stellar track record, we believe it is poised for an even more promising and influential future. With the five pillars that we identified in this study in mind, we offer some thoughts about potential next steps for *RRQ* that might propel it toward that promising and influential future that we believe is not only possible but also quite likely.

With pillar 1 (a reading research armamentarium) in mind, we feel certain that *RRQ* will likely continue to fulfill, with the continued assistance of highly knowledgeable and experienced reviewers on the Editorial Review Board, the two well-established roles: publishing high-quality reading research and publishing reading research that influences or impacts improved reading practices and programs in diverse contexts.

RRQ has long served as a primary archive or repository for reading research. We recommend that the journal continue and expand this role. With access to vast, low-cost storage and retrieval technologies, we recommend that *RRQ* consider initiating a secure website to archive data sets from published *RRQ* studies for use by other researchers. Doing so could encourage researchers to explore applying other data analytic techniques and support other secondary data analyses and meta-analytic studies. Similarly, storing data long term would provide greater accountability and transparency for auditing and understanding data coding processes as interpretations are made from quantitative and qualitative data. With increasing storage capacities, the journal's website could offer additional resources, such as access to research report implementation and intervention materials, lessons, and videos of instruction implementation. In these ways, *RRQ* would continue to function as a highly significant reading research armamentarium. We hope IRA will continue to invest in the journal's future by taking steps now to assure

that it will continue to serve as the premier reading research armamentarium in the future.

With respect to pillar 2 (a marketplace of ideas), we expect, as noted earlier, that traditional print research journals will not likely continue to function as a nexus for dialog or as a significant marketplace for ideas in the future as they have in the past. The communicative functions (e.g., letters to the editors, conversations, commentaries, dialog, snippets) that *RRQ* has served in the past to support dialog and provide a space or marketplace for ideas to be shared among researchers can now be accomplished via less costly and more time- and resource-efficient means on the World Wide Web. It is clear that waiting for weeks and months to respond to research published in *RRQ* is no longer necessary or even reasonable. Researchers can comment on and respond to authors and create an immediate dialog via listservs, blogs, and other electronic means. If *RRQ* has any future role in this rapid-fire, socially mediated networking communicative environment, it may be to establish a location or space online to support and house these kinds of communications, along with sufficient monitoring to assure that ethical and professional guidelines for civil discourse are observed.

In contemplating pillar 3 (broadening the lens to move the journal forward), we also acknowledge that current and future *RRQ* editors will necessarily need to juggle the competing demands of continuity with change. We strongly suspect that the journal will continue to function as a cultural broker or, as past editors Alvermann and Reinking (2003) noted, a broker of information among researchers. To accomplish this brokering function, we recommend that the journal continue to solicit and publish research reviews, meta-analyses, and historical accounts of the field as it has done with notable consistency across its first five decades. We note in the data reported here that these types of publications are often more frequently cited and tend to provide novice and experienced researchers access to summative analyses of vast amounts of data and reading research published in *RRQ* and elsewhere. Moreover, we recommend that *RRQ* continue to be responsive to change by reflecting sensitivity to the rapidly fluctuating contexts of literacy usage and the forward progress and evolution of literacy research methodologies. This will require editorial policies that consciously solicit and support cutting-edge research topics and methods while at the same time retaining the strong and stable pillars upon which *RRQ* has built its foundation. This balancing act, where change and constancy are juggled, will be a continuing challenge for current and future editors to move the journal forward into the future without too precipitously untethering it from its stable moorings of the past.

For example, despite strong advocacy for changing the name of the journal from *Reading Research Quarterly*

to *Literacy Research Quarterly* dating at least as far back as the silver anniversary editorial (Gough et al., 1990), we wonder how a change in the name would or would not serve to broaden the journal's appeal and audience. Would a name change strengthen or attenuate the appeal and strong brand recognition of *RRQ*? The definition of *literacy*, as a term, has become so inclusive (70+ definitions) that it prompted Bloome, a linguist and former *RRQ* coeditor, to suggest that the term *literacy* might have outlived its usefulness (Lee, Bloome, Gutiérrez, & Tierney, 2013). If we cannot clearly distinguish what literacy is and is not, then just about any act of learning, being, or doing can potentially be conceived of as literacy. How then does *RRQ* fill a unique niche in a field overcrowded with competing educational research and educational psychology journals focused on learning, neurosciences, and so on?

However, *RRQ* competes rather directly with several social science journals for reading research submissions. Given increasing interdisciplinarity among literacy research teams, it may be time to promote the journal as a preferred venue for research that connects to the work of nontraditional reading researchers, such as neuroscientists, engineers, and medical researchers. Such efforts to broaden the lens could profoundly influence the quality and breadth of research published in *RRQ* and serve to move the field forward.

Pillar 4 (top-tier education and social science research journal with global impact) highlighted for us, and we hope for the field, the results of archiving sporadic and incomplete data about *RRQ*'s relative standing compared with other similar education or social science research journals. With this in mind, we recommend, and note with some satisfaction, that the current editors and publishers of the journal are rapidly moving to maximize access to and use of bibliometric data and reports in ways that can inform editors and IRA leaders as they make future decisions about marketing, content, format, and reach. The capacity for technology-based data collection adds a dimension to the editorial role and likely requires the use of well-resourced publishing operations. Thus, the relationship among IRA, *RRQ* editors, and publishing professionals should include continuing efforts to maximize bibliometric analyses that will enhance the journal.

Pillar 5 (research that improves instructional practice), as a mainstay role for *RRQ* in the past, has largely defined the journal's unique contribution in the context of education and social science research journals. We recommend that this pillar continue to be supported as a central purpose, role, goal, and function of *RRQ* into the future. There are many pressing social and educational problems that link to the ability to read proficiently for which educational policymakers and practitioners are clamoring for answers. As mentioned, and as only one example, there is a need to support the literacy practices of

adolescents, including a focus on writing. Additionally, in an era of implementing and assessing the Common Core State Standards, the lack of convincing and converging data supporting the efficacy or even ability of the schools to implement or assess these new standards effectively is creating a heated political and educational controversy. This is perhaps one of the most pressing policy and educational issues of our time, and it is hard to envision a more appropriate outlet for publishing this type of research than *RRQ*.

Similarly, with an increase in the number of English learners in and entering the United States and other language learners around the world, more research focused on student populations learning to read and write a second or additional language and how language instruction could be more effective and supportive to promote multilingual literacy is yet one more issue where *RRQ* is a uniquely positioned outlet for publishing research. In fact, the current editors (Neuman & Gambrell, 2013) expressed in their inaugural editorial a desire for the journal to continue to pillarize improved reading instruction as one of its primary purposes:

We would hope that the field of reading research would increasingly impact the quality of practice for students— young children through adulthood—in both national and international settings. While basic research is extraordinarily important to our understanding, reading research must have implications for the development and/or the refinement of reading instruction.

This statement might be seen as narrowing the focus of the journal, targeting only practical issues that immediately relate to the classroom. Actually, ...we see it as broadening the journal's perspective and its potential reach. (p. 5)

Limitations and Possibilities for Further Research

Although comprehensive and complementary in its analysis, this study is not without limitations. Collapsing topic and population codes to 20 and 15, respectively, while practical, may have sacrificed a more nuanced understanding of the broad ranges of reading-related issues and readers contained therein. There are likely other ways to sort these foci, and subsequent research could undertake an analysis of *RRQ* content from a different perspective. Our analysis of a random sampling of 200 articles represents only 25% of the total published in the journal thus far. Further research could analyze a larger sampling to determine the same or other aspects of the reported research. An extended analysis of the special features published in *RRQ* could afford deeper insights into the social milieu that has contextualized the journal and the field, thus informing what we identify as trends and pillars.

Focusing on only a fraction (14) of the more than 100 published editorials also narrowed our view of the journal's content. In fact, the dialogic aspects of the journal, including editorials, letters to the editors ($n = 103$), commentaries ($n = 85$), new directions ($n = 22$), and conversations ($n = 15$), comprise 325 documents and nearly 25% of the journal's total content. These documents are also worthy of investigation. Moreover, an important aspect of *RRQ*'s impact relates to the dozens of research reviews ($n = 19$), summaries ($n = 24$), and research to practice syntheses ($n = 15$) that it has published since 1965. These reports, in addition to the 15 annual summaries promoted in volumes 1–15, offer a trove for historically oriented researchers. A more detailed analysis of these quite varied publications would be difficult but could greatly benefit the field. Undoubtedly, the contents of *RRQ* certainly afford a cache of resources worthy of exploration.

Concluding Comments

When we set out to make sense of the history, content, impact, and status of *RRQ*, we had no idea what we were actually agreeing to do. For us, this research has deepened and broadened our respect for all of those researchers, editors, and visionary pioneers who have contributed in multiple ways to the making of *RRQ*. We hope that in reporting this 50-year study of the journal, we have engendered in the readership a similar regard for the herculean efforts that have made and preserved *RRQ* as the finest reading research journal and among the finest education and social science research journals in the world.

NOTES

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Supporting Information

Additional supporting information may be found in the online version of this article:

Article S1. “Matthew effects in reading: Some consequences of individual differences in the acquisition of literacy” by Keith E. Stanovich.

Erratum

In Table 2 of the article “Evidence for Prosody in Silent Reading” by J. Gross, A.L. Millett, B. Bartek, K.H. Bredell, and B. Winegard that appeared in the April/May/June 2014 issue of *Reading Research Quarterly*, 49(2), the statistics were presented incorrectly. The table below is correct.

TABLE 2
Descriptive Statistics for Preference Ratings^a in Focus Congruous and Incongruous Conditions in Experiment 1

	Mean	Standard deviation
<i>Focus incongruous</i>		
SAM fell.	2.54	0.89
Sam FELL.	2.31	0.76
<i>Focus congruous</i>		
SAM fell.	3.83	0.94
Sam FELL.	3.36	0.70

^a5-point rating scale, with 5 as most helpful.