Effectiveness of Inclusion in K-12 Schools on Students' Academic Performance: A Qualitative Study

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Keywords: inclusive education, inclusionary practices, academic performance, special education, diverse learning needs

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ABSTRACT

Students with disabilities are entitled to free appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment. With this mandate inclusionary practices are expected to be implemented into school districts nationwide. Inclusion is defined in many ways making it difficult for educators to effectively educated diverse students. The purpose of this qualitative descriptive study sought to understand how inclusion impacts the learning of all students. Twelve participants were used in this study that included general education teachers, special education teachers, and administrators. Semi-structured interviews were conducted which each participant. The results of this study conclude that many educators feel unprepared to educate diverse classrooms and uneducated on special education regulations. A recommendation for future research is to evaluate the effectiveness of teacher preparation programs. Finally, there is a need for more professional development and training in the area of special education for educators.

Keywords: inclusive education, inclusionary practices, academic performance, special education, diverse learning needs

Appendix C

Signatory Page for Dissertation

(should be embedded into the beginning of the dissertation with all committee members and the Dean of the College of Education signatures following a successful dissertation defense)

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DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to all of my grandparents. Even though our time together was limited, I am grateful for the time we spent together. You have each impacted my life and shaped me into who I am today. I am proud to give you the best seats in the house at my graduation.

I would also like to dedicate this study to educators nationwide, tall and short, young and old; continue to mold young minds and make an impact in students' lives. Teaching is not easy, but it gets easier every day.

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Finally, I would like to offer my gratitude to my friends. Thank you for being patient and understanding while I progressed through this journey.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Introduction to the Problem

Education is in a state of constant flux. In the last decade, changes to safety regulations such as active shooter response drills, have been implemented nationwide to ensure better safety precautions in public schools (Troyer, 2019). Troyer (2019) lists twenty-five changes in education that include placing an emphasis on science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) curriculums, shifting to use common core standards, changes in standardized testing, and growth in online learning. Policies, regulations, funding, personnel, certification requirements, etc., are constantly changing and evolving at both the state and federal levels. The U.S. Constitution does not specify educational provisions. Much of educational policy is governed by the states; however, the federal government still plays a vital role in educational policy. The federal government dictates much of special education law and regulations, while the states can set stricter guidelines to follow (Rosencrantz, 2021).

The focus of this study is on the area of special education. Special education encompasses the field that deals with the education of students with disabilities and is mainly governed by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (Rosencrantz, 2021). Over the last several decades, the federal government has passed several laws and court cases that have resulted in many changes to special education policies and laws (Murdick et al., 2014; Wright & Wright, 2012). Prior to the 1960s, many students with disabilities were excluded from public schools and educated under a separate educational system (Hegarty et al., 1997). For example, *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), a notorious educational Supreme Court case, marked a pivotal moment in educational history. *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) laid the foundation for all students being treated equally. Many students with disabilities were still

institutionalized and discriminated against until laws such as Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA, 1965), Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA, 1975), and IDEA (2004) were passed. These changed public school funding, and the educational rights of students with disabilities.

IDEA (2004) mandates several provisions for students with disabilities. One of the provisions outlined in IDEA (2004) is to ensure students with disabilities are receiving free, appropriate public education (FAPE). One way to do this is to allow students with special needs access to general education curriculum and be educated in the least restrictive environment (LRE). School districts need to consider inclusionary practices to satisfy this mandate (Traylor, 2022). Inclusion practices differ from school district to school district. The four models of inclusion include (1) consulting, (2) co-teaching, (3) resource rooms, and (4) instructional assistants (Idol, 2006). Special education teachers provide consultation services outside of the classroom by assisting general education teachers with strategies to better support students with disabilities. Co-teaching occurs within the general education classroom and two certified teachers instruct the class together to increase educational success. In some cases, students with disabilities must be educated outside of the general education classroom; these are called resource rooms. Instructional assistants, such as paraprofessionals and aides, are non-certified staff members that provide support within the classroom to students. Although IDEA (2004) does not explicitly state and define the term inclusion, schools are expected to follow inclusionary practices. Inclusion practices are intended to enhance the academic performance of exceptional students. Academic performance is a key aspect and important goal in education. Academic achievement can be measured and monitored by educators using various assessments to determine if a student is reaching educational goals (Saumya et al., 2021). This study examined inclusionary practices

and the impact on the academic performance of students.

Background

Plessy v. Ferguson (1896) was a Supreme Court decision to condone racial segregation. Nearly six decades later, *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) overturned the Supreme Court's decision to condone racial segregation. That is, public school districts could no longer discriminate and equal opportunities needed to be provided to whites and blacks. This court decision initiated the start of change in educational law and impacted educational practices but did not change special education policies or laws. Changes to special education occurred when President Johnson signed ESEA (1965) which provided funding to public schools to educate exceptional children (Martin et al., 1996; Traylor, 2022). Although funding was provided, educating students with disabilities was not yet mandated. The educational rights of students with special needs were not mandated until President Nixon passed the Rehabilitation Act (1972). The Rehabilitation Act (1972) gave students with disabilities an equal opportunity to attend public schools with appropriate services provided by the school (Hogan, 2020; Traylor, 2022). As a result, inclusion became the expected practice of public schools.

Inclusion

Inclusion is a hot topic in education that is currently under scrutiny (Hogan, 2020; Savich, 2008). IDEA (2004) does not explicitly use the term inclusion or provide a clear definition of inclusion. Due to the disparity of interpretations of inclusion, inclusion is implemented differently from school district to school district, leading to discrepancies. There is an abundance of literature in the area of inclusion. According to Hegarty et al., (1997) inclusion is more than just the integration of students with disabilities into the general education classroom. Four key components encompass inclusion, (1) students with disabilities have access to general education

curriculum at their home school, (2) students with disabilities are placed in general education in proportion to nondisabled, (3) specially designed instruction is utilized, and (4) the placement is age-appropriate and grade-appropriate (Savich 2008). As outlined in IDEA (2004), students with disabilities are entitled to FAPE in the LRE, which coins the term inclusion. Students with disabilities must spend as much time as possible in the general education classroom, while still making adequate progress (Savich, 2008). When students are included in general education classrooms it should be proportionate to nondisabled peers and be age and grade appropriate (Savich, 2008). For example, a class of twenty-five students should not contain twenty students with disabilities. Once students with disabilities are placed within the general education setting, modifications and accommodations to instruction and/or assignments may be made. This process is referred to as specially designed instruction (SDI). Subsequently, general education teachers are tasked with delivering differentiated and effective instruction to diverse learners. Furthermore, teachers are required to follow any accommodations and modifications for students as outlined in the SDI section of the individualized education program (IEP).

Expectations of Special Education Teachers

One responsibility of a special education teacher is to write the IEP and ensure it is being implemented correctly. IEPs are legal documents that educational providers must follow (Hogan, 2020; Kritikos et al., 2018; Vaughn, 2015). An IEP is developed by an IEP team, which consists of the parents or guardian, student, special education teacher, a local educational agency (sometimes a principal or guidance counselor), and general education teacher (Diliberto & Brewer, 2012; Hogan, 2020). Within the IEP, there are several sections including behavioral and academic goals, SDIs, and present academic levels (Hogan, 2020; Kritikos et al., 2018; Vaughn, 2015). Once the IEP is finalized, the Notice of Recommended Educational Placement (NOREP) must be signed by the

child's parent and the IEP must be implemented in all classrooms the child is a part of (PaTTAN, 2019).

Another responsibility of a special education teacher is to progress monitor students with IEPs and report progress to parents (PaTTAN, 2019). Progress monitoring involves assessing the student with benchmark tests, writing samples, curriculum-based measurement probes, etc., to determine the child's academic progress toward goals. Special education teachers utilize progress monitoring to evaluate student progress and determine if changes to the child's educational plan need to be made (Brown, 2021). Research shows that the curricular, instructional, and role expectations between special education teachers and general education teachers differ greatly (Youngs et al., 2011). For example, special education teachers are responsible for developing the IEP, however, general education teachers are expected to deliver the lesson. Special education curriculum emphasizes student advocacy and helping the student understand his/her disability.

Special education teachers are responsible for a small group of students with disabilities (Takala et al., 2009). A role of special education teachers is to provide support to those students with varying disabilities across multiple subject areas and multiple grade levels. For example, at the secondary level, a special education teacher may be responsible for ten students on his/her caseload. Each of these students are classified with a different learning disability, have different learning goals, and are required to take various subjects with various general education teachers. The role of the special education teacher is to ensure each child is making adequate progress towards the learning goals that are outlined in the IEP, and general education teachers are following each child's IEP. Special education teachers are knowledgeable about the special education process but may not be well versed in all content areas. According to Wolf et al. (2019), preservice special education teacher preparation programs and coursework focus on child

development, adolescent development, behavioral theory, social cognitive theory, and learning theory for PK-12. In addition, special education programs target making accommodations and modifications to curriculum and assignments (Wolf et al., 2019). Therefore, preservice programs lack coursework in mathematics, science, etc.

In some cases, special education teachers are responsible to provide instruction in resource rooms (Idol, 2006). Resource rooms are pull-out classrooms for students with disabilities to receive additional support, such as use of assistive technology, scribes, slower instructional pace, modified curriculum, etc.

Expectations of General Education Teachers

General education teachers are expected to be equipped and skilled at instructing diverse learners in the inclusive classroom. The material and content that is to be taught should follow a clear outline and general education teachers are masters of their content (Youngs et al., 2011). However, many general education teachers are not skilled in or knowledgeable about implementing effective interventions to meet the needs of exceptional students.

The literature suggests general education teachers are unprepared, lack support, and lack resources to implement inclusionary practices (Goodman & Burton, 2010; Grieve, 2009; Hogan, 2020; Shady et al., 2013). In a study conducted by Goodman and Burton (2010), teachers expressed that there was a shortage of paraprofessionals, aides, and staff making it more difficult to manage a diverse class. Furthermore, many teachers lacked the proper training to be able to supervise and handle unique behaviors of students with disabilities (Goodman & Burton, 2010). General education teachers have immense roles and responsibilities ranging from teaching to ensuring the safety all students. One of the responsibilities of a general education teacher is to implement and follow the IEPs of students with disabilities. The IEP outlines a specially

designed intervention program that must be implemented and followed for each student (Cohen & Spenciner, 2009; Hogan, 2020.) In some cases, teachers have multiple IEPs to follow per class period. This is a challenge for general education teachers that lack an understanding of special education policies and interventions.

In some districts, special education teachers may serve as a consultant or co-teacher to general education teachers (Idol, 2006). The special education teacher can serve as an expert and provide the general education teacher with interventions and strategies to use with students with disabilities. These are consultation services. Consultation occurs outside of the general education classroom, so it does not provide immediate feedback. Co-teaching is an evidence-based strategy where the general education teacher and special education teacher jointly instruct the diverse class (Carty, & Marie Farrell, 2018; Gately & Gately, 2001).

Another option in districts is offering instructional assistants such as paraprofessionals or aides to support general education teachers during class (Idol, 2006). Paraprofessionals and aides may be assigned to classrooms to provide support to specific students with disabilities. Classroom teachers are often times in charge of or may supervise what paraprofessionals do within their classrooms. As a result of these roles and responsibilities many teachers are experiencing higher levels of stress leading to negative perception of inclusive classrooms (Brackenreed, 2008; Forlin, 2001; Galaterou & Antoniou, 2017; Hogan, 2020; Shady et al., 2013).

Expectations of Administrators

According to research, principals have the largest impact on the effectiveness of inclusionary practices that are in schools (Causton et al., 2013). Teachers view principals as instructional leaders and a resource for support. While principals do not teach classes, the role of

a principal is intricate and complex (Causton et al., 2013). Not only do principals supervise teachers, but also manage the school in which they reside (Causton et al., 2013). They are expected to provide a link between the school and community. Principals are responsible to follow regulations and policies at the district, state, and federal levels. Some examples of district policies could include discipline and behavioral referrals. Many principals receive written referrals from teachers stating a behavioral issue that occurred within a classroom and it is a principal's job to decide on a consequence.

Principals sometimes must oversee the special education department and ensure all special education laws are followed correctly. If a law is not followed, the district runs the chance of due process hearings being conducted (IDEA, 2004, PaTTAN, 2019). A due process hearing can be used to resolve a conflict within schools (IDEA, 2004). Due process hearings can only be used to solve disputes filed by parents on behalf of their child with special education needs not for general education concerns (Lee, 2021). An example of a dispute could be a parent filing a complaint that a teacher is not following the child's IEP. A non-biased hearing officer renders a final decision on due process hearings that determines the course of action (Lee, 2021). Just like special education teachers and general education teachers, the principal's role is ever-changing, and many educators lack the resources and support to effectively instruct all students.

Problem Statement

IDEA (2004) mandates students with disabilities receive FAPE in the LRE. With these requirements in place, inclusionary practices are expected in districts nationwide. According to Gilson et al. (2020), "currently, the concept of inclusion in research and practice is broadly defined and loosely interpreted, resulting in variability of participation in student life" (p. 66).

Currently, there is no nationwide definition of inclusion, leading to misinterpretations, lack of implementation, and misunderstandings about inclusion (DEC/NAEYC, 2009). Consequently, general education teachers feel unprepared, lack knowledge, lack training and resources, and feel more stressed from inclusionary practices (Brackenreed, 2008; Forlin, 2001; Galaterou & Antoniou, 2017; Goodman & Burton, 2010; Grieve, 2009; Hogan, 2020; Shady et al., 2013).

The lack of formal definition makes it difficult for teachers to implement inclusion consistently. Due to this misunderstanding, inclusionary practices are implemented differently from district to district. For example, a district may utilize co-teaching practices to help meet the needs of inclusive classrooms, while another district does not provide co-teaching opportunities. As a result of inclusion practices, general education teachers are tasked with the responsibility of educating students with disabilities. Subsequently, many general education teachers do not have a background in special education coursework, laws, procedures, guidelines, and interventions (Hogan, 2020; Marin, 2014; Zagona et al., 2017). It is not known how effective inclusion practices without co-teaching or instructional aides are on the academic performance of all students. This study sought to understand the inclusion phenomenon and the academic performance of students.

Significance of Study

Inclusion is a topic in education that is being debated by educators everywhere. The purpose of this qualitative descriptive study sought to understand how inclusion impacts the learning of all students. The focus of this study was a rural school district in Central Pennsylvania that utilizes inclusion with minimal to no co-teaching. The school district does not provide a resource room for english language arts, science, history or math; instead the students are all placed in the LRE, the general education classroom. Many general education teachers lack

the knowledge and resources to be able to effectively and successfully implement modifications and accommodations for students with special needs (Idol, 2006). This study sought to determine the validity of this statement.

IDEA (2004) is a federal law that impacts all school districts nationwide. The rationale for this study is based on the IDEA (2004) mandate of including students with disabilities and the growing need for general education teachers to be able to grasp and implement inclusionary practices (Hogan, 2020; Tomlinson, 2017). Subsequently, general education teachers must effectively provide accommodations and modifications to students with special needs.

The result of this qualitative descriptive study will contribute to the abundance of research that has been conducted on inclusion. Moreover, this study will help understand the impact of inclusion and the academic performance of students and how teachers' perceptions and background knowledge influence inclusive practices. This study is significant as it will provide this school district with critical information to discuss implications for future implementation. It is hoped that the findings and results of this study will help other school districts implement inclusion and provide insight into future interventions, professional development, and training opportunities.

Research Questions

There is a wealth of research in the area of special education, specifically inclusion. In the field of inclusion, there is a lack of research on how teachers' perceptions on inclusion affect the academic performance of students. Based on the problem statement above, the following guiding research questions were formulated for this study:

Q1: What is the effectiveness of inclusion without the use of additional supports (co-

teaching and/or instructional aides) in K-12 on the academic performance of students?

Q2: What are educators (teachers, administrators) background knowledge/perceptions of special education practices/law, and how does this influence teaching students with disabilities?

Q3: What barriers and limitations prevent inclusion from being effective for the academic performance of students?

Nature of Study

The research design for this study is a qualitative descriptive study with a sample size of twelve participants. The sample size of qualitative studies should be small and limited to approximately twelve participants (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). The rationale for choosing a qualitative study is it uses a naturalistic approach to gain insight, make sense of, and interpret phenomena as it occurs in the natural setting (Bloomberg & Vople, 2019; Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Queiros et al., 2017). Qualitative data can provide more contextual and in-depth information when answering research questions (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). The purpose of this study was to gather insight through the eyes of educators into inclusion and the academic achievement of students. Consequently, a qualitative descriptive study was used to answer the overarching research questions.

The goal of descriptive studies is to provide summaries and depictions of experiences of individuals or groups by using the participants' language in the summary of the data (Hogan, 2020; Kim et al., 2017; Lambert & Lambert, 2012). Therefore, a qualitative descriptive study aligned with the framework of this design.

The participants used in this study represent a rural school district in Central Pennsylvania. The district serves a student population K-12 of approximately 1900. The district is split into four schools, (1) elementary school (K-2), (2) intermediate school (3-5), (3) middle

school (6-8), and (4) high school (9-12). Participants were used from each school to collect data. Structured interviews were conducted with the participants to determine the impact of inclusion and the academic achievement of students. The sampling method used in this study was purposeful sampling, a technique used in qualitative studies (Bloomberg & Vople, 2019; Hogan, 2020; Leung, 2015).

Limitations and Delimitations

An assumption of this study was that participants had foundational knowledge about special education, teaching students with disabilities, and using inclusive practices. This assumption was useful because the focal point of this study was educators' viewpoints on inclusion and the impact on the academic performance of students. The target population was delimited to educators in public schools grades K-12 that had experience teaching in inclusive classrooms. More specifically, general education teachers that taught math, science, or ELA in grades K-12, special education teachers in grades K-12, or administrators of grades K-12. Teachers that taught electives, gifted teachers, or did not have experience teaching in the inclusive setting were excluded from this study. Due to the small sample size, only two special education teachers and two administrators were interviewed.

The data in this study could have been misinterpreted. As a result of the co-investigator being an employee at the research site, participants could have provided biased answers or felt coercion. Moreover, responses from participants could have been false statements. To combat this, questions were worded in a neutral perspective to deter any potential bias, and participants were reminded of the anonymity of the responses.

A final limitation to consider is the diverse levels of educational experience participants have teaching students with disabilities. Some of the participants have taught in the inclusive

setting for several years, daily, or not at all. For example, administrators generally are not teaching in the inclusive setting; however, they may have past experience or no experience teaching in inclusive classrooms. Administrators' perspectives are essential when considering how effective a program runs in a school district.

Conceptual Framework

Psychology is used to better understand the human mind and behaviors. Theoretical foundations of psychology were built on the notion that behaviors are controlled by external stimuli (Banura, 2001). Within psychology are branches of educational learning theories including cognitive, behaviorism, constructivism, humanism, and connectivism (Western Governors University, 2020). Cognitive theory focuses on how people think, and behaviorism deals with behaviors in relation to environmental factors. Constructivism centers on students building their own learning experiences. Humanism studies self-fulfillment and humanistic needs. Finally, connectivism is concerned with studying how people learn based on experiences (Western Governors University, 2020). Therefore, by incorporating all of these concepts within the educational domain, teachers can better understand the various ways students can learn and how best to implement these concepts into inclusive classrooms.

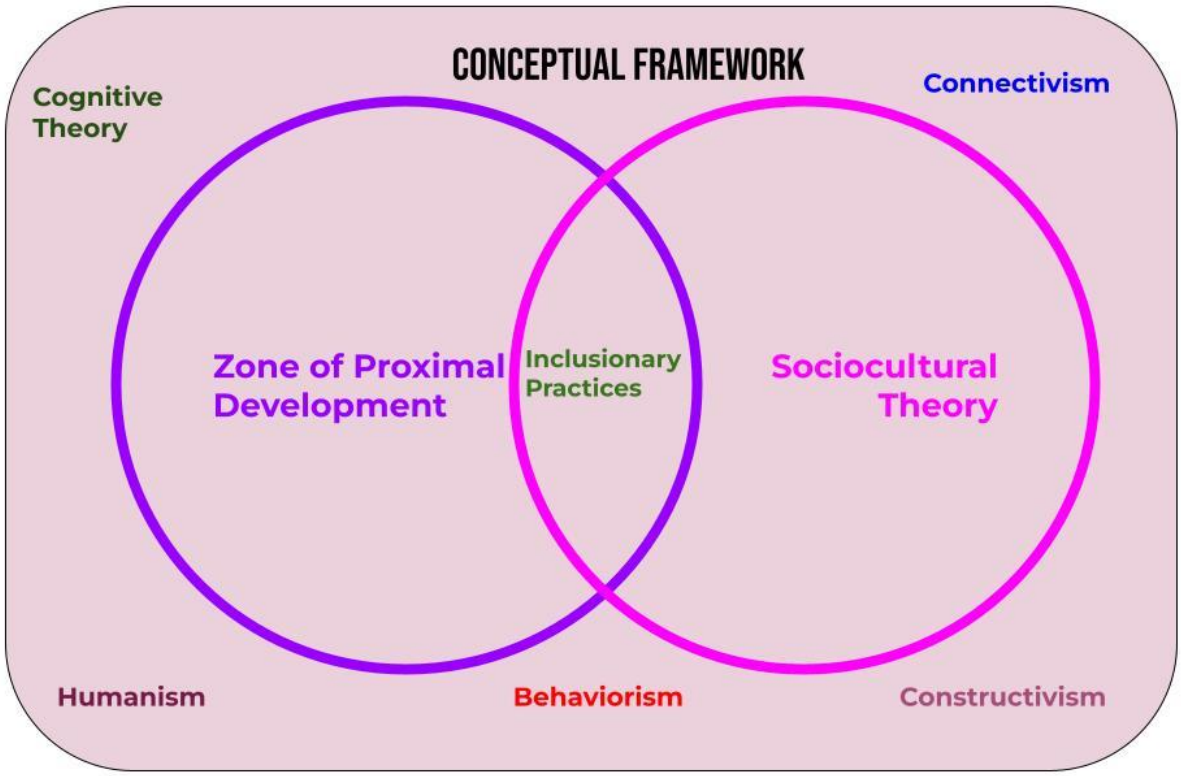
One of the leading contributors to educational theory is psychologist, Lev Vygotski (1896-1934). Vygotski is extensively known for his theory of the zone of proximal development (ZPD), which is aimed at answering the question of what type of instruction is best for each child (Kozulin et al., 2003). ZPD is also known as the “sweet spot” and it is where optimal learning occurs. The basis of ZPD is formed on three notions, (1) there are tasks students can complete independently, (2) there are tasks students can complete with assistance, and (3) there are tasks students cannot complete even with assistance (Kozulin et

al., 2003). The ZPD occurs within the tasks that students can complete with assistance.

Vygotski is also widely known for coining the educational theory of sociocultural theory (Kozulin et al., 2003). The sociocultural theory posits that cognitive ability is affected by a student's surrounding culture (Cherry, 2022; Kozulin et al., 2003). Moreover, this theory coincides with the idea that students with disabilities develop abilities and establish relationships based on the social environment and interactions with others (Daniels, 2017; Hogan, 2020). As a result, the literature establishes the concept of inclusionary practices earlier than inclusionary practices were mandated. Based on sociocultural theory, placing students with disabilities within the general education classroom will provide better opportunities to develop in comparison to resource rooms and other exclusionary practices. Below, Figure 1.1 provides a visual representation on how inclusionary practices are ground in theoretical foundations of psychology (Confair, 2022).

Figure 1.1

Conceptual Framework



Definition of Terms

Accommodation. Enables students with disabilities to complete the same assignments/tasks as non-disabled peers by adapting the allotted time, formatting, setting, response preference, and/or presentation. For example, a student that is blind should be given a Braille version (Center, 2015).

Co-teaching. Two or more certified educators deliver instruction in an inclusive setting (Cook & Friend, 2017).

Due Process. A legal way to settle controversies with public schools and special education (IDEA, 2004).

Disability. As outlined in IDEA, "Child with a disability means a child evaluated in

accordance with §§300.304 through 300.311 as having an intellectual disability, a hearing impairment (including deafness), a speech or language impairment, a visual impairment (including blindness), a serious emotional disturbance (referred to in this part as "emotional disturbance"), an orthopedic impairment, autism, traumatic brain injury, an other health impairment, a specific learning disability, deaf-blindness, or multiple disabilities, and who, by reason thereof, needs special education and related services" (Child with a Disability.20 U.S.C. §300.8).

Exceptional Students. Students that do not fall in the average range of development and require supplemental educational services in the classroom. Examples of these students include gifted students and students with disabilities (Columbia College, 2022).

Free appropriate public education. FAPE: From IDEA, "A free appropriate public education must be available to all children residing in the State between the ages of 3 and 21, inclusive, including children with disabilities who have been suspended or expelled from school, as provided for in §300.530(d)" (Free and Appropriate Public Education. 20 U.S.C. § 1401 (9)).

IDEA. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is a federal law that ensures the rights of students with disabilities are entitled to free appropriate public education with supplemental services provided (IDEA, 2004).

IEP. Individualized Education Plan: An individualized educational program tailored to the unique needs of a child with a disability. The document is legally binding that is required by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and includes information such as present levels, annual goals, supplemental aides, and related services (US Department of Education, 2010).

Inclusion. The practice of placing students with disabilities into general education classrooms to integrate their education experience with nondisabled peers (Savich, 2008).

Least restrictive environment. LRE: As stated in IDEA, "To the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities, including children in public or private institutions or other care facilities, are educated with children who are not disabled, and special classes, separate schooling, or other removal of children with disabilities from the regular educational environment occurs only when the nature or severity of the disability of a child is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily" (Least Restrictive Environment." 20 U.S.C. § 1412 (5)).

Modifications. Adaptations to assignments or task that change the curriculum or content that is being taught. For example, a student with a reading disability may complete an alternative assignment that only involves big ideas (Center, 2015).

Progress Monitoring. A method for teachers to evaluate and collect data on student performance, both academically and behavioral, to determine the strengths of the student and areas for improvement (Cohen & Spenciner, 2009).

Public School. Learning associations that offer education to children in grades K-12 that receive funding from local, state, and/or federal governments (What are Public Schools, n.d.).

Special Education. Specially designed instruction to meet the needs of students with disabilities (Special education, 2017).

Supplemental Aids and Services. Supports and services that allow students with special needs to be successfully educated in the general education classroom. Some examples include paraprofessionals or a scribe (NYSED, n.d.).

Chapter One Summary

Special education services have been provided to students with disabilities for several decades. Laws such as ESEA, the Rehabilitation Act, and IDEA and court cases such as *Brown v. Board of Education*, have ratified policies and regulations that mandate provisions to students with special needs as to what is taught and how it is taught. Consequently, inclusion is a practice that is expected and utilized in schools nationwide. With a lack of formal definition, inclusionary practices vary from district to district. Roles and expectations of educators differ, but the focus is on educating children.

While administrators provide the foundation and guidelines for programs and interventions that are utilized in schools, general education teachers and special education teachers carry out and implement these interventions in their classrooms. Administrators, general education teachers, and special education teachers all play a vital role in implementing inclusion to its fullest potential. The purpose of this study is to determine the relationship between inclusion and the academic performance of students and how the perceptions and background knowledge may influence inclusion. A qualitative descriptive design was utilized for this study to provide valuable insight into educators' viewpoints on how inclusion affects the academic performances of students.

Chapter two provides a summary of the literature including information about the history of special education, classifying disabilities, examining the special education process, defining inclusion, models of inclusion, benefits of inclusion, and barriers to inclusion. Chapter three outlines the methodology, target population, sampling procedures, setting, and details of the execution of the study. Chapters four and five discuss the findings, results, summary of the data, and implications for future studies.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction to the Review of the Literature

This chapter will analyze numerous pieces of literature and research that surround the implementation of inclusion in schools. The purpose of this study, as stated in chapter one, was to examine the effectiveness of inclusion and student academic performance. Understanding special education law and policies is a vital part of understanding inclusion. This will be done in five parts: (1) special education law, (2) disabilities, (3) examining the special education process, (4) defining inclusion, and (5) analyzing the benefits and barriers to inclusive education.

Research Question(s)

The research study sought to find answers to the following research questions:

Q1: What is the effectiveness of inclusion without the use of additional supports (co-teaching and/or instructional aides) in K-12 on the academic performance of students?

Q2: What are educators (teachers, administrators) background knowledge/perceptions of special education practices/law, and how does this influence teaching students with disabilities?

Q3: What barriers and limitations prevent inclusion from being effective for the academic performance of students?

Review of the Literature

History of Special Education Law

Before the 1960s, students with disabilities were discriminated against and neglected by the educational system. Students with disabilities were denied free appropriate public education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment (Hogan, 2020; Martin et al., 1996). Several

milestone court cases and public laws were passed that have changed the face of special education into what it is today.

In 1954, one of the most famous Supreme Court cases in educational history occurred, *Brown v. Board of Education*. *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) overturned the *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) ruling and stated public schools could not segregate students (Hogan, 2020). Even though *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) focused on whites and blacks, it provided the foundation for all students to be treated equally. As a result, several parent advocacy groups formed that advocated for special education and equal rights for diverse student populations.

The next landmark in education is the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). ESEA (1965) provided grants to public schools to educate students with disabilities. While important, public schools were not yet mandated to provide it (Martin et al., 1996; Traylor, 2022). ESEA (1965) marked the first major federal milestone in providing services to exceptional children and still provides funding to schools today (Martin et al., 1996; Traylor, 2022).

The 1970s laid the foundation for all special education policy as it is seen and used today. Several court case rulings and public laws were passed. In 1972, Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Children (PARC) v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania ruled that students with disabilities should be properly evaluated and placed in public schools that meet their needs (E.D. Pa. 1972; Hogan, 2020). Next, the U.S. Congress passed the Rehabilitation Act. The Rehabilitation Act included Section 504 (1972) which ensured the educational rights of people with disabilities. This marks the birth of inclusion practices. Moreover, exceptional children had an equal opportunity to attend public schools with appropriate services provided (Hogan, 2020; Traylor, 2022).

In 1975, the United States Congress passed a landmark law, PL 94-142. This is better known as the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA). EAHCA (1975) entitled exceptional children to FAPE in the least restrictive environment (LRE) to the fullest extent possible. Exceptional students were entitled to the development of Individualized Education Plans (IEP) to help meet their diverse needs. (Hogan, 2020). That is, students should be making adequate progress or public schools would be denying FAPE. Furthermore, students with disabilities were entitled to non-discriminatory evaluations and services provided by publicly funded schools at no cost to parents (Hogan, 2020). This law has been amended, terminology modified, and reauthorized several times since 1975.

In 1990 two breakthrough laws were signed by President George H. W. Bush, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA, 1990) and the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA, 1990) (Hogan, 2020). ADA (1990) protected persons with disabilities against discrimination and ensured equal employment opportunities. EAHCA (1975) was amended and reauthorized as IDEA (1990). Along with the name change, the terminology for exceptional children changed from Handicapped to Disabled and people first, disability second language was adopted. (IDEA, 1990). IDEA (1990) guarantees six components to students with disabilities (1) FAPE, (2) LRE, (3) IEP, (4) non-discriminatory evaluation, (5) parent/student participation, and (6) procedural safeguards for stakeholders. FAPE ensures students with disabilities are receiving free education in the public setting (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), n.d.). Students should be placed into general education classrooms as much as possible and be able to make adequate progress; this concept is LRE (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), n.d.). Students with disabilities must have an IEP. This document is a legally binding document that provides detailed instructions to meet the diverse

education needs of the child (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), n.d.). To be identified with a disability, the child must undergo an evaluation. This evaluation should be conducted by a trained professional and use multiple evaluations methods to ensure correct placement of the child (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), n.d.). From the start of the identification process the parents, students, and educators should collaborate and communicate regularly in regard to the child's education and educational growth (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), n.d.). Finally, the procedural safeguards provide the parents the information in relation to their rights and responsibilities during the special education process (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), n.d.). IDEA also extended the age requirements to include ages 18-21 (Hogan, 2020; Traylor, 2022).

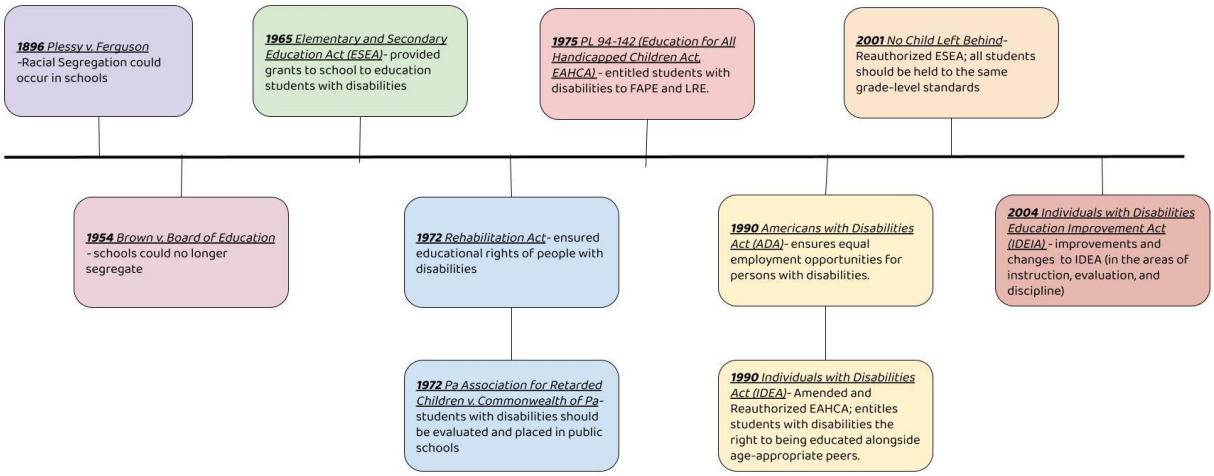
President George W. Bush reauthorized ESEA in 2001 as No Child Left Behind (NCLB, 2001; Traylor, 2022). NCLB (2001) increased the accountability of both teachers and students (Traylor, 2022). Specifically, it held all students to the same grade-level academic state standards to determine academic proficiency (Traylor, 20022; U.S. Department of Education, 2005). Teachers were evaluated based on the students' level of proficiency. NCLB (2001) uncovered many learning gaps in students and changed public school funding based on student achievement, making it controversial to educational stakeholders (Traylor, 2022). NCLB has ended and it is replaced today with the Every Child Succeeds Act (ESSA, 2015) as authorized by President Barack Obama (Traylor, 2022).

Finally, in 2004, the United States Congress amended IDEA and changed the name to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA, 2004; Hogan, 2020; Wright & Wright, 2012). With the reauthorization of IDEIA (2004), more emphasis was placed on public schools using evidence-based practices and interventions, revisions to due process,

modifications to the IEP, and changes to student discipline (Hogan, 2020; Wright & Wright, 2012). Below, Figure 2.1, provides a brief outline of the timeline of events leading to major educational decisions (Confair, 2022)

Figure 2.1

Visual Timeline of Landmark Events in Education



Almost seven decades ago, *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) was a pivotal moment for education today. Several milestone and landmark Supreme Court cases and laws were passed changing the face of education. Discrimination, segregation, exclusionary practices, and bias are no longer part of education, instead, inclusive education is the standard. Exceptional children are entitled to FAPE in the LRE with their nondisabled peers.

Classifying Disabilities

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2022), approximately 15 percent or 7.2 million students have been identified and are receiving special education services in public schools under IDEA (2004). Under IDEA (2004), students with disabilities are entitled to FAPE in the LRE with access to the general education curriculum (Hogan, 2020; Karten, 2017). IDEA (2004) defines thirteen categories of disabilities for which students can receive

special education and related services (Maanum, 2009). It is also important to note that some students do not fall under any of the thirteen categories. For example, Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD) is not identified as one of the thirteen disabilities, however, ADHD students may qualify for a Chapter 15/504 plan, also known as Protected Handicapped Students, or fall under Other Health Impairments (IDEA, 2004).

The thirteen categories, as detailed under IDEA (2004) are (1) Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), (2) Deaf-Blindness, (3) Deafness, (4) Emotional Disturbance, (5) Hearing Impairments, (6) Intellectual Disability, (7) Multiple Disabilities, (8) Orthopedic Impairment, (9) Other Health Impairments, (10) Specific Learning Disability (SLD), (11) Speech or Language Impairment, (12) Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), and (13) Visual Impairment (includes blindness) (Hogan, 2020; IDEA, 2004; Maanum, 2009). Disabilities are not contagious but may be genetic (Maanum 2009). Below is a short description of each disability category.

Autism

Autism, also known as Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), is a neurological and developmental disability that affects social skills (communication and language) and cognitive ability (Åsberg Johnels et al., 2019; Lee, 2019; Maanum, 2009). Spectrum disorders are also characterized by stereotypy behaviors such as pacing and resistance to change (i.e. fire drills) (Hogan, 2020; IDEA, 2004). Previously, the DSM-IV manual by American Psychiatric Association (1994) listed four separate categories of ASD. The four subcategories are (1) Autistic Disorder, (2) Asperger's Disorder, (3) Childhood Disintegrative Disorder, and (3) Pervasive Developmental Disorder Not Otherwise Specified (PDD-NOS) (Maanum, 2009). The fifth edition of the DSM manual by American Psychiatric Association (2013) consolidates these four categories into one diagnosis of ASD (DSM-5 and autism, n.d.)

Deaf-Blindness, Deaf, and Hearing Impairments

Deaf-Blindness is characterized by severe visual and hearing impairments that significantly impede the child's communication skills (IDEA, 2004; Maanum, 2009). The visual and hearing impairments must be medically diagnosed (Maanum, 2009). Deafness is a severe hearing impairment in which a child cannot hear even with the use of hearing aids (Maanum, 2009). Students diagnosed as deaf are unable to communicate using traditional hearing methods (Hogan, 2020; Lee, 2019). Hearing impairments are classified as difficulty with hearing; nevertheless, the child is not deaf (Cox et al., 2019; Hogan, 2020; IDEA 2004). Sound is measured in loudness (units are decibels) and frequency (units are hertz) (Maanum, 2009). Hearing impairments may affect one or both of these areas of hearing (Maanum, 2009). According to Maanum (2009), approximately 60 percent of students diagnosed as deaf are included in the general education classroom for at least part of the school day. It is also important to note that the intellectual ability of students who experience hearing impairments is unaffected; however, these students usually require additional supports such as interpreting software to be successful in the classroom (Maanum, 2009).

Emotional Disturbance

Students diagnosed with Emotional Disturbance (ED) struggle academically due to experiencing difficulties with relationships, inappropriate behaviors, anxiety about school, and unhappy or pervasive mood (Hogan, 2020; IDEA, 2004; Maanum, 2009; Scardamalia et al., 2019). These students can experience disoriented thinking, abnormal mood swings, and anxiety (Maanum, 2009). As a result of emotional disturbance, other disorders such as schizophrenia, anxiety, depression, and Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD) are comorbid with emotional disturbance (Hogan, 2020, Lee, 2019).

Intellectual Disability

Intellectual Disability, formerly known as Mental Retardation (MR), is characterized by below-average cognitive or intellectual functioning (Hogan, 2020; IDEA, 2004). Students in this category struggle with adaptive behaviors such as communicating, social skills with peers, getting dressed, using the bathroom, and feeding themselves (Hogan, 2020; Lee, 2019; Maanum, 2009). A common example of an intellectual disability is Down Syndrome (Hogan, 2020).

Multiple Disabilities

Multiple Disabilities are defined as significant developmental issues as a result of two or more disability conditions (Maanum, 2009). According to IDEA (2004), some examples of multiple disabilities include intellectual disability-blindness, intellectual disability-orthopedic impairments, intellectual disability-deafness, etc. Students in this category may require substantial educational needs (Hogan, 2020; Rogers & Johnson, 2018; IDEA, 2004).

Orthopedic Impairments

Orthopedic or Physical Impairments are defined as impairments that negatively affect a child's physical and academic performance (Maanum, 2009). Examples of orthopedic impairments include cerebral palsy, clubfoot, muscular dystrophy, fractures, burns, amputations, and limb deformity/limb deficiency (Cohen & Spenciner, 2009; Hogan, 2020, Maanum, 2009).

Other Health Impairments

ADHD, asthma, diabetes, etc., are chronic or acute medical conditions that may fall under the category of Other Health Impairments (OHI) (Hodge & Asola, 2019; Hogan, 2020; IDEA, 2004; Maanum, 2009). For a student to be diagnosed with OHI the chronic or acute condition must be medically diagnosed and adversely affect the student's academic performance

(Cohen & Spenciner, 2009; Hogan, 2020, Maanum, 2009).

Specific Learning Disability

Specific Learning Disability, SLD, is classified as a neurological disorder (Maanum, 2009). SLD is the most commonly diagnosed disability (NECS, 2022; Snyder et al., 2019). Students in this category experience difficulties with understanding or using written or spoken language. They otherwise are average or above-average academically in relation to peers (Cohen & Spenciner, 2009; Hogan, 2020; IDEA, 2004; Maanum, 2009). Students with SLD struggle in reading, writing, math, spelling, and/or communication (Hogan, 2020; Lee, 2019; Willcutt et al., 2019).

Speech or Language Impairments

Speech or Language Impairments is an umbrella term that encompasses a communication disability that is divided into four categories (Hogan, 2020, IDEA, 2004; Maanum, 2009). The four categories are (1) fluency disorder, (2) voice disorder, (3) articulation disorder, and (4) language disorder (Maanum, 2009). For a student to qualify for services under IDEA, these impairments must negatively affect academic progress (Cohen & Spenciner, 2009; Hogan, 2020).

Traumatic Brain Injuries

Traumatic Brain Injuries, TBI, are acquired injuries resulting from an accident or external factor that subsequently affects partial or total functional abilities (Hogan, 2020; IDEA, 2004; Maanum, 2009; Utley et al., 2019). TBIs are not a result of brain injuries that were caused from birth or that are naturally occurring or degenerative (Cohen & Spenciner, 2009; Hogan, 2020).

Visual Impairments

Finally, Visual Impairments include blindness or partial sight loss which is medically diagnosed and adversely affects academic performance (Hogan, 2020; IDEA, 2004; Maanum,

2009). Students may wear corrective lenses and still qualify for services under IDEA (Hogan, 2020; Kizilaslan, 2019; Cohen & Spenciner, 2009).

Below, Table 2.1 outlines the percentages of students with disabilities. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES, 2022) the following percentages of students aged 3-21 are diagnosed with each category of disabilities in 2020-2021.

Table 2.1

Percentages of Students Diagnosed with each disability

Disability type	Percent
Specific learning disability	33
Speech or language impairment	19
Other health impairment[1]	15
Autism	12
Development delay	7
Intellectual disability	6
Emotional disturbance	5
Multiple disabilities	2
Hearing impairment	1

Note. Some disabilities are not listed because the percentage diagnosed is less than 0.5 percent (NCES, 2022).

All of the thirteen disabilities are federally recognized under IDEA and are characterized by adversely affected academic performance (Hogan, 2020; IDEA, 2004). As a result of IDEA (2004), students with disabilities are entitled to education in the general

education classroom with non-disabled peers. Therefore, inclusive practices are now the norm and general education teachers are expected to make accommodations and modifications for students with disabilities to be successful (Hogan, 2020). The next section will examine the special education process.

Examining the Special Education Process

IDEA (2004) mandates that each state adopt a specific special education identification and referral process (Hogan, 2020; Maanum, 2009). Public Schools nationwide have the responsibility to find, evaluate, and identify all children from age birth through twenty-one for special education services (Lee, n.d.). This process is a part of IDEA (2004) and is called *child find* (Hogan, 2020; Kritikos et al., 2018; Lee, n.d.). Each state must adhere to federal guidelines; however, they can set more restrictive timelines for evaluations (Maanum, 2009). The process as outlined in IDEA (2004) involves five steps, (1) referral, (2) non-discriminatory evaluations, (3) determination of eligibility, (4) development of an IEP, and (5) implementation of IEP. The timelines below are based on Pennsylvania guidelines. These will be discussed in more detail below.

Referral

The special education process begins with a referral. It is important to note that once a referral is made, special education personnel must manage the process (Hogan, 2020; IDEA, 2004). General education teachers play a vital role in the special education referral process as they work with the child daily and usually are the first person to notice a concern (Hogan, 2020; Kritikos et al., 2018). Although teachers are expected to differentiate instruction and provide interventions to meet the unique needs and abilities of all students, sometimes these interventions are not effective for all students (Hogan, 2020; Tomlinson, 2017). If a teacher

finds these strategies are not effective for a student, the teacher can document all the strategies used on the referral (Cohen & Spenciner, 2009; Hogan, 2020). Others that may begin the referral process include parents, administration, or Local Education Agencies (LEA). Parents must give permission to evaluate their child, otherwise, the evaluation process may not occur (IDEA, 2004). If the parent does not give consent to evaluate their child, the LEA can request a due process hearing; however, it is not required (PaTTAN, 2019). Once a referral is made either orally or in writing, the LEA must provide permission to evaluate, PTE, form within ten calendar days to parents (PaTTAN, 2019). According to IDEA (2004), parents must also be given a copy of the Parental Rights and Procedural Safeguards (Hogan, 2020; Kritikos et al., 2018).

Non-Discriminatory Evaluations

Once the PTE form has been received by the LEA, the evaluation must be completed within sixty calendar days (Hogan, 2020; IDEA, 2004; PaTTAN, 2019). IDEA (2004) mandates that evaluations should be non-discriminatory, given by trained professionals, and consist of multiple evaluation measures (Hogan, 2020; IDEA, 2004; Murdick et al., 2014). The most common evaluations used by special education trained personnel include intelligence testing (IQ Scores) and achievement testing (Hogan, 2020; Vaughn, 2015).

Determination of Eligibility

After the evaluation is complete, a determination of eligibility for special education services is made (IDEA, 2004). Recalling the thirteen disabilities outlined above, each disability category has required criteria that must be met for a child to qualify to receive services. The parent must receive the evaluation report ten calendar days prior to the scheduled

IEP meeting (PaTTAN, 2019). It is important to note that a parent may request an outside agency complete an Independent Educational Evaluation, IEE, which must occur within a reasonable amount of time, usually ten calendar days (PaTTAN, 2019).

Development of the IEP

The next step of the process is the development of the IEP. An IEP team is formed, consisting of the parents, special education teacher (sometimes referred to as case manager), LEA representative, general education teacher, and the child (if the child is eligible for transition services) (Diliberto & Brewer, 2012; Hogan, 2020). The parent must receive the invitation to attend the development of the IEP ten calendar days prior to the scheduled meeting and it must occur within thirty calendar days of the finalization of the evaluation report (PaTTAN, 2019). An IEP is an individualized, legally binding document that consists of academic and behavioral (functional) goals, specially designed instruction that includes accommodations and/or modifications, and present academic levels (Hogan, 2020; Kritikos et al., 2018; Vaughn, 2015).

Implementation of the IEP

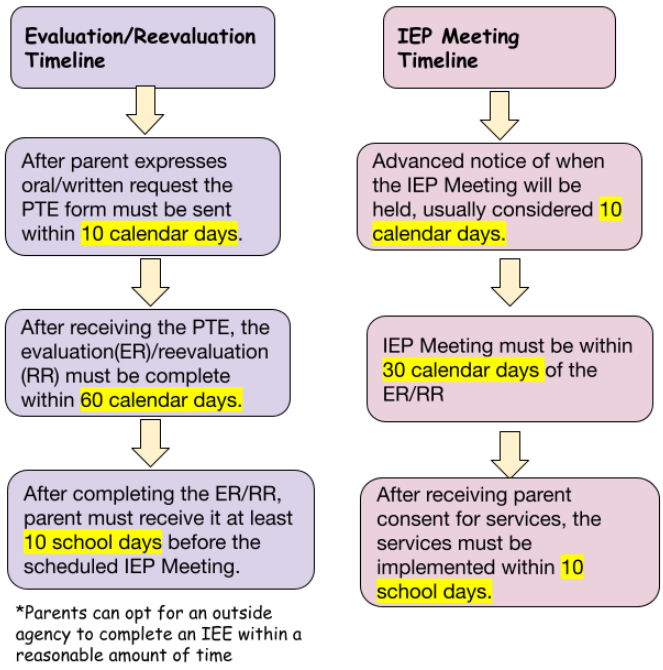
Finally, once agreed upon by parents, the IEP team issues a Notice of Recommended Educational Placement (NOREP) that must be signed and approved by the parent (PaTTAN, 2019). Following completion of the NOREP, the IEP must be implemented within ten school days (PaTTAN, 2019). After implementation, the IEP team must monitor the progress of the child (PaTTAN, 2019).

Figure 2.2 below provides a snapshot of the special education timelines in Pennsylvania. Placements of exceptional students are determined during the development of the IEP. As previously stated, when determining placement, the IEP team must consider

educating the child in the LRE (Demirdag, 2017; Hogan, 2020; IDEA, 2004). This stipulation as set forth in IDEA (2004) coincides with the purpose of this study; all general education teachers must be ready to teach in inclusive classrooms.

Figure 2.2

Special Education Timelines (Confair, 2022)



Defining Inclusion

Due to the IDEA (2004) mandates that students with disabilities must be educated in the LRE, exceptional children spend the majority of their school day in general education classrooms with a general education teacher. In 2018, approximately 64% of students with disabilities spent the majority of the school day, 80% or more, alongside age-appropriate peers

in general education classrooms (University of Washington, 2021). This led to the buzzword, inclusion, being used to describe the practice. Although the term inclusion is used frequently in education, the term is not used in IDEA (2004). Inclusive education has many different definitions, which leads to confusion. The following are three definitions of inclusion.

Daunarummo (2010) defined inclusion as "educating students with disabilities in general education classrooms alongside their age-appropriate peers without disabilities" (p. 13). This definition is simple, yet vague. There is no description of how this practice can be achieved in the educational setting. According to Bly (2000) inclusion is defined as,

> [a]n LRE rubric used to refer to the presumption of law that states all disabled students, regardless of the nature and severity of their handicap, can be educated satisfactorily in the regular environment with the use of supplemental aides and services until and unless this presumption is rebutted. (p. 6)

Bly's (2000) definition seems feasible and manageable to follow in educational practice. Finally, Vanderbilt University (2022) defines inclusion as,

> inclusion–the preferred term–involves supporting students with disabilities through individual learning goals, accommodations, and modifications so that they are able to access the general education curriculum (in the general education classroom) and be held to the same high expectations as their peers. (p. 1; "What is inclusion" section)

Inclusion is defined in many ways; however, it must coincide with the federal mandates set forth in IDEA (2004). It is important to note that inclusion is a right and is meant to benefit all children. Inclusion is not meant to takeaway special education teachers or services but rather it should provide a way to integrate services to children in need (Parker 2009; Traylor, 2022). Today, it is assumed that general education teachers are masters of teaching diverse learners in

inclusive settings; however, this may not be the case. Nationwide, schools are implementing various inclusion models to best fit the needs of all students based on their interpretations of the above definitions. For the purpose of this study, the utilized definition of inclusion is incorporating and educating students with disabilities within the general education classroom with their age-appropriate peers to the fullest extent possible.

Models of Inclusion

Idol (2006) identifies four different models of inclusion. They are (1) consulting, (2) co-teaching, (3) resource rooms, and (4) instructional assistants. In the consulting model of inclusion, the special education teacher works closely with the general education teacher to ensure services are provided. The consulting teacher is not in the general education classroom but instead provides support when needed or asked (Idol, 2006). On the other hand, co-teaching is when the special education teacher pushes into general education classes to provide immediate support to general education teachers (Idol, 2006). Resource room support occurs when students with disabilities receive their services outside of the general education classroom (Idol, 2006). Finally, instructional assistants are paraprofessionals or aides that help the general education teacher provide services to students with disabilities in the classroom (Idol, 2006). These paraprofessionals or aides are not certified special education teachers.

All of the above models of inclusion are designed to ensure students with disabilities are receiving appropriate services. Plenty of research exists to show the benefits of and barriers to inclusion. The following sections will summarize the literature surrounding each of these viewpoints.

Benefits of Inclusion

There is an abundant amount of research in the field of inclusion and the research continues to grow and evolve. Children with disabilities are three times more likely to drop out of school and not graduate, less likely to enroll in postsecondary programs, and less likely to be employed (Kellems & Morningstart, 2010); Ravipati, 2017). According to research conducted by Lipsky and Gartner (1995), only 43.9 percent of students with disabilities go on to graduate and earn a diploma. Approximately 45% of students with disabilities enroll in postsecondary programs such as attending a college or technical program (Kellems & Morningstar, 2010). As of 1995, little quantitative data existed to support educating students with disabilities in the LRE (Lipsky & Gartner, 1995). Before inclusive practices, there were higher dropout rates for students with disabilities, lower rates of attending postsecondary education for students with disabilities, and higher unemployment rates for students with disabilities (Lipsky & Gartner, 1995). Today, a wealth of literature supports inclusion academically, behaviorally, and socially for all students.

Academic Benefits

Lipsky and Gartner (1995) reported that grades of exceptional children were not significantly different in the general education classroom in comparison to the special education classroom. Instead, students with disabilities had tremendous success in achieving their IEP goals (Lipsky & Gartner, 1995; Spence, 2010). The literature reports that including students with disabilities in general education classrooms has no effect or no negative effect on non-disabled peers (Lipsky & Gartner, 1995; Spence, 2010). Kefallinou et al., (2020) support the claim that the academic success of students with disabilities increases when they are placed in structured and mindful general education classrooms. According to Kefallinou et al., (2020) there is an abundance of research that exists and proves that inclusion is effective in

improving academic progress in students with disabilities (de Graaf et al., 2013; Dessemontet et al., 2012; Dyssegaard & Larsen, 2013; Hehir et al., 2016; Oh-Young & Filler, 2015; Spence, 2010). Furthermore, many students with disabilities thrive in inclusive settings, especially in primary education. It should be noted that this trend regresses in the secondary setting (De Vroey et al., 2015; Dyssegaard and Larsen, 2013; Kefallinou et al., 2020). At the secondary level, students are taking more electives and changing classrooms more frequently in comparison to the primary grades. Idol (2006) compared inclusion models at four elementary schools and used quantitative data to examine state test scores. Results showed the school that was using inclusion had no changes in scores on standardized testing (Idol, 2006). Overall, including students with disabilities either positively impacts academic performance or has no effect on academic progress.

Behavioral and Social Benefits

Behaviorally, inclusion provides benefits as it allows students with disabilities to observe appropriate behaviors by their age-appropriate peers. Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), is a program utilized in many schools, to reward appropriate behaviors and teach desirable behaviors. Center on PBIS (2022), supports that exposing students with disabilities to age-appropriate non-disabled peers improves the behavior of students with disabilities. Behaviors that are deemed appropriate vary from school district to school district. Some examples of common appropriate behaviors are completing work, staying seated during instruction, raising hand to be called on, etc. At the secondary level, there are more frequent inappropriate behaviors in comparison to the elementary level (Idol, 2006; Kefallinou et al., 2020). As a result, students with disabilities are able to observe appropriate behaviors and learn to modify their behaviors.

In conjunction with exposure to appropriate behaviors, students with disabilities also socially

benefit when being exposed to non-disabled peers. According to the literature, there are gains in social competence (Spence, 2010). Social competence is the ability to adapt and respond to various social interactions appropriately (American Psychological Association, n.d.). For example, if a student is meeting a new student, it is acceptable to say hi, instead of hitting the student. Students with disabilities obtain a better understanding of acceptable social behaviors by learning from non-disabled peers and can experience their classmates' acceptance (Lipsky & Gartner, 1995; Spence, 2010). Students with disabilities are able to experience acceptance when peers allow them admission into their social group. As a result of inclusion, students with disabilities are exposed to acceptable social and behavioral norms allowing them to improve their behaviors.

The literature suggests additional social benefits of inclusion such as improved self-esteem, raising disability awareness, and better secondary transitioning. Students with disabilities are shown to improve self-esteem (Lipsky & Gartner, 1995; Spence, 2010). Self-esteem is the ability to gain confidence. Building confidence and self-esteem are essential for students with disabilities to self-advocate for special education services and support. Inclusion also provides opportunities to raise disability awareness, accept diversity, and reduce the negative stigma of students with disabilities (Lipsky & Gartner, 1995; Spence, 2010). Non-disabled persons tend to view students with disabilities negatively. Furthermore, some students are excluded from cliques and friendships due to having a disability. As a result of inclusion, the negative stigma is lessened and students with disabilities gain acceptance. Students with disabilities struggle with planning for post-secondary life (Allen, 2022; Gardner, 2008). The literature shows that social inclusion benefits students with disabilities in adult life and in employment (Kefallinou et al., 2020). IDEA (2004) mandates that transition planning is required

for students with disabilities by the age of sixteen (Allen, 2022; Mazzotti et al., 2009). Transition planning is student-focused and establishes measurable goals in the areas of education, employment, and independent living (Allen, 2022). Inclusion allows students to feel a sense of belonging and acceptance. In addition, students with disabilities are more likely to hold a job long-term and be financially independent and stable (Kefallinou et al., 2020).

Co-teaching

Co-teaching, although not mandated by IDEA (2004) is an evidence-based approach that allows general education teachers and special education teachers to collaborate to enable diverse populations to be successful (Carty, & Marie Farrell, 2018; Gately & Gately, 2001). Furthermore, the literature suggests that co-teaching has many benefits (Carty & Marie Farrell, 2018; McDuffie et al., 2009; Murawski & Swanson, 2001). Co-teaching is designed to increase student engagement by providing more opportunities for small group instruction or one-on-one instruction, but it may take away from the social interactions of students (Carty & Marie Farrell, 2018; Strogilos & Avramidis, 2014).

Schools nationwide are at different developmental stages of implementing inclusion. Some schools have adopted the inclusion approach by navigating through the various models of inclusion, while others have been easing into the process of inclusion exploring options of best fit (Idol, 2006). Evidence shows that administrative knowledge and support are critical to success in inclusive settings (Idol, 2006). Research shows many benefits to inclusion, however, barriers to inclusion exist.

Barriers to Inclusion

The literature suggests there are many barriers to inclusion. Students with special needs are spending more time in general education classrooms, and as a result, general education

teachers are affected. Leaders and those in leadership roles are making policies about education; however, many have never been educators. Consider some presidents from 1962 until today: Johnson, Nixon, Ford, George H. W. Bush, Clinton, George W. Bush, Obama, Trump, and Biden. While many of these presidents attended Ivy League schools, none of the listed presidents has ever been an educator nor did they obtain degrees in education (Kaduk, 2022). Yet, these leaders are passing laws that affect the education of the nation. Similar things could be stated about administrators and superintendents of schools. Administrators and superintendents are the leaders of schools that make decisions regarding policies such as how to implement inclusion; however, their background in special education is lacking.

High Levels of Stress

The findings from the literature show that high levels of stress are present when teaching in an inclusive setting. According to research, general education teachers are experiencing higher levels of stress (Brackenreed, 2008; Forlin, 2001; Galaterou & Antoniou, 2017; Hogan, 2020). Frolin (2001) conducted a qualitative study using a *Teacher Stress and Coping Questionnaire* (TCS) to determine if levels of stress are affected when following inclusive educational practices. The study collected responses from 571 teachers. Results showed that females experienced higher levels of stress than males. However, both genders had higher levels of stress and deteriorating mental health due to more classroom issues (Frolin, 2001). Brackenreed (2008) replicated Frolin's (2001) study. The findings were similar to the findings in Frolin (2001). Brackenreed (2008) noted that 85 percent of teachers expressed that following and implementing IEPs was the main stressor. Finally, Galaterou & Antoniou (2017), conducted a qualitative study that used two tools to collect data, and the results concurred with Frolin (2001) and Brackenreed (2008).

Teacher Shortages

Nationwide, school districts are facing shortages in education (Roth & Harris, 2022). Countless schools have many vacant teaching positions and are unable to fill these positions. Between 2020 and 2022 the Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that around 300,000 teachers left the profession of teaching (Grider, 2022). Teachers are deciding to leave the profession to pursue other opportunities or choosing early retirement (Roth & Harris, 2022). These shortages are making it difficult to educate diverse students successfully and effectively. As a result of the shortages, class sizes are increasing, classroom management is more difficult, and resources are lacking (Roth & Harris, 2022). Special education teachers are experiencing increased caseloads of students with disabilities to manage. These shortages are making it difficult for many districts to implement inclusion efficiently and effectively. As a result of the teacher shortages, ratios of students with disabilities to students without disabilities are becoming unbalanced, making it difficult to educate diverse populations (Brown & Babo, 2017). For example, a class size of 20 students may have 12 students with disabilities and 8 without disabilities. Brown and Babo (2017) found that this has a negative effect on the academic performance of students without disabilities. The teachers shortages is a critical barrier to consider when implementing inclusionary practices.

Pre-service Teacher Programs/Lacking Training

Other barriers to inclusion are a lack of pre-service teacher programs and necessary supports to foster inclusive educational settings. The goal of inclusion is to establish and ensure that students with disabilities are receiving the proper services needed, as outlined in their IEPs, to be successful while remaining in the general education classroom with non-disabled peers (Hogan, 2020; Shady et al., 2013). Few studies have been conducted on models

of inclusion used in school districts and evaluating teacher training, support, and pre-service programs (Hogan, 2020; Kilanowsik-Press et al., 2010). Instead, studies have shown that general education teachers are not equipped or prepared to teach in inclusive settings.

Idol (2006) conducted a study spanning K-12 and the results showed that low percentages of general education teachers felt knowledgeable and comfortable in making modifications and accommodations in the inclusive setting. Studies from Fuchs (2010) and Weiss & Lloyd (2002) reported that teachers felt underprepared to teach students with disabilities and had difficulty meeting the unique needs of exceptional students. Other studies have found that resources and training are lacking leading to inclusion being implemented without fidelity (Goodman & Burton, 2010; Grieve, 2009; Hogan, 2020; Shady et al., 2013).

According to the National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ) (2021), few states require special education coursework or classes on teaching in an inclusive setting in teacher preparation programs. Furthermore, Harper (2019) states that only 17% of general education teachers feel adept at teaching in an inclusive setting. It is important to mention that one class on special education or inclusion is not sufficient enough for teachers to become comfortable teaching adeptly in inclusive settings (Unianu, 2012).

Humans are not perfect, and errors are made regularly. Special education relies on making judgments about students and students' placements. It is important to recognize these judgments may not be universally the same from school to school (Kauffman & Hornby, 2020). Therefore, one special education professional may deem the LRE for a student 100 percent of the day in a general education classroom; however, another special education professional may disagree. Due to a lack of training and universally accepted guidelines, different judgements about the level of inclusion for students with disabilities vary from school district to school district.

Perceptions

A final barrier to understand and overcome is teachers' perceptions of inclusion and teaching in an inclusive setting. Students do not learn from teachers they do not like. Attitude is everything (Burke & Sutherland, 2004; Hernandez et al., 2016; Hogan, 2020; Swain et al., 2012). The literature shows that teachers' perspectives are impacted by inclusive practices; especially by the types of disabilities within the classroom and the availability of necessary supports for success (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; Hogan; 2020). For example, veteran teachers that have lacked formal training in the area of special education may view students with disabilities negatively. The teacher's negative stigma and attitude affect the teacher-student relationship making it more difficult to educate students with disabilities. Research suggests that novice and pre-service teachers are more inclined to have positive attitudes in comparison to veteran teachers (Barnes & Gaines, 2015; Galaterou & Antoniou, 2017; Hogan, 2020; Silervman, 2007). The positive student-teacher relationship that is established leads to more effective and successful learning. According to Idol (2006), there is a link between teachers with experience teaching in inclusive settings and positive attitudes. That is, teachers that were teaching in inclusive classrooms expressed more favorability towards inclusion (Idol, 2006).

Need for Research

A critical first step to assessing the effectiveness of inclusion is to investigate the special education knowledge and perceptions of general education teachers. Numerous studies showed that educators are not prepared or well-versed in teaching in inclusive settings leading to ineffective teaching and higher stress. Furthermore, negative attitudes about inclusion affect fidelity. Due to the misinterpretation and lack of resources, many school districts are implementing inclusion in various ways. Nevertheless, children with disabilities must be

provided the necessary supports to make adequate academic progress. As stated in IDEA (2004), students with disabilities are entitled to FAPE in the LRE. If a student is not making appropriate academic progress, then the child is being denied FAPE. Thus, a second vital step is to assess the effectiveness of inclusion on the academic performance of students. Finally, identifying the barriers and limitations to inclusion will show what is needed to implement inclusion with fidelity.

Chapter Two Summary

Several decades ago, Brown v. Board of Education (1954) was the first major Supreme Court case to lead to changes in education. This led to parent advocacy groups forming to fight for equal rights for all students. Over the next two decades, several more court cases occurred and more federal and public laws were passed. A momentous law in education was PL 94 - 142 better known as Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA). This law marked the birth of inclusive practices and guaranteed rights to students with disabilities to be educated alongside their age-appropriate peers. After several reauthorizations and amendments, this law is known as IDEA (2004). IDEA (2004) protects and guarantees the rights of students with special needs.

IDEA (2004) outlines thirteen disabilities that qualify students for special education services and supports within the classroom. Within IDEA (2004), timelines for the special education identification process are outlined. Nevertheless, each state is able to mandate more restrictive timelines as long as they adhere to IDEA (2004). IDEA (2004) outlines six components that are guaranteed for students with disabilities. Students with disabilities are entitled to FAPE in the LRE with age-appropriate peers, if adequate progress is being made. General education teachers are expected to be experts at accommodating and modifying

instruction to meet the diverse needs of all students. An IEP is a legally binding document that general education teachers are expected to follow. The progress of students with disabilities should be monitored and communicated to parents on a regular basis; a report card is not sufficient enough.

Due to IDEA (2004), inclusion is the new norm in education. Inclusion is defined in various ways, some detailed and some vague. Although inclusion is not stated in IDEA (2004) based on the mandate of including students with special needs, it is an assumed practice. Some school districts utilize various forms of inclusion leading to effective and noneffective results. There is an abundance of literature to suggest both proponents and opponents of inclusion for teachers and students. Inclusion has been a practice for decades; learning from the past will ensure successful implementation in the future.

Chapter three will discuss the methodology for this study. This includes information about the target population, sampling method and size, participants, setting, data collection and analysis, transferability, ethical considerations, and limitations.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Introduction to Methodology

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to determine the effectiveness of inclusion on students' academic performance. IDEA (2004) mandates that exceptional children must be educated alongside age-appropriate peers in the LRE. As a result of IDEA (2004), school districts must implement and practice inclusion. Inclusion models differ from school district to school district making it difficult to compare districts to one another. Research suggests many benefits to inclusion for all students (de Graaf et al., 2013; Dessemontet et al., 2012; Dyssegaard and Larsen, 2013; Hehir et al., 2016; Oh-Young & Filler, 2015). This study examines a rural school district in Central Pennsylvania to determine the effectiveness of inclusion in academics.

The research design selected for this study was a qualitative descriptive study. A qualitative design allows researchers to gather insight and information from individuals to gain context about a situation. The tool utilized for this study was semi-structured interviews. Interviews provide the researcher in-depth details to build context and a better understanding of the research in question (Bloomberg & Vople, 2019).

Research Questions

Research in the field of education continues to grow, nevertheless, many gaps in educational research exist. Inclusion is a practice that began in the 1970s and has been expanded upon. Today, school districts are expected to include students with disabilities in general education classrooms, otherwise school districts are denying students their right of FAPE; a federal mandate of IDEA (2004). Inclusion is a hot topic in education and has been researched in various ways. The research study sought to find answers to the following

research questions in regard to inclusion:

Q1: What is the effectiveness of inclusion without the use of additional supports (co-teaching and/or instructional aides) in K-12 on the academic performance of students?

Q2: What are educators (teachers, administration) background knowledge/perceptions of special education practices/law, and how does this influence teaching students with disabilities?

Q3: What barriers and limitations prevent inclusion from being effective for the academic performance of students?

Research Design

A qualitative study was chosen as the design for this research as it uses a naturalistic approach to gain insight, make sense of, and interpret phenomena as it occurs in the natural setting (Bloomberg & Vople, 2019; Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Queiros et al., 2017). The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of inclusion and academic performance through educators' experiences. A quantitative study would not be appropriate for this study as mathematical data would not provide contextual information to answer the research questions. Qualitative data is described as robust and in-depth (Bloomberg & Vople, 2019). Therefore, a qualitative study was used to answer the research questions.

Qualitative studies can be broken into different categories such as action research, case studies, ethnographic, grounded study, narrative, descriptive, etc., which can be useful for various research projects (Bloomberg & Vople, 2019). A qualitative descriptive study was used to conduct this research. The purpose of this study was to provide insight into inclusion and academic performance of students by understanding the background and educators' viewpoints. Descriptive studies seek to provide descriptions and summaries of experiences of

individuals or groups by using the individuals' language in the summary of the data (Hogan, 2020; Kim et al., 2017; Lambert & Lambert, 2012). For this reason, a qualitative descriptive study was ideal for this study.

Action research investigates possible solutions to the problems individuals experience and was not appropriate for this study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). A case study is used to understand the phenomena or multiple phenomena of a program, organization, unit, community, etc. (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). Thus, a case study would not be appropriate for this research. Ethnography provides descriptions of the culture and customs of individuals, so an ethnographic study would not be appropriate for this study (Bloomberg & Volpe; 2019; Hogan, 2020). Grounded theory was not chosen for this study as the goal of it is to establish a theory (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). A narrative inquiry focuses on the stories of the participants and is used to study life, therefore, it was not selected for this study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019).

For this study, structured interviews were conducted with educators to collect data to better understand inclusion and students' academic performance. To do this, open-ended questionnaires were used during interviews with educators. The open-ended questionnaire was created by the researcher and tailored to the school district. A field test of the open-ended questionnaire was conducted with five other educators, that were not part of the research study. Below information about the population, sampling, setting, and data collection will be detailed.

Target Population, Sampling Information, Setting, and Associated Procedures

Target Population

The target population for this study was approximately 150 educators in grades K-12. Educators include general education teachers, special education teachers, and administrators.

The criteria for participation is educators must be utilizing inclusive practices, be acting as an administrator, special education teacher, or general education teacher of a core subject (core subjects are math, science, and ELA). Educational backgrounds vary from earning a bachelor's degree to earning a master's degree. Additionally, differences in gender, content area taught, and years of service were observed. General education teachers that did not teach core classes were excluded from this study.

It is critical to survey educators with various levels of educational experience to determine if the experience is a barrier to effective inclusion. Administrations' perspectives were also collected to determine how their perspectives may influence practices. Finally, although special education teachers have a background in special education, some were surveyed as they may have strong viewpoints on inclusion.

Sampling Method

The sampling method selected for this study was purposeful and judgment sampling (Bloomberg & Vople, 2019; Hogan, 2020; Leung, 2015). Judgment sampling is a sampling technique used in qualitative studies. It allows the researcher to deliberately select participants based on meeting outlined criteria for participation (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019; Hogan, 2020; Leung, 2015). Educators' perspectives on inclusive practices were the focus of this study. Purposeful sampling allowed the researcher to select participants based on the qualification of teaching in the inclusive setting.

Sample Size

The sample size of this study was 12 educators. Participants were purposely selected based on meeting the outlined criteria and selected from a bank of interested participants. Interviews are how data was collected. According to Bloomberg & Volpe (2019), the ideal

number of interviews to be conducted in a qualitative study is no more than 12. Qualitative studies have small sample sizes because they are used to gain further understanding of context and experiences (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Hogan, 2020; Queiros et al., 2017). Additionally, qualitative studies are used to discover themes and patterns (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). Qualitative studies in comparison to quantitative studies are not used to generalize across multiple settings but rather used to gather insight and context about situations (Guetterman, 2015; Hogan, 2020). Therefore, 12 educators were used for this study to gain a deeper understanding, perceptions, and insight.

The recruitment of teachers was done via email and in person. The high school and middle school participants were recruited in person. Emails were used to recruit prospective participants from the elementary and intermediate schools. In-person recruiting occurred if educators did not respond to email. In the event that more than 12 participants volunteered, a random name generator was used to choose six participants from the primary level and six participants from the secondary level, as long as the selection criteria were met. Informed consent, Appendix B, was given to all participants in both electronic and hardcopy. If consent is not given, the participants were not used in this study, and a replacement was found. Participants were given the opportunity to ask questions and were able to drop out of the study at any time. No incentives were used to recruit participants; educators participated on a completely voluntary basis.

Participants

Twelve educators that teach in inclusive settings were interviewed for this study. Three administrators, two special education teachers, and seven general education teachers. Participants were interviewed from each of the four district's buildings. Four participants had different roles

in multiple buildings. Table 3.1 provides details of each participant. Educational background ranged from bachelor's to master's degrees and new educators to veteran educators (teaching more than 10 years). Six male and six females participated in this study. Many of the participants held multiple certifications. All participants have taught in the inclusive setting for at least one year.

Table 3.1: *Details of each Participant*

Participant Name	Years of Experience	Gender	Years Teaching in Current District
A	16	Female	5
B	16	Female	16
C	21	Female	20
D	6	Female	Less than 1 Year
E	26	Male	26
F	18	Male	9
G	18	Male	14
H	22	Male	22
I	21	Male	Less than 1 Year
J	5	Female	Less than 1 Year
K	8	Female	8
L	20	Male	20

Setting

The setting for this qualitative study took place in a rural public school district in Central Pennsylvania. The district educates students in grades kindergarten through twelve, and seniors are given the option to attend a technical school and/or university for college credits. The estimated student population of students in grades K-12 is approximately 1900. About 93

percent of the school's attendees are white and/or Caucasian and around 40 percent of the population is considered economically disadvantaged. About 14.2 percent of the student population are identified as receiving special education services. The school district is one-to-one with Chromebooks at the middle school and high school. All classrooms district-wide are provided sonic viewboards to utilize for instruction.

The school district is comprised of an elementary school (grades K-2), an intermediate school (grades 3-5), a middle school (grades 6-8), and a high school (grades 9-12). Each school is a separate building. The elementary school and intermediate school each have one principal, while the middle school and high school each have two principals. The high school has six special education teachers, the middle school has six, the intermediate school has seven, and the elementary school has seven. There is one K-8 gifted support teacher, one K-5 social worker, and one 6-12 social worker.

The high school has two paraprofessionals that support the life skills classroom. The middle school, intermediate school, and elementary school struggle to maintain a consistent number of paraprofessionals and aides due to staffing shortages, so the number fluctuates week to week. Each school district also has a school nurse, cafeteria staff, and custodians. Shared between the four districts is one reading specialist, one speech and language therapist, one occupational therapist, and one ESL provider.

Data Collection, Analysis, and Related Information

Data Collection

A letter to the Superintendent of the Schools was sent to obtain permission to conduct the study in Appendix C. Once permission was obtained, a letter to the principal of each school was sent to describe and inform each school about the study in Appendix D. The principals were able

to ask additional questions to fully understand the research process and/or purpose of the study. Permission was requested to conduct interviews via zoom during the school day. Exceptions were made if this could not be arranged. Participants were recruited in-person and via email and were given informed consent both electronically and in person.

Interviews were scheduled with the participants according to a time that worked best. The researcher setup various meeting times for the participants to select from for organizational purposes. The researcher sent reminders to participants via email 24 hours before the scheduled interview. Participants were reminded of the purpose of this study and reminded responses would be collected and reported anonymously. Interviews were conducted via zoom and recorded. Participants were also given the choice of keeping their cameras off during the interview process. The zoom meetings were password protected and each meeting used a different link with a randomized ID. The transcripts were electronically saved with pseudonyms to a file on a computer. The computer was password and fingerprint protected for only the researcher to access the files. The data was saved in a file on a computer and will be destroyed and deleted at the conclusion of those three years. Participants' signed consent forms were stored in a secure lockbox and will be destroyed after three years.

Data Analysis

During the interviews, the researcher took notes. Transcriptions from the interviews were generated. The researcher watched the transcriptions after the interviews to ensure accurate notes were taken. For this study, thematic analysis was used to analyze the data. Due to the descriptive nature of the data, thematic analysis was appropriate. Thematic analysis involves coding the data and identifying overlying themes and patterns (Bloomberg &Volpe, 2019, Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researcher completed the thematic analysis by hand, using sticky notes to group

themes and used software to compare results to ensure accuracy. Ideal for education and dissertations, Nvivo was the software chosen by the researcher. NVivo is software tool that allows the researcher to streamline and analyze qualitative data (*Fueling academic research with world-class data analysis software,* n.d.). Qualitative software has recently become popular since it has advanced concept-mapping tools to correlate themes (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). Detailed information about the data analysis will be provided in chapter four.

Presentation of Results

No names of participants will be used in the presentation of results. This research was conducted to fulfill the doctorate requirements of Slippery Rock University. The results of this study will be typed up and shared electronically with stakeholders. If applicable, a presentation will be given to the administration to discuss implications for potential professional development. Due to the participants being employees, pseudonyms will be used to protect the identities of the participants for the presentation to administration.

Transferability and Triangulation

A goal of qualitative studies is to achieve transferability (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). Descriptions of participants, demographics, population, sample size, and other methodology details are provided to allow future researchers to replicate this study (Anney, 2015; Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019; Hogan, 2020). A purposeful and judgmental sampling of 12 participants was used for this study. Utilizing purposeful sampling in a qualitative study allows for transferability, which is an important component of qualitative studies (Anney, 2015; Bitsch, 2005; Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019; Hogan, 2020). The data collection tools are included in Appendix F.

An important component of qualitative studies is triangulation. Triangulation allows for

transferability and more detailed data (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). For this study, triangulation was achieved by using multiple participants from various levels of K-12 education with structured interviews.

Limitations

The focus of this study was educators' viewpoints in a rural school district. For this study, insights and data were collected from general education teachers, special education teachers, and administrators. Teachers that taught electives and specials, gifted teachers, and teachers that had no experience teaching in the inclusive setting were excluded from this study. Even though teachers of specials and elective may have experience working with students with disabilities, they were not used in this study. The target general education teachers taught core classes (math, science, ELA) to grades K-12. Whereas administrators and special education teachers represented a larger band of data, either grades K-5 or grades 6-12.

A limitation of this study could have been participants responding inaccurately to please the investigator. Due to the co-investigator being a fellow employee, participants could have provided answers during the interview that they felt pressured to give or felt coercion. Furthermore, participants' responses could have been untruthful or false statements. To avoid this, participants were reminded of the anonymity of the responses and ensured their identity would be protected and not shared with administrators or other educators within the buildings. Questions were also worded in a neutral perspective to avert any potential bias.

Another limitation to consider is the misinterpretation of the data. While software is a useful tool, accounting for user error is critical. The researcher performed several pilot tests in NVivo to practice entering and analyzing data. It is also important to consider the software may misidentify codes, patterns, and themes leading to incorrect interpretations. The investigator

double-checked results by hand to avoid this misinterpretation.

A final, limitation to consider is the varying levels of experience participants have in the inclusive setting. Some participants have taught in an inclusion setting on a daily basis for several years while others had little or no classroom teaching experience with disabilities. Administrators are not generally teaching in the classroom setting; however, their perspectives were vital in this study. While purposeful sampling was used for this study, the sample size may not provide enough insight to transfer to other districts. Nevertheless, the data may provide information about how to improve the district's programs and/or professional development opportunities.

Ethical Considerations

Permission to conduct this study was given by the IRB of Slippery Rock University. In addition, permission was given by the Superintendent of Schools. Each participant was given informed consent in two forms, electronically and hardcopy. Participants were assured anonymity and confidentially would be used for the duration of the study. Files were protected by both password and fingerprints to ensure confidentiality was not breached. Lastly, participants were reminded that participation in this study was voluntary, and they were able to withdraw at any time without consequences.

Chapter Three Summary

This chapter provided information about the methodology for this study. A qualitative descriptive study was used because it aligned with the purpose of this study. The purpose of this study was to examine the effectiveness of inclusion and academic performance of students by collecting perspectives and insight of various educators. Qualitative studies seek to provide an understanding about phenomena in natural settings (Bloomberg & Vople, 2019; Creswell &

Creswell, 2018; Queiros et al., 2017).

The target population was 12 educators from a rural school district in Central Pennsylvania. Qualitative studies use smaller samples, which could be a potential limitation of this study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). Purposeful sampling was used to select the participants of this study. Participants included general education teachers, special education teachers, and administrators of grades K-12.

Open-ended questionnaires were used during the interviews of the participants. Interviews were recorded for data collection and analysis. Participants were reminded of the anonymity of the interviews and their identities were protected. The data were thematically analyzed and coded to summarize the results. Chapter four provides information about the summary and analysis of the data collected in this study.

CHAPTER 4: DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to determine the effectiveness of inclusion on students' academic performance. The design of this study was a qualitative descriptive study, using semi-structure interviews. An important aspect of qualitative studies is triangulation. Triangulation allows for transferability and in-depth data (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). For this study, triangulation was achieved by using participants from various levels of K-12 education with semi-structured interviews. For data collection, participants were interviewed via zoom, with cameras off to protect the identity of participants. Recordings of each interview were generated and used for data analysis. This chapter will summarize the data, provide details for the method of analysis, and present the results by each research question.

Sample Characteristics and Description

The twelve participants of this study were educators from a rural public school in central Pennsylvania. Participants had various levels of experience, years of service, and multiple disciplines or content areas. Each of the participants taught in the inclusive setting for a minimum of one year. Some identifying information, such as participants' specific certifications were not included in the demographic data to ensure anonymity of the participants. Table 4.1 summarizes the participants' educational role, highest degree, and years teaching in the inclusive setting.

Table 4.1

Demographics of each Participant

Participant Name	Educational Role	Highest Degree	Years Teaching Inclusive Setting
A	General Education Teacher	Masters	16
B	Administrator	Doctorate	16
C	Special Education Teacher	Masters	16
D	General Education Teacher	Masters	1
E	General Education Teacher	Bachelors	26
F	Administrator	Masters	30
G	General Education Teacher	Bachelors	18
H	General Education Teacher	Masters	22
I	General Education Teacher	Bachelors	21
J	Special Education Teacher	Masters	5
K	General Education Teacher	Masters	8
L	Administrator	Masters	20

Figure 4.1 illustrates participant total years in education.

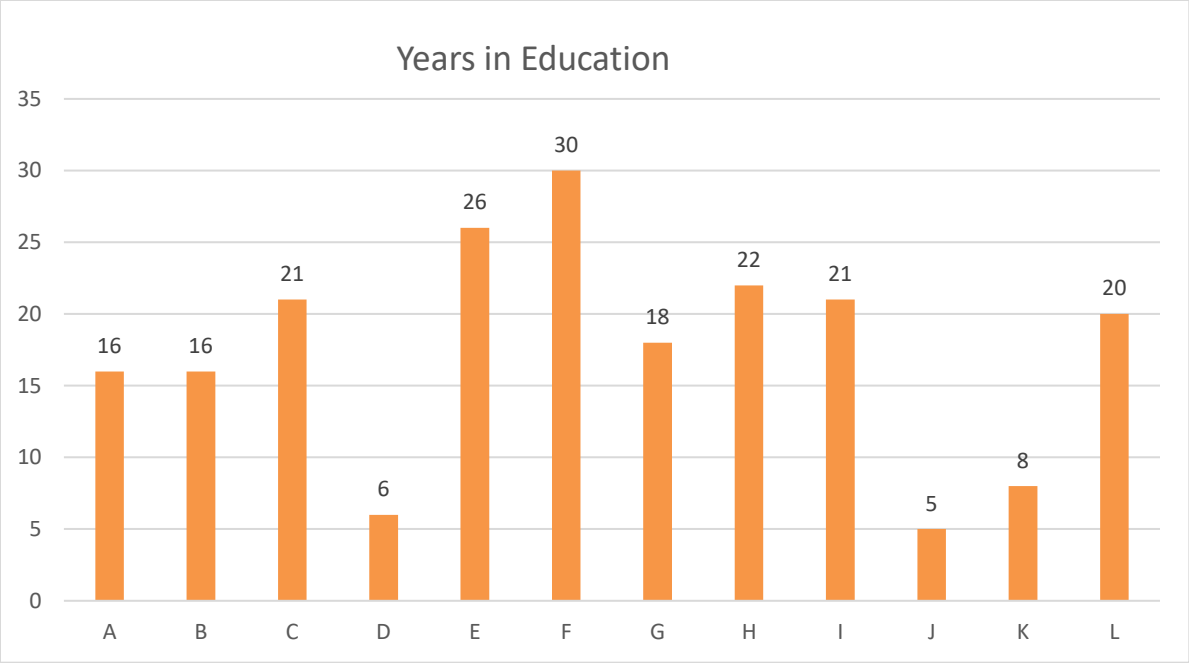


Figure 4.1. Years in Education

Participants certifications included Spanish K-12, ESL K-12, Supervision and Curriculum, Principal/Leadership, Superintendent License, Administrative K-12, Elementary Education K-6, K-12 Special Education, 7-12 Biology, 7-9 Math, Cooperative Education, Library/School Media, K-12, Earth and Space Science, Environmental Science, General Science, Accounting, Social Studies 7-12, Instructional Technology, 7-12 Office Technology, Highly Qualified Elementary Education, Elementary Education K-4, and ABA Certificate. Certifications are not linked to each participant to protect anonymity.

Data Analysis Procedures

Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data. This method for analyzing data is commonly used in qualitative research, yet poorly distinguished due to the flexibility of analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Nowell et al., 2017). Thematic analysis involves organizing, describing, coding, and reporting themes found within the data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Nowell et al., 2017). Advantages of thematic analysis include its flexible approach and versatility of

summarizing large data sets (Nowell et al., 2017). The data analysis followed a six-phase model as developed by Braun and Clarke (2006). The phases are (1) familiarizing with the data set, (2) generating initial codes, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) producing the report (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Nowell et al., 2017).

Phase one involved the investigator immersing into the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Nowell et al., 2017). The data collected through the semi-structured interviews was transferred into a spreadsheet. After transferring the data into a spreadsheet, the investigator re-read the data to grasp the breadth and depth of responses. The investigator re-read the data a third time and wrote down initial ideas gained from the data analysis.

Next, during phase two, generating initial codes took place. Codes were formed using an inductive analysis approach. An inductive analysis is data-driven and allows the researcher to code from the raw data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Nowell et al., 2017). Codes identified interesting aspects of the data and refer to a basic component of the raw data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Each code should have defined bounds and not be redundant (Nowell et al., 2017). The researcher used a methodical approach to work through the data set and gather all data relevant to potential themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This involved reading in vivo responses, verbatim, line by line, searching for patterns, and highlighting key components for initial codes to emerge. These codes were organized into a table.

After finalizing the codes, phase three commenced. Phase three consists of sorting and searching for themes in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Nowell et al., 2017). Themes of the data represent patterned and vital information in correlation to the research questions (Nowell et al., 2017). Some initial codes formed main themes and some initial codes formed subthemes (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Nowell et al., 2017). The researcher used sticky notes to create mind-maps to

organize codes by groups and develop themes. Mind maps organize data by using a central idea and key concepts that branch off the central ideas (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This was also done by dragging and dropping in Nvivo software. At the conclusion of phase three sixteen potential themes were identified.

Phase four entails refining the potential themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Nowell et al., 2017). According to Braun and Clarke (2006), this phase has two levels of reviewing and refining themes. For level one, the researcher reviewed all potential themes to determine if a logical pattern was formed. Once this was completed, level two evaluated if the potential themes fit in relation to the entire data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Nowell et al., 2017). The researcher re-read participants responses to ensure that the sixteen themes were supported by the data set. As a result, the researcher added a seventeenth theme.

Upon refining the themes, phase five started. Phase five involves defining and naming themes to determine what each theme conveyed (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Nowell et al., 2017). For this phase, the researcher identified the essence of each theme captured and determined which research question the theme answered. To do this, themes were read in correlation with participants' responses. At the completion of phase five, all seventeen themes were clearly defined.

Finally, phase six entails producing the report (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Nowell et al., 2017). During this phase the researcher selected extracts from participants' responses to support themes. Appendix I, shows the codes and themes organized with participants' responses. The researcher then summarized the data and themes as outlined within this chapter.

Summary of Results

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive study sought to understand how inclusion impacts the learning of all students. IDEA (2004) mandates that students with disabilities must be educated alongside age-appropriate peers in the LRE. As a result of IDEA (2004), school districts must implement and use inclusionary practices. Inclusion models differ from school district to school district making it difficult to compare districts to one another. This study examines a rural school district in Central Pennsylvania to determine the effectiveness of inclusion in academics.

Thematic analysis was conducted inductively to link educators' responses with themes to answer the research questions. The research study sought to find answers to the following research questions regarding inclusion:

Q1: What is the effectiveness of inclusion without the use of additional supports (co-teaching and/or instructional aides) in K-12 on the academic performance of students?

Q2: What are educators (teachers, administration) background knowledge/perceptions of special education practices/law, and how does this influence teaching students with disabilities?

Q3: What barriers and limitations prevent inclusion from being effective for the academic performance of students?

Table 4.2 below identifies the pseudonyms of each participant to reference in vivo responses. The data is organized and presented by each research question. Furthermore, the research question is stated with discussion of themes to follow.

Table 4.2

Participant Pseudonyms

Participant	**Pseudonym**
A	Mrs. Arlington
B	Mrs. Barbados

C	Mrs. Carlisle
D	Mrs. Denver
E	Mr. Erie
F	Mr. Frankfort
G	Mr. Grove
H	Mr. Huntington
I	Mr. Indianapolis
J	Mrs. Jefferson
K	Mrs. Knoxville
L	Mr. Lancaster

Themes for Research Question 1

Research question 1: What is the effectiveness of inclusion without the use of additional supports (co-teaching and/or instructional aides) in K-12 on the academic performance of students?

This study revealed that educators are providing multiple opportunities, interventions, and supports to ensure the success of their students. Educators had varied responses for the types of supports used within their classrooms. While teachers and administrators were certain students with disabilities were included in their classrooms, many were uniformed about the categories of disabilities they work with. The data shows seven themes in correlation to research question one, as discussed below.

Educators are uninformed. Seventy-five percent of participants conveyed a lack of knowledge about the categories of disabilities they encounter, and the percentage of students identified in each class period. Multiple participants expressed they were unsure of the types of

disabilities. Many participants also used incorrect or offensive terminology to describe students with disabilities. Mr. Huntington's response:

I've worked with a student with cerebral palsy, visually impaired students, wheelchair students, autistic students, and students that used assistive technology.

I push in so I work with a variety of students like ADHD, ELLs, and ODD (Mrs. Arlington).

Unsure, learning disabilities of some type (Mr. Indianapolis).

Spectrum kids, ODD, ADHD, visual impaired, hearing impaired, and students that used assisted technology (Mr. Erie).

Participants expressed varying percentages of students identified per class period. Some participants were unsure how many were in a class and took guesses.

Unsure, maybe 4% (Mr. Lancaster).

Due to selective scheduling, the learning support class is a high percentage of disabled to non-disabled, so I'd say approximately 25% disabled for the grade (Mr. Erie).

One percent or less (Mr. Grove).

Forty percent to fifty percent (Mrs. Carlisle).

The pattern in responses revealed that teachers and administrators are uninformed about the categories of disabilities that they work with. Responses also revealed a varying number of students identified per class period. Primary teachers had fixed ratios of students with special needs to whole class, while secondary had varying numbers due to switching classes throughout the day.

Using multiple means to evaluate. All participants expressed using multiple methods to evaluate student academic performance. Methods included formative and summative

assessments, standardized testing, benchmarking, various assignment completion, discussions, progress monitoring, and positive working habits. Mr. Lancaster's response:

I not only look at grades but positive working habits to be successful for life or work.

I look at test and quiz scores, homework, on-task working, and meeting progress monitoring goals (Mrs. Arlington).

Effort through student's own performance, homework completion, labs or projects, tests, and quizzes (Mr. Grove).

I look at more than grades. It is based on student work completion and discussions (Mr. Indianapolis).

I look at easy CBM, CDTs, MAPs, benchmarking, enVision's SuccessMaker, which is differentiated for each student, and GetMoreMath (Mr. Frankfort).

I use formative and summative assessments like tests, quizzes, projects, exit tickets, and discussions (Mr. Erie).

I use formative and summative assessments and being able to apply information across content (Mrs. Knoxville).

The sample responses above reveal a common pattern of multiple means to evaluate the success of students. Some educators use formative and summative assessments in addition to other methods to evaluate students' academic performance.

Providing various supports. Teachers and administrators provided details about the various supports and opportunities they are using to help students academically. Supports and opportunities include observations of students, consulting with learning support teachers, following IEPs/504s, stating clear expectations, PBIS, individualized support, Social-Emotional Learning (SEL), relationship building, after school programs, using small groups, and prompting.

Sample responses below describe the supports and opportunities educators are providing for students.

I walk around and observe to help based on student needs. I also collaborate with the learning support teachers (Mr. Huntington).

First, I analyze the needs of students to differentiate. I collaborate with learning support teachers. I provide extra help, additional review, use small groups or grouping students, and use visual accommodations over reading. I think relationship building is important as well (Mr. Erie).

I use benchmarking to track progress and determine needs, small groups based on the needs and abilities of students, and use paraprofessionals, when available (Mrs. Knoxville).

I have individual conversations with students when needed, reinforce rules and expectations, and retain when needed (Mr. Grove).

I follow all IEPs/504s. I walk around and observe to help based on the needs of the students and collaborate with learning support teachers (Mrs. Arlington).

PBIS is used in all school buildings. The elementary school uses check in/check out (Mrs. Bakersfield).

I use pre-assessments and grouping students. I track student data. I use individualized learning plans. I teach SEL skills (Mrs. Jefferson).

We have multiple programs available for our students, Saturday school, wildcat academy, and homework help. All students and parents are welcome to attend these programs (Mr. Frankfort).

I make sure to give students missing work reminders and tell students to contact their teachers when they are absent (Mrs. Carlisle).

Performance of students with disabilities varies. Educators were asked how the performance of students with disabilities compares to the performance of students without disabilities. Teachers and administrators believe some students with IEPs are performing better and some students with IEPs are performing worse. Furthermore, educators expressed that a grade is not an accurate reflection of a students' abilities.

Some students without IEPs do awful so it comes down to effort and motivation. I'd say they perform on par (Mr. Grove).

I feel they perform worse because they are not properly supported. No, grades are not an accurate reflection of a students' ability. Grades do not assess what is taught, they are inflated, and teachers use poorly designed assessments (Mrs. Bakersfield).

Students with disabilities are performing below where they need to be. A grade doesn't matter. The skill set is what matters, and we should award all students for achieving (Mr. Frankfort).

Students with disabilities are performing on par, I am pleased with effort. My class is ungraded, so it is a good example that grades aren't needed or accurate (Mr. Huntington).

Behavioral problems are affecting student performance. Some students are doing worse in inclusion classrooms because of it, but some better because they are getting more help (Mrs. Carlisle).

I'm unsure if a grade is an accurate reflection of a students' ability. Some students are bad test takers, and students with IEPs have barriers to take tests and be successful (Mrs. Arlington).

According to the sample responses above, the pattern shows that student performance is mixed; however, a grade is not accurate of a student's ability. Some participants expressed that

students with disabilities are performing worse, while others said on par.

Many accommodations and modifications are used. Educators were asked what accommodations and modifications were used within their classroom to support students' success. Patterns in responses revealed that teachers are implementing multiple accommodations and modifications within their classrooms to ensure the success of their students. Some educators were able to list evidenced-based practices (EBPs) that are used within their classrooms or buildings, while others had no idea what an EBP entailed. The excerpts below reveal several accommodations and modifications that educators are using within their classrooms.

Within my classroom I use proximity, word walls or banks, small groups, read aloud, extended time, building background knowledge, building vocabulary, eliminating distractors, color coding, and pictures or manipulatives (Mrs. Arlington).

I don't feel the district is good at differentiating. Some of the accommodations and modifications used are read aloud, extra time, small groups, technology use, and modified tests (Mrs. Bakersfield).

They are student dependent. Some of the ones I use are reduce multiple choice items, copy of completed notes, previewing, review, proximal seating, use of fidgets, visual and/or verbal prompting, small group testing, use of manipulatives or tactile, chunking, checking for understanding, and extended time (Mrs. Jefferson).

What is an EBP, I have no idea (Mrs. Carlisle).

No idea what an EBP is (Mr. Huntington).

Effectiveness of inclusion is average at best. Participants were asked to rate on a 5-point Likert scale the effectiveness of the inclusion program on students' academic performance. The inclusion program of this school was defined as incorporating and educating students with

disabilities within the general education classroom with their age-appropriate peers to the fullest extent possible with little to no additional supports from co-teaching or instructional aides. One represented ineffective and five represented effective or best. The responses revealed that most educators believe that the effectiveness of the inclusion program is average or below average on students' academic performance. Furthermore, seventy-five percent of participants rated the inclusion program as 3 or less.

I'd say 2. It's effective with some, but several behavioral issues with students with IEPs make it difficult (Mr. Indianapolis).

I'd give it a 2. Some advanced learners are suffering. We need better resources and opportunities. There are still learning gaps with students without disabilities (Mr. Frankfort).

Two. Teachers don't want students with IEPs or know how to support them. As a district we are not good at differentiating (Mrs. Bakerfield).

2.5. Many students without disabilities find it easier to work independently and choose not to work with students with disabilities (Mr. Lancaster).

One participant felt it was a one.

One. Students are included but it's not effective (Mrs. Jefferson).

Some participants gave it a 3.

Three. It's dependent on the individual student and family involvement. Student motivation is key. Honors students don't experience the benefits of inclusion as much. They are missing out on experiencing diversity and gaining a deeper understanding through someone else's eyes (Mr. Grove).

Three. We are giving it our best effort (Mr. Huntington).

Three. We are trying to include students with disabilities but it's not effective. We are not

given enough resources or support for students. It is student dependent though. If a parent is knowledgeable about special education, then those kids get the most for their child (Mrs. Knoxville).

The responses above show how effective the inclusion program is on student academic achievement. A pattern of a response of two or three is shown, revealing that it is average at best.

Inconsistently and ineffectively. While inclusionary practices are used, support is not provided consistently and effectively. Teachers and educators revealed that inclusion differed from building to building and class to class. Some educators expressed minimal to no support for inclusionary practices and some educators had co-teaching and paraprofessionals or aides, irregularly. The excerpts below reveal a pattern of inconsistency and ineffectiveness.

Kids with IEPs are in general education classrooms with infrequent co-teaching and ineffective co-teaching, when it occurs, it is rare, and there are many behavioral issues the inhibit the learning of students (Mrs. Jefferson).

Learning support students are in regular classes with minimal support, sometimes pulled out, but mostly for testing (Mrs. Bakersfield).

Special education students in regular education classrooms with no aides, no co-teaching, and no support (Mr. Indianapolis).

Kids are tracked and grouped based on levels or scores on benchmarking platforms. Learning support teachers are provided to classrooms with higher rations of IEPs, when possible. Aides are used when available but limited because of staffing issues (Mr. Frankfort).

In my classroom, I sometimes have classroom aides and paraprofessionals to provide additional support, but they float in and out. I have no co-teacher (Mrs. Knoxville).

Most special education students are in regular education classrooms without supports, aides, or co-teaching (Mr. Grove).

Themes for Research Question 2

Q2: What are educators (teachers, administration) background knowledge/perceptions of special education practices/law, and how does this influence teaching students with disabilities?

Participants were asked a series of questions to determine their background knowledge in special education and perceptions. This study revealed that educators have limited background knowledge about special education. Many educators did not take special education courses in their teacher preparation programs. The data revealed six major themes. Each theme is discussed in detail to follow.

Lack of knowledge. Participants were asked about the law that governs students with disabilities. Based on the patterns in the responses, teachers and administrators are uneducated about the law that mandates inclusionary practices for students with disabilities. Fifty-eight percent of participant responses were simply "not sure" or "no idea". Some sample responses below reveal a pattern of uncertainty.

I think it is the 1972 clause that supports the disabled, Individual goals are closed with progress monitoring and modified continuously (Mr. Frankfort).

I think it's meeting goals and progress monitoring (Mrs. Arlington).

Not sure. I don't know the acronym, but IEP has them (Mr. Indianapolis).

No idea (Mrs. Denver).

Not sure (Mr. Huntington).

In teachers' classrooms from special education (Mr. Grove).

The Individuals with disabilities Act guarantees LRE and FAPE (Mrs. Carlisle).

Teacher preparation programs lacking. Seventy-five percent of educators expressed taking limited or no special education courses during teacher preparation programs. Three participants had a major in special education, so they completed extensive coursework in special

education. Some participants earned master's degrees and expressed taking special education coursework then, but not during undergraduate classes. Sample responses below revealed a pattern of lacking educational programs.

Don't think I had any special education courses, it's too long to remember (Mr. Grove).

Not a lot, too far to remember (Mr. Erie).

I took a couple of classes in special education and special education law but only in my doctoral studies (Mrs. Arlington).

A little; mainly topics on adapting assignments and following IEPs (Mr. Indianapolis.

During undergraduate classes, I took broad and superficial topics. During my administrative coursework and doctoral studies, I took none (Mrs. Bakersfield).

During undergraduate classes no, but during my masters yes (Mr. Huntington).

Yes, I was a special education major (Mrs. Jefferson).

Limited knowledge of inclusion. Teachers and administrators were asked what inclusion means. The patterns in responses revealed that educators' knowledge on inclusion is varied and limited. Sixty-seven percent of participants stated some variation of having a mixed class. That is, including students with IEPs with students without IEPs. Thirty-three percent, or 4, participants elaborated into further details about inclusion.

I think it is giving everyone the same academic and social opportunities regardless of ability (Mr. Lancaster).

I think it is including all students with and without disabilities and allowing them to perform at their own level (Mrs. Knoxville).

It's having students with IEPs in the general education setting to the fullest extent that is beneficial to their learning (Mrs. Jefferson).

I think it is the ability to for all students to attend grade-level work with differentiated work (Mr. Frankfort).

I think means including students with IEPs with non-IEP students (Mrs. Arlington).

Including all students, from gifted to learning disabled, in activities, groups, and academics (Mrs. Bakersfield).

Students with and without disabilities together (Mr. Erie).

Students with learning disabilities or IEPs included with regular education kids (Mr. Huntington).

Mixed classes with IEPs and non-IEPs (Mrs. Carlisle).

Students with disabilities spend a large amount of time in the general education classroom and not the special education classroom (Mr. Grove).

The sample responses above reveal a pattern of limited background knowledge on inclusion. Multiple participants stated that it is including students with disabilities with non-disabled peers. One participant, Mrs. Denver, stated that she was unsure.

Inconsistent with IEP document. Participants were asked about parts of an IEP. The responses revealed educators are inconsistent with knowing what an IEP is and the difference between accommodations and modifications. Sixty-seven percent of participants expressed that they knew what an IEP was; however, they had never seen the full document. Thirty-three percent of participants had no idea what an IEP was or what it entailed. Teachers and administrators had a partial understanding of the difference between accommodations and modifications. The responses below represent sample responses of the data.

Yes, an IEP is an individualized learning plan, but I only receive a copy of the SDIs instead of the full document (Mr. Huntington).

I have no idea what an IEP is and I haven't seen one here (Mrs. Denver).

I have no idea (Mr. Indianapolis).

I believe an accommodation is like proximity and a modification is changing tests (Mr. Erie).

I think an accommodation is creating a setting, and a modification is changing content (Mr. Lancaster).

I always get these confused, but I think an accommodation changes the classroom environment, seating, and time, and a modification is changes in content (Mrs. Bakersfield).

An accommodation adds things to give students. For a modification, work is changed or tweak assignments (Mrs. Jefferson).

Unknowledgeable about special education process. Educators revealed that they are unknowledgeable about the special education identification process. One participant fully knew the special education process, while others stated they were unsure or did not know. Some participants stated incorrect information, that is the teacher fills out a referral form. The sample responses below reflect that the educators are unknowledgeable about the special education identification process.

I know it is the request of a parent, not teacher, and I think a student is referred to MTSS first. I know there are other steps but I'm not sure (Mrs. Bakersfield).

No idea (Mrs. Denver).

Unsure (Mr. Grove).

I know there are procedures, but I have no idea what they are (Mr. Huntington).

The teacher can start the process with a parent, but I am not sure what happens after (Mr. Erie).

I think the parent recognizes the struggle and fills out a paper or the teacher (Mrs. Arlington).

Parents ask for an evaluation, then there are several tests to determine ability and present levels (Mr. Frankfort).

It starts with a general education teacher noticing struggles. The general education teacher notifies the parents and requests a meeting. The teacher(s) try various supports and interventions before referred for evaluation (Mrs. Jefferson).

Enjoy the challenge and reward. Teachers and educators were asked to share how they felt about teaching students with disabilities. Many of the participants had neutral or positive feelings. The responses revealed a pattern of educators enjoy teaching students with disabilities and view it as challenging and rewarding.

I enjoy it. It's the most fun. I like breaking down information (Mrs. Arlington).

I love it because the outlook is to help kids (Mrs. Carlisle).

I love it! Every child deserves to learn (Mr. Frankfort).

I think it's rewarding and challenging (Mr. Huntington).

I enjoy it! I like the challenge (Mrs. Knoxville).

I feel like it's more rewarding than teaching regular students. It's nice to work one-on-one with students and in small groups. I feel like it has more impact (Mrs. Jefferson).

Okay with it (Mrs. Bakersfield).

No problems with it, all are welcome in my class (Mr. Grove).

No problem with it (Mr. Indianapolis).

No problem with it (Mr. Lancaster).

I'm not totally comfortable with it, I need to learn more (Mrs. Denver).

It depends on the disability. I am not sure I'm effective teaching all disabilities (Mr. Erie).

Half of the participants expressed positive words about their feelings towards working with disabilities. Approximately 17% did not feel comfortable or felt they were not adept at teaching students with disabilities. Around 33% expressed neutral feelings about working with students with disabilities.

Themes for Research Question 3

Q3: What barriers and limitations prevent inclusion from being effective for the academic performance of students?

This study revealed that educators believe there are barriers and limitations to implementing inclusion effectively. Many expressed the lack of training or professional development and lack of resources as main barriers. Participants also provided their ideas on how to make improvements to the inclusion program so it could be more effective on students' academic performance. Four major themes were identified from the data and our discussed below.

Various improvements. Participants identified several barriers and ideas for improvements to the inclusion program. A total of ten ideas were given as advice for improvement. The first area for improvement was more collaboration. The sample responses below represent the participants that felt collaboration was an area of improvement.

Teachers need to be more involved and have common planning (Mrs. Arlington).

There needs to be more collaboration and time to connect with teachers, daily, to determine if students can do the assignments rather than just modifying them. I am not involved in meetings for special education. Everyone needs to be included (Mr. Huntington).

There needs to be more general education input. We need to meet with other teachers and administration to discuss what successful inclusion looks like. Then we should evaluate each student's case and listen to general education input (Mrs. Knoxville).

One participant stated teachers' perceptions need to be changed first.

We need to change teachers' perspective to want the kids and understand all kids need to be successful. I am not sure how to help and support them, but teachers need to learn to support and want special education kids (Mrs. Bakersfield).

Some participants expressed staffing issues and concerns as an area for improvement. Below are sample answers of participants.

We should reduce class assignments, get extra bodies such as aides, staff, and paraprofessionals (Mrs. Carlisle).

We need more learning support teachers. Aides make the class worse (Mr. Erie).

We should add an additional case manager to check in with students (Mr. Lancaster).

We need to create and fill more staff positions (Mr. Grove).

The next area for improvement involved educating and training. Below are sample responses of participants.

We need to educate regular education teachers on how to accommodate student and provide general education teachers an assigned special education teacher to provide support and consulting (Mrs. Carlisle).

There should be yearly training on new resources (Mrs. Arlington).

We need more training on accommodations and modifications (Mr. Grove).

We need to build on lacking skills (Mrs. Jefferson).

Some participants requested smaller class sizes to be easier to manage.

We need to keep numbers low so we can differentiate content better (Mr. Frankfort).

We need fewer kids in sessions (Mr. Erie).

We need smaller class sizes (Mr. Indianapolis).

One participant cited parent involvement as a weakness.

We need more parent involvement (Mr. Frankfort).

Two participants expressed that we need to differentiate instruction.

We need to differentiate and personalize content better (Mr. Frankfort).

It needs to be more individualized. For example, a slower learner needs more time to master a skill (Mr. Grove).

Three participants described ways to provide more support to students and teachers in class.

We need to provide additional supporting classes in place of electives for struggling students. There needs to be more pull-out opportunities for math and ELA (Mrs. Jefferson).

We need more pull-out time for ELA and math (Mr. Erie).

We need more time with kids that are failing behind (Mrs. Carlisle).

One participant suggested student schedules be designed differently.

We should have leveled classes. Students should be grouped by ability (Mr. Indianapolis).

More training and resources. Participants stated that more training and resources are needed to effectively educate students with disabilities. Several participants expressed feeling unprepared in their teacher preparation programs and insufficient training and resources are provided at school. Three participants stated they felt prepared to teach students with disabilities; however, they had a major in special education. The sample responses below revealed

participants want more training in special education because they felt unprepared during teacher preparation programs.

I only had superficial courses in special education. I didn't learn how to support special education students. It was not good preparation. Special education teachers receive enough training but not regular education teachers (Mrs. Bakersfield).

As a special education teacher yes, but not enough for regular education teachers. Administration has to be more willing to listen (Mrs. Carlisle).

No, not enough for classroom teachers (Mrs. Denver).

In the past yes, but not now (Mr. Grove).

No, aides should be added at a minimum and co-teaching needs to be effective. When special education teachers are progress monitoring there are no resources to improve students' lacking skills (Mrs. Jefferson).

No, we need more professional development. We need more strategies and skills to use for struggling students (Mrs. Knoxville).

I felt unprepared for inclusion. I only took one special education class during my undergraduate program (Mrs. Arlington).

We have the resources there, but professional development needs to be used. We could build mini-courses for teachers (Mr. Frankfort).

Seventy-five percent of participants stated that they need more classes in special education. The 25% of participants that did not state this had backgrounds in special education. The responses above revealed a pattern of feeling underprepared and insufficient teacher preparation programs.

Implementing IEPs stressful. Teachers identified various reasons why implementing an

IEP is stressful. While 17% of participants stated it is not stressful at all 83 % found areas of implementation stressful. Below are some sample responses of participants that expressed it was a lot to manage.

Keeping up with multiple IEPs in a class at once and remembering it all (Mr. Erie).

I have difficulty remembering all the IEPs (Mr. Huntington).

It's hard to meet all the needs of the students. There are a lot of kids to accommodate for (Mrs. Jefferson).

Making sure you got everything since it's a bunch to manage and they are legally binding documents to follow (Mr. Lancaster).

Several participants listed multiple areas that made implementing an IEP stressful. Some sample responses are below.

Collecting IEP data and getting teachers to implement SDIs are difficult. Some teachers already have their own judgements and make it difficult (Mrs. Bakersfield).

Progress monitoring is not done correctly (Mrs. Knoxville).

Some things that are stressful are time constraints, homework sheets or agenda sheets that need to be signed, and ongoing parent communication (Mrs. Carlisle).

I think it is hard when the SDIs are eliminating the student's responsibility and accountability (Mr. Indianapolis).

Parents struggle with the labeling of their child. It is difficult to find support and hire staff because of low pay (Mr. Frankfort).

I don't feel it's stressful, except when I don't agree with the IEP (Mrs. Arlington).

Unable to provide feedback. Participants were asked if they were provided with opportunities to give feedback and felt supported. The responses revealed a pattern of

participants disclosing they were not given the opportunity to provide feedback. Furthermore, participants stated that they felt unsupported by the administration but supported by teachers. Two participants, seventeen percent, stated they felt fully supported by teachers and administration. Below are sample responses of participants.

No, I am not given the opportunity to give feedback. I can't say anything in regard to special education because they think what they are doing is perfect. I do feel there is a lot of communication between teachers but not administration (Mrs. Arlington).

I'm not denied an opportunity to provide feedback. I am only able to give limited input but not on a regular basis (Mr. Grove).

There is nothing in place for giving feedback. A form would be helpful or a system. I do feel supported by teachers but not by the administration (Mr. Huntington).

As a special education teacher, I am not given the opportunity to provide feedback. I feel supported by teachers but not by the administrators (Mrs. Jefferson).

I am not given the opportunity to provide feedback. When it comes to support, for administration it depends on the day, but teachers are supportive (Mrs. Knoxville).

Chapter 4 Summary

This chapter presented the qualitative data that was collected through semi-structured interviews. These semi-structured interviews were conducted with twelve participants at a rural public school in central Pennsylvania. Participants provided detailed information about how effective their inclusion program is on students' academic achievement. Educators also provided ideas for improvement. From the data, a total of seventeen themes were revealed by coding and thematic analysis.

Chapter five will discuss the results of this qualitative data in correlation to each of the

research questions. In addition, limitations and implications for practice will be presented, and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSIONS

Introduction

Chapter five presents the summary and discussion of this qualitative descriptive study. The purpose of this study is to examine the effectiveness of inclusion and student academic performance. The identified problem statement of this study is it is not known how effective inclusionary practices without co-teaching or instructional aides are on the academic performance of students. The focus of this study was a rural school district in Central Pennsylvania that utilizes inclusion with minimal to no co-teaching.

IDEA (2004) is a federal law that entitles students with disabilities to FAPE in the LRE. The rationale for this study is based on the IDEA (2004) mandate of including students with disabilities and the growing need for general education teachers to be able to understand and implement inclusionary practices (Hogan, 2020; Tomlinson, 2017). Subsequently, general education teachers must effectively provide accommodations and modifications to students with special needs. Many educational practitioners have little to no exposure to special education coursework during teacher preparation programs.

For this qualitative descriptive study, semi-structured interviews were used to collect data to address the following research questions:

Q1: What is the effectiveness of inclusion without the use of additional supports (co-teaching and/or instructional aides) in K-12 on the academic performance of students?

Q2: What are educators (teachers, administrators) background knowledge/perceptions of special education practices/law, and how does this influence teaching students with disabilities?

Q3: What barriers and limitations prevent inclusion from being effective for the academic performance of students?

For data collection, participants were interviewed via zoom, with cameras off to protect the identity of participants. Recordings of each interview were generated and used for data analysis. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data. The responses of the participants were coded using line by line, in vivo coding. From the data, seventeen themes emerged.

The chapter is organized as follows: summary of the results in relation to each of the three research questions, implications, conclusions, and recommendations for future research.

Summary of the Results

Research Question One

Q1: What is the effectiveness of inclusion without the use of additional supports (co-teaching and/or instructional aides) in K-12 on the academic performance of students?

Participants were aware that students with disabilities were placed in their classrooms. The responses revealed that many did not have a firm understanding about disabilities. Participants described various methods and interventions that are used to support students within the class. From the data, seven themes emerged from this research question.

The first theme was educators are uninformed about the types of disabilities they work with, unsure of the percentage of identified students, and use incorrect terminology. Teachers and administrators were certain students with disabilities were placed within general education classrooms. Based on the responses, many participants did not know the proper terminology or correct special education language. Furthermore, many incorrectly thought ADHD and ODD are two recognized disabilities under IDEA (2004). In addition to the uncertainty about the types of disabilities, many participants were unsure what percentage of students were identified in a class period.

The second theme identified was educators are using multiple means to evaluate the success of students. Participants described various methods for collecting evidence and evaluating the success of students. These methods included formative and summative assessments, labs, discussions, various benchmarking platforms, and various assignments. This was an important consideration when determining the effectiveness of inclusionary practices.

Next, the third theme that emerged was teachers and administrators are providing various supports and opportunities for helping students academically. These supports ranged from providing after school programs that offered support to observing students to determine needs. Participants recognized the need to support struggling students and opportunities were provided to support students.

The fourth theme was participants believe some students with IEPs are performing better and some students with IEPs are performing worse; however, a grade is not an accurate reflection of students' abilities. Almost all participants stated that a grade was not an accurate reflection of a students' abilities. Furthermore, some thought a pass and fail system would be better. In relation to student performance, participants' responses revealed that student performance was dependent on each individual student. Participants had mixed responses and reasoning as to what determined the outcome of student performance.

The fifth theme identified was teachers are implementing multiple accommodations and modifications within their classrooms to ensure the success of their students. Participants' responses showed that there was a clear understanding that accommodations and modifications should be used to promote the success of students. Some educators were able to list EBPs that they used within their classrooms; however, many participants were unsure what an EBP entailed.

Theme six concluded that the majority of educators believe that the effectiveness of the inclusion program is average or below average on students' academic performance. Most participants rated the inclusion program below average. Concerns about the inclusion program were students are included but not effectively, advanced learners are suffering, and behavior issues are ruining the classroom culture. Based on participant responses it is evident that inclusion is not effective in this setting.

Finally, the seventh theme identified was while inclusionary practices are used, support is not provided consistently and effectively. Participants' responses revealed inconsistencies from building to building and classroom to classroom. Many educators stated that no support was given to learning support students and it was rare co-teaching occurred. Furthermore, co-teaching was viewed as ineffective and inconsistent.

Research Question Two

Q2: What are educators (teachers, administration) background knowledge/perceptions of special education practices/law, and how does this influence teaching students with disabilities?

All participants in the study were aware students with disabilities were being placed within their classrooms. However, the responses revealed that most participants had minimal special education background knowledge, making it difficult to work effectively with students with disabilities. Six themes emerged from the data, as discussed below.

The first theme was teachers and administrators are uneducated about the law that mandates inclusionary practices for students with disabilities. Teachers and administrators had a firm understanding that students with disabilities are included in general education classrooms; however, many participants were uncertain and unknowledgeable about special education law and practices.

Next, the second theme identified was many educators were provided with no or limited special education classes during teacher preparation programs. Participants revealed feeling unprepared to teach students with disabilities. Many stated they had no coursework on special education during undergraduate teacher preparation programs, which lead to being uneducated in the field of special education. Furthermore, even newer teachers stated only superficial courses were required in their undergraduate programs. In comparison to the general education teachers, participants that majored in special education did have rigorous coursework in special education. Overall, teacher preparation programs are lacking critical coursework.

The third theme that emerged was educators' background knowledge on inclusion is varied and limited. Participant responses revealed superficial knowledge about inclusion. Many participants stated inclusion was including students with IEPs in general education classes. Participants narrow view on inclusion is an important consideration when evaluating how effective the inclusion program is on students.

The fourth theme was educators are inconsistent when knowing what an IEP is and the difference between accommodations and modifications. While many participants stated several accommodations and modifications that are used within their classrooms, very few participants knew the difference between an accommodation and modification. Participants' responses showed a firm understanding that they must follow IEPs; however, some participants stated they have never seen all components of an IEP.

The fifth theme identified was educators are unknowledgeable about the special education identification process. Participants' responses revealed a lack of clarity on how a student is referred for services. Several participants stated teachers refer students for an

evaluation. Some participants knew there were procedures but had no idea what the procedures were or where to find the procedures.

Finally, the sixth theme was educators enjoy teaching students with disabilities and view it as challenging and rewarding. Participants' responses revealed that perceptions towards teaching students with disabilities were positive. Some revealed they were okay with it, some expanded further with many positive remarks. This is an important consideration as it affects educators' attitudes towards teaching students with disabilities.

Research Question Three

Q3: What barriers and limitations prevent inclusion from being effective for the academic performance of students?

Participants in this study expressed that the inclusion program was ineffective; however, provided several ideas for improvements. Participants revealed student needs were not being met due to a lack of training and professional development, lack of teacher preparation coursework, unsupportive administration, and stress. From the data, four themes emerged and are discussed below.

The first theme identified was educators believe various improvements to the inclusion program need to be made. The inclusion program of this school was defined as fully incorporating and educating students with disabilities within the general education classroom with their age-appropriate peers with little to no additional supports from co-teaching or instructional aides. While many educators felt this current inclusion program was ineffective, several ideas for improvement were stated. A participant suggested appointing a case manager to several teachers to offer support as needed. Others suggested the need for more collaboration, the need for more staff, and the need for more training.

The second theme that emerged was educators state that more training and resources are needed to effectively educate students with disabilities. Many educators expressed that minimal or superficial training in special education is given during professional development. Furthermore, participants stated more resources and strategies were needed to meet the needs of diverse learners. Teachers are struggling to meet the needs of diverse students due to the lack of training and professional development.

Next, the third theme was teachers identified various reasons why implementing an IEP is stressful. Participants expressed feeling stressed due to having to implement numerous IEPs in a class. One participant stated that due to it being a legally binding document it was more stressful to ensure everything on the IEP was accounted for with all students. Two participants expressed feeling stressed due to them perceiving that an IEP removes student accountability.

Finally, the fourth theme identified was teachers are not able to provide feedback about special education and many educators do not feel supported by their administrators. Many participants expressed feeling unsupported by administration, while still feeling supported by other teachers. Participants also stated they are not given an opportunity to provide feedback about the special education services and inclusion program. Some participants wished there was a form to do this.

Relation of Results to the Literature

An abundance of literature supports inclusionary practices academically, socially, and behaviorally. For this study, the effectiveness of inclusion on students' academic performance was evaluated. Academically, there is a wealth of research that suggests the effectiveness of inclusion on students' academic performance (de Graaf et al., 2013; Dessemontet et al., 2012;

Dyssegaard & Larsen, 2013; Hehir et al., 2016; Kefallinou et al., 2020; Oh-Young & Filler, 2015; Spence, 2010).

The results of this qualitative descriptive study provide significant insights into the effectiveness of inclusion on students' academic performance. Participants' responses lead to the conclusion that the inclusion program being implemented within their district was considered ineffective on students' academic performance due to several barriers. This study helped to narrow the barriers to lack of special education background knowledge, lack of training, lacking teacher preparation programs, lack of collaboration, teacher shortages, lack of support, and higher levels of stress.

Literature suggests that resources and training are lacking leading to inclusion being implemented ineffectively (Goodman & Burton, 2010; Grieve, 2009; Hogan, 2020; Shady et al., 2013). In correlation with lack of training and resources, few teacher preparation programs incorporate special education coursework (NCTQ, 2021). Additionally, research shows there are higher levels of stress when teaching in an inclusive setting (Brackenreed, 2008; Forlin, 2001; Galaterou & Antoniou, 2017; Hogan, 2020). This coincidences with the results of this study. Furthermore, few studies have been conducted on models of inclusion used within school districts and evaluating teacher training, support, and pre-service programs (Hogan, 2020; Kilanowsik-Press et al., 2010). This study focused on the effectiveness of an inclusion program that provided limit to no support, no co-teaching and/or teaching aides, to students and the results showed this model was ineffective. Therefore, the results of this study contribute significantly to the field of special education.

Limitations

A goal of qualitative studies is to achieve transferability and triangulation (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019; Lambert & Lambert, 2012). A strength of this study was the use of participants from various levels of K-12 education with semi-structured interviews. This allowed for triangulation of the data by using multiple educators at various levels of K-12 for data collection.

A second strength of this study was that the data collected through the semi-structured interviews was evidenced to have reach saturation (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). That is, no new information was found in the data analysis phase. There was also repetition in responses that the inclusion program was ineffective on students' academic performance with a need for more training. Finally, many of the participants' responses showed similarities for themes to emerge.

The first limitation of this study was participants were volunteers. This could have impacted the responses to the semi-structured interviews. Participants could have chosen not to participate due to not wanting to share negative feeling about inclusion.

Another limitation of this study could have been participants responding untruthfully to please the investigator. Due to the co-investigator being a fellow employee at the high school and middle schools, the high school and middle school participants could have provided answers during the interview that they felt pressured to say or felt coercion.

Implications

Practical Implications

The results of this qualitative descriptive study contribute to the abundance of literature on the impact of inclusionary practice on students' academic performance. The data showed that the inclusion program being implemented within this school district was considered ineffective on students' academic performance due to several barriers. The barriers found were lack of

special education background knowledge, lack of training, lacking teacher preparation programs, lack of collaboration, teacher shortages, lack of support, and higher levels of stress.

Teachers and administrators struggled to identify the types of the disabilities they encounter in their classrooms. In addition, educators showed limited knowledge about special education laws and practices. This shows a need for building a better understanding in special education and a need for training and improvements to teacher preparation programs. Teachers encounter various disabilities within their classrooms and need strategies to support students with disabilities and trainings to better understand how to meet the needs of diverse learners. By understanding special education components, laws, and practices teachers can effectively educate students with disabilities within their classrooms. Professional development should be offered to assist educators in acquiring instructional strategies to support students with disabilities and learning special education components.

The second area of need is for more collaboration between teachers and administrators. The responses from educators lead to the conclusion that there is a need for more time to collaborate with others within the building. One participant suggested teachers and administrators meeting to discuss what successful inclusion looks like and what ideas we could implement to reach that goal. Some teachers just want to be part of the conversation during IEP meetings.

Another area of need is hiring more staff. Some participants expressed the need for more staff to help support general education teachers. Due to various reasons such as low pay, working conditions, high turnover rate, and benefits the district struggles to retain and hire employees.

Finally, an area of need is supporting teachers and reducing stress levels. The data concluded that many teachers do not feel supported by the administration, while still feeling

supported by other teachers. This leads to higher levels of stress. Participants also indicated implementing several IEPs contributed to higher levels of stress.

Future Implications

This study was able to conclude that teachers viewed teaching students with disabilities rewarding and challenging. However, teachers are lacking proper training and preparation to effectively educate students in an inclusive classroom. In addition, teachers feel unsupported by the administration and as a result experience higher levels of stress.

There is a need for more training and professional development to assist educators in gaining the correct skill set to meet the needs of diverse and unique leaners. As a result, students will be more successful academically and the inclusion program will be more effective. Teachers will also feel more adept at educating and meeting the needs of students with disabilities.

Recommendations for Future Research

Education is in ever-changing field. In order to best address and meet the diverse needs of students, it is recommendation for further qualitative research be conducted at urban and suburban public schools. This would allow for generalization of the data.

Another recommendation for future research is to conduct a qualitative study with students in inclusive classrooms. Students would be able to share their viewpoints, thoughts, and experiences in regard to the inclusive setting. Furthermore, students would be able to provide insights about their teachers' perceptions in inclusion.

Another recommendation for future research is to conduct a quantitative study with teacher preparation programs. This would provide information about the types of coursework that are required for aspiring teachers to complete in order to graduate. It would also provide insight into what teacher preparation programs are preparing future teachers best.

A final recommendation for future research is to conduct a mixed-methods study. Collecting quantitative data on students' academic performance would provide insights into students' achievement. In conjunction with quantitative data, qualitative data would provide insight into why the inclusion program may be effective or ineffective on students' achievement.

Conclusions

The results of this study provide insight into the effectiveness of an inclusion program in a rural public school district. While the sample size used in this study was small, the data collected through semi-structured interviews revealed strong conclusions. The findings offer practical considerations and impact future research.

Participants showed positive feelings towards inclusionary practice. On the other hand, participants revealed they are not prepared to meet the diverse learning needs of students with disabilities. Teacher preparation programs are lacking special education coursework and the district is not providing appropriate professional development to close the gap in knowledge.

In addition, participants described various interventions, supports, accommodations, and modification that are used to support struggling students. One participant listed three after school programs that were available for students to attend that offered support. Educators are considering various evaluation tools to measure the success of students.

Finally, participants expressed feeling unsupported by the administration. Some wished there was a form to provide feedback for improvements. School districts should utilize various forms of data collection to make data driven decisions about improving the inclusion program. As a result, the professional development could be planned accordingly to help address the lacking skills educators need to effectively educate diverse learners. As a result of implementing

these strategies, students' academic performance will increase due to the strategies and interventions used to meet the needs of all students.

Appendix A

IRB Approval

SlipperyRock University of Pennsylvania

TO: Dr. Toni Mild
Special Education

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

DATE: December 2, 2022

RE: Protocol #: 2023-053-88-A
Protocol Title: Effectiveness of Inclusion on the Academic Performance of Students

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Slippery Rock University received the requested modifications to the above-referenced protocol.

The IRB has reviewed the modifications and approved the protocol under the EXEMPT category of review.

You may begin your project as of December 2, 2022. Your protocol will automatically close on December 1, 2023 unless you request, in writing, to keep it open.

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 B

Superintendent Approval

Mifflinburg Area School District
Administrative Offices
178 Maple Street
MIFFLINBURG, PA 17844

Dr. Kenneth J Dady, Jr.
Superintendent

Renee M Jilinski
Business Administrator

Tammy L. Boop
Board Secretary

Administrative 570-966-8200
Business Office 570-966-8200
Fax 570-966-8210

09/20/2022

Angela Confair,

This letter is to let you know that at the last Board Meeting I discussed the research study you wish to conduct for your dissertation. There is no board policy we can find that relates to this (so no vote was necessary by the Board and there were no concerns with the study as presented to the Board) and the nature of the study you presented does not present any difficulties with student information or confidentiality. Therefore, you may proceed with your study as presented in your letter.

Good luck and we look forward to hearing about your results!

Dr. Kenneth J. Dady, Jr.
Superintendent

Appendix C

Informed Consent

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Effectiveness of Inclusion on the Academic Performance of Students

Dr. Toni Mild

Email: toni.mild@sru.edu

Phone: 724-738-2454

Angela Confair

Email: amc1070@sru.edu

Phone: 570-419-1762

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. In order to participate, you must be an educator, male or female, teach a core subject (math, science, English) or special education, or an administrator. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Important Information about the Research Study

Things you should know:

- The purpose of the study is to determine how effective inclusion is on the academic performance of students in your school. If you choose to participate, you will be interviewed, at a time that is convenient for you. This will take approximately 1 hour.
- Risks or discomforts from this research include nervousness or anxiety during the interview process and breach of confidentiality.
- The study will provide an opportunity for you to provide information about your school district and ideas for improvement.

Participants Initials _____

  - Your identity will be protected, and pseudonyms used
  - No identifiable information or interview transcripts will be given to administrators
- Taking part in this research project is voluntary. You do not have to participate, and you can stop at any time.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research project.

What is the Study About and Why are We Doing it?

The purpose of the study is to determine if the current inclusive instructional approaches are effective to the academic performance of your students.

What Will Happen if You Take Part in This Study?

If you agree to take part in this study, you will be asked to consent to participate, schedule a zoom interview at a time and location of your choice, and answer interview questions. We expect this to take about 1 hour total. During the interview, we may learn that some practices are not conducive or effective for student learning. Your responses will not be identifiable to others. The information collected will not be connected with any other data and your identity will be protected.

How Could You Benefit From This Study?

You might benefit from being in this study because it will allow you to provide ideas for improvement in your school. No identifiable information will be used, and interview transcripts will not be shared with anyone except the researcher. As a result, better resources and opportunities may become available for both students and educators.

What Risks Might Result From Being in This Study?

You might experience some risks from being in this study. They are nervousness during the interview and/or breach of confidentiality. Participating in the interview via zoom will allow you to answer questions in a relaxed atmosphere. The recording of the interview will not be shared with others and will only be accessed by the researcher.

How Will We Protect Your Information?

I plan to publish the results of this study. To protect your privacy, I will not include information that could directly identify you. Coding will be used instead of your name. I will protect the confidentiality of your research records by storing the interviews electronically in a folder on a computer that is password and fingerprint protected by the researcher. Your name and any

other information that can directly identify you will be stored separately from the data collected as part of the project.

What Will Happen to the Information We Collect About You After the Study is Over?

I will not keep your research data to use for future research or other purposes. Your name and other information that can directly identify you will be kept secure and stored separately from the research data collected as part of the project. The video recorded transcripts of the interviews will be destroyed three years after the conclusion of the study.

What Other Choices do I Have if I Don't Take Part in this Study?

If you choose not to participate, there are no alternatives.

Your Participation in this Research is Voluntary

It is totally up to you to decide to be in this research study. Participating in this study is voluntary. Even if you decide to be part of the study now, you may change your mind and stop at any time. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer. If you decide to withdraw before this study is completed, there is no penalty. If you continue to reschedule or postpone your interview time, you may be terminated from the study.

Contact Information for the Study Team and Questions about the Research

If you have questions about this research, you may contact **Angela Confair at amc1070@sru.edu or 570-419-1762 or Dr. Toni Mild at toni.mild@sru.edu or 724-738-2454.**

Contact Information for Questions about Your Rights as a Research Participant

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, or wish to obtain information, ask questions, or discuss any concerns about this study with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact the following:

Institutional Review Board
Slippery Rock University
104 Maltby, Suite 008
Slippery Rock, PA 16057
Phone: (724)738-4846
Email: irb@sru.edu

Participants Initials_____

Your Consent

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. I/We will give you a copy of this document for your records. I/We will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

I understand what the study is about and my questions so far have been answered. I agree to take part in this study. I understand that I can withdraw at any time. A copy of this signed Consent Form has been given to me.

Printed Participant Name	Signature of Participant	Date

By signing below, I indicate that the participant has read and to the best of my knowledge understands the details contained in this document and have been given a copy.

Printed Participant Name	Signature of Participant	Date

Photo/Audiotape/Videotape Release Form:

We request the use of photographic/audiotape/videotape (specify which is used) material of you as part of our study. We specifically ask your consent to use this material, as we deem proper, specifically, for news releases, professional publications, websites and pictorial exhibits related to our study. We also emphasize that the appearance of these materials on certain media (websites, professional publication, news releases) may require transfer of copyright of the images. This means that other individuals may use your image. Regarding the use of your likeness in photographs/audiotape/videotape, please check one of the following boxes below:

☐ I do…

☐ I do not…

Give unconditional permission for the investigators to utilize photographs/audiotapes/videotapes (specify which is used) of me.

Print Name	Participant Signature	Date

PLEASE NOTE: Should you choose not to allow your image or voice to be used, we can still benefit from your inclusion as a research study participant.

Appendix D

Letter to Superintendent of Schools

August 11, 2022

Dr. Ken Dady
Superintendent of Schools
Mifflinburg Area School District
178 Maple Street
Mifflinburg, Pa 17844

Dear Dr. Dady,

It is with great excitement that I write to you to request your permission and the permission of the School Board to work with the educators (teachers and principals) in the Mifflinburg School District in order to complete the research for my doctorate. Currently, I am in the process of completing my dissertation with Slippery Rock University in the Special Education doctoral program.

The title of my dissertation is *Effectiveness of Inclusion K-12 on the Academic Performance of Students*. As you are aware, it is the law of IDEA (2004) to educate students with special needs in the least restrictive environment. As a result, school districts are interpreting the law and implementing inclusion practices as they see fit best for students. The qualitative research that I will be conducting is aimed to determine how effective inclusion practices are on the academic achievement of your students.

For this study, I will utilize interviews and open-ended questions of teachers and principals. Once approval has been granted to conduct the study, I will reach out to building principals to inform them of the study and answer any follow-up questions about the study. I will seek approval from the principals for teachers to participate in the study during the school day, when possible, and/or at a time that is convenient to each participant before or after school, during lunch, or prep period. Only twelve participants for this study will be needed and the identity of the participants will be anonymous.

I look forward to hearing from you, at your earliest convenience, regarding approval and board approval to conduct this study. I would be happy to share with you and the board the results of my research at the conclusion of the study. If you have any further questions please do not hesitate to reach out at amc1070@sru.edu or aconfair@mifflinburg.org.

Sincerely,

Angela Confair

Appendix E

Letter to Principals

November 30, 2022

Mr. Richard Strausburg, Principal
Mifflinburg Area High School
75 Maple Street
Mifflinburg, Pa 17844

Dear Mr. Strausburg,

It is with great excitement I write to you to inform you I will be working with the educators (teachers and principals) in the Mifflinburg School District in order to complete the research for my doctorate. Currently, I am in the process of completing my dissertation with Slippery Rock University in the Special Education doctoral program.

The title of my dissertation is *Effectiveness of Inclusion K-12 on the Academic Performance of Students*. As you are aware, it is the law of IDEA (2004) to educate students with special needs in the least restrictive environment. As a result, school districts are interpreting the law and implementing inclusion practices as they see fit best for students. The qualitative research that I will be conducting is aimed to determine how effective inclusion practices are on the academic achievement of your students.

For this study, I will utilize interviews and open-ended questions conducted via zoom of teachers and principals. Only twelve participants for this study will be needed and the identity of the participants will be anonymous.

I am seeking one secondary level administrator and one primary level administrator to participate. If you would like to participate, please email me at amc1070@sru.edu by December 20th. Please also read through and sign the attached consent form. If you would like a hard copy of this form, please let me know and I will send it in interdepartmental mail.

I look forward to hearing from you, at your earliest convenience. If you have any further questions please do not hesitate to reach out.

Sincerely,

Angela Confair

Appendix F

Letter to Participants

Good morning!

I am Angela Confair, a teacher at the middle school and high school. Currently, I am in the process of completing my dissertation with Slippery Rock University in the Special Education doctoral program under the advisement of Dr. Toni Mild. The title of my dissertation is *Effectiveness of Inclusion K-12 on the Academic Performance of Students*. I am seeking twelve participants to interview via zoom. Participation is on a volunteer basis. If a large number of participants volunteer, I will use a random name generator to select six participants from the primary level and six from the secondary level. The requirements for participation include being an educator of grades K-12, be acting as an administrator, teaching in an inclusive setting, teaching a core subject (Math, Science, English, any elementary non-elective teacher), special education teacher, and building principal. The interview will be conducted via zoom
and can be scheduled at a time that is convenient for you. It will last approximately one hour. The interview will be recorded; however, your identity will be protected. You may turn your camera off for the interview and pseudonyms will be used. Your answers will not be shared with others, including the administration.

Attached you will find the "Informed Consent" form that provides more detailed information about my research, and your rights as a participant. Participation in this
study is completely voluntary; however, I would appreciate your participation and valuable input. The results of this study could be used for improvement planning for the district to address the academic needs of our students better. The superintendent and school board have given me permission to conduct interviews and I'd be happy to schedule a time that works best for you.

If you would like to participate, please email me at amc1070@sru.edu or aconfair@mifflinburg.org by December 20th. Please also read through and
sign the attached consent form. If you would like a hard copy of this form, please let me know and I will send it in interdepartmental mail. Please let me know if you have any further questions or if I can be of any assistance.

Thank you & Have a great day!

Angela Confair

Appendix G

Interview Questions for Teachers

Q1: What is the effectiveness of inclusion without the use of additional supports (co-teaching and/or instructional aides) in K-12 on the academic performance of students?

- What are the different disability areas that you have had experience working with?
    - Approximately what percentage of students in a class period are students with disabilities?
- How do you measure student success in your classroom?
- How do you address and meet the needs of students of all abilities?
- What are you doing to support the success of your students:
    - Academically? Please provide examples.
    - Behaviorally? Please provide examples.
    - Socially? Please provide examples.
- On average, compared to the regular students, do your students with IEPs perform better or worse?
- Do you feel a letter grade is an accurate representation of students' ability?
- What accommodations and modifications do you use within your classroom?
- Do you use any evidence-based practices within your classroom/building? If so, which ones?
- On a scale of 1-5, 5 being the highest and 1 the lowest, how effective do you think the inclusion program is on the ACADEMIC performance of students with disabilities?
    - Why?

- On a scale of 1-5, 5 being the highest and 1 the lowest, how effective do you think the inclusion program is on the ACADEMIC performance of students without disabilities?
    - Why?

Q2: What are educators (teachers, administrators) background knowledge/perceptions of special education practices/law, and how does this influence teaching students with special needs?

- What is your content/certification area?
- How long have you been teaching?
    - How long with this district?
    - How long in the inclusive setting?
- What is your highest degree earned?
    - During your college coursework, did any classes focus on special education topics?
- What is IDEA?
- What is inclusion?
    - What does inclusion look like in your school/classroom?
- What is an IEP? Have you ever seen/read a full IEP?
- What is the difference between accommodations and modifications?
- What are SDIs?
- Describe the special education identification process?
- How do you feel about teaching students with disabilities?

Q3: What barriers and limitations prevent inclusion from being effective for the

academic performance of students?

- What ideas do you have to make inclusion more successful in your class?
    - In this school?
- Do you feel the school district provides enough resources to assist you in working with students with disabilities? Explain.
- How did your teacher preparation program prepare you?
- In what ways could you have been better prepared?
- What components of implementing an IEP do you find most stressful/difficult?
- Do you feel adequately supported by administrators and teachers?
- Are you given the opportunity to provide feedback about special education services and ways to make improvements?
- Is there any other information that you would like to share?

Appendix H

Interview Questions for Administrators

Q1: What is the effectiveness of inclusion without the use of additional supports (co-teaching and/or instructional aides) in K-12 on the academic performance of students?

- What are the different disability areas that you have had experience working with?
    - Approximately what percentage of students are identified with an IEP within your building?
- How do you measure student success in your building?
- What are you doing to support the success of your students:
    - Academically? Please provide examples.
    - Behaviorally? Please provide examples.
    - Socially? Please provide examples.
- How do you ensure your teachers are following and implementing IEPs accurately?
- On average, compared to the regular students, do your students with IEPs perform better or worse?
- Do you feel a letter grade is an accurate representation of students' ability?
- What accommodations and modifications are used within your building?
- Do you use any evidence-based practices within your building? If so, which ones.
- On a scale of 1-5, 5 being the highest and 1 the lowest, how effective do you think the inclusion program is on the ACADEMIC performance of students with disabilities?
    - Why?

- On a scale of 1-5, 5 being the highest and 1 the lowest, how effective do you think the inclusion program is on the ACADEMIC performance of students without disabilities?
    - Why?

Q2: What are educators (teachers, administrators) background knowledge/perceptions of special education practices/law, and how does this influence teaching students with special needs?

- What is your content/certification area?
- How long have you been acting as an administrator?
    - How long with this district?
    - How long in the inclusive setting?
- What is your highest degree earned?
    - During your college coursework, did any classes focus on special education topics?
- What is IDEA?
- What is inclusion?
    - What does inclusion look like in your school?
- What is an IEP? Have you ever seen/read a full IEP?
- What is the difference between accommodations and modifications?
- What are SDIs?
- Describe the special education identification process?
- How do you feel about teaching students with disabilities?

Q3: What barriers and limitations prevent inclusion from being effective for the academic performance of students?

- What ideas do you have to make inclusion more successful in your building?
- Do you feel the school district provides enough resources to assist teachers when working with students with disabilities? Explain.
- How did your teacher preparation program prepare you?
- In what ways could you have been better prepared?
- What components of implementing an IEP do you find most stressful/difficult?
- Do you feel adequately supported by other leaders within your school district?
- Are you given the opportunity to provide feedback about special education services and ways to make improvements?
- Is there any other information that you would like to share?

Appendix I

Coding Organizer

Theme	Code	In Vivo Responses
Educators are uninformed about the types of disabilities they work with, unsure of the percentage of identified students, and use incorrect terminology.	Unsure	B: Unsure D: Unsure I: Unsure; Learning disabilities of some type B: Unsure: "about 300 identified out of 1900" ~ 16% D: Unsure L: 4% - Unsure
	Correct	C: Lifeskills, ESY, MDS, Gifted Ed, Learning Support E: ASD, ODD, ADHD, Visual Impaired, Hearing Impaired, Students that used AUG TECH F: Learning Support, MDS, ASD G: Visual Impairment (loss), minor hearing disabilities, extreme physical disabilities, non verbal H: Cerebral Palsy, Visually impaired, Wheelchair students, ASD, Students that used Assistive Tech J: ASD, Specific Learning Disability, OHI (ADHD, ADD, ODD), Emotional Disturbance, visual impairment/blind K: ASD, learning support and learning disabled L: ASD, Mental/Physical/Learning
	Incorrect	A: I push in so a variety of students i.e. ADHD, ELL, ODD C: Lifeskills, ESY, MDS, Gifted Ed, Learning Support E: ASD, ODD, ADHD, Visual Impaired, Hearing Impaired, Students that used assistive tech F: Learning Support, MDS, ASD G: Visual Impairment (loss), minor hearing disabilities, extreme physical disabilities, non-verbal H: Cerebral Palsy, visually impaired, Wheelchair students, ASD, Students that used assistive tech K: ASD, learning support and learning disabled L: ASD, Mental/Physical/Learning
	0-14%	F: 14% G: 1% or less H: 6-12th - 5%; K-5 - 10% - 15% L: 4% - Unsure
	15-30%	B: Unsure: "about 300 identified out of 1900" ~ 16% E: Due to selective scheduling the learning support class is a high percentage of disabled to non-disabled. I'd say approximately 25% disabled for grade H: 6-12th - 5%; K-5 - 10% - 15%

		J: 20% K: 15%
	31 and up	A: 33% - 50% C: 40% - 50% I: 35%
Educators are using multiple means to evaluate the success of students.	Formative/Summative Assessments	A: Test/Quiz Scores, homework, On-task, meeting progress monitoring goals E: Formative and Summative Assessments (Tests, quizzes, projects, exit tickets), discussions G: Effort, through student's own performance, HW completeness, labs/projects, tests, quizzes K: Formative and Summative Assessments (tests, quizzes, etc.), being able to apply info across content
	Standardized Testing	B: ES - acaydence, MAP, SWIS (PBIS data); MS/IS - PSSAs, MS/HS - CDTs, HS, CDTs F: Easy CBM, CDTs, MAPs, Benchmarking, enVision, SuccessMaker (differentiated by student), GetMoreMath
	Various Assignment Completion	C: Provide Individualized work, correctness in math, less than 70% reteaching D: No grading used, check outs and exit tickets, completion of online activities F: Easy CBM, CDTs, MAPs, Benchmarking, enVision, SuccessMaker (differentiated by student), GetMoreMath G: Effort, through student's own performance, homework completeness, labs/projects, tests, quizzes H: K-5 completion of online assignments at 84% or higher or repeat until earned an 84% - not graded courses; HS Various assignments I: I look at more than grades, based on student work completion, discussions J: For special ed, I do progress monitoring data, benchmark, weekly/quarterly reports; When I push in I am measuring social skills/observations, quiz/test scores L: I not only look grades but positive working habits to be successful for life/work; time management, accountability
	Discussions	E: Formative and Summative Assessments (Tests, quizzes, projects, exit tickets), discussions I: I look at more than grades, based on student work completion, discussions
	MISC	J: For special ed, I use progress monitor data, benchmark, weekly/quarterly reports; When I push in I

		am measuring social skills/observations, quiz/test scores L: I not only look at grades but positive working habits to be successful for life/work; time management, accountability
Teachers and administrators are providing various supports and opportunities for helping students academically.	Observations	G: I follow all IEPs/504, walking around/observation, help based on needs H: Walking around/Observation to help based on needs, collaborate with learning support teachers
	Consulting	E: Analyzing needs to differentiate, collaboration with learning support teachers, extra help, additional review, grouping students, visual accommodations over reading H: Walking around/Observation to help based on needs, collaborate with learning support teachers K: Benchmarking, small groups based on needs/abilities, use of paraprofessionals (when able)
	Follow IEP/504	G: Follow all IEPs/504, walking around/observation, help based on needs E: Analyzing needs to differentiate, collaboration with LS teachers, extra help, additional review, grouping students, visual accommodations over reading J: giving accommodations/modifications, manipulatives, use of calc for math
	Expectations	K: Using consistency (procedures/routines), high/clear expectations G: Individual conversations with students when needed, reinforce rules/expectations, retrain when needed
	PBIS	B: PBIS, Check in/out (ES), counselors work with students E: Praise good behavior, individual conversations with bad
	1-1	L: Providing support, using resources A: Take the lead to help all students; pull-out testing E: Analyzing needs to differentiate, collaboration with LS teachers, extra help, additional review, grouping students, visual accommodations over reading I: Group work (hetero mix), provide more help to lower students L: Providing support, using resources G: Individual conversations with students when needed, reinforce rules/expectations, retrain when needed

	SEL	B: SEL at lower levels J: SEL Skills
	Relationship Building	E: Relationship building I: building relationships G: Hardest one, try to teach behaviors (such as hat removal), encourage students to get involved with outside of school activities L: Teaching communication skills (i.e. writing emails); encouraging students to get involved within the school (Dance, Drama, Sports)
	Programs	B: ES - MTSS, title 1, 6-8 - HW help, HS - none F: Saturday school and wildcat academy F: Homework Help, Wildcat Academy, and Saturday school
	Grouping	I: Group work (hetero mix), provide more help to lower students J: Pre-assessments, grouping, individualized learning plans, tracking data K: Benchmarking, small groups based on needs/abilities, use of paraprofessionals (when able)
	Prompting	C: Give students missing work reminders, tell students to contact teachers when abs I: Making sure students have assignments done, helping
Educators believe some students with IEPs are performing better and some students with IEPs are performing worse; however, a grade is not an accurate reflection of students' abilities.	Par	G: On Par - some students w/o IEPs do awful so it comes down to effort/motivation H: On par - pleased with effort L: In the past worse; this year on par
	Worse	B: Worse because not properly supported F: Below where they need to be I: Worse J: Worse
	Mixed	A: Mixed bag, some do well some do worse; dependent on motivation C: Behavioral problems affect performance, worse for inclusion, better because of more help E: Mixed bag, sometimes better, sometimes worse K: Student dependent so 50/50
	Yes	C: Accurate because of how grades are structured;

		standards-based grades would be better L: Yes, it can be with rubrics/structure
	No	B: NO, it's not assessing what is taught, they are inflated, and use poorly designed assessments D: Not Always, students are unique E: Not always, pass/fail would be better F: Grade doesn't matter, skill set matters; award all students for achieving H: my class is ungraded, so good example that grades aren't needed or accurate I: Not always, some aren't good test takers J: No K: NO
	Unsure	A: Unsure if it's accurate (some students bad test takers, students with IEPs have barriers to take tests and be successful) G: Not sure, pass/fail is an option, bad test takers
Teachers are implementing multiple accommodations and modifications within their classrooms to ensure the success of their students.	Accommodations/Modifications	A: Proximity, word walls/banks, small group, read aloud, extended time, building background knowledge, building vocab, eliminating distractors, color coding, pictures/manipulatives B: read aloud, extra time, small group, technology use, modified tests, district not good at differentiating C: Calculator, APL strategies, document reader, repetition, tailor to student needs D. Visual lesson, hands-on, checking reading comprehension E. retesting, visual aides/pictures, extended time, engagement F: proximal seating, extended time, visual aides/larger print, read aloud, calculator, modified work/assignments G: proximal seating, equipment, keep it as normalized as possible, reduce multiple choice options, modified materials/quizzes/test, increased font H: TSS's, use the IEP, iPads/Tech use, headphones I: Student dependent, reduce multiple choice, chunking, adapting tests/quizzes, lower reading level J: Student dependent, reduce multiple choice, copy of completed notes, previewing, review, proximal seating, use of fidgets, visual/verbal prompting, small group testing, use of manipulatives/tactile, chunking, check for understanding, word banks K: small groups, modified assignments, scaffolding L: retesting, reduce multiple choice, extended time
	EBPs	A: Book study/Word walls (MS only)

		B: MTSS, PBIS, Wonders, Paths/SEL, Envision, Phonics to reading, Title 1 programs F: Book study, vocab enhancement, PBIS K: Paths/SEL, ecri
	Unsure	C: No idea what EBP is D: Unsure E: formative assessments and APL; unsure G: Unsure of EBP - discovery learning H: No idea what EBP
	None	I: None J: No L: I am trying to but I am looking into
The majority of educators believe that the effectiveness of the inclusion program is average or below average on students' academic performance.	1-1.9	J: 1 - students are included but it's not effective
	2-2.9	B: 2 - Teachers don't want students with IEPs or know how to support them, not good at differentiating instruction C: 2 - Past was better but not enough common planning time, no/minimal support given to inclusive classrooms, in some unique instances works better (I.e. and ela class is co-taught with a sped teacher dual cert in ela F: 2 - Covid made it more difficult to close the gaps I: 2: effective with some, but several behavioral issues with IEPs C: 2 - it would be detrimental if we didn't have honors separated from IEPs F: 2 - Some advanced learners are suffering, need better resources/opportunities, still gaps with non disabled L: 2.5 - many students w/o disabilities find it easier to work independently and choose not to work with students with disabilities
	3-3.9	E: 3.5 - based off what is heard from colleagues, not enough pull-out time for math/ELA G: 3 - dependent on individual student and family involvement; motivation is key H: 3.5 - giving best effort K: 3 - trying to include students but it's not effective, not given enough resources or support for students,

		student dependent, (parents that are knowledgeable in SPED get the most for their child) L: 3.5 - Okay, still trying to figure out how to do this effectively A: 3 - Dependent on student and environment B: 3 - Kids are accepting of students with IEPs/Disabilities G: 3 - Honors don't experience inclusion as much, some benefits to diversity, gaining a deeper understanding through someone else's eyes I: 3 - no effect, unless there is a higher number of IEPs then the advanced students get bored
	4-4.9	A: 4 - Idea is good, best we can do without common planning H: 4 - giving it our best effort
	5	E: 5 - Because we used a leveled schedule (students with IEPs aren't with advanced kids) K: 5 - helps promote diversity and empathy
While inclusionary practices are used, support is not provided consistently and effectively.	Paraprofessionals/Instructional Aides	E: Students included with a learning support teacher or aide F: Kids are tracked and grouped based on levels/scores on benchmarking platforms; Learning support teachers are provided to classroom with higher ratios of IEPs; aids are utilized when available (limited) H: Usually aids/TSS's to support students, sometimes co-teaching K: Classroom aides and paraprofessionals provide additional support (but they float in and out), no co-teaching
	Co-teaching	A: MS - Co-teaching in many classes: use of aids in some; no support in ES or HS (from observations) E: Students included with a learning support teacher or aide F: Kids are tracked and grouped based on levels/scores on benchmarking platforms; Learning support teachers are provided to classroom with higher ratios of IEPs; aids are utilized when available (limited)
	No support	A: MS - Co-teaching in many classes: use of aids in some; no support in ES or HS (from observations) G: Most special education students in regular education classrooms without supports/aides/co-teaching I: Special education students in regular education classrooms with no aide, no co-teaching, and no support

	Minimal Support	B: Learning support students are in regular classes with minimal support, sometimes pulled out mostly for testing (MS, ES, HS) C: 30%-40% ratio without any classroom support, but support students for testing; general education teachers do all accommodations H: Usually aids/TSS's to support students, sometimes co-teaching
	Ineffective	J: Kids with IEPs in general education classrooms with infrequent co-teaching and ineffective co-teaching (when occurs, it's rare); many behavioral issues
Teachers and administrators are uneducated about the law that mandates inclusionary practices for students with disabilities.	Know	A: Individual disabilities ed act - safeguards for students with IEPs B; Doesn't know what it stands for; rules and regs for special education C; Individuals with dis Act - all students guaranteed LRE and FAPE B: Yes C: Yes H: Yes J: Yes K: Yes L: Yes
	Doesn't Know	D: No idea E: No idea G: Don't remember H: Not sure I: Not Sure A: Meeting goals and progress monitoring, no D: No E: NO F: Individual goals close with progress monitoring and modified continuously, no G: NO - in teachers classrooms from special education
	Partially	F: the 1972 clause that supports the disabled J: Individuals with Disabilities Education Act K: Ind. with Disabilities Act L: Ind. with Disabilities Education Act I: Don't know the acronym but IEPs has them
Many educators were provided with no or limited special education classes during teacher preparation programs.	None	D: None G: Don't think so

	Superficial	B: Undergrad: broad topics/superficial, Admin - none; Doctorate - None E: Not a lot; too far to remember I: A little, topics on adapting assignments and following IEPs K: Undergrad - approximately 3 basic classes
	Yes	C: Yes - Special education major F: Yes J; Yes - Special education major
	During Advanced Courses Only	A: I took a couple of classes in sped/sped law course but only in doctoral studies H: Undergrad - no, Master's -yes L: Yes, during admin courses, no undergrad
Educators' background knowledge on inclusion is varied and limited.	Mixed classes	A: Including students with IEPs with non-IEP students B: Including all students (gifted to learning disabilities) in activities, groups, and academics C: Mixed classes with IEPs and non-IEPs E: Students with and without disabilities together H: Students with learning disabilities/IEPs included with regular ed kids I: IEPs included with Non-IEPs J: Having students with IEPs in the general education setting to the fullest extent that is beneficial to their learning K: Including all students with and without disabilities and allowing them to perform at their own level
	Grade-Level Work	F: Ability for all students to attend grade level work with differentiated work J: Having students with IEPs in the general education setting to the fullest extent that is beneficial to their learning
	Large	G: Large time in general education classroom and not special education classroom
	Unsure	D; Not sure
	Opportunities	L: Giving everyone the same academic and social opportunities regardless of ability K: Including all students with and without disabilities and allowing them to perform at own level
Educators are inconsistent with knowing what an IEP is and the difference	Incorrect	A: Testing, read aloud (accommodations); Given in Classroom (mod) D: Do what regular kids do but with aides; Different assignments

between accommodations and modifications.		I; Social issues (accommodations); Assignments (mod) K: Completing the same task with more scaffolding (accommodations);
	Knows	A: Yes B: Yes C: Yes E: Yes F: Yes G: Yes H: Yes/NO, only SDIs I: Yes J: Yes K: Yes B: Classroom environment, seating, time (Accom); Changing Content (Mod) C: Changes in the environment (accom); Changes in content (mod) F: Seating, scribe, AUG Test, resource-based (accom); content driven with work (mod) J; Add things to give students (accom); work is changed, tweak assignments (mod) L: Changing content
	Doesn’t	D: Didn't know the acronym; hasn't seen one here
	Seen	A: Yes B: Yes C: Yes E: Yes F: Yes J: Yes K: Yes L: Yes
	Not Seen	D: Didn't know the acronym; hasn't seen one here G: No H: Yes/NO, only SDIs I: No
	Partially	E: Proximity (accommodations); changing tests (mod) G: change the physical arrangement in the classroom (accommodations); test/quizzes changed, work adapted (mod) H: iPad, large monitors, software, large print (accommodations); control curriculum ex in 4th grade but function at 1st (mod) K: changed assignment (mod) L: Creating a setting (accommodations);

Educators are unknowledgeable about the special education identification process.	Unsure	B: Request of a parent, not teachers, student referred to MTSS first, other steps but not sure D: No idea E: teacher can start the process with a parent but not sure what after G: Unsure H: Knows there are procedures, no idea what they are I: I don't know
	Incorrect	A: Parent recognizes and fills out paper or teacher C: Screening in second grade, parent or teacher can request
	Knows	F: Parents ask for an evaluation, several tests to determine ability and present levels J: Starts with general education noticing struggling, notifies parents for a meeting, tries various supports/interventions, before referred for evaluation
	Partially	B: Request of parent, not teachers, student referred to MTSS first, other steps but not sure K: MTSS tries to identify supports and measure progress if none then referred for evaluation J: MTSS tried to identify supports and measure progress if none then referred for evaluation
Educators enjoy teaching students with disabilities and view it as challenging and rewarding.	Enjoy	A: "I enjoy it." "Most fun" "I like breaking down information" C: "I love it, outlook to help kids" F: "I love it, every child deserves to learn." K: "I enjoy it, I like the challenge."
	No Problem	B: "Okay with it" G: "No problems with it, all are welcome in my class." I: "No problem with it." L: " No problem with it"
	Uncomfortable	D: "Not totally comfortable, I need to learn more"
	Depends	E: "Depends on the disability, not sure I'm effective teaching all disabilities."
	Challenging	H: "Rewarding and challenging." K: "I enjoy it, I like the challenge."
	Rewarding	H: "Rewarding and challenging." J; "I feel like it's more rewarding than teaching regular students. Nice to work 1-1 and in small groups." - more impact

Educators believe various improvements to the inclusion program need to be made.	Collaboration	A: Teachers need to be more involved and have common planning H: More collaboration, connect with teachers more daily to determine if students can do the assignments rather than just modifying them K: More general education input H: Not involved in meetings for special education, everyone needs to be included K: Meet with other teachers and admin to discuss what successful inclusion looks like; evaluate each student case and listen to general ed input
	Perspectives	B: Change teachers perspectives to want the kids and understand all kids need to be successful. Not sure how to help and support them, but teachers need to learn to support and want SPED kids
	Hiring	C: Reduce assignments, extra bodies (aids, staff, paras), educate regular ed teachers on how to accommodate students, provide general education teachers an assigned special ed teacher to provide help/consulting E: More learning support teachers, aides make the class worse L: Adding an additional case manager to check in with students G: More training on accommodations/modifications; create/fill more staff positions
	Educate	C: Reduce assignments, extra bodies (aids, staff, paras), educate regular ed teachers on how to accommodation students, provide general education teachers an assigned special ed teacher to provide help/consulting
	Class size	F; Keep numbers low, personalization/differentiate content better, more parent involvement E: More pull-out time for math and ELA, fewer kids in sessions I: Leveled classes (group by ability) and smaller class sizes
	Parent	F; Keep numbers low, personalization/differentiate content better, more parent involvement
	Differentiate	F; Keep numbers low, personalization/differentiate content better, more parent involvement G: More individualized, i.e. a slow learner needs more

		time to master a skill
	Support	J: Provide additional supporting classes in place of electives; pull out for math and ELA C: More time with kids that are falling behind, assigned a buddy to help with special education needs E: More pull-out time for math and ELA, fewer kids in sessions
	Training	A; Yearly training on new resources G: More training on accommodations/modifications; create/fill more staff positions J: Build on lacking skills
	Scheduling	I: Leveled classes (group by ability) and smaller class sizes
Educators state that more training and resources are needed to effectively educate students with disabilities.	Insufficient	B: Yes, special education teachers receive enough training, not general ed C: Yes, but not for regular ed. Admin has to be more willing to listen D: No, not enough for classroom teachers E: Yes, some additional resources for extreme disabilities would help G; In the past yes, but not now H: It would be nice to have more resources J: No, aides need to be added at a minimum, co-teaching needs to be effective, when progress monitoring there were no resources to improve lacking skills K: No, need more professional development. We need more strategies and skills to use for struggling students
	Enough	L: Yes, but education is ever changing making it difficult to hit the mark
	Professional Development	A: Yes, but they could always do more F: Resources are there but professional development needs to be used, build mini-courses for teachers
	Prepared	C: Methods class for special education, Student Teaching, special education law are important F; Several special education courses, well prepared, hands-on H: Felt prepared, tons of field works, observations, and student teaching J: Observed a lot, additional special education hours at the IU, student teaching, well prepared

	Unprepared	A: Unprepared for inclusion, only one special education class for undergrad B: Superficial courses in special education, didn't learn how to support special education, not good preparation G: Not prepared, needed more student teaching, observations or field teaching experiences L: Not well enough for special education; Student teaching I: I was a teacher intern so I was hired while student teaching. We talked some about special education but not a lot.
	More	A: More classes for special ed B: More classes for special ed C: More experience with visual/hearing impaired and adaptive tech E: More prepared on all the new initiatives G: More student teaching, don't create broad certifications i.e. k-12 H: More classes for special ed J: More experience in writing IEPs and conducting meetings K: More classes for special ed L: More classes for special ed
Teachers identified various reasons why implementing an IEP is stressful.	Not stressful	A: Doesn't feel it's stressful, only when I don't agree with the IEP G; Not overly stressful, just uses out-of-the-box thinking/effort to make some accommodations.
	A lot	E: Keeping up with multiple IEPs in a class at once and remembering H: Difficulty remembering all the IEPS J: Meeting all the needs of students, a lot of kids to accommodations. L: Making sure you got everything; a bunch to manage; legally binding docs to follow
	Progress Monitoring	B; Collecting IEP data, getting teachers to implement SDIs, teachers have their own judgment and make it difficult K: Not PM correctly
	Parents	C: Time constraints, homework sheets signed/agenda signed, ongoing parent communication F: Parents struggle with the labeling of their child; finding support and hiring teachers (low pay)
	Disagree	A: Doesn't feel it's stressful, only when I don't agree with the IEP B; Collecting IEP data, getting teachers to implement

		SDIs, teachers have their own judgment and make it difficult I: SDIs eliminating students responsibility and accountability
Teachers are not able to provide feedback about special education and many educators do not feel supported by their administrators.	Yes	B: Yes C: Yes
	No	A: No, can't say anything in regards to special education, they think what they are doing is perfect E: Not really F: No G: Not denied, able to give limited input but not on a regular basis H: Nothing in place, a form would be helpful or a system I: Not asked J: NO K: NO
	Mixed	L: As an admin yes, as a teacher no A; Yes, there is a lot of communication with teachers B: Some not all D; Some yes, some no H: Teachers yes, admin no J: teachers yes, admin no K: admin depends on the day, teachers yes L: Generally but could be more

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