PERSPECTIVES OF SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS ON STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES IN AN INCLUSION SETTING: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

A Dissertation

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by

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ABSTRACT

In this study, the educational discussion focused on inclusion, methods for teaching in inclusive classrooms, and positive aspects of inclusion for academic growth. Also studied were the perspectives of special education teachers on students with disabilities in an inclusion setting. Inclusion in public school districts is a very debated and sensitive subject that has been controversial for many years. Inclusion denotes the education of students with disabilities and students that do not have disabilities in the same classroom setting. The data collected from this study was analyzed using measures of central tendency, specifically the mode and percentages and the chi-square test of independence. Data analysis was conducted to determine the perspectives of special education teachers on the controversy of inclusion practices for students with disabilities in two separate clusters, grades K-3 and 4-6, respectively. The qualitative analysis results revealed the presence of two main themes regarding teacher attitudes on inclusion: (a) Risks of inclusion are special education student lack of success, increased burden on teachers, and class disruptions; and (b) Inclusion can benefit all students. Results of the quantitative analysis revealed no statistically significant relationship between years spent in a special education environment and teacher inclusion attitudes. These results suggest that teachers' views on inclusion are varied and are not significantly influenced by their years of experiences teaching in a special education environment. Recommendations for future research include changes to the study design and data collection techniques. Implications for positive social change include increased teacher confidence, diverse learning

opportunities for all students, and the potential for a positive shift in societal beliefs about special education student capabilities and the benefits of inclusion.

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DEDICATION

This research and study are dedicated to my late grandmother, Kathleen Rose Hregdovic, who always believed in me and could not wait to see her oldest grandchild become a “doctor.” I believe that without her expectations and wisdom throughout the years, the pursuit of a terminal degree would have never been an option. She is the true role model who inspired and instilled the mindset to make excellent choices, remain persistent, and never give up. The research ideas were completed with her in my heart and mind. I would also like to dedicate my research to Dr. Nancy Joan Kline, an outstanding educator, mentor, and friend. Without her tough love, I would not be where I am today. Thank you!

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction and Background

Many controversial topics are being debated in education today. Some issues include Common Core, national standards research, tech trends, social policy, school reform, and child development. A topic of relevance is the perspectives of special education teachers on inclusion. Inclusion education is the full-time dynamic participation of students with disabilities in the general education classroom with students without disabilities (Shin et al., 2014). A recent trend within many schools across the country is inclusion. Due to the mandates within the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001, teachers and students are under extreme pressure to increase academic achievement. Teachers need to ensure that all students meet state standards and reach grade-level benchmarks.

Furthermore, teachers need to understand students' learning variances and accommodate these different learning styles in classroom instruction daily. This has become more challenging for teachers to achieve because of increased inclusion in schools today (Salisbury, 2006). The focus of Chapter 1 is to introduce the research problem, researcher's background, hypotheses, research questions, the rationale for the study, and provide a brief overview of inclusion and the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). Subsequent chapters will specify the need for special education teacher perceptions and considerations to implement a student-centered, cohesive inclusion program where all students benefit.

Research Problem

An increasing number of students with disabilities are spending most of the day in regular education classrooms together with their naturally emerging peers, according to new federal statistics (Heasley, 2016). In 2013, more than 6 out of 10 students under the Individuals with

Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) spent at least 80% of their day in a regular classroom (Heasley, 2016). By disparity, half of the students with disabilities met that condition in 2004 (Heasley, 2016). The data originates from a report that Congress had issued several years ago by the U.S. Department of Education charting the progress of the nation's special education students (Heasley, 2016).

The LRE, a federal mandate of Public Law (PL) 94–142, is part of the IDEA (Decker & Jansma, 1995; Wilson et al., 2020). The LRE directs that children who receive special education should spend as much time as possible with peers who do not receive special education (Decker & Jansma, 1995). Since 1975, the implementation of the LRE has been challenging for physical educators and adapted physical educators (Wilson et al., 2020). Specifically, confusion and misinterpretation of the intent of the LRE, as well as competing ideologies, have hampered its practice in the United States (Wilson et al., 2020).

Today, the implementation of inclusion into classrooms requires teachers to have a positive view, plenty of time, energy, dedication, and assurance toward the process (Salisbury, 2006). Each teacher is confronted with the everyday challenges of having to teach many different learning styles. These challenges require multi-tasking, which may impact their effectiveness and perspective on instruction in the inclusive setting. The absence of additional support staff and resources in the classroom makes it hard for the teachers to function to their maximum potential and guarantee that each child's individual needs are met (Salisbury, 2006). These are issues that can influence a teachers' perspective.

The knowledge of teachers' views is essential when it comes to implementing inclusion. It is important to study the views of special education teachers involved in the implementation process. Their goal is to create effective instructional strategies and demonstrate effective

collaboration among all parties involved, which will help students with disabilities feel comfortable in an inclusive environment. The way special education teachers perceive their role in the inclusion process will ultimately determine whether it will benefit parties involved and make progress.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to determine the perspectives of special education teachers on the controversy of inclusion practices for students with disabilities in two separate clusters, grades K-3 and 4-6, respectively. The research methodology for this study was a mixed research method. The general population included special education teachers teaching in primary school (K-3) and upper elementary school (4-6) in a suburban school district located in northwestern Pennsylvania. The target population comprised 12 inclusion teachers in the district. The research instruments for the study included quantitative surveys and semi-structured interviews.

Hypotheses

The hypotheses for this study are:

H0: There is no significant difference in the perspectives of primary and upper elementary school special education teachers with various years of experience on having students with disabilities in an inclusion setting.

H1: There is a significant difference in the perspectives of primary and upper elementary school special education teachers with various years of experience on having students with disabilities in an inclusion setting.

Research Questions

This study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. Do years of experience in special education impact teachers' perspectives regarding students with disabilities in an inclusion setting?
2. Do the perspectives of primary and upper elementary school special education teachers differ regarding educating students with disabilities in an inclusion setting?

Rationale for the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the views of special education teachers who are working in an inclusive environment. This study: (1) identified the views of special education teachers relative to inclusive education in the district; (2) examined and explained any variances between the inclusive school experiences of special education teachers at primary and elementary school levels within the district; and (3) examined and explained any other major differences in responses based on selected demographic variables such as definite years of experience.

In public schools, inclusion continues to grow tremendously, so the perspectives of special education teachers are essential for making the learning experience more meaningful and fruitful for students with disabilities. How they implement the inclusion process may be largely due to their attitudes towards it (Shin et al., 2014). Since the passage of NCLB, all students must participate in state standardized testing in grades 3 through 8 in reading and math because schools must exhibit adequate yearly progress (AYP). This has led to increased pressure to ensure that students with disabilities are making progress parallel to students without disabilities.

Federal Legislation and Inclusion

The IDEA, reauthorized as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA), stresses that logical-based interventions in the general education classroom can be utilized to ascertain whether students' learning complications are due to a lack of reasonable instruction. Studies have reported that general education teachers somewhat change their instructional methods when students with disabilities are placed in their classrooms. The results of this study have generated valuable information for educators who teach students with disabilities.

The Federal Education for All Handicapped Children Act, PL 94-142 (EAHCA; 1975) is arguably the most critical legislation for students in special education in the history of public education. Since 1975, developing inclusionary programs that offer special education students equal access to general education classes in the LRE has been challenging in the United States and globally. Evidence is found in the 61 studies considered for this review. Research from Canada, Norway, England, and Australia were all considered in addition to literature from the United States because globally, school systems are faced with similar challenges (Kalambouka et al., 2007). In the United States, EAHCA (1975) was the first legislation to define equity for students with disabilities who either had not been educated or had been provided inadequate education in isolation at segregated sites (Yell et al., 2018). This law was reauthorized and is better known today as IDEIA.

Such legislative and policy reforms are often designed to provide answers to inequity in schools. One can recognize a parallel between the implementation of IDEIA and the results of the seminal case of Brown versus Board of Education (1954), in which the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the Fourteenth Amendment must be upheld. This case mandated that no group should

be arbitrarily discriminated against, including those individuals with disabilities. Furthermore, the 12th court's unanimous decision stated that separate educational facilities were inherently unequal (Yell et al., 2018). Although this case is best known for its strong defense against racial segregation, it also supported students with disabilities and their access to a nondiscriminatory education.

Like IDEIA, Brown versus Board of Education (1954) was intended to reverse legal segregation in public schools. These initiatives positively influenced practices and mindsets in education; however, despite decades of effort and changes, there is still much work to be done. When referring to the lack of initiative to revise and improve legislation regarding equity, López and Burciaga (2014) insightfully stated,

> Very few individuals are willing to part ways with the decision itself, despite its many flaws and failed promises. Simply put: We believe in Brown, and we hang onto it dearly like an old teddy bear or precious family heirloom. (p. 807)

Like Brown versus Board of Education, those impacted by IDEIA cling tightly to what the law represents to the students, despite the multitude of iterations it has endured.

Issues and Trends in Research on Inclusion

Research supports the notion that teachers in schools who are successful in implementing inclusionary practices also utilize many methods to meet the needs of all their students (McLeskey et al., 2014). This section analyzes studies regarding practices in inclusive settings. Overall, research finds that there are a variety of practices that have been successful in establishing positive results for inclusive programs (Dieker & Murawski, 2003; Hoppey, 2016; Jordan et al., 2009; Morningstar et al., 2015; Thurlow, 2005). What needs to be developed is a cohesive teaching model and that teaching partners are given time to communicate about (a)

curriculum, (b) co-planning, (c) assessment, (d) behavioral issues, and (e) Individual Education Plans (IEPs). Educators are warned against being reactive and taking "the ready, fire, aim approach (which) negates what we know about change needing time and professional buy-in" (Dieker & Murawski, 2003, p. 54).

Thoughtful and systematic planning is essential in creating a successful co-teaching program. Hoppey (2016) conducted a longitudinal study regarding inclusive instruction. This study included examining a school-university partnership that prepared teachers to work in inclusive settings at a rural school where students with mild to moderate disabilities were successfully included into general education classes. The work at the school focused specifically on developing knowledge about inclusion through pre-service training, and professional development through weekly Professional Learning Community (PLC) meetings. The researcher examined the steps taken by the school to implement a successful inclusion program. The school in the study showed marked improvement over a six-year period. The findings of Hoppey (2016) emphasized the importance of shared knowledge regarding an inclusion model.

Hoppey also recognized that few educators, both in-service and pre-service, were prepared to collaborate with other educators to meet the needs of diverse students within inclusive classrooms. These findings included both special and general education teachers, and the students showed notable improvement in various areas. Specifically, for students in inclusive environments, standardized assessment scores rose from 36% proficient to 64% proficient in Math, and English Language Arts (ELA) scores rose from 32% proficient to 70% proficient on standardized testing. The number of students with disabilities included in general education classes increased from 50% to over 90% during the six-year study. Students showed meaningful gains in peer relationships, social skills, and reduction of challenging behaviors.

In a report for the National Center for Learning Disabilities, Cortiella and Burnette (2008) reported that professional development and a shared vision school-wide were the key components of this school's success. Morningstar et al. (2015) conducted a descriptive study that examined 65 classrooms in six schools on the impact of inclusion on all students. Morningstar et al. found that these schools successfully utilized Universal Design for Learning, behavioral interventions with class-wide behavioral expectations, adaptions, and modifications (i.e., enlarging print, graphic organizers, or scribes) for students who required those supports. This success emphasized high-quality differentiated instruction, assessment, progress monitoring, and curricular and instructional accommodations.

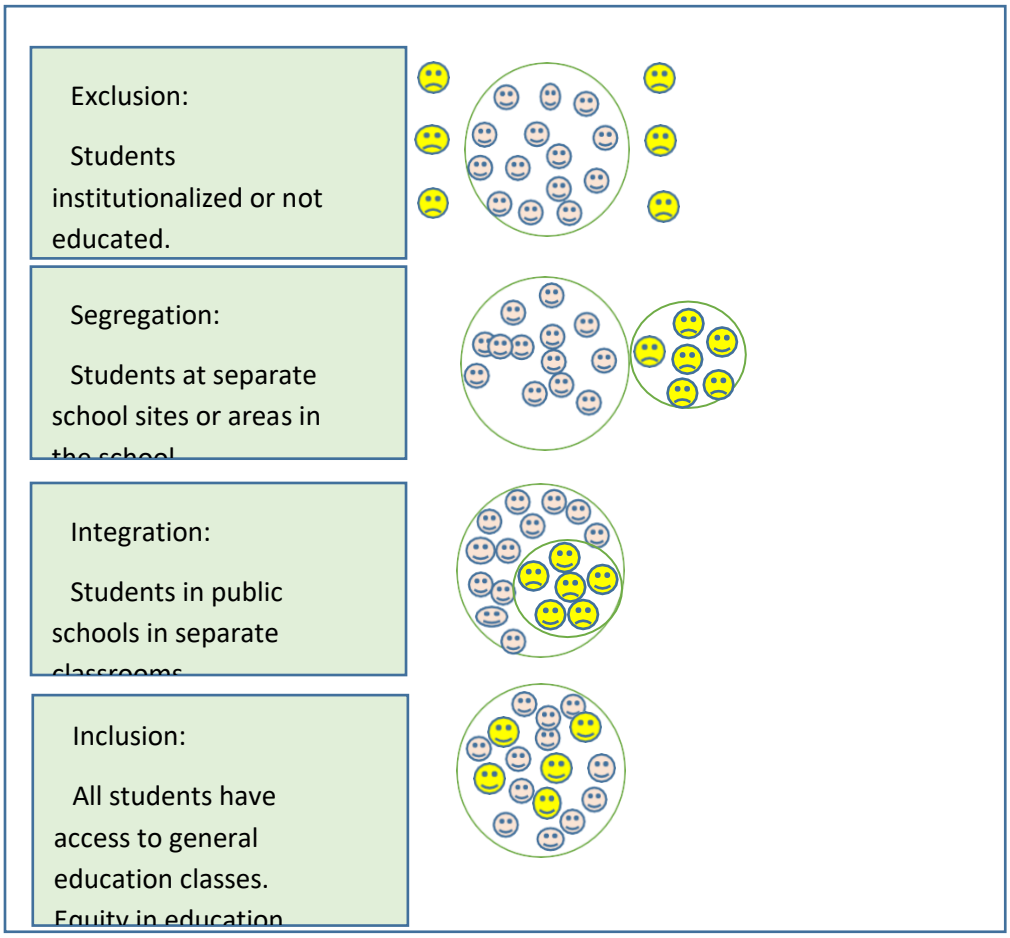
Simple accommodations can make a huge difference. As recent as a hundred years ago, children with disabilities received little, if any, formal education (Trani et al., 2011). Consistent with the tradition of segregating students during the middle to late 19th century, special schools for those with disabilities continued to be created in the early 1900s. These schools claimed to educate children; however, they primarily served as residential facilities and institutions (Proffitt, 2020). Even in 1918, as states began creating a nationwide public school system, children with disabilities were usually excluded. Between 1850 and 1950, special classes with people trained to care for individuals with disabilities began to develop as teachers noted differences among students (Davis, 2018).

During these years, groups of parents of children with developmental disabilities started schools and programs. Although these developments were sporadic, they began to change the ideas about teaching these children. Attitudes continued to change in the mid-1920s as educators began to see the value of education and community involvement for individuals with disabilities. Still, children continued to be placed in institutions as many parents believed these facilities

offered the only educational opportunity available to their child (Eddy et al., 2019). Figure 1 illustrates the inclusion framework's evolution over time.

Figure 1

Inclusion's Theoretical Framework and Evolution



Note. Theoretical framework of the evolution towards inclusion in education adapted from Instituto Alana (2016). A summary of the evidence on inclusive education. Within the framework, the larger ring represents the general education environment. The smaller ring in the framework represents the distinct separation of students with disabilities. Student faces are smiling when they are fully participating members of the general education environment and not smiling when isolated.

However, several studies notably found that the inclusion of students with disabilities in general education classrooms required effective implementation and thoughtful practice by teachers or the school (Huberman & Parrish, 2011; Salend & Garrick Duhaney, 2011). Thurlow (2005) cited a study from the Donahue Institute, University of Massachusetts, which analyzed urban public schools and identified 11 practices central to the success of elementary and middle school students with special needs. Thurlow found a pervasive emphasis on curriculum alignment with the state standards. Thurlow also revealed the importance of effective systems to support curriculum alignment. Emphasizing inclusion and access to the curriculum was also essential (Thurlow, 2005). Thurlow highlighted the culture and practices that supported high standards and student achievements, as well as a well-disciplined academic and social environment.

Moreover, Thurlow also suggested using student assessment data to inform decision-making, applying unified practice supported by targeted professional development. Further, access to resources to support key initiatives, effective staff member recruitment, retention and deployment, flexible leaders and staff that work effectively in a dynamic environment, and effective leadership were also important contributors to practices for students with special needs (Thurlow, 2005). This study was directed by the Massachusetts State Legislator, in conjunction with the Massachusetts Office of Education. It was a large study examining 33 school districts over several years. Additionally, Hoppey (2016) and Morningstar et al. (2015) found similar results in their research.

The Researcher

The researcher has an interest in the perspectives of special education on the extent of inclusion. This originates from the researcher's involvement with students with disabilities, first

as a general education teacher in an inclusive setting and later as a special education teacher. The initial experience of the researcher was in the general education classroom for ten years, followed by three years as a special education teacher and then back to general education. The researcher desires to gain relevant knowledge in this area and subsequently make it available for others who are involved in inclusion.

The EAHCA, initially passed in 1975 and later referred to as the IDEA has significantly impacted the researcher's teaching experience. The act directs that no child be omitted from receiving an appropriate education, regardless of their disability. It also states that children with disabilities must be educated in the general education classroom to the maximum possible. These iterations of PL 94-142 order that students with disabilities be taught in the LRE as much as possible. It also stipulates that a child with a disability receives appropriate education for their individual need. As the researcher transferred from the role of a general education teacher to a special education teacher, his teaching style progressed to a more differentiated style to meet the needs of the students. For example, IEPs were compulsory, and modifications and accommodations were also employed to meet the needs of the students to achieve grade-level standards.

Definitions of Terms

Disability – The physical or mental impairment that substantially limits or restricts the condition, manner, duration under which an average person in the population can perform a major life activity, such as walking, seeing, hearing, speaking, breathing, learning, working, or taking care of oneself (Friend, 2010).

General Education – The set of integrated learning experiences structured across subject areas to provide the skills and knowledge needed for all students to function in society (Berry, 2012).

General Education Teacher – A professional specializing in teaching regular education with special education students, including the general education classroom (Friend, 2010).

Inclusion – Term used to describe services that place students with disabilities in general education classrooms, with appropriate support services. A student may receive instruction from both a general education teacher and a special education teacher (Voltz et al., 2001).

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) – A four-part (A-D) piece of American legislation that ensures students with a disability are provided a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) tailored to their individual needs (Heasley, 2016).

Individual Education Plan (IEP) – Special education term outlined by IDEA to define the written document that states the goals, objectives, and services for students receiving special education (Pullin, 2013).

Integration – Describes including children with disabilities in regular classrooms and where a student with special needs belongs (Stein, 1994).

Learning Disabilities – Impairments in one or more processes related to perceiving, thinking, remembering, or learning. Students may experience significant problems in learning to read, write, and compute math problems. It is the most common disability serviced under the IDEA (Friend, 2010).

Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) – A special needs student's placement in a manner promoting the maximum possible interaction with the general school population. Placement options include a regular classroom with no support services, a regular classroom with

support services, designated instruction services, special day classes, and private special education programs (Pullin, 2013).

Mainstreaming – Also describes including children with disabilities in regular classrooms, so that children with special needs will grow up to become adults in mainstream society (Stein, 1994).

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) – Focuses on accountability through data collection and adherence to standards set forth by the federal government. These measures are tied to financial inducements. The NCLB Act requires reporting annual yearly progress, graduation rates, and student achievement levels (Ed.gov, 2012).

Special Education – Instruction specially designed to meet the exceptional needs of a child with a disability. Special education is individually developed to address a particular child's needs that result from his or her disability and occurs in many different educational settings depending on the needs of the individual (Pullin, 2013).

Special Education Teacher – A teacher who works with students with a broad range of learning, mental, emotional, and physical disabilities (Berry, 2012).

Students with Disabilities – Students sufficiently evaluated and analyzed with a disabling condition that requires accommodations and modifications to the general curriculum. Related services such as physical therapy, speech pathology, social work, psychological services, and occupational therapy are also included (Ratner, 2016). Integration and mainstreaming are all terms that describe including children with disabilities in regular classrooms (Stein, 1994).

Summary

Inclusion denotes the placement of students with disabilities in the LRE or a setting where they can be most successful (Robertson & Valentine, 1999). The EAHCA was originally

passed in 1975 and is referred to as the IDEA. It mandates that no child will be omitted from receiving an appropriate education, regardless of their disability. It also states that students with disabilities need to be educated with their peers who do not have disabilities in the general education classroom. The IDEIA directs that students with disabilities be taught in the LRE as much as possible with their peers who do not have disabilities. It guarantees access to a free and appropriate public education in the environment least restrictive to every child with a disability (Ed.gov, 2012). Arguably, the LRE for students with special and major needs is usually the general education classroom (Robertson & Valentine, 1999).

The knowledge of special education teachers' perspectives is essential when it comes to implementing inclusion. Chapter 2 contains a review of the literature regarding inclusion and teacher perceptions toward inclusion. Chapter 3 will cover a detailed overview of the research methodology used in this study. The final two chapters offer an opportunity to review the research results and offer suggestions for further research.

CHAPTER 2

Review of Literature

Historical Background

Before 1975, children with disabilities were often deprived of an education in public schools. Shin et al. (2014) stated that special education services designed to include these children were presented in response to PL 94-142, also known as the EAHCA of 1975. The law's main purpose was to provide children with disabilities a free and appropriate public education to meet their exceptional needs (United States Department of Education, 2003). After the EAHCA was passed, the inclusion framework began to take form. The evolution of the education system initiated by the PL 94-142 involved evaluations of all students with individualized and appropriate services outlined in the IEPs. Students with disabilities were taught and assessed according to an improved curriculum that covered fewer skills and was less complex than the general education curriculum in self-contained settings. This approach created gaps in achievement between students with disabilities and their general education peers. To meet the exceptional needs of students with disabilities, reauthorizations of the IDEA in 1990, 1997, and 2004 emphasized providing services to students with disabilities among the general population whenever feasible (Robertson & Valentine, 1999).

The NCLB Act of 2001 further revamped federal guidelines for all students. The guidelines require that all students display yearly progress in content areas of reading and mathematics, participate in the general education curriculum, and take part in district and state-wide assessments (NCES, 2020). The reauthorization of IDEA in 2004 initiated changes known as the IDEIA (United States Department of Education, 2003). The number of individuals with disabilities in general education classrooms increased due to legislative changes and evolving

cultural standards. Moreover, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) allows states greater flexibility in administering student learning accountability systems than the 2001 NCLB Act (ESSA, 2015). The 2001 NCLB Act is also a civil rights law (ESSA, 2015), and the evolution of inclusive education has created many differences among schools, districts, and states regarding defining and implementing it.

For some schools, inclusion means only the physical presence or social inclusion of students with disabilities in regular classrooms. In other schools, it means the dynamic modification of content, instruction, and assessment practices so that students can successfully engage in academic experiences and learning (Heasley, 2016). By adjusting their instruction and evaluation approaches, teachers allow more students with disabilities to participate keenly in learning. Inclusion varies, and until every school can define it and implement it the same way, successful inclusion will become even more difficult to accomplish. Therefore, expectations are that students with disabilities will achieve the same as other learners; thus, increasing the emphasis on educating them in general education settings. Audette and Algozzine (1997) suggested that schools have an "opportunity to carefully reinvent special education as an integral part of public education" (p. 378).

The Law

> Legally, the IDEA of 2004 describes inclusive education in terms of the LRE, or that, To the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities… are educated with children who are not disabled… Removal from the regular education environment occurs only when the nature or severity of the disability is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aides and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily. (PL 94- 142, Section 1412 (5) (B))

In addition, court cases such as Oberti v. Clementon Board of Education (1993) have determined that school districts must demonstrate a preponderance of the evidence that students with disabilities cannot be satisfactorily educated in the general education classroom and that sufficient steps must be taken to support students with disabilities in general education classrooms first. In addition, Roncker v. Walter (1983) established the concept of portable special education services, meaning that special education is a service rather than a place, and whether such services can be provided in the general education classroom, they should. However, the interpretation and models vary across regions of the United States.

According to Ryndak et al. (2014) the principle of LRE has led to the "continued misinterpretation of special education as a specific location, rather than a set of supports and services to be delivered in any location" (p. 67). Although the law indicates a preference for inclusion, decisions regarding special education services continue to be conflated with location, resulting in many students with disabilities being educated in segregated settings (Ryndak et al., 2014). Although the law appears to indicate a preference that students with disabilities be included in general education classrooms alongside their nondisabled peers, there remains ambiguity as to the extent of inclusion. The many shades of gray within the wording of 'maximum extent appropriate' can bend in favor or against inclusion and have been used to support both sides of the issue. The law has been an underlying theme for defining and implementing inclusion in the education system. Intricately linked, many define inclusion from a placement perspective.

Least Restrictive Environment

Once a child has qualified for special education and related services, an IEP must be written for the child. The IEP team consists of a general education teacher, special education

teacher, administrators, related service providers, and the parents or guardian of the child. The IEP team is tasked with developing an appropriate educational program for the student based on the child's unique needs. This individualized program consists of identifying the student's strengths and weaknesses, annual goals, a description of how those goals will be monitored, and the consideration of special factors (Gilmour, 2018; Yell & Katsiyannis, 2004). IEP teams must not determine educational placement before discussing the programming needs and supports of individual students. Only after the IEP team has developed a child's annual IEP programming can they consider an educational placement for the child.

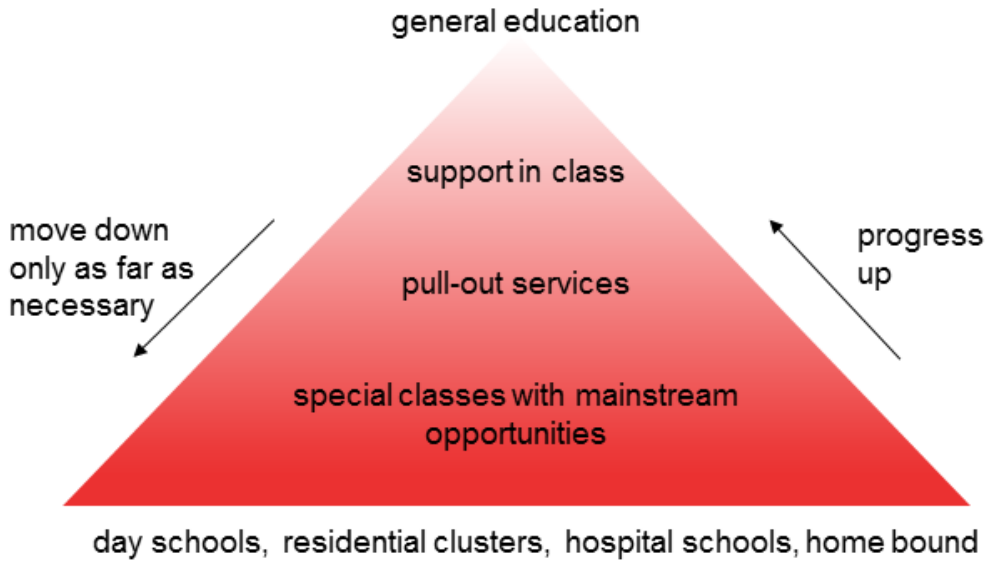
Definition of Least Restrictive Environment. When IEP teams are discussing placement options, they must be mindful of the LRE. To qualify for federal funding, states must ensure that they educate students with disabilities in the LRE (Daniel, 1997). The LRE mandate states that children with disabilities must be educated with non-disabled peers to the maximum extent appropriate in the general education classroom (Daniel, 1997; Yell & Katsiyannis, 2004). The LRE mandate also stipulates that if the general education setting is not appropriate for a student with a disability, the child may be placed in a more restrictive setting (Daniel, 1997; Yell & Katsiyannis, 2004). By rolling out the LRE mandates, the IDEA infers that all children have the right to be educated with non-disabled peers; however, the IDEA does not require a fully inclusive, general education placement for all children with disabilities. Instead, the IDEA requires that IEP teams consider a continuum of alternative placements (Stein, 1994; Yell & Katsiyannis, 2004). The IDEA allows local IEP teams the control to make individual decisions regarding placement based on the unique needs of each student. The IEP meetings hold annually, and the LRE for a child may change at each IEP meeting. The IEP teams also have the power to

amend the IEP during the school year if a change of educational placement is in the child's best interest.

Continuum of Placements. The IDEA requires that a continuum of alternative placements (Figure 2) be made available to local education agencies so that the IEP teams can ensure that students with disabilities are placed in an appropriate LRE setting (Yell & Katsiyannis, 2004). By providing a continuum of educational placements, policy makers allow room for educational teams to make individual placement decisions based on the exclusive needs of each student. One placement may not be best suited for all students, especially those students with significant special needs. The continuum of alternative placements includes the general education classroom, resource room, self-contained classroom, special schools, home instruction, and hospital or institution (Yell & Katsiyannis, 2004). It should be noted that the IEP team cannot make placement decisions based on the student's disability category or severity of the disability, availability of educational or related services, availability of space, or administrative convenience (Stein, 1994; Yell & Katsiyannis, 2004). For example, all students who qualify for special education services under the category of cognitive impairment must not automatically be placed in a self-contained special education classroom based on their disability category. The IEP team must make placement decisions based upon a student's needs.

Figure 2

The Continuum of Special Education Services



Note. Theoretical framework of special education continuum of services according to Causton-Theoharis et al. (2010). The continuum of services pyramid is a visual model for an individual student's services and programs resulting directly from that individual's needs. School Districts are required to offer services and supports, that start in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) and then move across the continuum so that all of the student's needs can be met. As a student's needs change, services may move up and/or down the continuum; the goal is always up. The continuum of services is fluid; as a student's needs change, services and service delivery can change.

Court Cases Involving LRE. Educational placements for students with disabilities have been frequently litigated in the court system. As a result of the *Daniel R.R. v. State Board of Education* (1989) case, the court developed a two-pronged standard to determine whether an LRE placement is appropriate for a given student (Daniel, 1997). When ruling on LRE placements, the courts must consider whether education in the general education classroom can be successfully attained through the use of supplemental aids and services and the school is proposing a setting other than the general education classroom, and whether or not the

school has integrated the student to the maximum extent appropriate (Daniel, 1997; Katsiyannis et al., 2001).

The *Daniel* court case, along with *Hartmann v. Loudoun County Board of Education* (1997), affirmed that a general education placement is not appropriate if the student with disabilities is not benefitting from that placement if any minimal benefits would be significantly outweighed by the benefits that could be achieved in a more restrictive setting, and/or if the child extensively disrupts the other students (Katsiyannis et al., 2001). These court cases make it clear that placement in the general education classroom is not always the most appropriate placement for a child with a disability. The IEP teams may determine that a more restrictive setting will provide more benefits to certain children. Each LRE placement decision needs to be carefully considered based on the individual student and what they need to be successful.

Inclusion, integration, and mainstreaming are all terms that describe including children with disabilities in regular classrooms (Stein, 1994). Inclusion can be defined as a service delivery model that strives to ensure student success by providing special education services and supports to students with special needs in the general education classroom (Brice & Miller, 2000). An inclusive classroom is an integrated setting where all children learn together, no children are specifically labeled as students with special needs, and all students use the same curriculum to make educational gains (Brice & Miller, 2000). In an inclusive classroom setting, all students are accepted as equals, regardless of their unique abilities or disabilities (Dixon, 2005). It is important to note that inclusion does not involve placing students with special needs in a regular education classroom without the necessary supports.

Furthermore, a student who has qualified for special education services may need support in the general education classroom, which could consist of the assistance of a paraprofessional, modifications to the curriculum, or push-in support from therapists or special education teachers (Dixon, 2005). Data from the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (2020) revealed that in the 2014-15 school year, 62.7% of students, ages 6-21, who received special education services were educated in the general education classroom for at least 80% of the school day. This indicated an increase in inclusive placements from the 2006 school year, when only 55.2% of students with special needs were placed in the general education classroom (Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, 2020). With the inclusion model on the rise within schools, educational stakeholders need to understand the components required to implement an effective inclusion program.

Connections—Inclusion and IDEA

The IDEA is a crucially important federal law that enables individuals with disabilities to access the education that they need to thrive now and later in life as adults. Given that special education is a complicated issue, this statute offers guidelines for educators and parents on how to implement special education for students with disabilities. It is a law that gives children and their parents rights to various issues within special education. This law also supports the development and use of assistive technologies in education.

Based on research and the ambiguity of the law, several different definitions of inclusion exist. The lack of unification is problematic in school settings, with teachers and administrators perhaps not sharing a unified vision for their school and students with disabilities. First and foremost, to uphold the law, inclusion is the placement of students with disabilities in the general education classroom with students without disabilities; however, the definition needs to extend

further into a belief system and attitude embraced by an entire school, not specific to special education. Inclusion demands human equality.

One can observe this battle fought in different strains countless times throughout history, including racial, gender, and socioeconomic differences. A label should not stand as a divider of students and the quality of education they receive. The idea that all students can and will succeed is critical for entire schools to accept and believe. With these beliefs, access to the general education classroom and curriculum should be a right, not a privilege to be earned. As Causton-Theoharis et al. (2010) suggested, “We cannot be satisfied with schools that work for only some” (p. 47).

The term inclusion has the capability of extending far beyond the context of special education; individuals of all different backgrounds, cultures, and ability levels can benefit from inclusive practices. Many view the purpose of school as a preparation for life as a citizen in our society. In segregated schools, the preparation for society is limited; students with disabilities will not be exposed or experience with other peers, the knowledge others have upon graduation. Likewise, students in general education classrooms will not have experience with students with disabilities. The classroom is no longer a natural setting which is not realistic for the future of our students.

Many of the barriers found within inclusion can be defeated using the best practices, such as collaboration, development of a belief system, and differentiating instruction to meet all student needs. Creating a vision and definition is a critical component that is frequently overlooked; inclusion has an assumed definition when there are many different perspectives. Throughout the research, it is evident that several steps and practices are suggested for the proper implementation of inclusion. As many suggest, a proper first step is developing a belief system

to be shared by the school promoting optimism, success for all, and high expectations. Thereafter, it is important to redefine roles as a team.

Just as it is important for everyone to share the same perspective of what inclusion is, it is also important for everyone to share the perspective of the jobs everyone holds and their role in the process. As mentioned by teachers and parents in blogs, it is helpful to directly teach acceptance of differences to students and acknowledge and value diversity. Having this conversation with the class may prevent barriers in the future. It is especially crucial to incorporate it directly into academics during a unit on the body, or even having a student with a disability share with the class.

After these ideas have been established, collaborative planning for differentiation, universal design for learning, and co-teaching is also critical. Though timely, team planning allows ideas to greet many professionals before being administered to the class. It also allows for other paraprofessionals, co-teachers, and specialists in the room to understand, follow, and contribute to the lesson. By differentiating instruction, no child is left out. Inclusion is more than just a place. Having a chair in the general education classroom is not enough. True inclusion occurs when all students belong and all students learn.

Process

Other scholars insist inclusion must be more than an effort to abide by the law and move students into a single room. Some define inclusion based on principles of how to practice inclusion. Ryndak et al. (2014) suggested access to the room and the collaboration of the education team to design and evaluate effective instruction. This implies that there is more to inclusion than placement. It takes more than moving students with disabilities into the general education classroom to define inclusion.

"Teachers must be willing to not just give me a desk and then leave me to fill the chair. Teachers need to become as a conductor and guide me through the many places I may get lost" (Kasa & Causton-Theoharis, 2017, p. 2). Kasa and Causton-Theoharis (2017) also defined inclusion as a process where students are given a variety of ways to access content and demonstrate knowledge and learning. As the authors noted, "The strategy behind inclusion is to design supports—innovative approaches to learning, differentiated instruction, curricular adaptations—for every student in the classroom, to include the entire spectrum of learners" (p. 2). Rief and Heimburge (2006) emphasized differentiated instruction when defining inclusive education and pedagogical choices that meet the needs of all students. The authors claimed inclusion should involve changing the pace, level, or kind of instruction. Inclusion should provide challenging instruction to motivate students. Inclusion is relevant, flexible, and varied, meaning it is essential learning, adapted for students' particular needs. Students with disabilities need to be actively engaged in the content with their thinking and ideas being challenged and pushed to new limits. Closely aligned to defining inclusion as a process is defining inclusion as a philosophy, as our actions are closely tied to our beliefs.

Philosophy

Howley and Rose (2007) stated that it is not enough to place students with disabilities in mainstream classrooms. The researchers believed that it could be problematic to think changing the location makes individuals with disabilities a member of the classroom community. The idea of location and philosophy were combined by Hoppey and McLeskey (2014), who stated that inclusion is "places where students with disabilities are valued as active participants and where they are provided supports needed to succeed in academic, social, and extracurricular activities of the school" (p. 4). Inclusion is a philosophy and social justice perspective. It is valuing diverse

learning and a core belief system that guides professional thinking. Hoppey and McLeskey claimed inclusion is the removal of barriers while providing accommodations in shared environments.

Friend and Bursuck (2015) held a similar definition of inclusion but a different perspective on setting. Friend and Bursuck (2015) stated, “Inclusive practices represent the belief or philosophy that students with disabilities should be fully integrated into general education classrooms and schools and that their instruction should be based on their abilities, not their disabilities” (p. 4). However, Friend and Bursuck felt placement should be determined on a student-by-student basis and that “[s]ometimes learning must occur in a separate setting” (p. 3). Villa and Thousand (2003) also stated that inclusion is not just a set of strategies but a belief system. Moreover, it is the opposite of segregation and isolation. “Inclusion is a way of life—a way of living together—that is based on a belief that each individual is valued and belongs” (p. 10). In addition to the LRE definition, they claimed:

> Inclusive education is about embracing everyone and making a commitment to provide each student in the community, each citizen in a democracy, with the inalienable right to belong. Inclusion assumes that living and learning together benefits everyone, not just children who are labeled as having a difference. (p. 5)

Kasa and Causton-Theoharis (2017) also mentioned inclusion as “a philosophy where all students are valued and supported to participate meaningfully with each other” (p. 2). They continued by defining inclusion as utilizing student strengths and providing all students with a sense of belonging. Similarly, Causton-Theoharis et al. (2010) described inclusion as viewing diversity as a strength rather than a weakness. “Inclusive education is providing each student the right to an authentic sense of belonging to an inclusive school classroom community where

difference is expected and valued" (p. 195). As shown in Figure 2, the goal of inclusion is to educate all students within the general education environment. Only when supports and specific remediation cannot meet a student's needs should the child be removed from the general education classroom.

Differentiated Instruction

Differentiated instruction has been nationally used in American education for many years. It was created in the 1990s and written in support of the practice. Bearne (1996) defined differentiation as an approach to teaching where teachers proactively modify curricula, teaching methods, resources, learning activities, and student products to address the diverse needs of individual students and small groups of students to maximize the learning opportunity for each student. Differentiated instruction is responsive teaching. Differentiation is a modification of teaching and learning routines and can address a broad range of learners, readiness levels, interests, and modes of learning (Tomlinson, 2001). It stems from a teacher's concrete and growing understanding of how teaching and learning occur, and responds to varied learners' needs for more structure or individuality, more practice or greater challenge, and more active or less active approaches to learning.

Supporting the practice are four guiding principles that relate to differentiating classroom practices: (a) a focus on essential ideas and skills in each content area; (b) responsiveness to individual student differences; (c) integration of assessment and instruction; and (d) an ongoing adjustment of content, process, and products to meet individual student's level of prior knowledge, critical thinking, and expression styles (Tieso, 2003; Tomlinson, 2001). Lending further credence to the approach are seven basic beliefs (Tomlinson, 2001): (a) same-age students can differ greatly in their life circumstances, past experiences, and readiness to learn; (b)

these differences have a significant impact on the content and pace of instruction; (c) student learning is improved when they receive support from the teacher that challenges them to work slightly above their comfort level; (d) student learning is enhanced when what they are learning in school is connected to real-life experiences; (e) student learning is also strengthened by authentic learning opportunities; (f) student learning is boosted when they feel they are respected and valued within the context of the school and community; and (g) the overarching goal of schooling is to recognize and promote the abilities of each student.

Lawrence-Brown (2004) reported that differentiated instruction has great importance for students who struggle in mastering the grade-level curriculum. Two goals are achieved as a result of differentiated instruction. First, a high level of attaining the grade-level standards for all students is paramount. It is important for teachers to scaffold the instruction as necessary for struggling learners. Second, the goal is to make curricular adaptations for those students who need it. Teachers who differentiate are very aware of the scope and sequence of curriculum prescribed by their state, district, and school. They are also mindful of the students in their classrooms who begin each school year spread out along a continuum of understanding and skill. The teacher's goal is to maximize the capacity of each learner by teaching in ways that help all learners bridge gaps in understanding and skill and help each learner grow as quickly as they can. Tomlinson (2001) wrote that a differentiated classroom provides different paths for acquiring the content, causes the teacher to support students in processing or the making sense of ideas, and helps students create products to learn effectively.

A teacher can differentiate instruction in many ways in various subjects. Instruction can be differentiated based on a student’s readiness, learning profile, or interest by varying the content, process, or product (Tomlinson, 2001). The main strategies utilized are compacting,

independent projects, interest centers or interest groups, tiered assignments, flexible grouping, learning centers, varying questions, mentorships, anchoring activities, and learning contracts. Differentiation occurs parallel with assessment and grouping. The way assessment is used to create groupings is unlike using it to create stagnant ability groups. While assessment helps determine which students need more challenge, which ones are performing at grade level, and which ones need scaffolding to meet the expectations, the teacher must decide how to make the lesson engaging and focused. These approaches would entail brain compatibility, learning styles, and cooperative learning strategies.

Special Education Students in Inclusion Classrooms

Most of the research has focused on the achievement of special education students in inclusive classroom settings. Corbett (2009) conducted a study to add to the body of research regarding special education student achievement in general education classes. The researcher wanted to clarify that the special education students involved in the study were not only physically in a classroom with general education peers, but were given access to general education contexts. They defined inclusion based on that criterion (i.e., special education students in general education classrooms and using the same text and curriculum as general education students).

Barrett (2014) studied the relationship between the number of hours spent in general education classrooms and math and reading achievement of 1,300 children ages six to nine from 180 school districts. Barrett found the more time special education students spent in an inclusion classroom, the better they scored on achievement tests for math and reading, with a half-point and .37 of a point gain for each hour in math and reading general education classes, respectively. The findings implied that special education students would benefit from more time spent in

inclusion classrooms. The researcher focused on the achievement of special education students and did not report findings for the achievement of regular education students in the same classrooms.

Benefits of Inclusion for General Education

An inclusive classroom is defined as being friendly, appreciating, investing, and supporting the academic, social/emotional, language and communication learning of all students in shared environments and experiences to accomplish the goals of education (Villa & Thousand, 2003). Providing students with the benefits in an inclusion setting should include teachers making a commitment to provide each student with the absolute right to belong and not be excluded (Villa & Thousand, 2003). Inclusion assumes that living and learning together benefits everyone, not just children who are labeled as different. Inclusion is a value and belief system, not just a set of strategies (Villa & Thousand, 2003). An inclusion education orientation and a set of general practices benefit students with disabilities, and all students, educators, parents, and community members. Inclusion is not a programmatic set of specific approaches, rather, it is a way of life based on the belief that everyone is valued and belongs.

By implementing inclusion in more classrooms, students with and without disabilities benefit academically. Ratner (2016) believed that "the regular education class can provide an environment in which students with special needs have more opportunities to learn and to make educational progress in academic achievement" (p. 195). Additional staff in the classroom provide benefits to individuals, small group instruction to all students, and allow students with disabilities to be exposed to a richer curriculum.

Ratner (2016) stated that often, in special education classrooms, teachers can be forced to stray away from the curriculum due to fear that their students will not understand the important

concepts and will not be able to master the material. Students with disabilities in an inclusive setting are being exposed to age-appropriate curriculum and receive individualized instruction to support them in the general education classroom. This can lead to students with disabilities feeling more confident in themselves because they are given important work that challenges them academically, as opposed to completing work that is easy and feeling like their accomplishments were minimal.

Direct instruction with teacher-led lessons is often needed, but it is also essential to have more constructivist, learner-centered activities and lessons to give students with and without disabilities the chance to have ownership in their learning. As noted by Heasley (2016), the sole reliance on direct instruction would deprive students with disabilities the opportunity to develop greater independence and the ability to work with and learn from their peers. The heterogeneity of the students can be effective in inclusive classrooms such as cooperative learning models. During these cooperative learning activities, the teachers in the room can provide direct instruction and additional support to students who need it.

Benefits of Inclusion for Special Education

Inclusive education provides benefits to students with disabilities but also to their nondisabled peers too (McCarty, 2006). As communities and schools embrace the true meaning of inclusion, they become better able to transform special education into an inclusive service delivery that supports social tolerance of differences. This embracement enables them to celebrate students' natural diversity in an inclusion setting (Villa & Thousand, 2003). A significant challenge in creating and sustaining inclusion in schools is building reliable friendships for students with disabilities and their non-disabled peers. The benefits of inclusive classrooms in research have shown that it reaches beyond academics (Voltz et al., 2001). When

students with disabilities are sequestered and taught only in special education classrooms, they are not given the opportunity to interact with a diverse group of people. By creating inclusive settings, these students can interact socially, and develop a relationship with their peers.

McCarty (2006) believed that this allowed the students with disabilities to increase their social skills and behavior by having appropriate examples in the general education classroom. McCarty also stated that students with disabilities had shown improvement in their ability to follow directions and initiate contact with others. When students with disabilities become part of a general education classroom, they are more likely to become socially accepted by their peers. The more those students without disabilities interact with their peers with disabilities, the greater the chance that they will learn tolerance and have a greater acceptance of other's differences (Wilson & Michaels, 2006). The classroom climate should facilitate the idea that differences are natural, and each student should be comfortable with being themselves (Forlin, 2001).

Every student should have something special and unique to offer. Students with disabilities will feel that they are part of a learning community in their classroom because of the belief in inclusion by their peers and their teachers. It is known that unless adults, teachers, and parents do something purposeful, meaningful friendships for students with disabilities are limited in number and depth (McCarty, 2006). Children with disabilities are targets of bullying more often than their typical peers, and this problem appears to grow worse as physical and verbal aggression in schools is quantified and studied (Salisbury, 2006). Parents, students, and teachers need provision and skills to reverse this long-recognized rejection from friendships and the school's social life. Giangreco (2007) believed that if students felt they were being given authentic, meaningful work, they were more likely to show pride and accomplishment in that work. It is necessary for teachers to vary their instructional strategies because of the diversity of

the students involved. A one size approach does not fit all. Idol (2006) felt that special attention must be paid to differentiating what is taught, and how it is taught.

Social Aspects

Students with disabilities can face many difficulties when they come into the general education classroom. Becoming socially accepted by their peers in the classroom setting can be difficult. This is especially true for students who are experiencing inclusion for the first time. These students are not familiar with being around their peers without disabilities, so it is difficult for them to interact socially (Wilson & Michaels, 2006). Voltz et al. (2001) stated that becoming socially accepted depends on the severity of a student's disability. Students without disabilities soon realize the differences in capabilities of those students with disabilities, and they label and treat them differently (Wilson & Michaels, 2006). This can result in students without disabilities rejecting them as friends, especially if their behaviors are unusual or inappropriate. Modeling and explanations of behavior expectations are important for students with disabilities, who can sometimes find it difficult to follow the rules set in the general education classroom. This is especially true if the teacher does not take the time to model and explain expected behaviors frequently enough to learn and understand them. If students with disabilities become frustrated, they may act out inappropriately (Voltz et al., 2001).

Being in a larger classroom with more students and more noise can become a distraction and a catalyst for inappropriate behavior. Also, Voltz et al. found that students with disabilities may also display unsuitable behavior because they mimic another student who is not abiding by the rules. So, is the behavior exceptional, or is it the norm? These issues can take up precious instructional time so teachers feel they are doing more disciplining than teaching. This is especially true if the general education teacher does not have any additional support staff in the

classroom to help. Forlin (2001) found that one of the greatest pressures for teachers during inclusion was the actual behavior of the students with disabilities. In Forlin's study, over 70% of the teachers reported that students with disabilities disturbed others in their class.

Students understand social justice and are more accepting of individual differences by being exposed to inclusive settings. Students can also learn culture and climate respect in a classroom with inclusion settings. If students with disabilities do not have the "special education student" label while in inclusive classrooms, they do not feel singled out or embarrassed in any way (Idol, 2006). The researcher stated when every student is included in the learning activities occurring in the classroom, the students are unaware of the students who receive special education services. Cooperative learning groups are beneficial when teachers can mix students with disabilities into groupings based on their strengths. Students will feel that they belong because they are not taken out of the room or segregated from their peers. Their peers will see them as contributing members to the classroom and not as "different" or "special."

Voltz et al. (2001) felt that every student had something unique to share, and differences among students should be openly acknowledged and addressed. Differences should be respected and seen as assets to students' learning. In a learning community, every student should feel comfortable in their classroom and feel that they are part of it. By exposing children to diversity, teachers model social justice and show them real-life situations (Idol, 2006). By doing this in inclusive classrooms, students with and without disabilities form friendships, gain an improved sense of self-worth, and become better human beings by learning tolerance (Idol, 2006).

Perceptions and Attitudes Toward Inclusion

A teacher must develop self-efficacy to believe they can teach students successfully (Buell et al., 1999). A lack of efficacy creates a concern for teachers regarding inclusive

education because of their lack of training and education on inclusion. Teachers may feel effective in inclusive classrooms if they have had chances to experience some success in these settings through training and education. It has been important to research teachers' attitudes toward inclusion because it can tell schools the areas where teachers need support to help them implement inclusive education effectively and successfully (Buell et al., 1999). Buell et al. studied factors that contributed to teachers' ability to meet the educational needs of students with disabilities within an inclusive environment. This study explored teachers' perceptions towards inclusion and their needs for supports and resources to successfully implement an inclusive setting.

Generally, all the teachers voiced that they needed supports to successfully integrate a student with disabilities into the regular education classroom. Overall, teachers must feel supported and empowered for inclusive practices to successfully address the individual needs of students (Buell et al., 1999). Better in-service training can be implemented for teachers when they feel that they need more supports. However, Buell et al. pointed out that efficacy in teachers is not only developed through training and gaining knowledge but also through successful personal experiences and contextual practices. More efficacy helps promote the schools' need to encourage more teacher participation in decision making and practices that concern their students with inclusion in the classroom.

Horne and Timmons (2009) found that,

> Overall, most teachers were in favor of inclusion. Most felt they got needed support from the principal. However, teachers did feel that they "lacked the adequate training needed to implement inclusion successfully. They also felt they were not given sufficient time to

> prepare, and they needed more support in the form of smaller class size and assistance with modifying the curriculum. (p. 274)

Teachers felt that the lack of training or collaborative teaching opportunities had a more negative effect on inclusion. Understanding the current knowledge and concerns of elementary school teachers about inclusion could help develop remedies and supportive procedures that can be implemented to improve inclusion programs (Hammond & Ingalls, 2003). The purpose of this study was to determine whether teachers were supportive or not of implementing inclusive programs. It also determined whether general patterns of responses were evident in the teachers' attitudes and made recommendations to address teachers' attitudes (Hammond & Ingalls, 2003).

Inclusionary programs were evaluated as being beneficial by most teachers in their schools. A high percentage of teachers had either negative or uncertain attitudes toward inclusion that were not fully committed to the concept of inclusion. Lack of collaborative opportunities was a concern for teachers, and they believed they did not receive appropriate training for providing inclusion services (Hammond & Ingalls, 2003). Teachers involved in inclusion programs should have a positive attitude toward the concept of inclusion which is very important. Also, teachers need to realize the legal reasons for inclusion and the positive impact inclusionary programs can have on students' academic and social development. An additional conclusion emphasized that teachers need to voice their concerns and be actively involved in creating solutions to improve inclusion programs.

However, the data revealed that teachers had limited commitment, various levels of uncertainty, negative attitudes toward inclusion, and that the commitment of school administrators would be needed for the program to succeed (Hammond, & Ingalls, 2003). According to de Boer et al. (2011), teachers were also negative or undecided on their beliefs

about inclusion and did not consider themselves competent to educate students with disabilities. They did not feel confident to teach students with special needs and would more often reject students with special needs than regular students. Also, the authors concluded that teachers' attitudes were vastly influenced by years of teaching experience, experience in inclusive environments, and training in special education.

Special education teachers play an important role in the education of students with disabilities. Overall, teachers help develop and implement inclusive education models that meet the social and academic needs of all students enrolled in general education classrooms. The attitude of special education teachers towards students with disabilities is the main factor in determining the success or failure of inclusive education. Salisbury (2006) stated that attitudes toward inclusion were greatly influenced by the amount of education and academic preparation teachers received. Special education teachers who experienced specific training to teach students with disabilities expressed more positive attitudes towards inclusion when compared to those who did not have specific training (Lambe & Bones, 2006).

Additionally, the severity of the students' disabilities was another factor that influenced special education teachers' attitudes. Kniveton (2004) stated that the more severe the student's disability, the less positive inclusion was regarded by teachers. It is difficult for students with disabilities to adjust to the routines and rituals of a general education classroom which requires a greater amount of responsibility on the part of the general education teacher. Students with severe disabilities can become an added stress to the general education teachers. Lastly, proper support from their principal was of paramount importance to teachers.

Teachers who were not provided with the proper training or professional development opportunities believed they were not fully supported by their principal. Also, if the principal did

not prepare teachers with the appropriate teaching staff to support the students with disabilities in their classroom, such as a paraprofessional or a special education teacher, such teachers would not have a favorable view of inclusion. Lambe and Bones (2006) interviewed 324 elementary teachers and found that although they agreed that students with disabilities had the right to be in the general education classroom, most disagreed that they could receive effective instruction in the general education classroom. Teachers also understood that students with disabilities in the general education classroom increased the instructional load of the general education teacher. Instructional modifications were difficult to implement and required extra time and planning.

The teachers also indicated that there were more management problems in the classroom when they included students with disabilities, which was an issue. Lambe and Bones also found that special education teachers felt it was necessary use pull-out services for some students with disabilities because they needed more one-on-one attention and assistance than the general education classroom can provide. They also believed that the general education teacher should not have the primary responsibility for the education of students with disabilities when they are in an inclusive setting. They thought that the magnitude of the inclusion process was too great of a task for a teacher to implement alone, and it is important to include the expertise of the special education teachers to ensure that students with disabilities are receiving all of the support they need in the general education classroom.

Administrative Support

In addition to a clearly defined inclusion plan and teacher training on specific strategies, general education teachers need time to collaborate with special education teachers. Support from the administration is a critical factor for inclusion to be successful within a school. Brice and Miller (2000) maintained that administrators must be held accountable for providing general

and special education teachers with the time needed to collaborate and communicate regarding the educational programming of students with special needs.

The lack of time for collaboration between general and special education teachers is frequently blamed for the failure of inclusion; therefore, administrators must set aside time for educators to meet, discuss, and plan interventions for students with special needs who are placed in the general education classroom (Brice & Miller, 2000; Harrower, 1999). Effective inclusion classrooms are built on a team approach and partnership between all teachers, and collaboration between general and special education teachers is essential for students to thrive in an inclusive classroom (DeSimone et al., 2013; Obiakor et al., 2012). Many schools are implementing co-teaching, which allows the general and special education teachers to work closely together to provide instruction to a group of students.

Co-Teaching. Co-teaching between the general education and special education teacher provides numerous opportunities for collaboration and communication in the inclusive classroom. Co-teaching can be defined as "the partnering of a general education teacher and a special education teacher or another specialist for the purpose of jointly delivering instruction to a diverse group of students, including those with disabilities or other special needs" (Friend et al., 2010, p. 11). Moreover, according to Hang and Rabren (2009), the four major components of co-teaching include the involvement of two certified teachers, both participating in the instructional delivery of the academic content, with a group of students comprising children with and without disabilities, and the instruction taking place in one classroom. Co-teaching can take the shape of several different models, which are one teach-one assist, station teaching, alternative teaching, and team teaching in the general education classroom. In the one teach-one assist

model, one teacher provides the whole-group instruction to all students, while the other teacher aids students who need additional help (Obiakor et al., 2012).

The station teaching model involves dividing the students in a classroom into three groups. Each teacher works with one group, while the third group of students works independently (Obiakor et al., 2012). When teachers engage in parallel teaching, both teachers work together to write the lesson plan. Students in the classroom are split into two groups, and each educator teaches the same lesson to one of the smaller groups of students (Obiakor et al., 2012). The co-teaching strategy of alternative teaching allows one of the teachers to pre-teach or re-teach academic content to a small group of students who require more support (Obiakor et al., 2012). Finally, the team-teaching approach involves both teachers taking an active part in planning and teaching the same lesson to the entire group of children in the classroom (Obiakor et al., 2012).

In a study by Hang and Rabren (2009), 45 co-teachers completed a perceptions survey. The results of the survey indicated that the co-teachers agreed that the students with special needs within the co-taught class increased their self-confidence and academic skills. The teachers in the survey also agreed that the students with special needs had appropriate supports and exhibited fewer behavior problems in the co-taught classroom (Hang & Rabren, 2009). Co-teaching also provides value to all the learners in the general education classroom as all of the students benefit from access to a second teacher (Walsh & Jones, 2004). Co-teaching has proven to be an effective way to increase the collaboration between general and special education teachers. However, due to high caseloads that require special education teachers to work with numerous children in multiple grade levels, paraprofessionals are often called on to provide support to students with special needs in the general education classroom.

Training for Support Staff. In addition to intentional and intensive training for general education teachers, paraprofessionals who will be tasked with providing support to students with special needs in the inclusive classroom must also receive adequate training and professional development (DeSimone et al., 2013; Idol, 2006; Lee, et al., 2009). When students with special needs are placed in the general education classroom with untrained paraprofessionals, serious pitfalls may occur. The negative effects for students with special needs include decreased interactions with the general education teacher and peers, over-dependence on adults, limited opportunities to practice self-control and self-management skills, and fewer chances to receive high-quality instruction from the general education teacher (Harrower, 1999).

To avoid these hazards, support staff receive specific and thorough training to ensure that they constantly work on fading prompts and promoting independence (Harrower, 1999). Inclusion will not work if children with special needs are in a corner of the general education classroom, working on a separate activity with a paraprofessional. Paraprofessionals must be given the tools to support students in the classroom, while allowing the general education teacher to take ownership of the child's learning. Once school districts have laid the groundwork for inclusive educational placements to work, the IEP team members must make a case-by-case determination on which students with special needs would benefit from placement in the general education classroom. The IEP team must consider the benefits and possible disadvantages of an inclusive placement for each child.

Obstacles of Inclusion

Inclusion seems to have many promising benefits for students, but it has become increasingly hard to implement because many different setbacks need to be overcome by teachers and administration (Villa & Thousand, 2003). Furthermore, many people question

whether it is practical and realistic for all students to be educated successfully in the same setting. The need to educate all students, including those with disabilities, has led to the creation of special education programs (Villa & Thousand, 2003).

Villa and Thousand indicated that for inclusion classrooms to be committed to teaching all students, they had to include most severe disabilities both physically and philosophically. Many have argued that students with disabilities should be kept in an environment only for special education classrooms and away from the children in the regular education classrooms; inclusion would present a problem for the children without disabilities (Villa & Thousand, 2003). Therefore, the topic of inclusion has caused much debate and controversy for many years (Villa & Thousand, 2003). Situated in an elementary education setting, Kelley (2017) explored the perceptions of regular education teachers, special education teachers, and administrators on the effectiveness of inclusion programs for special education. Kelley also explored the benefits and challenges of the learning environment for students with disabilities. Employing a qualitative case study, Kelley conducted interviews with eight participants and revealed that educational experience, training, and administrative support for teaching students with disabilities played an essential role in the successful implementation of inclusion. Kelley thus suggested inclusion was important, and it could enable students to be educated with their peers in the LRE with instructional strategies, such as cooperative learning and differentiation.

A general education classroom usually becomes an inclusion setting when more staff are available in the classroom to assist the general education teacher. According to the National Education Association, inclusive classrooms should have no more than 28 students, and of those, students with disabilities should make up no more than 25 percent of the class (National Education Association, 2020). It has been estimated that approximately 290,000 special

education paraprofessionals are employed in schools, with many playing an increasingly prominent role in the instruction of students with disabilities, especially in inclusive settings (Ghere & York-Barr, 2007).

Schools, however, have had difficulty retaining paraprofessionals and support staff. According to Ghere and York-Barr (2007), there have been several explanations offered for paraprofessional turnover, including inadequate wages, few opportunities for career advancement, and a lack of administrative support and respect. Stress and ambiguity also negatively affected the retention of paraprofessionals. Turnover usually happens when the development of a skilled paraprofessional workforce is adversely affected at a high rate. Ghere and York-Barr (2007) stated teachers estimated that it takes between 3 to 12 months for new paraprofessionals to become proficient at working with students. A significant amount of time and money is required for school districts to hire, interview, and train a new paraprofessional. According to Ghere and York-Barr, it was estimated that the cost of replacing an employee varies between 70% and 200% of the departing employee's salary.

The teachers and students involved in the inclusion program were affected by the turnover. Personnel changes can result in extra demands and stress on the teachers. Teachers would need more time to train the new paraprofessionals, teach them the routines, and help them become familiar with the students they are working with. Students are impacted when paraprofessional turnover occurs. The students build strong relationships with the paraprofessionals, and when they leave, it is a significant loss for them, socially and academically.

Teachers who support inclusion identified critical problems with its implementation. Research suggested that these problems stem from a lack of proper training and education

(Winter, 2006). Teachers feel ill-equipped to teach in an inclusive setting because they feel they did not receive appropriate training or professional development to implement inclusion into their classrooms properly. Researchers have found that inclusion is inadequately addressed and often neglected in teacher training. For instance, The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES; 2020) found that almost 60% of all public-school teachers indicated they did not feel well prepared to meet the social and emotional needs of students with special needs from their teacher education program. Winter (2006) stated that ensuring newly qualified teachers have a basic understanding of inclusive education is the best investment possible.

Pre-service teacher preparation is a critical factor in helping teachers formulate their beliefs about inclusion and affecting their ability to teach students with disabilities. Cook (2002) stated, "If pre-service teachers do not possess the knowledge and skills to implement inclusion appropriately, the included students with disabilities in their future classes will certainly have diminished opportunities to attain desired outcomes regardless of teachers' attitudes toward inclusive reforms" (p. 202). In another study, researchers found that forty-five percent of the teachers surveyed believed they did not receive adequate staff development regarding teaching students with special needs (Pavri & Hegwer-DiVita, 2006).

Teacher training is important and without a coherent plan to address the educational needs of students with disabilities, attempts to include these students in the general education classroom become extremely challenging. For inclusion to be considered successful, it is important that teachers are prepared, have the confidence and the skills to teach in inclusive settings, and can provide instruction to every student (Winter, 2006). Inclusion is based on several arguments and philosophies.

These arguments assert that isolating children with disabilities in special settings refuses these children rightful access to normal experiences (Robertson & Valentine, 1999). They also showed that segregated services have not resulted in satisfactory education for students (Robertson & Valentine, 1999). According to the IDEA, exceptions for inclusion should be considered when the characteristics or severity of the student's disability affect the achievement in regular education classes, despite supplementary aids, supports, and services (Winter, 2006).

There are many positive benefits for everyone in an inclusive classroom. Proponents of inclusion currently argue that children with disabilities can grow more academically and socially due to inclusive environments (Barrett, 2014). Students with special needs are now exposed to the diversity present in regular education. However, these benefits do not automatically assume that the sole reason for a child reaching their perceived potential is inclusion. It is primarily because, with inclusion, the child is given the opportunity to reach higher achievement levels than if they were confined to a special education classroom (Idol, 2006).

Even with increasing emphasis on the inclusion of students with disabilities, there are still those who believe that the practice has disadvantages (Spenceley, 2014). These critics argue that inclusion is too costly, provides an unfair advantage over students without disabilities, and is detrimental to students without disabilities and education overall (Spenceley, 2014; Tieso, 2003). They also believe that the negative reaction of students without disabilities in an inclusion classroom to their disabled peers also affects the self-esteem of students with disabilities (Winzer & Mazurek, 2016). Without the appropriate training and supports, the general education classroom can be a very socially isolating environment for students with disabilities.

Winzer and Mazurek (2016) mentioned a few studies on the effectiveness of co-teaching analyzed by Baker and Zigmond. Five schools implementing inclusion were included. Several

disadvantages of inclusion models were found. First, the special education teacher moved between several classrooms throughout the day. The findings indicated that the students with disabilities were not getting enough individualized attention. There was no evidence of any "specific, directed, individualized, intensive, remedial instruction of students who were clearly deficient academically and struggling with the schoolwork" (Winzer & Mazurek, 2016, p. 14). In 1997, a study conducted by Boudah and his colleagues examined the engagement of students with mild disabilities in co-taught secondary classrooms (Corbett, 2009). The study results indicated that the students with mild disabilities had "a low level of engagement in such activities as raising their hands, recalling prior knowledge, or using a strategic skill" (Corbett, 2009, p. 57).

Upon examining past research, Chennat (2020) found that students with disabilities receiving instruction in the general education classroom did not get the type and intensity of support needed and struggled with the required academic tasks. In addition, the self-esteem of students with disabilities was often negatively impacted because of these academic struggles. DeSimone and Parmar (2006) conducted a descriptive study in a middle school setting to examine teachers' beliefs regarding teaching students with learning disabilities in inclusive classrooms. The findings of this study suggested that although teachers felt these students should be included, teachers were not sure how to effectively address the instructional needs of the students with learning disabilities (DeSimone & Parmar, 2006). The teachers did not find a difference between the results of instruction in the resource classroom versus instruction in the inclusion classroom. Teachers also indicated that they are unsure about how to motivate the students with disabilities and keep their attention (DeSimone & Parmar, 2006; NCES, 2020).

Strategies to Create Successful Inclusion

To achieve successful inclusion, stakeholders have to lay the groundwork. Several strategies can have a major impact on whether inclusion is effective. For example, providing training and professional development opportunities to teachers to help them better accommodate every child's learning needs and understand how to manage an inclusive classroom appropriately is one way to ensure school districts are effective. Creating a positive climate that embraces diversity helps inclusion become part of the school's culture. Also, ensuring collaboration and shared responsibility between all faculty and administration are very important components of inclusion success. Lastly, when teachers use different instructional strategies and provide modifications to the curriculum, they ensure that every student in their classroom receives the education to which they are entitled (Majoko, 2016).

Providing Training and Professional Development

Many practicing teachers do not have any prior training in special education and are not adequately prepared to teach students with disabilities. Leyser and Kirk (2004) found that general education teachers use strategies and adaptations directed toward the class as a whole and incorporate only minor or no modifications based on student needs. Administrators need to provide their staff with training and professional development opportunities that give them the knowledge and skills needed to implement inclusion in their classrooms successfully. Leyser and Kirk also reported that general education teachers had training needs in curriculum modification, differentiated instruction strategies, assessment of academic progress, behavior management, development of IEPs, and use of assistive technology.

Training should also be developed to help teachers understand the different disabilities that their students may possess and that they will be dealing with daily. As Leyser and Kirk

(2004) believed, training should be aimed at facilitating and using strategies to promote communication and collaboration with parents. More training also needs to be offered to teachers at the pre-service level. Leyser and Kirk stated that "a single three-credit-hour course in special education for education majors in the United States, is not enough" (p. 273). More positive attitudes toward inclusion involve the proper knowledge and skills because they would feel better prepared to include students with disabilities in their classroom. General education teachers would willingly embrace inclusion with few or no reservations if they received the guidance they needed (Leyser & Kirk, 2004).

Creating a Positive Climate that Embraces Diversity

Special educators move through the process with varying perceptions and experiences triggered by numerous variables such as teachers' attitude, administrative support, coteaching, integration of goals/accommodations, instructional/intervention strategies, and collaboration that either contribute to the success of inclusion or detract from the intentions of the legal regulations. The experiences and resulting perceptions of special educators can help identify the essential concerns that may promote a better understanding of inclusion practices, which can ultimately lead to satisfactory student learning outcomes.

Collaboration and Shared Responsibility

Collaborative discussions focus on students with disabilities in the regular education classroom, classroom problems, teaching practices, and resource sharing. The special educator has the task of networking with professionals both within and outside their field to better grasp the fundamental issues associated with ensuring student access to the general education curriculum. Collaboration is a strategy that advances inclusion and access to the general education classroom (Conderman & Johnston-Rodriguez, 2009). Although special educators

acknowledge the importance of collaboration, research showed that special education teachers found collaboration with general education teachers, parents, and paraprofessionals more challenging than paperwork. Collaboration takes center-stage when administrators at the district and school level search for appropriate strategies that would reveal the techniques that best promote serving students with disabilities in the general education classroom.

Although co-teaching has been identified in many districts as a viable process for including students with disabilities, researchers have recognized that simply placing teachers in a classroom to promote inclusion is not necessarily evidence of collaboration (Murawski & Goodwin, 2014). Working with others to obtain the best results of inclusion is a growing trend in administrators' approach. When special educators engage in collaboration with their colleagues, it is expected that they ensure students' needs are met in the general education classroom through instructional and management practices, there are ongoing collections and reviews of data, and their participation in classroom activities is influenced and directed by the regular education teacher.

The input of the special education teacher enables students with disabilities access the general education curriculum more effectively (Murawski & Goodwin, 2014). Planning together is one way teachers can effectively enhance the access of students with disabilities in the general education classroom. There is a definite need for proactive collaboration through the planning exercise. Collaboration with professionals is key to the inclusion process. For some special educators, it is a challenge; for others, it is a smooth interaction with colleagues who welcome their resources in making the necessary changes for inclusion to succeed.

Modifying Curriculum

Successful inclusive practices that integrate curriculum requirements and the needs of the students in the classroom benefit all students. Successful inclusive practices emphasize the need for collaboration among regular education teachers, administrators, and special educators, as well as student peers (Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2002). How students with disabilities are educated, and the setting in which they are educated have been greatly influenced by the IDEIA (2004). This reauthorization emphasizes higher expectations for students with disabilities and participation in the grade-level curriculum in the general classroom. This change in student learning outcomes has required more involvement of regular education teachers in the IEP process.

The IDEA regulations outline strict requirements for the regular education teacher. The regulations state that the regular education teacher of a child with a disability, as a member of the IEP team, must, to the extent appropriate, participate in the development of the IEP and determine appropriate positive behavioral interventions and supports, supplementary aids, and services and program modifications (Wright & Wright, 2007). General education teachers help develop the IEP and make recommendations for adaptations and accommodations appropriate for students with disabilities to access the general education classroom and the curriculum. These have become part of a body that engages in discussions about the needs of the students. Consequently, the special educator becomes involved in collaborative activities with the regular educator to address the many aspects and procedures of the IEP.

The Inclusion Model Redefined

Inclusion, integration, and mainstreaming are all terms that describe including children with disabilities in regular classrooms (Stein, 1994). Inclusion can be defined as a service delivery model that strives to ensure student success by providing special education services and

supports to students with special needs in the general education classroom (Brice & Miller, 2000). An inclusive classroom is an integrated setting where all children learn together, no children are specifically labeled as students with special needs, and all students use the same curriculum to make educational gains (Brice & Miller, 2000). In an inclusive classroom setting, all students are accepted as equals, regardless of their unique abilities or disabilities (Dixon, 2005). It is important to note that inclusion does not involve placing students with special needs in a regular education classroom without the necessary supports.

A student who has qualified for special education services may need support in the general education classroom, which could consist of the assistance of a paraprofessional, modifications to the curriculum, or push-in support from therapists or special education teachers (Dixon, 2005). Data from the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (2020) revealed that in the 2019-2020 school year, 62.7% of students, ages 6-21, who received special education services were educated in the general education classroom for at least 80% of the school day. This indicates an increase in inclusive placements from the 2006 school year, when only 55.2% of students with special needs were placed in the general education classroom (Office of Special Education, 2020). With the inclusion model on the rise within schools, it is important for educational stakeholders to understand the components needed to implement an effective inclusion program.

Critical Factors of Inclusion. For inclusion to be truly successful, careful planning needs to occur between all the educational stakeholders involved in the process (Obiakor et al., 2012). An inclusive experience will not benefit anyone if a child with special needs is simply dumped in the general education classroom when the general education teacher has no training and the necessary supports are not provided to the child in need. Monsen et al. (2014) conducted

a study on teachers' attitudes towards inclusion. In the study, 95 male and female elementary teachers with varying years of teaching experience completed a questionnaire that inquired about their feelings on different aspects of inclusion (Monsen et al., 2014). Results of the study revealed that teachers who felt they had inadequate support with inclusion were less likely to have a positive attitude about including students with special needs in their classroom (Monsen et al., 2014). Teacher attitudes play a huge role in creating a culture of inclusion; therefore, it is imperative that staff feel prepared and supported during the implementation of inclusion. Teacher training, administrative support, collaboration, and training for paraprofessionals must all be in place before an inclusive environment can flourish.

Teacher Attitudes and Training for General Education Teachers. One of the biggest factors that must be considered when preparing for an inclusive classroom is the attitude of and training for the general education teachers. Research indicates that general education teachers often do not feel that they have adequate skills or training to meet the needs of students with disabilities (Gilmour, 2018; Monsen et al., 2014). Teacher attitudes regarding inclusion are complex and are affected by numerous factors, including teacher attributes, self-efficacy, student disability categories, and school-based conditions (Salend & Garrick Duhaney, 1999).

Before implementing an inclusion service delivery model, general education teachers must receive training on best practices for including all students in a common classroom (Brice & Miller, 2000). Researchers have suggested that schools create an inclusion plan that clearly defines the level of inclusion, and the level of support the student will need to be successful in the general education classroom (Brice & Miller, 2000). General education teachers, and special education teachers, administrators, and parents, should contribute to developing a thorough inclusion plan for each child with special needs. The inclusion plan should specify who is

responsible for providing what type of instruction during the school day, and when that instruction will occur. The plan should also specify what type of training will be needed for paraprofessionals who will be involved in the child's inclusion plan (Brice & Miller, 2000). General education teachers need specific training to successfully implement an inclusion plan and ensure that students with special needs benefit from their placement in the regular education classroom.

Teacher Attitudes and Training for General Education Teachers. A study conducted by Monsen et al. (2014) revealed that younger teachers had significantly higher positive attitudes about including students with special needs in their classrooms, as opposed to teachers with more teaching experience. The results of this study indicated that experienced teachers might require more direct and intensive training to feel confident with adopting inclusive practices in their classrooms. In the same study, teachers expressed the most apprehension about including students with behavior disorders and multiple disabilities in their general education classrooms (Monsen et al., 2014).

In another study conducted by DeSimone et al. (2013), teacher respondents reported more comfort with including students with learning disabilities in the general education classroom. However, over one-fourth of the teacher participants shared their belief that the general education classroom might not be appropriate for students with severe disabilities (DeSimone et al., 2013). One way to improve teacher attitudes about inclusion for all students with special needs is to provide adequate training and support for general education teachers. Ideally, this training should be proactive and provided before placing a student with special needs in the general education classroom.

Types of Training for General Education Teachers. Inclusion for students with special needs involves more than just the students' physical presence in the general education classroom. The IDEA states that IEPs must list all the supplementary aids and services the child needs to be successful within the LRE (Lee et al., 2009). Supplementary aids and services could be curriculum modifications and adaptations, changes to the classroom's physical environment, access to assistive technology, and the support of a paraprofessional (Lee et al., 2009). General education teachers need training on how to provide some of these supplementary services.

Training for general education teachers must encompass strategies on differentiated instruction and how to keep students with special needs engaged in classroom activities by modifying the instructional activities and adapting the educational content, as needed (Harrower, 1999). Allowing students with special needs to choose how they demonstrate their knowledge on a given topic is one instructional adaptation the teacher could easily implement in a general education classroom. The special education teacher should provide the needed modifications. However, general education teachers will feel more empowered if they have a better understanding of how to modify classroom work for the students in their classroom.

Another effective strategy general education teachers need training on is priming, which consists of pre-teaching academic content that may be challenging prior to teaching the whole class (Harrower, 1999). General education teachers must also be aware of testing modifications such as extended time to take tests and supplementary aids, such as access to a calculator or a word prediction app that assists students as they are typing. General education teachers also should have training on how to utilize peers to ensure academic and social progress for students with special needs (Harrower, 1999). Teachers need to understand how to effectively incorporate cooperative learning groups, which include students with special needs.

Explicit peer training addressing the topics of age appropriateness, proper methods of helping, and general expectations of including students with special needs as equal members of the classroom need to be included in professional development trainings for general education teachers so they can create an inclusive culture within their classroom (Harrower, 1999). Jackson et al. (2000) asked experts in the field of moderate to severe disabilities to identify useful practices in inclusive education. According to the survey results, the promotion of inclusive values needs to be explicitly taught by the classroom teacher. It would be beneficial for general education teachers to receive training and tips on cultivating a culture of acceptance and community within their classrooms. The teacher will set the tone in the classroom, and the students will model their behavior according to how the teacher acts towards students with special needs.

Summary

Chapter 2 focused on the existing literature on the research problem. The researcher presented and synthesized the key findings and suggestions indicated in the existing research. A comprehensive review of the literature revealed that few studies have been conducted to determine the perspectives of special education teachers on the controversy of inclusion practices for students with disabilities in grades K-3 and 4-6. Besides, few researchers in this research field have employed a mixed-method exploratory sequential design to study the research phenomenon. In response, the researcher targeted 20 inclusion teachers in a suburban school district located in northwestern Pennsylvania. The researcher aimed to fill the gap in research, and this study could advance knowledge and contribute to the scholarship of inclusion for special education students. The focus in Chapter 3 is on the methodology. In Chapter 3, the researcher will introduce and cover the discussions of the description of research, the research approach,

instrumentation, validity, reliability, participants and setting, data collection procedures, ethical considerations and limitations, the data analysis procedures, and a summary.

CHAPTER 3

Description of Research

Integrating inclusion into classrooms requires teachers to have a positive view, plenty of time, energy, dedication, and assurance toward the process (Salisbury, 2006). However, each teacher is confronted with the everyday challenges of having to teach many different learning styles. These challenges require multi-tasking which may impact their effectiveness and perspective on instruction in the inclusive setting. It is important to study the views of special education teachers involved in the implementation process. The purpose of this study was to determine the perspectives of special education teachers on the controversy of inclusion practices for students with disabilities in two separate clusters, grades K-3 and 4-6, respectively. Specifically, this research explored the perspectives of special education teachers with various years of teaching experience and determined whether there is a difference in perspectives among primary and upper elementary school special education teachers.

The hypotheses for this study were:

H0: There is no significant difference in the perspectives of primary and upper elementary school special education teachers with various years of experience on having students with disabilities in an inclusion setting.

H1: There is a significant difference in the perspectives of primary and upper elementary special education teachers with various years of experience on having students with disabilities in an inclusion setting.

This study also addressed the following research questions:

1. Do various years of experience in special education impact teachers' perspectives regarding students with disabilities in an inclusion setting?

2. Do the perspectives of primary and upper elementary school special education teachers differ regarding educating students with disabilities in an inclusion setting?

In this chapter, the researcher presents a description of the research, the specific research approach, participants and setting, data collection procedures, ethical considerations, and the data analysis procedures. This chapter concludes with a discussion of issues that placed limitations on the study, followed by the summary.

Research Approach

A mixed-method with an explanatory sequential research design was used to examine the perspectives of special education teachers with various years of experience on students with disabilities in an inclusion setting. A mixed-method study combines both a qualitative and a quantitative research method (Kallio et al., 2016). An explanatory-sequential research design is a sequential approach used when the researcher is interested in following up the quantitative results with qualitative data (Kallio et al., 2016). It allows for the promptings and insights from one method to inform the use of another. This study aimed to employ surveys (i.e., Teacher Attitudes Toward Inclusion Scale—TATIS) and semi-structured interviews to uncover trends in thoughts and opinions, and to allow a deeper insight into this issue. Details of the two instruments are discussed in the Instrumentation section.

The Wilcoxon signed-rank test was used to analyze the categorical data and the data collected from surveys and semi-structured interviews. The Wilcoxon signed-rank test compares a sample median against a hypothetical median. The Wilcoxon matched-pairs signed-rank test computes the difference between each set of matched pairs, then follows the same procedure as the signed-rank test to compare the sample against the median (Cullen et al., 2010). Cullen et al. indicated this could produce the number of cases with a certain characteristic in each

category. The Likert scale and participation demographic data were utilized for the study. The data was then sorted into discrete mutually exclusive categories, and the frequency of occurrence within each category was counted (Cullen et al., 2010).

Instrumentation

Teacher attitudes toward the inclusion of students with disabilities in general education classrooms have been shown to be strong predictors of the success of efforts to create inclusive learning communities. Specifically, research has shown that when teachers have positive mindsets toward inclusion, they more readily adapt their teaching methods to meet various student learning needs (Cullen et al., 2010). This assumption suggested that the inclusion movement would benefit from research that identifies effective ways to assist teachers in forming positive attitudes and beliefs toward inclusion. Inquiries of this kind required instrumentation.

To address this need, Cullen et al. (2010) developed the TATIS. The TATIS is an instrument built around three components of teacher attitudes toward inclusive teaching: (a) attitudes toward students with disabilities in inclusive environments; (b) beliefs about professional roles and responsibilities; and (c) beliefs about the effectiveness of inclusion (Cullen et al., 2010). The research questions regarding years of experience in special education and primary vs. elementary settings influencing teachers' attitudes toward inclusion directly align with the TATIS instrument. Cullen et al. developed the TATIS for teachers who were both in-service and pre-service to assure maximum utility in all phases of professional development.

The research questions and hypotheses in this current study aligned with the questions in TATIS. The TATIS survey consists of 14 Likert scale questions with six demographic questions to obtain the participants' background information. Additionally, the questions retrieved

information about participants' experiences with inclusion. Likert scales are often used to dig deep into a specific topic to ascertain (in greater detail) what people think about it. Likert scales are also used for any other questions where one needs to measure sentiment about something specific, and seeks a deeper level of detail in the responses (Harrell & Bradley, 2009). The deeper level of detail is what survey experts call variance. The more variance one has, the better one is aware of the nuances regarding a person's thinking. Similarly, the Likert scale is a valuable and important part of survey research.

A Likert scale is an ordered scale from which respondents choose one option that best aligns with their view. It is often used to measure respondents' attitudes by asking the extent to which they agree or disagree with a particular question or statement (Harrell & Bradley, 2009). A typical scale might be ordered as *Strongly disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree,* and *Strongly agree*. Likert scales met the researcher's needs for surveying attitude, belief, and behavior. In this particular study, the Likert scale responses were on a scale of 1-7 consisting of: *1-Agree Very Strongly 2-Strongly Agree, 3-Agree, 4-Neither Agree nor Disagree 5-Disagree, 6-Strongly Agree, and 7-Disagree Very Strongly.* The items were developed from literature that identified the benefits and disadvantages of inclusion. Refer to Appendix A for the TATIS.

Another instrument used in this study was the semi-structured interview. A semi-structured interview is a meeting in which the interviewer does not strictly follow a formalized list of questions (Kallio et al., 2016). Instead, the interviewer asks more open-ended questions, allowing for a discussion with the interviewee rather than a straightforward question and answer format (Kallio et al., 2016). Semi-structured interviews were employed to elicit the perspectives of special education teachers on the controversy of inclusion practices for students with disabilities in two separate clusters, grades K-3 and 4-6, respectively.

Validity

The TATIS was subjected to a principal components analysis to confirm its construct validity. The procedure revealed three factors that accounted for just over 58% of the variance (Cullen & Noto, 2007). Commonalities for the 14 items ranged from 0.40 to 0.80, with a mean of 0.58. When the items were rotated using the Equamax method with Kaiser Normalization, the component loadings ranged from 0.584 to 0.88 with a mean of 0.72 (Cullen & Noto, 2007). The items found to load on the expected factors and the commonalities were similar to those of another survey called the APTATIS, from which the TATIS was developed. These results confirmed that the TATIS was successful in eliciting what it was designed to measure. Semi-structured interviews were valid instruments for this study because semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to ask open-ended questions to explore the research phenomenon.

Reliability

The reliability of the TATIS was confirmed through Cronbach's alpha correlation procedure (Cullen & Noto, 2007). The results revealed that along with the strong factor loadings indicating good content validity, the reliability of the instrument was found to have an overall correlation coefficient of 0.821 (Cullen & Noto, 2007). The reliability coefficients confirm that the TATIS is a reliable instrument for measuring teacher attitudes toward the inclusion of students with disabilities (Cullen & Noto, 2007).

Participants and Setting

The sample for this study was selected from the population of special education teachers who teach in primary (K-3) and upper elementary school (4-6) in a suburban school district located in northwestern Pennsylvania. The primary schools have an average of 89% free and reduced lunch population, and a 52% male and 48% female student population. The upper

elementary school has an average of 87% free and reduced lunch, and a 48% male and 52% female student population. The upper elementary student population consists of 31% Caucasian, 55% African American, and 14% Asian. Approximately 610 students are served in the school district in kindergarten through sixth grade. There are approximately 12 dedicated men and women in the special education teaching capacity in grades K-6. Teachers' experience ranges from 2–28 years, and certification in special education, N-12. The primary and elementary teaching staff identifies as Caucasian, with 70% female and 30% male teachers. The district includes one primary school and one upper elementary section. Purposive sampling was used to select 12 inclusion teachers in the district, all of whom were asked to complete the survey. Participants received a summary of the research document, which explained and guaranteed confidentiality and anonymity. Superintendent approval was also obtained prior to the survey distribution as deemed appropriate.

Data Collection Procedures

Permission to conduct the research was obtained from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Slippery Rock University for this research (Appendix C). The researcher sought the site permission for conducting the research. The instrument was then distributed to 20 participants through Survey Monkey, an online survey service. All the respondents consented before completing the questionnaire (Appendix B). Also, demographic questions were included to obtain information such as position, gender, years of teaching experience, courses, and teaching level. Participation in the survey was voluntary and kept anonymous by not revealing the participants' names and other demographic information. Participants were given the option to leave survey items blank if they did not want to provide the requested information. The consent form and survey were given to 12 special education teachers in primary and elementary schools

who had direct involvement with inclusion from the identified school district. The participants were asked to return the survey within one month. A follow-up notice was sent through email to all participants after one week, reminding them to complete the survey if they had not done so previously. A second follow-up notice was sent after two weeks. The response time for the survey closed after one month. The completed survey answers to each question were then analyzed.

Additionally, semi-structured interviews were conducted to obtain qualitative data on the research problem (Appendix D). All data collection started after each research participant granted their consent to attend the interview.

Research procedures can be summarized as follows:

1. Permission to conduct the research was obtained from the Sto-Rox Superintendent of Schools for this research. Following Superintendent approval, an IRB application was submitted to Slippery Rock University's IRB Office with all supporting documentation.
2. After approval from the IRB was granted, the researcher sought consent from each of the participants. Participation in the survey was voluntary and kept anonymous by not revealing the participants' names and other demographic information. Participants were given the option to leave survey items blank if they did not want to provide the requested information.
3. After obtaining all consent forms, the TATIS instrument was then distributed to participants through Survey Monkey. Demographic questions were included to obtain information such as position, gender, years of teaching experience, courses, and teaching level.

4. The consent form and survey were given to 12 district special education teachers in primary and upper elementary schools who had direct involvement with inclusion from the identified school district. The participants were asked to return the survey within one month.
5. A follow-up notice was sent through email to all participants after one week, reminding them to complete the survey if they had not previously done so. A second follow-up notice was sent after two weeks. The response time for the survey closed after one month. The completed survey answers to each question were then analyzed.
6. Qualitative data was collected from participants who agreed to participate in the semi-structured interviews.
7. The semi-structured interviews were conducted outside of school hours and arranged two weeks before data gathering. The setting was familiar to the participants, which reduced the risk for anxiety that could arise from a sense of exposure or loss of confidentiality.
8. Individuals responded at will and cooperatively as they desired. All participants were offered chances to explain and build upon the topic by adding thoughts as they arose.

Ethical Considerations and Limitations

All schools and teachers were treated with confidentiality and anonymity throughout the entire study. Based on the small number of participants, specific schools within the district were not named, and specificity beyond that information remained masked and anonymous. Informed consent forms were provided to all participants before including them and their responses to the data in this study. The findings were subjected to other interpretations, which constituted a limitation for this study. The survey was administered to special education teachers in the school district only. Finally, it is important to note that research was conducted during a national

pandemic, and factors such as remote, hybrid, and traditional instructional practices might affect the study.

Data Analysis Procedures

The data collected from this study were analyzed using measures of correlation. More specifically, a correlational design was used to test the hypotheses and determine whether there was a significant relationship between teachers' years of experience and perspectives on having students with disabilities in an inclusion setting. The .05 alpha level was used for the level of significance. Pearson's *r* was used with the data, except basic assumptions were violated, in which case, nonparametric correlation was used, namely Spearman's ρ (rho). Spearman's ρ test examines the concordance of ranked values of two continuous variables by using ranks and now absolute values. It does not rely on variance in the same way the parametric correlation (Pearson's *r*) does and can be used with non-normally distributed data. The analytical technique creates a score ranging from -1.00 to 1.00. These extreme values represent a perfect negative or positive relationship, respectively. Values close to 0.00 indicate the lack of a meaningful relationship.

Data from semi-structured interviews remained confidential to protect participant's contributions (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Data was viewed and analyzed. The results were then shared with the participants to ensure that the data analyzed was done correctly. Common statements, themes, words, and phrases were re-played to clarify what was stated by the participants. The interviews were transcribed into text-based documents immediately after each interaction. After the transcription, the responses were coded by the themes, words, and phrases using Survey Monkey's statistical software. This was then used to write the analysis of the

participants' personal experiences as a special education teacher, and their opinions regarding having students with disabilities in an inclusion setting.

Summary

In Chapter 3, the focus was on methodology. Topics covered in Chapter 3 included discussions of the description of research, the research approach, instrumentation, validity, reliability, participants and setting, data collection procedures, ethical considerations and limitations, data analysis procedures, and a summary. The research design for the study was a mixed explanatory sequential design. The instruments for data collection included both quantitative surveys and semi-structured interviews. To improve the quality of the research findings, the researcher also discussed establishing the validity and reliability of the study. The researcher also detailed the ethical assurances and the limitations of the study. In Chapter 4, the focus will be on the data analysis, results, and findings of the study.

CHAPTER 4

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine any possible relationship that may exist between teacher inclusion beliefs and years spent in a special education environment. The results of the mixed-methods study are presented in the two main sections of this chapter. The first main section is a presentation of the quantitative results. The second main section is a presentation of the qualitative findings. A summary concludes this chapter.

Quantitative Results

In this chapter, the researcher will cover how the quantitative data were processed and scored after collection. Also described will be the demographic characteristics of the final sample and the study variables. Data analysis procedures and results will then be described, and a summary provided.

Demographics

The final sample consisted of 20 individuals. They were primarily between 30 and 60 years of age (75.00%), from the southwestern region of Pennsylvania (90.00%), and had a household income between $25k to $99k per year (55%). A full accounting of the sample demographics can be found in Table 1.

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of the Final Sample

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Age		
18-29	2	10.00%
30-44	7	35.00%
45-60	8	40.00%
> 60	1	5.00%
Missing	2	10.10%
Gender		
Female	10	50.00%
Male	8	40.00%
Missing	2	10.00%
Household Income		
$10,000-$24,999	1	5.00%
$25,000-$49,999	3	15.00%
$50,000-$74,999	3	15.00%
$75,000-$99,999	5	25.00%
$100,000-$124,999	1	5.00%
$125,000-$149,999	2	10.00%
$150,000-$174,999	2	10.00%
$200,000+	1	5.00%
Missing	2	10.00%
Region		
Middle Atlantic	18	90.00%
Missing	2	10.00%

Note. n = 20.

Inclusion Attitude Scoring Procedure

An overall score of teacher attitudes toward inclusion was created from item-responses to the TATIS. Four items from the TATIS (7-10) were reverse-scored so that higher levels of agreements would indicate more acceptance of an integrated learning environment. An example of a reverse-scored item is TATIS #7 “Students with mild to moderate disabilities should not be

taught in regular classes with non-disabled peers because they will require too much of the teacher's time." After this, an average of all 14 items was taken as a general indicator of inclusion attitudes. By taking an average, the Likert-scale ranging from 1-5, with higher values indicating more agreement with an integrated learning environment, was preserved.

Quantitative Analysis

Before analysis was conducted, the two quantitative variables of interest were examined. Notably, a Shapiro-Wilk test showed that the data measuring the number of years spent in a special education environment were not normally distributed ($W(20) = 0.79$, $p = .001$). The variable showed a high positive skew (1.60), due in part to 30.00% of the sample having 0 years of experience in a special education environment. For this reason, non-parametric correlational techniques were used. A full accounting of the descriptive statistics of study variables can be found in Table 2, and a histogram for Years in Special Education with a superimposed normal curve can be found in Figure 3.

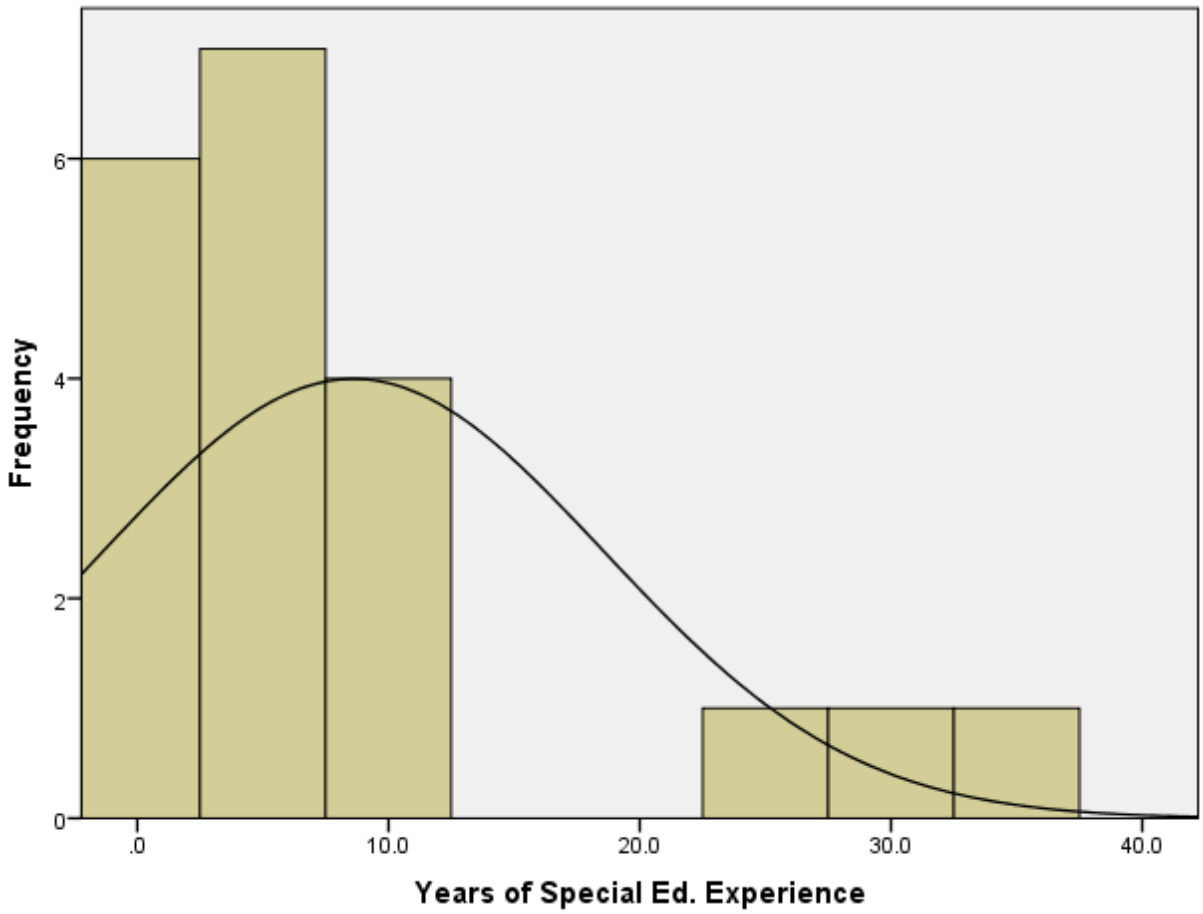
Table 2

Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables

	n	Mean	Standard Deviation	Skewness
Inclusion Attitudes	20	3.59	0.76	0.25
Years in a Special Education Environment	20	8.60	9.98	1.60

Figure 3

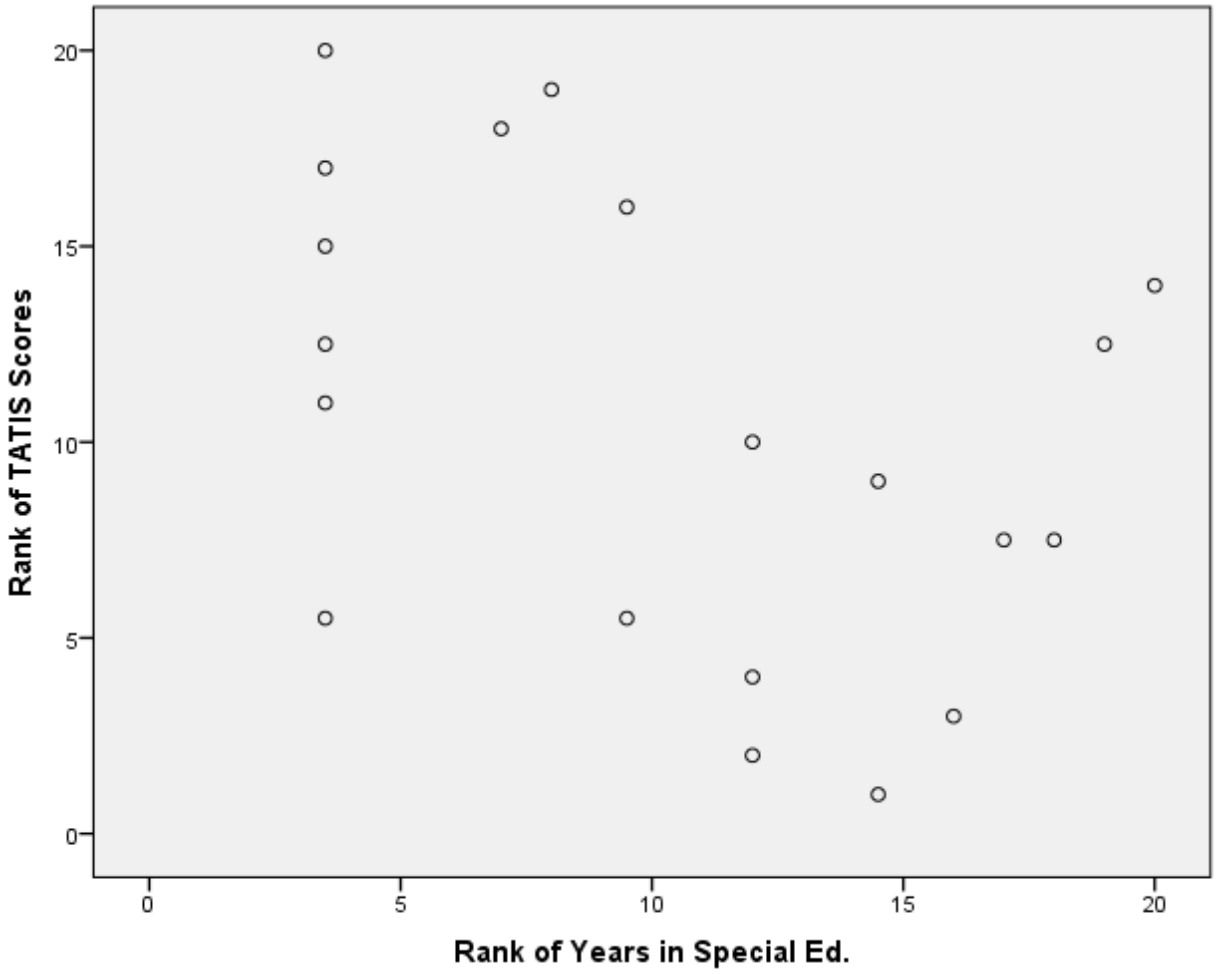
Histogram of Years in Special Education with Normal Curve



When inclusion attitudes and years spent in a special education environment were examined, the results were not statistically significant (ρ = -.42, p = .07). In addition, there was no statistically significant evidence to show a meaningful relationship between inclusion attitudes and years spent in a special education environment. A scatterplot of ranked values of the two variables can be found in Figure 4. Scatterplots are the standard visualization for displaying correlational relationships, and in this case ranks are used because the non-parametric correlational statistic used (ρ) is calculated with ranked values rather than raw scores.

Figure 4

Scatterplot of Ranked Values of TATIS Scores by Years in Special Education



Qualitative Findings

This chapter section is a presentation of the qualitative findings. Qualitative data was provided by the same sample of 20 participants who provided quantitative data. In the first subsection, the qualitative data analysis procedure is described. The second subsection contains the presentation of the findings.

Qualitative Data Analysis

Qualitative data was elicited from the sample of 20 participants through the seven open-ended questionnaire items. The data was compiled and downloaded as a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet and then imported as a source file into NVivo 12 computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software for analysis. The qualitative data were analyzed using the inductive, thematic procedure described by Braun and Clarke (2006). In the first step of the qualitative analysis, the data was read and reread to gain familiarity (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The second step of the analysis involved open coding of the data. Open coding was conducted by labeling excerpts from the responses with brief, descriptive phrases to indicate their meanings.

In NVivo, excerpts from the responses were assigned to nodes. Each node represented an initial code. The nodes were labeled descriptively. Response excerpts with similar meanings were assigned to the same node. For example, P1 stated that special education students in inclusion settings could be “very needy.” P18 stated, “Children with mental disabilities require more attention” from teachers. These two responses were assigned to an NVivo node, along with 12 other similar responses, and given the descriptive label: Inclusion risks include increased burden on teachers. Table 3 indicates the codes identified during Step 2 of the analysis and the number of data excerpts assigned to each of them.

Table 3

Data Analysis Initial Codes

Initial code	*n* of response excerpts included
Inclusion benefits other students	4
Inclusion benefits special education students	4
Inclusion has unspecified benefits	4
Inclusion risks include additional burden on teachers	14
Inclusion risks include bullying of special education students	2
Inclusion risks include potential for special education students to disrupt instruction	6
Inclusion risks include special education student lack of success	20
More support from current staff is needed	7
More training for teachers is needed	4
Positive impact of years of experience	8
Special education students described as like other children	7

The third step of the analysis involved clustering related initial codes into themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Codes were clustered when they were related as interdependent parts of a larger, overarching pattern in participants' responses. In NVivo, theming the data involved assigning the nodes representing related codes to the same parent node, which represented the theme. Table 4 indicates how the codes were grouped to form themes.

Table 4

Grouping of Initial Codes into Major Themes

Theme Initial code grouped to form theme	*n* of response excerpts included
Risks of inclusion are special education student lack of success, increased burden on teachers, and class disruptions	53
Inclusion risks include additional burden on teachers	
Inclusion risks include bullying of special education students	
Inclusion risks include potential for special education students to disrupt instruction	
Inclusion risks include special education student lack of success	
More support from current staff is needed	
More training for teachers is needed	
Inclusion can benefit all students	27
Inclusion benefits other students	
Inclusion benefits special education students	
Inclusion has unspecified benefits	
Positive impact of years of experience	
Special education students described as like other children	

The fourth step of the analysis involved reviewing and refining the themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The two themes were reviewed and compared to ensure that they were sufficiently distinct to constitute separate themes and accurately represented patterns in participants' responses. In the fifth analysis step, the themes were assigned the propositional names that appear in Table 4. The sixth step involved creating the following presentation of the findings.

Qualitative Analysis Findings

This presentation of the qualitative findings is organized under the two major themes that emerged during data analysis. The first theme was: risks of inclusion are special education

student lack of success, increased burden on teachers, and class disruptions. The second theme was: inclusion can benefit all students.

Theme 1: Risks of Inclusion are Special Education Student Lack of Success, Increased Burden on Teachers, and Class Disruptions. Participants indicated that teaching special education students in an inclusion setting had the potential to benefit all students, but they emphasized that inclusion is associated with significant risks that supports are needed to mitigate. The risk participants most frequently associated with teaching special education students in an inclusion setting was that the special education students would be unable to succeed in the faster pace of instruction and higher-stimulus environment of a standard classroom. Participants also cited increased teacher burden and class disruptions impacting the academic success of other students as risks of inclusion.

Participants expressed the perception that special education students may be unsuccessful in an inclusion setting if the pace and style of instruction were not aligned with their needs or if the stimuli in a standard classroom overwhelmed their ability to focus and cope. P7 stated of special education students in an inclusion setting, “I feel the [special education] kids may be distracted, unmotivated, will not be successful unless [instruction] moves at slower level.” P16 stated that special education students may not succeed in an inclusion setting because they are, “Easily distracted.” P19 expressed a perception similar to P16’s in responding, “Some [special education] students just do not do well when in a larger classroom. There is too much stimulation.” Because of the potential for the instructional methods in an inclusion setting not to meet all special education students’ needs, P10 indicated concerning inclusion placement for those students, “Sometimes it’s setting them up to fail.” P17 warned that if special education students are unsuccessful in an inclusion setting, “It can kill their confidence.”

Participants also indicated that placing special education students in an inclusion setting can result in an additional burden on teachers, who may need to offer significant, individualized, supplementary supports to meet special needs. P1 said, regarding teacher experiences of assisting special education students in an inclusion classroom, “Oftentimes, it takes a lot of energy.” P2 expressed a reason why teaching special education students can require additional effort on the part of teachers in stating instruction, “Trying to figure out how to explain the material differently, so they [special education students] understand.” P13 indicated that an additional burden might be placed on teachers because some special education students, “Lack social skills, don’t remain on task, struggle with assignments, need individualized instruction, need prompting.” According to P3, the success of special education students in an inclusion classroom can depend in large part on the, “Ability of teacher[s] to slow down or revise plans to accommodate different learning styles.”

The risk of inclusion to which participants referred least frequently was the potential for special education students to disrupt instruction in ways that impede the academic success of the general education students in the classroom. P5 expressed the perception that in an inclusion setting, general education students “won’t advance as fast” because of disruptions of instruction by special education students. P7 stated, about special education students, “Some have behaviors that may disrupt classes.” P19 regarded inclusion as potentially beneficial for all students but added the caveat, “The problem comes in when a [special education] student is disruptive and prevents others from learning.” Regarding the appropriate placement of disruptive special education students, P19 expressed the perception, “Some students are too disruptive due to [negative] behaviors and need to be in a classroom where they can be more 1:1 with a teacher.”

Participants indicated that for special education and general education teachers to overcome the challenges of inclusion and effectively promote the success of all students, two main supports are needed. First, participants indicated that support from other teachers is needed to promote the success of all students in inclusion classrooms. P20 described the needed support as, “Support from other staff members,” and P1 expressed a similar perception in stating that the needed support was, “Better help from other teachers.” P5 expressed a need for general education teachers to provide more support for special education teachers: “Teachers that deal with disabled children [need to be] involved as well as regular teachers.”

The second kind of support for which participants expressed a need was additional training for teachers. P9 stated, regarding current support needs, “I think more education for instructors across the board is needed.” P14 indicated that teachers need, “Better training” in successfully managing an inclusion classroom, and P6 expressed a similar perception in stating that teachers need, “Time and training” to promote the success of all students better. The additional needed supports would require administrative backing, P4 indicated, stating that a needed support is, “Buy-in from administration to support different styles of teaching to break up lesson time.” P3 indicated a need for, “Buy-in from above [administrators]” to ensure that teachers receive needed supports.

Theme 2: Inclusion Can Benefit All Students. Although participants associated the practice of teaching special education students in inclusion settings with significant risks, they also indicated that when needed supports are made available to teachers and students, inclusion had the potential to benefit all students. P12 stated of inclusion, “I agree it’s good for all the students.” P16 specified that inclusion could benefit general education students because, “It could help other students become used to those with disabilities and could be a good thing.” P14

stated of special education students, “They offer a different perspective” to general education students.

Participants also indicated that inclusion has the potential to benefit special education students. P15 indicated that when general education peers are accepting of special education students, “Some of the benefits of tolerance for children with disabilities are friendship skills, peer modeling, problem-solving skills, positive self-image, and respect for others.” P20 indicated that instruction in an inclusion classroom could benefit special education students because, “I think it’s important for them to feel normal.” P9 indicated that inclusion was potentially beneficial for special education students because, “Students with disabilities are like other students, in that they have varying degrees of abilities and interests and learn in different ways.”

Participants indicated that experience on the part of teachers was a factor that contributed to the success of all students in inclusion settings. P14 stated, on their years of experience teaching special education students, “It has allowed me to be a better teacher.” P6 wrote about teacher experience, “It would be a welcome asset,” and P5 stated, “It helps [teachers] to have experience” teaching special education students.

Chapter Summary

The data originally collected from 50 participants was narrowed down to 20 cases based on the usability and meaningfulness of both open-ended and specific responses. A score for teacher inclusion attitudes was created by averaging TATIS items after reverse scoring some items to preserve the valence of agreement. Due to many participants having no experience in a special education environment, the data for this variable showed a high positive skew, which necessitated using nonparametric statistics. Analysis could not show a meaningful relationship between inclusion attitudes and years spent in a special education environment.

During the analysis of the qualitative data, two major themes emerged. The first theme was: risks of inclusion are special education student lack of success, increased burden on teachers, and class disruptions. Participants indicated that teaching special education students in an inclusion setting had the potential to benefit all students; however, they emphasized that inclusion is associated with significant risks that supports are needed to mitigate. The risk participants most frequently associated with teaching special education students in an inclusion setting was that the special education students would be unable to succeed in the faster pace of instruction and higher-stimulus environment in a standard classroom. Participants also cited increased teacher burden and class disruptions impacting the academic success of other students as risks of inclusion.

The second qualitative theme was: inclusion can benefit all students. Participants indicated that when needed supports are made available to teachers and students, inclusion had the potential to benefit all students. General education students can benefit from learning tolerance and from exposure to the diverse perspectives offered by special education students. Special education students can benefit from learning to cope and navigate both socially and academically in a general education classroom. Teacher experience was perceived as a factor that promoted beneficial instruction for all students in inclusion classrooms. Chapter 5 includes the discussion, interpretation, implications, and recommendations based on these results.

CHAPTER 5

Summary of Findings

In this chapter, the researcher will summarize and interpret the findings from the present study. The implications of the findings and limitations of this study will also be discussed. Lastly, the chapter will end with several recommendations for future research and some concluding remarks. To successfully implement inclusive practices in the classroom, knowledge of teachers' perspectives on the matter is critical. This may be deemed even more important for special education teachers, who often teach general education students and special education students in the same setting (Kirby, 2017). Both groups of students require different teaching strategies, varying levels of teacher attention, and learning aids, which can place undue stress on teachers. Should teachers perceive a lack of support from their schools or be ill-prepared to adapt to an inclusion setting, the teaching environment can be further dampened (DeVries et al., 2018). Therefore, the present study was conducted to determine any possible relationships between teacher inclusion beliefs and years spent in a special education environment. The goal of the present study was primarily to enhance understanding of the perspectives of special education teachers regarding the implementation of inclusion practices for students with disabilities in general primary and elementary school classes.

A combination of questionnaire items and semi-structured interview questions were utilized to help answer the hypotheses and research questions of interest in this study. Notably, preliminary analyses showed that the data was not normally distributed for the variable measuring the number of years spent in a special education environment. This was most likely due to a third of the participants having indicated that they had no previous experience in a special education environment. Further analysis of the questionnaire data revealed insufficient

evidence to suggest a meaningful relationship between teacher inclusion beliefs and the number of years spent in a special education environment. Analysis of the interview data revealed two major themes: (a) risks of inclusion are special education student lack of success, increased burden on teachers, and class disruptions; and (b) inclusion can benefit all students. Overall, these findings contributed to current literature concerning what factors influence teacher inclusion beliefs specific to teaching special education students in general education classrooms.

Interpretation of Findings

Beginning in the 1990s and continuing into the 2000s, revisions to the IDEA have placed increasingly greater emphasis on ensuring that students with disabilities are provided with the services and opportunities they require to learn alongside their general education peers (Robertson & Valentine, 1999). Combining that with the introduction of programs like the NCLB Act of 2001—which stresses that all students should make significant improvements in their academic achievement from year-to-year (Ed.gov, 2012)—many teachers have had to face unique challenges surrounding inclusion implementation for classrooms where special education and general education students are taught together (Salisbury, 2006). Therefore, additional research in this setting was essential to enhance understanding of teachers' perspectives on the feasibility and benefits of inclusion for the teachers and the students they teach. The following sections review the qualitative and quantitative findings from the present study, which attempted to add valuable information to the research in this area.

Qualitative Results

The first purpose of this study was to explore teacher inclusion beliefs to understand the individual perceptions of special education inclusion better. The main concerns expressed by teachers during their interview sessions were that inclusion could potentially harm special education student success, disrupt the learning of general education students, lead to bullying of special education students, and place undue burden on teachers. These results were in line with past research linking a lack of teacher training, support, and reassurance with more negatively nuanced beliefs regarding the effectiveness of inclusive classrooms and the feasibility of maintaining an inclusive classroom environment where all students can receive the best education possible (de Boer et al., 2011; Hammond & Ingalls, 2003; Lambe & Bones, 2006). Additionally, the interview technique employed in the present study to gather participant data has been used in prior research that obtained similar results. For example, in the qualitative case study by Kelley (2017), the participants held similar views that sufficient, continued training and resource support was essential for the successful implementation of inclusion in the classroom.

Ideally, an inclusive classroom is one in which all students learn together following the same curriculum to meet their educational needs, and without explicit labels such as ‘general’ or ‘special education’ being used to categorize them (Brice & Miller, 2000). This type of inclusion implementation process often requires teachers to possess a positive view of inclusion and devote plenty of time, energy, and dedication to achieving both successful inclusion practices and adequate academic achievement among their students (Salisbury, 2006). As a result of such resource demands, teachers often require assistance in the form of additional support staff or learning aids to maximize their instructor potential to meet the challenges of successful inclusion (Huberman & Parrish, 2011; Salend & Garrick Duhaney, 2011). When these forms of support

are not available or provided to teachers, it can greatly impact their attitudes towards inclusion efforts (Shin et al., 2014), as is reflected in the present study's qualitative findings.

Even though the participants in the present study expressed such concerns about inclusion, many also acknowledged that inclusion does have the potential to benefit all students—both general students and special education students alike. As evidenced by the second theme to emerge from the data analyses, participants expressed views that inclusion has both specified and unspecified benefits (e.g., promoting positive social norms, offering the opportunity to encounter diverse perspectives). Additionally, exposure to inclusive classroom environments also provides unique learning experiences for teachers, which helps them improve as educators in the long run. Prior research by Buell et al. (1999), and Salend and Garrick Duhaney (1999) supports these views. Supporting teachers by way of focused training and unique classroom experiences can enhance their self-efficacy; thus, promoting a greater appreciation for, and desire to implement, inclusion practices in these teachers' classrooms.

Quantitative Results

The second purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between teacher inclusion beliefs and years spent in a special education environment. Findings from the present study indicated that there was no statistically significant evidence to indicate a meaningful relationship between inclusion attitudes and years spent in a special education environment. Overall, the overwhelming view held by teachers regarding inclusion is that training and support in multiple forms are required for them to successfully teach all students in the same classroom setting, under the same general instruction (Horne & Timmons, 2009). In the present study, these views held regardless of how many years of experience the participants had in a special education environment, as opposed to the alternative hypothesis proposed by the researcher,

which stated that there would be a significant difference in the perspectives of primary and upper elementary special education teachers with various years of experience on having students with disabilities in an inclusion setting. These findings also diverged from previous studies, like those of Monsen et al. (2014), which revealed that experienced teachers tended to express more negative attitudes about including students with special needs in their classrooms when compared with less experienced teachers.

Because the sample size of the present study was limited to 20 participants, it is possible that the small sample at least partially accounted for the nonsignificant result found. Possibly, if a larger sample size had been utilized—or, a more normally distributed sample of participants who had experience teaching in a special education environment was available—then the results of the quantitative analysis may have turned out differently. Further, perhaps using only the TATIS scale (Cullen et al., 2010) was not a sufficient quantitative method to produce the desired results; the results may have turned out differently had additional 'inclusion experience' or 'teaching experience' scales been utilized with the participants in this study. Nevertheless, the findings showed that careful attention needs to be paid to teacher training, teacher support resources, student support services, and continuous collaboration among educational stakeholders at all levels of the academic institution where inclusion is being implemented for the benefit of the students and teachers (Obiakor et al., 2012)

Implications of Findings

Inclusion entails the placement of special education students in the LRE that still enables them to be the most academically and socially successful (Robertson & Valentine, 1999). In recent decades, the consensus has been increasing among scholars and practitioners that the LRE for special education students should be the general education classroom due to the benefits it

has for both special education and general education students; thus, the emphasis on implementing successful inclusion to reach this ideal continues to grow (Audette & Algozzine, 1997). The results of the present study revealed several important insights regarding the specific needs and hesitations of teachers who are attempting to educate all students within the same, inclusive classroom setting. Years of teaching in a special education environment did not appear to significantly impact these teachers' views of inclusion implementation based on the results of this study. Both the qualitative and quantitative results provide a basis for enacting positive social change at the individual, family, organizational, and societal levels in the future.

There are many possibilities for positive social change at these various levels. For example, understanding the needs and hesitancies of current teachers should prompt school administrators and education advocates to invest in additional teacher training opportunities to increase teacher confidence, expose teachers to new teaching tactics, train teacher support staff to focus on supporting all students and their headteachers appropriately, update classroom learning aids to reflect the latest educational research, and continue to spread awareness about the benefits of inclusive learning environments. Additionally, as the students figure out how to help each other learn and socialize effectively in the same environment, they would be exposed to the differences they each possess early on in their lives, and would have a head start on learning how to appreciate these differences long before they enter the "real world" and adulthood. As a result of schools working with teachers to provide the best possible environment for all students to learn, socialize, and feel included, the families of general education students may become more accepting of special education students learning alongside their children (Wilson & Michaels, 2006). Also, the families of special education students would feel less of the stigma associated with having a child with special needs that currently exists across much of

the world (Kalambouka et al., 2007). Lastly, over time, the combination of positive social change being enacted at the individual, family, and organizational levels should ultimately lead to a positive shift in societal beliefs about special education student capabilities and the benefits of inclusion for all.

Theoretical, Research, and Practical Implications

The results of the present study are generally in line with previous research on teacher attitudes regarding special education students in inclusion environments. As suggested by the participants, placing special education students in the same classroom environment as general students is not enough. Rather, additional supports (e.g., technological learning aids and a diverse array of tailorable teaching methods; Lee et al., 2009) are needed to ensure that teachers are adequately trained to navigate the unique needs of special education students and that these students can thrive alongside their general education peers.

These conclusions are similar to those of O'Connor et al. (1996), who noted that cooperative learning models should be implemented in inclusion classrooms so that students have greater access to support resources if needed. Cooperative learning models are a unique instructional approach focused on leveraging a heterogenous group of students' varying backgrounds, skills, and abilities for the benefit of individual and overall class learning outcomes (O'Connor et al., 1996). For example, general and special education students could participate in reading exercises together under the guidance of a teacher that has been trained in cooperative learning best practices, with the goal of students teaching and learning reading skills from one another together. Cooperative learning approaches such as these could help special education students gain greater independence and knowledge by working interactively with their peers, teachers, and available classroom support stimuli. Further studies on the nuances of teacher

attitudes and their teaching experiences will further improve the learning environment for both general education and special education students, and increase the confidence that teachers have in their ability to educate diverse groups of students effectively.

The findings of this study provided valuable insights on teacher attitudes towards inclusion through the methodological techniques employed. However, one way to further the research on this topic would be to interview not just teachers, but also students—especially those who have experience in inclusion settings. Students new to inclusion environments have to make similar adjustments as (if not more so than) teachers do as regards interacting with and learning alongside students traditionally labeled as "different." Thus, obtaining student perspectives on inclusion and their experience with special education students in inclusion settings and combining them with the results of the present study would extend the boundaries of this research and provide a more comprehensive basis for enacting real-world change.

Finally, as noted briefly in previous sections, the practical implications of the present study's findings are many. For instance, these results could be used by educators to lobby for additional personnel and educational resources like interactive technologies or increased funding for educational field trips. These findings could also be referenced in the development of specific training modules that would help teachers understand that they are not alone in feeling the pressures associated with inclusion, and that there are instructional/social practices they can engage in among themselves and with their students that would benefit everyone both inside and outside of the classroom. Therefore, schools would be wise to utilize the results of this study to diversify their instructional strategies, types of student assignments, evaluative methods, and general overall approach to educating students of differing backgrounds (Idol, 2006). In doing so, students may benefit from greater feelings of accomplishment and stronger social ties, while

school administrators will benefit from higher test scores and fewer instances of peer bullying and disruptive student behavior (Giangreco, 2007; Voltz et al., 2001).

Limitations of the Study

Even the most renowned scientific studies have limitations that should be addressed in some form, and the present study is no exception. Limitations are issues that may affect a study's procedures or results—regardless of whether or not they were within the researcher's ability to control or account for. Several design limitations and implementation limitations will be discussed in the subsections below.

Design Limitations

Due to the nature and scope of this study, it would have been very difficult for the researcher to gather interview data from a large number of participants due to time and scheduling constraints. Therefore, a decision was made to limit the final participant sample to 20 individuals who fit the sampling criteria. It is possible that this sample size was still too small to allow significant quantitative data to be generated, even though it was a sufficient size to uncover common themes in the qualitative data. Future research on this topic may benefit from employing a larger research team so that participant recruitment and testing can be expanded.

To communicate more easily with participants being interviewed, the researcher chose to purposefully sample a handful of special education teachers from a particular location in southwestern Pennsylvania. Additionally, the present study only focused on primary and elementary teachers; no middle or high school teachers participated. These factors of geographic location, public/private distinction, and grade specificity could elicit some concerns about the generalizability of this study's findings. Regarding geographic location, the general population in different regions across the United States (and around the world) could view inclusion more

negatively or positively and could already have various policies regarding inclusion practices in schools. Thus, skepticism remains about whether the results of this study would hold true outside of the specific region sampled. Furthermore, it may have been beneficial for the researcher to gather demographic data from teacher participants in both public and private schools at the time of their participation. This is because it is common for private institutions to have larger budgets due to the tuition fees they charge, which enables them to provide a greater breadth of resources to their students to help them succeed in school (Riley et al., 1997).

The results of the present study may or may not be generalizable to both public and private institutions. Comparatively, public school budgets are largely determined by taxes in their local area—meaning that wealthier areas typically receive more funding than poorer areas to enhance their students' learning (Riley et al., 1997). Thus, funding is a factor that should be assessed in future studies to increase generalizability across contexts. Finally, the scope of the current study limited the participants to only those who taught in primary or elementary grades. However, special education students continue to study in middle and high school just like their general education peers. Future studies could extend the research of the present one to determine whether teachers' views regarding inclusion hold even into students' secondary education curriculum where the number and difficulty of classes often increase quite dramatically compared to elementary school.

Lastly, another design limitation in the present study was that only one scale (TATIS) was used for the quantitative portion of the study. If some additional scales had been used to gather data on factors like teacher confidence, experience with inclusion settings, or teacher training experiences, then more correlational analysis may have been conducted, leading to greater chances of finding some significant results. Alternatively, the researcher could have

chosen to recruit some student participants as well; and, adapt the TATIS (or use a different scale) to assess student views of inclusion and their experiences with it. Future research should consider following these study design changes to expand the scope of the current study and incorporate the possibility for more comparative analyses to be conducted.

Problems During Implementation

In addition to study design limitations, there were also several problems that arose—or may have arisen—during implementation of the present study. First, an important demographic characteristic observed during data analysis was that the sample of teacher participants in this study all indicated their race as 'White.' Due to this, the researcher cannot be sure that the TATIS answers or the views expressed by teachers during their interviews would be generalizable to teachers of other races, because experiences can vary depending on the school, the surrounding community make-up, and the general treatment of teachers of color over time. Future research should attempt to address this issue by recruiting a more diverse sample of teachers.

Another important limitation of this study noted in an earlier chapter is that this research was conducted during the global COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, interviews could not all be conducted in person, and online video communication platforms were necessary. The implications here are two-fold. One, not all of the teacher participants may have had the same level of familiarity with online communication platforms or video interview etiquette, meaning that execution of study procedures could not be kept strictly uniform. Two, the semi-structured interviews were conducted outside of school hours, which could have increased the burden on teacher participants who may have had outside obligations to attend to—especially since they were volunteering their time to participate in this study. The pandemic placed a great deal of

stress on many teachers who quickly adapted to online teaching and tried to keep students engaged during class time without being physically present to guide them. It would be interesting to replicate the present study after the pandemic subsides and schools resume their normal operations.

The next limitation concerns the SurveyMonkey platform used to house the survey and analyze the quantitative and qualitative data. Firstly, as was explained in Chapter 4, a sizeable number of potential participants were removed from consideration because their answers to questions were too short or did not adequately address what was being asked. These lackluster responses could have simply been the result of lackadaisical respondents; however, it is important to consider the alternatives, namely participant fatigue or unclear survey instructions. For example, the survey may have contained certain jargon that respondents were not familiar with. It is unreasonable to expect respondents to look up the meaning of words on their own, as it is the responsibility of the researcher to clarify beforehand any terms that may need additional explanation for the average layperson to understand. Respondents may have become too stressed or tired of trying to understand unfamiliar words or confusing instructions on their own, resulting in boredom and minimal effort given on their part to complete the survey to the best of their ability.

Likewise, related to the SurveyMonkey platform is the limitation that SurveyMonkey's statistical software capabilities may not have been sufficient to accurately analyze the TATIS data and transcribed interview data. While the researcher used SurveyMonkey to assess the interview data transcribed in NVivo, SurveyMonkey was not originally designed to be a statistical software program. It is true that the platform has increased its analytic capabilities over the years, and it may indeed have been sufficient to analyze the data for this study. Nevertheless,

using a dedicated statistical software program like SPSS or R in combination with NVivo to analyze the qualitative data may have been more beneficial.

Additionally, as was noted in a subsection of Chapter 4, data on the 'years of experience in a special education environment' was not normally distributed, forcing the researcher to change their analytic tactic from the Pearson's *r* correlation to the Spearman's ρ (rho) non-parametric correlation. The Pearson correlation is based on the raw data and evaluates the linear relationship between two continuous variables. In contrast, the Spearman correlation is based on ranked values created for each variable rather than the raw data. So, the nonsignificant findings for the quantitative analysis may have turned out differently had the data been normally distributed, allowing for the use of the Pearson correlation. Correlation does not imply causation, however, so alternative methods would need to be developed and implemented to truly evaluate what contributes to certain views on the inclusion of special education students in general education classrooms.

Recommendations for Future Research

Due to the present study's limitations, several recommendations for future research should be considered to further develop the current literature base and expand on the present study's findings. These recommendations will be reviewed in the subsections below.

Recommendation #1: Expand Participant Criteria

As identified in the limitations section, the criteria that potential participants need to meet to proceed with the study could be expanded upon. For example, in the present study, race, age, and gender were not considered during the recruitment phase. While the participants recruited for this study were limited to a certain geographic location, future researchers may not face such strict location limitations. Therefore, future researchers could try to recruit teacher participants

who are more racially diverse. Including a more diverse sample of teachers may allow future researchers to conduct comparative analyses surrounding the views and experiences of teachers in special education environments, which was not the focus of this particular study. In doing so, researchers may uncover significant themes that vary according to race/ethnicity. These themes may include the success of inclusion efforts in their classrooms, barriers to inclusion encountered from families or school administrators, and the professional development opportunities available to learn more about implementing inclusion efforts and successfully teaching a diverse classroom of students. Racial diversity offers a unique lens with which to investigate the experiences of teachers in a special education environment.

In addition to recruiting a more diverse sample of teacher participants, future researchers may also consider expanding their criteria to include a student participant sample. By including a student sample, researchers could compare the views of teacher participants with those of student participants to determine whether any significant differences in themes emerge. For example, perhaps children have unique concerns regarding inclusion as they actively learn alongside peers that have traditionally been labeled as "different." Or, maybe children's families influence their views towards inclusion efforts in the classroom—thereby making inclusion efforts more difficult or easy to implement for their teachers. Therefore, examining student perceptions towards special education student inclusion in mainstream classrooms in conjunction with the perceptions of their teachers could provide a fruitful avenue for future research. The examples presented in this subsection are but a few changes that could enhance the understanding of successful inclusion.

Recommendation #2: Expand the Location and Amount of Data Collection

Another limitation of the present study highlighted in the previous section is that data was only collected from a small sample of participants in a specific location in the Middle Atlantic area of the United States. Similar studies conducted in the future could attempt to sample from more geographic areas around the United States. For example, researchers could collect data from East Coast and West Coast participants or participants in the northern and southern states. Doing so could allow for cross-examination of the data to determine whether geographic location might correlate with certain teacher attitudes about inclusion related to years spent working in a special education environment.

Alternatively, research teams across the globe could work collaboratively to compare data collected from samples of participants worldwide. One approach could be to compare the views of teacher and/or student participants living in more collectivistic cultures (e.g., Japan) with the views of participants living in more individualistic cultures (e.g., U.S.). This approach to data collection may provide insightful information about how cultural values influence perceptions of inclusion in schools among students, teachers, and the broader society in each country.

Finally, increasing the sample size could allow for additional data to be collected and analyzed. In the current study, the researcher was limited to a small sample of participants from the same geographic area. These restrictions may have impacted the conclusions that could be accurately drawn from the data and how generalizable the conclusions would be in other locations within the United States and globally. Perhaps a meaningful relationship between teacher inclusion attitudes and the time spent in a special education environment would have emerged if a larger participant sample (e.g., $n = 50$ instead of $n = 20$) had been available to

utilize in the present study. Future research could investigate this possibility by increasing the sample size and broadening the sampling location.

Recommendation #3: Utilize Additional Scale Measures

Earlier on in the limitations section, the researcher explained that the TATIS may have been insufficient on its own and may not have been the right measure to use in the present study to produce the desired results. Therefore, future studies could consider utilizing additional scales that measure similar items to the TATIS, or expand the scope to examine other factors that may influence teacher perceptions of inclusion. Some examples of such scales include the Multidimensional Attitudes toward Inclusive Education Scale (MATIES), used to assess teachers' attitudes regarding inclusive teaching practices (Mahat, 2008), and the Teacher Emotions Scales (TES), used to assess teachers' enjoyment, anger, and anxiety (Frenzel et al., 2016). Scales like the MATIES and TES could help future researchers uncover additional insights into the attitudes and current emotional state of teachers attempting to implement inclusion in their classrooms. The use of additional scale measures such as these would serve to strengthen the researcher's claims, as well as any significant findings revealed from the data analyses.

Recommendation #4: Utilize a Longitudinal Study Design + Inclusion Initiative

The use of the mixed-methods design in the current study allowed the researcher to uncover several themes regarding teacher participants' attitudes toward inclusion. Unfortunately, no significant difference was found in the data to suggest that the perspectives of primary and upper elementary special education teachers with various years of experience teaching in a special education environment differed in their views about having students with disabilities in an inclusion setting. An alternative approach to the mixed-methods design used in the present

study that may uncover significant correlations related to the researcher's hypotheses in future studies is a longitudinal study design. In a longitudinal study, participant data is collected at several points across time, ranging from every few months to every few years depending on the aim of the specific study (Caruana et al., 2015). For a future study similar to the present one, a longitudinal study design may be utilized in combination with an inclusion initiative. An example of a longitudinal design paired with an inclusion initiative is outlined in the following paragraph.

Utilizing a longitudinal design paired with an inclusion initiative is one recommendation for future research that may yield insightful results concerning special education teachers' perception of inclusion in schools. Participating schools interested in implementing inclusion would do so under the guided direction of a group of researchers and educators. Data from teacher participants at these schools would then be gathered before the inclusion implementation occurs and at several time points across the school year. At the end of the study duration, these teacher's views would be assessed again. Afterward, the final assessment data would be compared to the data collected at earlier time points throughout the school year to determine whether significant correlations or themes had emerged and possibly changed over time. Furthermore, data from teachers at schools implementing inclusion could be compared to data from teachers at schools not implementing inclusion. This comparison could help researchers determine whether significant differences in perceptions emerged due to prolonged exposure to inclusion environments over time. Such novel research could prove vital to understanding the benefits of successful inclusion for both students and teachers, and what resources are required to implement inclusion in schools successfully.

Summary and Conclusions

The present study examined prior literature concerning special education student inclusion in general education classrooms and teacher perspectives on the matter. Additionally, the present study aimed to analyze teachers' views on students with disabilities in an inclusion setting and to uncover whether any significant differences exist in the perspectives of special education teachers with various years of experience on having students with disabilities in an inclusion setting. Based on the literature review, it was apparent that views about inclusion in the classroom setting were mixed, as many sample participants in these studies reported both concerns and benefits associated with inclusion. Therefore, the researcher expected to find similar views among the participant sample in the present study. However, what was not apparent from previous studies was whether years of experience in a special education environment would impact teachers' views of inclusion. Consequently, the results of this particular analysis would serve to further knowledge on inclusion attitudes in the current literature.

The researcher employed a mixed-methods approach with an explanatory sequential design to examine the perspectives of special education teachers concerning inclusion practices for students with disabilities in two separate clusters, namely grades K-3 and 4-6. Purposive sampling techniques were used to recruit participants, and data was gathered via online surveys and semi-structured interviews. Upon analyzing the qualitative data, two overarching themes emerged: (a) Risks of inclusion are special education student lack of success, increased burden on teachers, and class disruptions; and (b) Inclusion can benefit all students. Analysis of the quantitative data revealed no statistically significant evidence of a meaningful relationship between years spent in a special education environment and teacher inclusion attitudes.

These intriguing results prompted discussion around the interpretations, implications, and limitations of the present study. Recommendations for expanding on the present study findings were also discussed. Overall, teacher views on the inclusion of special education students into the general education classroom remain mixed, with a consensus existing for the specific concerns related to inclusion practices and the various ways inclusion can be beneficial to all involved. More research is needed to determine whether—and to what extent—years of experience within a special education environment and/or an inclusion environment can influence teacher attitudes about inclusion. This summary section of Chapter 5 concludes this study.

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APPENDIX A: THE TATIS SURVEY

Teacher Attitudes Toward Inclusion Scale: TATIS

Appendix A: Teacher Attitudes Toward Inclusion Scale (TATIS).

Directions: The purpose of this confidential survey is to obtain an accurate and valid appraisal of your perceptions of the inclusion of students with mild to moderate disabilities in regular classrooms. It also contains questions pertaining to your beliefs about professional roles, attitudes toward collegiality, and perceptions of the efficacy of inclusion (i.e., whether or not you believe that inclusion can succeed). Because there are no "right" or "wrong" answers to these items, please respond candidly.

Definition of Full Inclusion: For the purposes of this survey, full inclusion is defined as the integration of students with mild to moderate disabilities into regular classrooms for 80% or more of the school day. Under federal special education law, mild to moderate disabilities include Learning Disabilities; Hearing Impairments; Visual Impairments; Physical Handicaps; Attention Deficit Disorders; Speech/Language Impairments; and mild/moderate Emotional Disturbance, Mental Retardation, Autism, or Traumatic Brain Injury.

Use the following scale for all items:

1=Agree Very Strongly (AVS), 2=Strongly Agree (SA), 3=Agree (A), 4=Neither Agree nor Disagree (NAD), 5=Disagree (D), 6=Strongly Disagree (SD), 7=Disagree Very Strongly (DVS)

	1 AVS	2 SA	3 A	4 NAD	5 D	6 SD	7 DVS
1. All students with mild to moderate disabilities should be educated in regular classrooms with non-handicapped peers to the fullest extent possible.	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
2. It is seldom necessary to remove students with mild to moderate disabilities from regular classrooms in order to meet their educational needs.	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
3. Most or all separate classrooms that exclusively serve students with mild to moderate disabilities should be eliminated.	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
4. Most or all regular classrooms can be modified to meet the needs of students with mild to moderate mild to moderate disabilities.	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
5. Students with mild to moderate disabilities can be more effectively educated in regular classrooms as opposed to special education classrooms.	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
6. Inclusion is a more efficient model for educating students with mild to moderate disabilities because it reduces transition time (i.e., the time required to move from one setting to another).	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
7. Students with mild to moderate disabilities should not be taught in regular classes with non-disabled students because they will require too much of the teacher's time.	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
8. I have doubts about the effectiveness of including students with mild/moderate disabilities in regular classrooms because they often lack the academic skills necessary for success.	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
9. I have doubts about the effectiveness of including students with mild/moderate disabilities in regular classrooms because they often lack the social skills necessary for success.	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
10. I find that general education teachers often do not succeed with students with mild to moderate disabilities, even when they try their best.	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
11. I would welcome the opportunity to team teach as a model for meeting the needs of students with mild/moderate disabilities in regular classrooms.	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
12. All students benefit from team teaching; that is, the pairing of a general and a special education teacher in the same classroom.	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
13. The responsibility for educating students with mild/moderate disabilities in regular classrooms should be shared between general and special education teachers.	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
14. I would welcome the opportunity to participate in a consultant teacher model (i.e., regular collaborative meetings between special and general education teachers to share ideas, methods, and materials) as a means of addressing the needs of students with mild/moderate disabilities in regular classrooms.	O	O	O	O	O	O	O

APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

You are invited to take part in a study that focuses on the perspectives of special education teachers on the controversy of inclusion practices for students with disabilities in two separate clusters, grades K-3 and 4-6, respectively. The researcher is inviting inclusion teachers in a suburban school district located in northwestern Pennsylvania who are willing to participate in the study. This form is part of a process called "informed consent" to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part.

This study is being conducted by a researcher named Ron Carlisle who is a doctoral student at Slippery Rock University.

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is to determine the perspectives of special education teachers on the controversy of inclusion practices for students with disabilities in two separate clusters, grades K-3 and 4-6, respectively.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to:

- Sign an informed consent form.
- Participate in both a quantitative survey and an audio-recorded semi-structured interview.
- Participate in a member checking process to validate the researcher's interpretation of the data collected.

This study will seek to answer the following research questions:

1. Do various years of experience in special education impact teachers' perspectives regarding students with disabilities in an inclusion setting?
2. Do the perspectives of primary and upper elementary school special education teachers differ regarding educating students with disabilities in an inclusion setting?

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

This study is voluntary. You are free to accept or turn down the invitation. Everyone will respect your decision of whether or not you choose to be in the study. No one will treat you differently if you decide not to be in the study. If you decide to be in the study now, you can still change your mind later. You are free to decline or discontinue participation in the study at any time and your decision will not have any negative impact.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

Being in this type of study involves some risk of the minor discomforts that can be encountered in daily life, such as fatigue, stress, or becoming upset. There are no other known risks to the participant associated with this study.

Payment:

There will be no payments, compensations, thank-you gifts, or reimbursements provided to participants.

Privacy:

Reports coming out of this study will not share the identities of individual participants. Details that might identify participants also will not be shared. The researcher will not use your personal information for any purpose outside of this research project. The researcher will not include your name, institution name, or anything else that could identify you in the study reports. To protect names and keep participants confidential, the names of the participants will be coded using reference codes during the data collection process. Data will be kept secure by storing electronic data in a password-protected computer.

Contacts and Questions:

You may ask any questions you have now. Or if you have questions later, you may contact the researcher via email rsc1006@sru.edu or via telephone 412-855-9669. If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call the IRB at Slippery Rock University at 724-738-4846 or email irb@sru.edu. The researcher will give you a copy of this form to keep.

Obtaining Your Consent

If you feel you understand the study well enough to decide about it, please indicate your consent by signing below.

Printed Name of Participant

Date of Consent

Participant's Signature

Researcher's Signature

APPENDIX C: INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD (IRB) APPROVAL

Slippery Rock University of Pennsylvania

TO: Dr. Ashlea Rineer-Hershey
Special Education

FROM: _____
Michael Holmstrup, Ph.D., Interim Chairperson
Institutional Review Board (IRB)

DATE: May 17, 2021

RE: Protocol Approved

Protocol #: 2021-073-88-B
Protocol Title: Perspectives of Special Education Teachers on Students with Disabilities in an Inclusion Setting: A Comparative Analysis

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Slippery Rock University has received and reviewed the requested modification(s) to the above-referenced protocol utilizing the expedited review process. The IRB has approved the protocol effective May 17, 2021.

You may begin your project as of May 17, 2021. Your approved protocol will expire on May 16, 2022. You will need to submit a Progress/Final Report at least 7 days prior to the expiration date.

Enclosed are copies of the approved consent and assent forms to be copied for participants to sign. (if applicable)

If you complete the study within the next year, please notify the IRB with a Final Report. The Final Report form and instructions can be found on the IRB website.

Please contact the IRB Office by phone at (724)738-4846 or via email at irb@sru.edu should your protocol change in any way.

APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How many years of experience do you have in special education?
2. How would you describe students with disabilities in terms of their characteristics, personality traits, and needs, as compared with students without disabilities?
3. Have you had experience with educating students with disabilities in an inclusion setting?
4. What do you think about having students with disabilities in an inclusion setting?
5. How do your years of experience in special education impact or contribute to your perspectives on having students with disabilities in an inclusion setting?
6. What obstacles do you perceive with educating students with disabilities in an inclusion setting?
7. What support would you need to overcome these obstacles?