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Special Education Teachers' Perspectives on Personalization of Evidence-Based Practices

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Walden University
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Abstract

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Gail E. Lott

MA, University of Colorado, 1995

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Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Abstract

Special education teachers' varying levels of awareness of evidence-based practices (EBPs) leads to personalizing practices that can be either positive or negative for student learning outcomes. There is a gap in practice in the research literature regarding special education teachers' perceptions of why and how they personalize EBPs to teach transition-related skills to students with disabilities. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore special education teachers' perceptions of why and how they personalize EBPs to teach transition-related skills to students with disabilities. Guided by Bandura's concept of self-efficacy, which holds that self-efficacy underlies teachers' perceptions of their ability to conduct effective EBP, the research questions focused on high school special education teachers' perceptions of why and how they personalize EBPs. Purposive sampling was used to choose six high school special education teachers who had taught at least two years to participate in semistructured interviews. Inductive data analysis included open and axial coding and thematic analysis. The findings showed that teachers believed in using the most effective practices available, whether identified as effective through research or their own teaching experiences. Teachers implemented content practices as written but adapted them for content and personalized practices to include transition-related practices to meet students' needs. Participants felt prepared to use content-area EBPs but were less knowledgeable of transition-related EBPs. Teachers wanted additional resources, not further training. This study could lead to positive social change by informing professional development design to increase teacher awareness of secondary transition EBPs and how to personalize them effectively, facilitating successful outcomes for students with disabilities.

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Dedication

I dedicate this doctoral dissertation to my husband, Gary. He has been my biggest supporter and encourager. It is his unwavering belief in my ability to complete this task that gave me strength when I felt like giving up.

Acknowledgments

I would like to say to my family and friends, “thank you” for your love, encouragement, and support throughout this journey. I truly appreciate your patience and understanding of the times that I was not available because I was attending to this work. I would also like to express my gratitude and appreciation for the coaching that I received along the way that enabled me to successfully complete this journey.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Historically, students with disabilities have experienced less successful postschool education and employment than their nondisabled peers. Federal and state initiatives related to transition planning have been in place in the United States since the 1980s as a way to address the disparity in student performance outcomes (Landmark & Zhang, 2012). Congress passed the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 to support the successful transition of students with disabilities from high school to adult life and to ensure access to a free and appropriate public education (Mazzotti, Test, et al., 2014). In 1990, the secondary transition provisions of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) began and continued with subsequent amendments in 1997 and 2004 (Holzberg et al., 2018).

IDEA requires that students with disabilities exit high school prepared for postsecondary education, employment, and independent living (Mazzotti, Test, et al., 2014). Teachers should use research-based instructional practices and interventions to support students during high school in preparing for postsecondary education and employment (Cook et al., 2015). A significant tenet of IDEA is the use of evidence-based practices (EBPs), which are instructional methods that demonstrate improved student outcomes. Cook and Cook (2011) defined EBPs as "practices supported by multiple, high-quality studies utilizing research designs that demonstrate causality and meaningful effect on student outcomes" (p. 3). Key legislation such as No Child Left Behind (2002) has

> Identified the use of EBPs as essential to experiencing classroom instructional success. IDEA (2004) highlights the need for teachers to be trained to implement scientifically based (i.e., evidence based) instructional practices to improve the academic and functional performance of students with disabilities. (Guckert et al., 2016, p. 63)

EBPs are "instructional strategies that have been proven effective through scientifically-based research methods" (Torres et al., 2012, p. 64). Researchers at the National Secondary Transition Technical Assistance Center (NSTTAC) conducted a comprehensive systematic literature review and identified 64 EBPs to support students with disabilities in the area of secondary transition (Test, Fowler, et al., 2009). Because special educators should use evidence-based instructional practices in their classrooms (Yell et al., 2006), they must be able to select effective instructional practices supported by the best available evidence (Cook, Carter, et al., 2014). If teachers use EBPs, it increases the likelihood that students with disabilities will achieve successful employment and postsecondary education outcomes (Mazzotti, Rowe, et al., 2013; Rowe et al., 2015; Sprunger et al., 2018).

Using an EBP does not lessen the importance of teachers having the necessary knowledge and skills to instruct students effectively (Torres et al., 2012). Cook and Odom (2013) referred to implementation as the critical link between research and practice. Effectual professional development to support teacher acquisition and fluency in delivering EBPs is necessary for the successful implementation of EBPs (McKenna & Parenti, 2017). As such, if teachers are to implement EBPs with fidelity, they need

ongoing coaching and performance feedback (McKenna et al., 2015). Teacher education programs influence the postschool success of students with disabilities (Morgan et al., 2014).

Despite IDEA's requirements, students with disabilities continue to face less-successful postschool outcomes than their nondisabled peers (Holzberg et al., 2018). The 2017 Disability Statistics Annual Report showed significant disparities between individuals with and without disabilities. In 2016, 35.9% of U.S. individuals with disabilities ages 18 to 64 years were employed compared to 76.6% of individuals without disabilities (Kraus et al., 2018). In 2008, there was a disparity of over $10,000 in median earnings between individuals with disabilities and those without, a number that has continued to increase (Kraus et al., 2018). Further, the poverty gap between those with and without disabilities rose from 7.4% in 2009 to 8.3% in 2016 (Kraus et al., 2018). Luecking and Luecking (2015) found students with disabilities more likely to be unemployed or underemployed and to need additional community supports to benefit from public education. They are less likely to finish high school or pursue postsecondary education (45% versus 53%). They also tend to work less than their nondisabled peers (57% versus 66%; Flannery & Hellemn, 2015; Luecking & Luecking, 2015; Plotner et al., 2015).

There is often a disconnect between how teachers utilize practices and the impact of the practices on students. This disconnect could be due to the lack of implementation fidelity (Kretlow & Helf, 2013) and may negatively affect student learning (Guckert et al., 2016). Although challenging, teachers must implement EBPs with fidelity (Maheady

et al., 2016); otherwise, they risk impacting students in negative ways (Guckert et al., 2016). McKenna and Parenti (2017) asserted that "maintaining a high degree of fidelity or closely adhering to the core components of a teaching practice or intervention is necessary to maximize student benefit" (p. 331). Teachers' level of EBP awareness could lead to personalizing (altering) practices, with the resultant low degree of fidelity detrimental to students with disabilities (Guckert et al., 2016). It was unknown whether special education teachers' perceptions of their level of awareness and personalization of EBPs in this study led to lower levels of implementation fidelity.

This study could lead to positive social change because it extends prior research, showing that teachers rely more heavily on their personal experiences than on research about instructional practices. The study addressed a gap in practice identified in the literature. Teachers appear to personalize in ways that may be detrimental to students' learning outcomes. As Guckert et al. (2016) stated, "If teachers can become more aware of research and personalize research effectively, positive academic outcomes for students may result" (p. 77). The findings can provide direction for enhancing teachers' awareness of the research supporting EBPs, increasing their motivation for implementing EBPs with fidelity, and improving the likelihood that students with disabilities will experience more successful postschool outcomes.

In this chapter, I present the background of the study, problem statement, purpose, research questions, conceptual framework, nature of the study, definition of key concepts and constructs, assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations, and significance. I then summarize the main points of the chapter and provide a transition to Chapter 2.

Background

The passage of IDEA 1997 mandated teachers' use EBPs in their classrooms. This legislation was the impetus for increased research related to EBPs in special education, the use of EBPs in special education teacher preparation programs (TPPs), the frequency of EBP use in the field, as well as teachers' attitudes about using EBPs (Heckaman et. al., 2018). Cook and Cook (2011) defined EBPs as practices supported by a sufficient number of high-quality methodological research studies. Appropriate research designs allow for the assessment of effectiveness and meaningful effect sizes, such that they merit educators' trust that the practice works. The choice and implementation of EBPs depends on the wisdom and expertise of special educators (Guckert et al., 2016). EBPs are effective when implemented with fidelity (Cook & Odom, 2013; Wang & Lam, 2017). Implementation fidelity refers to "the extent to which an intervention is delivered as intended and includes documenting the quality of instruction, identifying professional development needs, and sustaining effective practices to improve student outcomes" (Wang & Lam, 2017, p. 54).

Leko (2015) asserted that students would experience successful outcomes from EBPs implemented with fidelity, or as intended. Because every EBP does not work for every student, every time, adaptations are inevitable (Harn et al., 2013; Leko, 2015). However, in some cases, adaptations can compromise the effectiveness of an intervention (Leko, 2015).

This study addressed a gap in practice identified in the research literature regarding special education teachers' perceptions of why and how they personalize EBPs

to teach transition-related skills to students with disabilities. Boardman et al. (2005) conducted a study of special education teachers' perceptions of research and how they made decisions about what practices and materials to use. Boardman et al. also investigated whether professional development provided teachers with practices and research findings useful for their students. Results indicated that although teachers used practices endorsed by their schools or districts, many were responsible to select instructional practices and continued to use what worked for them. Furthermore, teachers did not feel obligated to use research-based practices (RBPs). Teachers were more concerned with the absence of professional development to address their unique needs, inadequate materials, and finding ways to manage the varying levels of academic needs and behaviors in their classrooms. Boardman et al. concluded that the lack of attention to teachers' fundamental needs was a barrier to implementation of research-based instructional practices and contributed to teachers' pessimism regarding the applicability of research to their classrooms.

Boardman et al. (2005) cited several barriers to the successful implementation of RBPs. Teachers were hesitant to spend substantial time learning new practices they might not find useful and that the district might not continue to support. Also noted was the full range of teaching responsibilities that often superseded the implementation of a new program. Most of the teachers reported that when they did implement new practices, they did not do so completely; rather, they adapted practices by selecting pieces from different workshops or modified what they had learned. The teachers expressed that adaptations enabled them to meet the specific needs of their students. For example, several teachers

of students with learning disabilities were more likely to use practices they could individualize, whereas teachers of students with emotional disabilities reported using practices that were motivating and engaging to students. Although the RBPs did not apply to their students with learning or emotional disabilities, the teachers found the research appropriate to general education students.

Jones (2009) examined novice special education teachers' views of EBPs. Through interviews, observations, and self-reporting, Jones found low rates of implementation and a lack of alignment between what novice teachers said and did in their classrooms. Results showed the teachers were definitive supporters, cautious consumers, or critics of research. The definitive supporters viewed research as essential to special education services but used few EBPs during classroom observations. The cautious consumers viewed research as having a place but unsure of the value. These teachers hesitated to use EBPs after past use without success; instead, they often relied on trial and error to make instructional decisions. The cautious consumers adopted a trial-and-error approach when implementing EBPs but used few practices within their classrooms. The critics doubted the usefulness, appropriateness, and applicability of research to guide practice, but believed they were using EBPs to a great extent. As with the other categories, critics used EBPs minimally. Jones attributed the research-to-practice gap to inaccurate perceptions of teaching practices and lack of knowledge about how to effectively implement EBPs. When teachers reflected on their teaching practices to objectively view their performance, such as through self-evaluation, they were more able to improve their practices.

Guckert et al. (2016) extended Jones's (2009) study by examining the EBPs of highly qualified and experienced special education teachers. Findings showed that the level of awareness and personalization of EBPs affected teachers' ability to adapt and implement EBPs effectively. For example, aware teachers had in-depth knowledge of EBPs, used and relied on them, and often shared research with their colleagues. Partially aware teachers were not always cognizant of using or sharing EBPs, uncertain of the sources of EBPs, uneasy about sharing research, unable to provide specific descriptions of EBPs, and not frequently reliant on research. Unaware teachers did not trust research, were unfamiliar with EBPs, and did not depend on EBPs to instruct students with disabilities. Also, unaware teachers did not discuss research with their colleagues, did not know whether their instructional practices were evidence-based, and disregarded the importance of EBPs. Guckert et al. suggested that the level of awareness affected how teachers chose and personalized their practices. They further proposed that teachers with an in-depth knowledge of EBPs can personalize EBPs in a manner that could benefit students. Conversely, teachers who lacked an in-depth understanding of EBPs were likely to personalize their practices in ways that are inconsistent or even detrimental to student outcomes. Guckert et al. concluded that teachers' perceptions and use of EBPs warranted further investigation, specifically with regard to how an understanding of research findings influenced the way special education teachers implement EBPs.

Researchers have discussed additional factors that may influence the postschool outcomes of students with disabilities. One of these is a lack of knowledge of transition competencies (Flannery & Hellemn, 2015; Mazzotti & Plotner, 2016; Plotner et al.,

2015). Another is that even if teachers have an awareness of the characteristics of effective instructional practices and transition curricula, they may not be skilled in providing this instruction (Mazzotti & Plotner, 2016; Plotner et al., 2015).

This study addressed a gap in practice identified in the literature, and particularly the Guckert et al. (2016) findings, by exploring special education teachers' perceptions about why and how they personalize EBPs to teach transition-related skills to students with disabilities. This study was needed because little is known about teachers' perceptions of why and how they personalize EBP research. Understanding the factors that influence teachers' perceptions of their knowledge and personalization of EBPs is essential in identifying approaches to assist teachers in effectively implementing EBPs for teaching transition-related skills, improving the postschool outcomes of students with disabilities.

Problem Statement

The problem addressed in this basic qualitative study was that teachers' varying levels of awareness of EBPs leads to personalizing practices (Guckert et al., 2016). Also, I addressed a gap in practice regarding how and why special education teachers personalize EBPs to teach transition-related skills to students with disabilities. I extended Guckert et al.'s (2016) findings and built upon research highlighting teachers' perceptions of their practices (Boardman et al., 2005; Jones, 2009) and their uncertainty of how to implement EBPs with fidelity (Cook et al., 2015; Cook & Odom, 2013).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to examine special education teachers' perceptions of why and how they personalize EBPs to teach transition-related skills to students with disabilities. Achieving this purpose extended Guckert et al.'s (2016) findings that although the teachers in their study believed they were using EBPs, they personalized these practices based on their level of research awareness. Results showed that more-aware teachers relied on and trusted research; in comparison, less-aware teachers did not often rely on or trust research in selecting and personalizing their teaching practices. Guckert et al.'s findings suggested that teachers with greater research awareness personalize their practices in ways that are positive for student learning outcomes. In contrast, teachers with less awareness personalize in ways that may be detrimental. Guckert et al. did not examine why and how teachers personalized their implementation of EBPs, so this study addressed that gap in practice.

Research Questions

The following questions guided the collection, analysis, and interpretation of data:

RQ1: What are high school special education teachers' perceptions of why they personalize EBPs to teach transition-related skills to students with disabilities?

RQ2: What are high school special education teachers' perceptions of how they personalize EBPs to teach transition-related skills to students with disabilities?

Conceptual Framework

The framework for this basic qualitative study was Bandura's (1977) theory of self-efficacy. Defined as individuals' beliefs about what they can accomplish, self-

efficacy is associated with feelings of competence, motivation, and ability to act in specific ways to accomplish a task. Teachers who possess a strong sense of self-efficacy welcome the opportunity to master challenging tasks. There are four primary sources of self-efficacy: mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, social persuasion, and physiological and affective arousal. Mastery experiences occur when individuals achieve repeated success and demonstrate proficiency in a task. Vicarious experiences involve observing similar others successfully perform a behavior. An example of vicarious experience would be when teachers see a coworker, mentor, or coach successfully implement an instructional strategy, and then believe in their ability to accomplish the same task. Social persuasion refers to encouraging or convincing individuals they have the skills to master a task. Physiological state or emotional arousal reflects in the positive or negative emotions an individual experiences when completing a task. For example, teachers might experience negative emotions such as sweaty palms or upset stomach when implementing an instructional strategy because they are not confident in their abilities. According to Bandura, mastery experiences are the most effective way to build strong self-efficacy. Self-efficacy increases as teachers develop experience and master their craft. Mastery experiences include teachers feeling supported through education, professional development, and coaching (Bandura, 1997).

Self-efficacy in teachers affects instructional quality and student performance (Miller et al., 2017). Also, self-efficacy is related to the selection and implementation of instructional strategies, teachers' perceptions of EBPs, and their ability to be self-reflective and proactive (Garberoglio et al., 2012). Self-efficacy served as a foundation

for this study because of its relation to teachers' confidence in their ability to succeed in a specific task (Bandura, 1977). Self-efficacy underlies teachers' perceptions of their ability to select and deliver effective evidence-based instruction to students with disabilities (Bandura, 2004). Notably, this study focused on the construct of mastery experiences as the framework. Bandura (1977) highlighted the interplay between experience and content mastery as a link to a teacher's sense of efficacy.

Teachers' efficacy beliefs also include accurately reflecting on what they can and cannot do well and addressing the instructional challenges they face in the classroom (Bandura, 2004). In this study, semistructured interviews allowed participants to reflect on their instructional practices and explain their perceptions of why and how they personalize EBPs. The research questions were related to self-efficacy theory, allowing an exploration of teachers' perceptions and reflections. The data collection process was based on the research questions to elicit information on participants' use of EBPs as well as why and how they personalized EBP research. I organized the data into themes that emerged from the interview responses to explain why and how teachers' personalization of EBPs affected their implementation. I discuss the conceptual framework in greater detail in Chapter 2.

Nature of the Study

A basic qualitative approach was appropriate to explore special education teachers' perceptions of why and how they personalize EBPs to teach transition-related skills to students with disabilities. A basic qualitative design facilitates the investigation of a phenomenon from the perspective of the individuals involved (Merriam, 2009; Yin,

2014). This approach was suitable to explore the central phenomenon of EBP personalization and the fidelity of implementation in instruction from the teachers' perspectives. This research design gave voice to participants' feelings, perspectives, and perceptions to identify how teachers interpret their experiences with EBPs and the meaning they attribute to their experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Qualitative researchers collect data through interviews, observations, or document analysis, with subsequent analysis by identifying recurring patterns and interpreting data based on participants' understanding of the phenomenon of interest (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I selected a basic qualitative design because it provided an opportunity for rich, detailed descriptions of differing perspectives on teaching practices to reveal EBP implementation issues. Through interviewing, qualitative data collection allowed for a thorough exploration of why and how these special education teachers use and personalize EBPs.

I conducted one-on-one interviews via Google Meet with six high school special education teachers who used EBPs to teach transition-related skills to high school students with disabilities. I scheduled two 60-minute interviews in case I was unable to pose all questions during the first interview. I also obtained participants' permission to audio record the conversations. The interviews for Participants 1, 2, and 4 were 60 minutes, with all questions answered during the first interview. The other participants required a second interview to complete the remaining questions. Participant 3 provided very detailed responses over two interviews totaling 130 minutes; the interviews of Participants 5 and 6 were 95 minutes. I transcribed the recordings verbatim and analyzed

the text using open coding with thematic analysis. I performed coding after each interview to allow data saturation to determine the final sample size. Data saturation occurs when analysis shows no further insights with new interviews, and new data will not offer any new information or insight for the developing categories (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Member checking, peer debriefing, researcher reflexivity, and consideration of discrepant data were means to ensure the accuracy and trustworthiness of data collection and analysis.

Definitions

The following are operational definitions of key concepts and constructs used within this study.

Disability: A child with a disability has been evaluated and shows the presence of cognitive, emotional, or physical impairment and requires special education and related services (U. S. Department of Education, 2017).

Evidence-based practices: Following high-quality research, these teaching methods used to teach a specific skill have shown to be effective, indicating a strong record of success for positive postschool outcomes for students with disabilities (Cook, Buysse, et al., 2014; Test et al., 2016).

Individualized education program: An individualized education program (IEP) is a written plan for a child with a disability meet the child's individual needs to enable the child to be involved in and make progress in the general education curriculum and defined in Part 300 of IDEA (U.S. Department of Education, 2006, pp. 1–3).

In-school predictors: These indicators include in-school interventions, program structures, and practices identified through high-quality correlational research to increase the likelihood that students will experience successful postschool outcomes (National Technical Assistance Center on Transition [NTACT], 2018).

National Technical Assistance Center on Transition: Formerly called NSTTAC, NTACT assists state education agencies, local education agencies, state vocational rehabilitation agencies, and vocational rehabilitation service providers in implementing evidence-based and promising practices for students with disabilities (NSTTAC, 2014).

Personalization: Among others, teachers personalize their approaches by changing, altering, or modifying an EBP (Guckert et al., 2016).

Predictors of postschool success: Some in-school practices and programs are correlated with improved postschool outcomes in education, employment, and/or independent living for students with disabilities (Mazzotti, Rowe, et al., 2013).

Promising practices: Practices that show potential are those developed through single-case, correlational, or qualitative research. These approaches have demonstrated limited success for improving outcomes, may or may not have undergone a systematic review process, and might or might not adhere to quality indictors related to specific research design (Test et al., 2016).

Research-based practices: Group experimental, single-case, and correlational research has shown RBPs supporting the implementation of in-school predictors of postschool success. These practices have a sufficient record of success for improving outcomes, may or may not have undergone a systematic review process, and might or

might not adhere to quality indicators related to specific research design (Test et al., 2016).

Taxonomy for transition programming: Teachers and districts often rely on "a comprehensive, conceptual organization of practices through which transition-focused education and services are delivered" (Kohler & Field, 2003, p. 177).

Taxonomy for transition programming (2.0): Building on the earlier taxonomy for transition programming (Kohler, 1996), Version 2.0 provides concrete strategies to implement effective, transition-focused education for students with disabilities (Kohler et al., 2016).

Transition services: Moving a child from school to postsecondary or professional status entails "a coordinated set of activities that is focused on improving the academic and functional achievement of the child with a disability to facilitate the child's movement from school to postschool activities" (Wrightslaw, n.d., para. 2).

Assumptions

Underlying this study were several assumptions about special education teachers and their level of awareness and use of EBPs that are believable but unverifiable. The first assumption was that the teachers had some level of awareness of EBPs, as expected for certified teachers of students with disabilities. This assumption was necessary because the participants were volunteers who met the selection criteria; thus, I could not predetermine their level of EBP awareness. The next assumption was that the participants were candid in their responses, providing honest reflections of their perspectives about why and how they personalized their use of EBPs in teaching transition-related skills to

students with disabilities. I made this assumption because informing the participants of the purpose of the study and assuring them of confidentiality should have led to responses that accurately reflected their perceptions (Simon, 2011).

Scope and Delimitations

A study's scope defines its boundaries (Simon & Goes, 2013). The scope of this study was teachers' level of awareness of EBPs and their personalization of practices when teaching transition-related skills to students with disabilities. This focus was appropriate because personalization may lead to ineffective implementation of EBPs and potentially lower postsecondary education and employment outcomes for the students. Research indicates that teachers are often unprepared to select and implement EBPs. There is a significant interplay between experience, self-efficacy, and content mastery (Bandura, 1977). As such, instructors who have been teaching more than 2 years may have had the opportunity to reflect on their instructional practices (Farrell & Ives, 2015). Also, they likely had a chance to reflect on why and how they personalize EBPs to provide instruction to students with disabilities. Therefore, teachers who have taught fewer than 2 years were not eligible to participate in this study.

The boundaries of the study were a sample of four to six special education teachers of Grades 9–12. Each teacher had a license to teach special education students and had taught for at least 2 years in the target school district. The population excluded general education teachers due to the study's specific focus on high school special education teachers' level of awareness of EBPs and their personalization of EBPs to teach students with disabilities.

One delimitation of this study was the exclusion of additional sources of influence on self-efficacy: vicarious experiences, social experiences, and physiological arousal. I did not select these sources because mastery experiences, the most substantial influence on self-efficacy, are rooted in past training or prior on-the-job experiences. Participating teachers reflected on the role that past experiences, TPPs, and professional development opportunities had in assisting them to master EBP instruction. Another delimitation was the exclusion of the taxonomy for transition programming, recognized as the foundation for effective transition planning and used by transition teams across the nation in reviewing the context of implementation and effectiveness of transition education and services (Kohler, 1993; Kohler et al., 2016; Kohler & Field, 2003). Although the taxonomy "provides a comprehensive, conceptual framework of practices through which transition-focused education and services are delivered" (Kohler & Field, 2003, p. 177), it does not allow for the examination of teachers' perceptions of why and how they personalize EBPs. The taxonomy was not appropriate because it would not have allowed me to focus on teachers' perceptions of how and why they personalize EBPs.

Limitations

A basic qualitative research design has several limitations that may impact the interpretation of the results. One limitation of qualitative methodology is that it is difficult to achieve, maintain, and demonstrate rigor (Anderson, 2010). Also, the number of participants was a limitation, as a small sample size could reduce transferability (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The sample of six high school teachers does not reflect a similar population in other settings due to demographic and socioeconomic factors.

Another limitation was the potential for researcher bias to influence data collection, analysis, and interpretation. Rather than trying to eliminate biases, researchers must acknowledge and monitor them (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

I took measures to limit bias by suspending my judgment, respecting the participants' views, and acknowledging the subjective nature of the interview process (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I avoided leading questions that would have influenced participants' responses by aligning interview questions to the key themes from the literature and the research questions. Before the interviews, I asked two experts in the field to review my questions to ensure they were appropriate, free from bias, and comprehensive (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Powell et al., 2012). Additionally, I kept a reflective journal to log details of how my assumptions, preconceptions, and values might influence findings (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). The journal helped me to reflect on processes, analyses, assumptions, and biases (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Last, I asked a colleague familiar with evidence-based secondary transition practices to serve as peer debriefer, reviewing my analyses and findings to ensure objectivity and accuracy. The actions taken to address the limitations were means to improve the dependability of the results to reflect the phenomenon of interest. In addition, I established dependability through the use of an audit trail in which I described the steps from the beginning of the study through the reporting of findings (Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

Significance

Despite the identification of EBPs for teaching transition-related skills to students with disabilities (Guckert et al., 2016; Mazzotti, Test et al., 2014), these students continue

to achieve less-successful postschool outcomes than their nondisabled peers (Holzberg et al., 2018). This study contributed to improving student outcomes through the exploration why and how special education teachers personalize their instruction in ways that might reduce effectiveness. The results could advance practice in teaching transition-related skills through identified approaches to address teachers' awareness of research in personalizing their instruction.

This study might advance practice beyond the local setting through the identification of ways to address the research-to-practice gap in TPPs and through professional development. Guckert et al. (2016) investigated the translation of research to practice by examining special education teachers' perceptions of their level of awareness, use, and personalization of EBPs. Guckert et al.'s findings provided a starting point to understand these factors in EBP implementation. This study's findings could lead to positive social change in linking awareness of research to the role of TPPs in promoting the use of EBPs in schools (Darling-Hammond, 2014; Morningstar & Benitez, 2013; Scheeler et al., 2016). Additional information provided was the role of professional development that encourages teachers to personalize their instruction in ways that retain the essential components of EBPs (Darling-Hammond, 2014; Mazzotti & Platner, 2016; McKenna & Parenti, 2017; McKenna et al., 2015). This outcome would likely lead to better postsecondary education and employment success for students with disabilities.

Summary

In this chapter, I explained the need to conduct this study and the potential for social change. I presented a background for the study, identified the problem and

purpose, posed the research questions, described the conceptual framework, discussed the nature of the study, and provided definitions of key constructs. Additionally, I clarified the assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations, and significance of the study.

Chapter 2 presents a comprehensive literature review, including a description of the literature search strategy, an in-depth explanation of the conceptual framework, and an exhaustive review, synthesis, and critique of current research literature. The chapter concludes with a summary of the major themes in the literature, what is known and not known about the topic, and how this study filled a gap and extended knowledge about EBPs. I end by connecting the gap in practice with the methods described in Chapter 3.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The problem addressed in this basic qualitative study was that special education teachers' varying levels of awareness of EBPs lead to personalizing practices. Personalization could mean ineffective implementation of EBPs in transition services for students with disabilities, thus decreasing the likelihood that students achieve successful outcomes. It is critical that high school teachers implement EBPs to help ensure students with disabilities experience positive postschool success and successful postsecondary education and employment postschool outcomes (Guckert et al., 2016; Leko et al., 2019; Mazzotti, Rowe, et al., 2013; Mazzotti, Test, et al., 2014; Torres et al., 2012).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore special education teachers' perceptions of why and how they personalize EBPs to teach transition-related skills to students with disabilities. The study addressed a gap in practice identified in the literature as special education teachers' perceptions of why and how they personalize EBPs. Guckert et al. (2016) provided a starting point to understand teachers' awareness, use, and personalization of EBPs as important factors in their implementation. Guckert et al. found EBP implementation affected by how teachers personalize research. I extended Guckert et al.'s findings by exploring why and how special education teachers personalized EBPs.

Synopsis of Current Literature

Congress requires the use of instructional programs and practices grounded in scientifically based research to improve educational outcomes for all students (Simpson et al., 2004). According to No Child Left Behind (NCLB; 2002), scientifically based research "involves the application of rigorous, systematic, and objective procedures to obtain reliable and valid knowledge relevant to education activities and programs" (§ 9101[37]). NCLB was a general education reform initiative that required the use of scientific research when making instructional decisions for all students (Spencer et al., 2012).

In 2002, the Institute of Education Science established the What Works Clearinghouse to determine educational practices grounded in scientifically based research (Test, Fowler, et al., 2009). Subsequently, the Council for Exceptional Children created a task force to identify scientifically based research practices (Test, Fowler, et al., 2009). The task force defined EBP as "educational practices that demonstrate effectiveness based on quality research" (Test, Fowler, et al., 2009, p. 116). Likewise, Cook and Odom (2013) defined EBPs as "practices and programs shown by multiple high-quality experimental or quasi-experimental research to have substantial effects on student outcomes" (p. 135). EBPs must meet prescribed, rigorous standards (Cook & Cook, 2011).

IDEA (2004) mandated that when students with disabilities exit high school, they are prepared for postsecondary education, employment, and independent living. IDEA also required teachers' use of research-based instructional practices and interventions to

support high school students in preparing for postsecondary education and employment (Cook et al., 2015; IDEA, 2004; Mazzotti, Test, et al., 2014; NCLB, 2002). Secondary transition planning is the process used to prepare students for successful postschool outcomes. IDEA defined transition services as

> A coordinated set of activities for a student with a disability that is designed to be within a results-oriented process that is focused on improving the academic and functional achievement of the child with a disability to facilitate the child's movement from school to postschool activities, including postsecondary education, vocational education, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation. (300.42[a][1])

Another major tenet of IDEA (2004) was the use of EBPs (e.g., instructional practices, programs, or interventions) that have strong research support and show improved student outcomes (Cook, Buysse, et al., 2014; Spencer et al., 2012). Despite these requirements, students with disabilities experience less-successful postschool outcomes than their nondisabled peers (Holzberg et al., 2018). When educators use high-quality research to identify EBPs and in-school predictors of success for students with disabilities, there is an increased likelihood that students will experience successful postschool outcomes.

In the 1990s, researchers identified numerous secondary transition EBPs proven successful for secondary students with disabilities. These practices led to benchmarks essential for measuring transition efforts and improving postschool outcomes for students

with disabilities (Kohler, 1993, 1996; Kohler, DeStefano, Wermuth, Grayson, & McGinty, 1994). Initially, Test, Fowler, et al. (2009) identified 32 EBPs in secondary transition. However, NSTTAC (now NTACT) noted additional practices and predictors of postschool success, which it clarified as evidence-based, research-based, or having promising levels of evidence in the areas of postsecondary education, employment, and independent living (Test et al, 2016). As a result, there are currently 11 EBPs, 47 RBPs, and 73 promising practices (see Appendix A).

Although all EBPs are research-based, not all RBPs are evidence-based (Leko et al., 2019). There is no guarantee that EBPs will work for all teachers (Cook & Odom, 2013); therefore, when deciding which practice to use, teachers should assess the cost, complexity and transferability, and contextual fit (Leko et al., 2019). Implementation is the critical link between research and practice (Fixsen et al., 2005 as cited in Cook & Odom, 2013). A simple formula to represent the interconnection between research and practice (implementation): "effective interventions (EBPs) x effective implementation = improved outcomes" (p. 138, Fixsen et al., 2005 as cited in Cook & Odom, 2013). This formula indicates that without effective implementation of EBPs, there will be no improved outcomes.

Researchers have identified numerous EBPs that will improve the postsecondary outcomes of students with disabilities when implemented with fidelity (Cook, Carter, et al., 2014; Luecking & Luecking, 2015; Maheady et al., 2016; Mazzotti, Test, et al., 2014). However, selecting and implementing EBPs is a complex process that requires in-depth content knowledge and extensive training (Leko et al., 2019). Teachers who select

and implement EBPs with fidelity will increase the likelihood of students with disabilities to experience successful outcomes (Mazzotti, Test, et al., 2014; Rowe et al., 2015; Sprunger et al., 2018). Some teachers believe they are using EBPs, and others report using instructional practices with minimal evidence of effectiveness (Kretlow & Helf, 2013). Also, teachers indicate varying levels of awareness of EBPs (Guckert et al., 2016). There remains a gap in practice that could be due to teachers' varying levels of awareness of EBPs and why and how they personalize EBPs (Cook & Odom, 2013; Guckert et al., 2016; Jones, 2009; Plotner et al., 2015).

In this chapter, I discuss the literature search strategy and the conceptual framework that grounded this study. I present resources from peer-reviewed journals to review to key concepts and variables.

Literature Search Strategy

The literature search began by accessing relevant academic databases through the Walden University online library, including PsychINFO, ERIC, EBSCO, SAGE, ProQuest, Education Source, and Thoreau. Search terms were *secondary transition planning, postschool outcomes, students with disabilities, transition outcomes, transition services, teacher preparation, teacher role, teachers perspectives, self-efficacy, teacher self-efficacy, Bandura's theory of self-efficacy, social cognitive theory, teacher awareness, individualized education program, generalization of educational practices, special education law, teacher training, instructional practices, teachers perceptions, evidence-based practices, transition continuum, taxonomy for transition programming, predictors of postschool success, conceptual framework, conceptual framework,*

implementation fidelity, implementation of evidence-based practices, implementation science, IDEA 1997, and *IDEA 2004.* I gathered additional resources by reviewing the references of relevant articles and dissertations, as well as having conversations with national leaders in the field of secondary transition and college professors who teach transition courses to preservice teachers. Inclusion criteria for these materials were that they were peer-reviewed, primary research articles published in the last 5 years (2014-2019); in addition, seminal articles presented the historical context of the problem. In the literature review, I discuss material from 97 sources: 26 for the conceptual framework and 56 for the literature related to key concepts and variables, with 26 sources published within the past 5 years and 15 seminal sources. There were no articles related to why and how teachers personalize EBPs and three articles related to teachers' perceptions of EBP research. Therefore, my focus became identifying themes related to the gap in research.

I identified and used the following categories and themes to organize the literature: (a) self-efficacy as the conceptual framework; (b) current literature indicating federal mandates as an impetus for changes in transition planning to improve postschool employment, postsecondary education, and employment of individuals with disabilities; (c) EBPs (i.e., how to identify them and their characteristics); (d) teacher knowledge and awareness of EBPs; and (e) EBP implementation.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study was based on Bandura's (1997) theory of self-efficacy, with self-efficacy defined as individuals' subjective beliefs about what they can accomplish. Self-efficacy is an integral part of social cognitive theory to

examine the connection between beliefs and behavior (Garberoglio et al., 2012). Self-efficacy aligns with an individual's feeling of competence, motivation, and ability to act in certain ways to accomplish a task (Bandura, 1997). Individuals' self-efficacy affects how they think and feel about their ability to execute a specific course of action. Self-efficacy also governs an individual's decisions, efforts, actions, and greater persistence when faced with challenges (Bandura, 1986; Bandura & Schunk, 1981). Individuals with a strong sense of self-efficacy approach difficult tasks as challenges they can master rather than threats they should avoid (Bandura & Schunk, 1981). An individual's perception of ability or self-efficacy beliefs is a strong predictor of actual behavior, even more so than actual ability (Bandura, 1997; Garberoglio et al., 2012).

Self-efficacy relates to the perceived ability to complete tasks in a specific context (Bandura, 1997), which, for teachers, is the educational environment. Teachers' efficacy within the school context includes beliefs in their capacity to promote student learning within the setting (Garberoglio et al., 2012). Teachers' perceived efficacy strongly influences their behavior in the classroom (e.g., level of effort, perseverance, and established goals).

Teacher self-efficacy is a job-specific efficacy defined as the degree to which teachers believe they can cope with the demands of the teaching profession (i.e., applying new teaching methods to promote student learning even when conditions are challenging; Hoy & Spero, 2005). Also, teachers with strong self-efficacy can plan and organize (Allinder, 1994) and manage their classrooms (Woolfolk & Hoy, 1990). They believe they can influence student learning (Guskey & Passaro, 1994) and have the persistence to

work with low-achieving students (Gibson & Dembo, 1984). Teacher effectiveness is enhanced by the teachers' ability to be self-reflective, self-regulating, and proactive (Bandura, 1997). Two characteristics related to student achievement are teacher preparation and teachers' sense of efficacy (Gibson & Dembo, 1984).

The conceptualization of self-efficacy in this study was as a significant teacher characteristic associated with instructional quality and student achievement (Miller et al., 2017), selection and implementation of instructional strategies, teachers' perceptions of EBPs, and their ability to be self-reflective and proactive (Allinder, 1994; Bandura, 1997; Garberoglio et al., 2102). Legislation such as NCLB (2002) and IDEA (2004) required teachers to use EBPs to guide instruction for students with and without disabilities. EBPs are instructional strategies that show consistent positive academic and postsecondary outcomes for students across multiple studies. IDEA requires that students with disabilities be prepared for postsecondary education and employment upon exiting high school (Mazzotti, Test, et al., 2014). The selection and use of EBPs is dependent on teacher wisdom and expertise (Guckert et al., 2016).

To be effective, EBPs must have implementation with fidelity (Cook & Schirmer, 2003). Bandura's self-efficacy theory suggests that teachers' beliefs about their ability to identify and implement EBPs with fidelity are crucial in instructional quality and student achievement. Mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, social persuasion, and physiological (social and emotional) states develop teacher self-efficacy. Mastery experiences are the most significant factors to increase self-efficacy (Ekstam, Korhonen, Linnanmäki, & Aunio, 2017), with past experiences forming the basis for current self-

evaluations and beliefs about future success (Bong & Skaalvik, 2003). Guided mastery experiences are powerful vehicles for instilling a strong sense of efficacy (Bandura, 2004). When TPPs include intensive supervised clinical work experiences, they are providing guided mastery experiences that allow preservice teachers to learn from expert modeling of practices in schools (Darling-Hammond, 2014; Flores, 2015). The creation of mastery experiences comes when teachers feel supported through education, professional development, and coaching (Bandura, 2004).

Kagan (1992) and Farrell and Lim (2005) identified limited correlations between beliefs and practices. They contended that teacher beliefs are "unconsciously held assumptions" (Kagan, 1992, p. 65) that remain hidden (Farrell & Ives, 2015) until brought to a conscious level of awareness. Li (2013) asserted that teachers' beliefs could predict their behavior and effect pedagogical decision-making in the classroom. Teachers' beliefs stem from their past experiences (good or bad) as learners, preservice education, and the students they teach. This belief system can overshadow what teachers learn in a TPP (Farrell & Guz, 2019).

The teachers in Guckert et al.'s (2016) study thought they understood EBPs and were using them when providing instruction to students with disabilities. However, the findings showed that teachers' level of awareness varied, leading to EBP personalization in ways that affected student outcomes. Guckert et al. highlighted the importance of teachers' accurate perception of their level of EBP awareness. Inaccurate perception of one's level of EBP awareness has the potential to produce less-favorable outcomes for students with disabilities (Farrell, 2008). By engaging in reflective practices to compare

their values and beliefs to their classroom practices, teachers increase the accuracy of their perceptions. Participating in EBP allows teachers to "articulate what they do, how they do it, why they do it, and what impact their teachings have on student learning" (Farrell & Ives, 2015, p. 595). Teacher education programs are one way for teachers to learn to systematically reflect on their teaching and student learning, followed by feedback and opportunities to improve their practice (Darling-Hammond, 2014). When teachers engage in data-driven reflective practice, they can identify areas for improvement and what they are doing well (Farrell & Ives, 2015).

Teachers make instructional decisions based on their beliefs, context, student needs, and organizational expectations (Farrell & Ives, 2015). However, not all teachers are aware of their beliefs or levels of awareness of EBPs, or how instructional practice reflects this awareness (Farrell & Ives, 2015; Guckert et al., 2016). Farrell and Ives (2015) conducted a case study to explore the connection between one English as a secondary language teacher's beliefs and observed classroom practices. Data collection entailed a series of semistructured interviews to discover the participant's beliefs about teaching and classroom observations to observe his practices. Also, the teacher kept a reflective journal to record his thoughts about his teaching.

Farrell and Ives (2015) identified a connection between the teacher's stated beliefs and classroom practices. The participant noted that the reason for the alignment might have been that the textbook allowed him to teach the way he wanted using the materials and activities he liked, which were in line with his beliefs. Also, he felt his experiences as a learner shaped his beliefs about how he taught, and that reflecting on his

practice enabled him to discover gaps in his teaching and what his students were learning. The participant recommended that all teachers take time to reflect on themselves and their teaching abilities. Although the Farrell and Ives's findings supported those of Li (2013), having a single participant was a limitation. Li asserted that teachers' beliefs could predict their behavior and effect "pedagogical decision-making" (p. 175) in the classroom. The teacher in Farrell and Ives' study believed his practices aligned with his beliefs because the text, materials, and activities also supported his beliefs.

This study was a means to understand teachers' perceptions of their level of awareness and use of EBPs, and why and how they personalize EBPs to teach students with disabilities in transition-related skills. This section presents key concepts and variables related to this phenomenon, including federal policy as the impetus for current transition policy, teacher knowledge of evidence-based instructional practices, the role of TPPs and professional development in building teachers' efficacy to use EBPs, teachers' roles in transition planning, and EBP implementation.

Literature Review Related to Key Variables and Concepts

Federal and state initiatives were the impetus for current transition policy (Erickson, Noonan, Brussow, & Gilpin, 2014; Guckert et al., 2016; Mazzotti, Test, et al., 2014; Poppen & Alverson, 2018). The discrepancy between the postschool outcomes of students with and without disabilities resulted in the development of key transition legislation (Guckert et al., 2016; Holzberg et al., 2018). To address concerns regarding the lack of successful postschool outcomes of students with disabilities, lawmakers passed several federal and state initiatives in the 1980s and 1990s (Erickson et al., 2014;

Papay & Bambara, 2014; Prince, Plotner, & Yell, 2014). In 1990, transition planning and services were components of providing special education services for youth between ages 14 to 21 years. The 1997 amendment to IDEA further extended the requirement that transition planning centers around students' postschool outcomes (Holzberg et al., 2018).

IDEA holds school districts accountable for their students' postschool outcomes (Mazzotti, Test, et al., 2014; Poppen & Alverson, 2018). This accountability does not mean that districts need to guarantee outcomes; however, districts must provide special education and related services based on assessment, allowing each student to benefit from special education (Mazzotti, Test, et al., 2014; Poppen & Alverson, 2018). Researchers believe that there is a direct link between IDEA 2004, the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and the successful postschool employment and postsecondary education outcomes of students with disabilities (Trainor, Morningstar, & Murray, 2016).

Employment of Individuals With Disabilities

IDEA 2004 requires that a student's IEP includes a postsecondary employment goal. Trainor et al. (2016) identified a link between the transition planning mandates of IDEA 2004 and successful employment outcomes. However, Bouck and Joshi (2014) and Papay and Bambara (2014) disagreed, presenting evidence that the mandates and implementation of transition services has not led to successful outcomes for students with disabilities. Students with disabilities have not been able to achieve the same level of successful postschool outcomes as their peers without disabilities.

In 1975, 17.5% of individuals with disabilities were employed compared to 65% of individuals without disabilities. That same year, the unemployment rate was 10.7%

and 5.1%, respectively, for these groups. Data indicated that students with disabilities were twice as likely to be unemployed as their nondisabled peers. In 2015, the U.S. Department of Labor reported an increase in the unemployment rate of 14.8% for youth with disabilities and 9.4% for youth without disabilities. Likewise, Wheman et al. (2014) showed that despite legislative requirements, youth with disabilities continue to experience lower rates of postschool employment.

Postsecondary Education of Individuals With Disabilities

The passage of IDEA 2004 made postsecondary education an option for all students with disabilities. States were required to report the percentage of students with disabilities who are enrolled in postsecondary education 1 year after graduating from high school (IDEA, 2004; Mazzotti, Test, et al., 2014; Shaw & Dukes, 2013). Further, following the 2008 amendments to the American with Disabilities Act, higher education institutions began to reconsider their policies for making education accessible to students with disabilities, increasing the number of students enrolling in postsecondary education programs. Shaw and Dukes (2013) reported that nearly 44% of students with disabilities enrolled in college in 2007, up from 26% in 1990. However, the completion rate for these students was 38% compared to 51% for students without disabilities Youth with intellectual disabilities are less likely than individuals with other disabilities to attend postsecondary school (Papay & Bambara, 2014).

Teacher Knowledge of Evidence-Based Practices

Teaching students with disabilities can be a “strategic, flexible, and recursive process as effective special education teachers use content knowledge, pedagogical

knowledge (including EBP), and data on student learning to design, deliver, and evaluate the effectiveness of instruction" (McLeskey et al., 2017, p. 17). Effective special education teachers use their professional judgment and the best available evidence to provide individualized instruction to meet students' needs. Effective special education teachers can prioritize objectives as well as plan for and deliver evidence-based instruction with fidelity.

Morningstar and Benitez (2013) identified teachers' lack of preparedness to implement effective EBPs as one reason students with disabilities are unprepared and unsuccessful. Special educators need specific knowledge, training, and competencies to implement effective practices, and if teachers are unprepared, they may be part of the problem. Likewise, Sciuchetti, McKenna, and Flower (2016) highlighted the need for teachers to identify what constitutes an EBP and what makes a practice evidence-based. Sciuchetti et al. hypothesized that the reason for the research-to-practice gap is partly due to teachers' lack of awareness and knowledge about what constitutes an EBP. The researchers surveyed 163 general and special education teachers to examine their knowledge of the term EBP, finding,

> Fifty-one respondents (31.9%), 29 general education teachers, and 22 special education teachers defined EBPs as practices with research proof. Another 35 (21.47%) referred to proof but did not indicate the origin of proof. This means that 86 respondents referred to proof of some kind, while 77 respondents did not provide a response that referenced proof. Twenty-four respondents (14.72%) suggested that the classroom teacher determined EBPs, four (2.45%) indicated

> they did not know, and 21 (12.88%) did not answer the question. The study results also indicated that the most commonly used sources of information regarding EBPs were colleagues (*n* = 77; 47.24%), Internet (*n* = 75; 46.01%, and research journals (*n* = 72; 44.17%). These methods were followed using textbooks (*n* = 57; 34.97%), practitioner-focused journals (*n* = 51; 31.29%), staff/professional development (*n* = 6; 3.68%) and graduate school education (*n* = 1; .61%). (Sciuchetti et al., 2016, pp. 24, 26)

The purpose of Sciuchetti et al.'s (2016) study was to examine teachers' current knowledge of term "EBP" and to understand the differences in knowledge between general and special education teachers. Findings confirmed the hypothesis that the research-to-practice gap was due to teachers' lack of awareness and knowledge of what constitutes an EBP. If the only criterion to define an EBP was that the practice was based on research, one-third of the sample would have provided an accurate response. However, identifying EBPs necessitates analyzing the methodological quality and the magnitude of available research supporting practices (Cook, Carter, et al., 2014; Cook & Cook, 2011). None of the respondents referred to the method, quantity, quality, or magnitude in their definition of EBPs. Implications for practice are that without knowing what constitutes an EBP, teachers might not accurately identify practices to use in their classrooms, resulting in significantly lower levels of effective instruction for students with disabilities. Sciuchetti et al. also found that educators relied on peers rather than research to identify and access EBPs, which likely explained why so few educators

provided an accurate definition of the term EBP. Finally, the teachers found professional development inadequate and used the practices they feel comfortable implementing.

Teacher Training

Teacher preparation programs. TPPs have emerged as one of the most influential variables in ensuring the postschool success of students with disabilities (Morgan et al., 2014). TPPs give teachers the knowledge and skills to provide instruction using EBPs. Also, TPPs prepare preservice teachers to become well-informed professionals who understand and select practices with empirical support and implement them as intended (Detrich & Lewis, 2012). Preservice teachers who learn to use professional wisdom and the best available evidence to meet individual student needs will positively impact student outcomes (Maheady et al., 2013).

Darling-Hammond (2014) emphasized the importance of strengthening teacher practice using supervised clinical practice. Well-prepared preservice teachers spend extended time in the field examining and applying concepts and strategies while learning alongside instructors who can model effective teaching strategies. Preservice teachers can generalize newly acquired skills into classrooms when they learn about and use EBPs and receive clinically rich field experiences in TPPs (Scheeler et al., 2016). Darling-Hammond (2014) believed that generalization occurred when preservice teachers are immersed in the instructional materials of practice. It is important to choose student teaching opportunities carefully to apply learning to real problems of practice as well as strategies to help students confront their beliefs and assumptions about learning.

Teacher education programs that are successful in producing desired outcomes show candidates how to reflect systematically on their teaching and student learning, providing feedback and opportunities to continue to improve their practice (Darling-Hammond, 2014). Although researchers have identified critical components of TPPs, Plotner et al. (2015) found that 75% of secondary special educators and transition personnel did not receive EBP training. Additionally, some teachers reported using practices without a level of awareness of their effectiveness, evidence base, or proper implementation (Guckert et al., 2016).

Effective training in EBPs increases the likelihood that preservice special education teachers can implement EBPs when they begin to teach (Scheeler et al., 2016). Unfortunately, many teachers acquire their knowledge of transition through professional development, trial and error, and colleagues rather than formal training programs (Morgan et al., 2014; Morningstar & Benitez, 2013). Students with disabilities have consistently experienced less-successful postschool outcomes than their nondisabled peers, bringing into question the professional ethics of learning transition practices on the job (Morningstar & Benitez, 2013).

Darling-Hammond (2014) conducted a 7-year program study of seven public and private institutions of higher learning that produced graduates they believed were well prepared on their first day in the classroom. These institutions had common program characteristics, including:

1. A shared, distinct sense of good teaching infuses coursework and clinical experiences.

2. Tight alignment and amalgamation among courses and between coursework and clinical work in schools.
3. Extensive use of case studies, research, performance evaluation, and a portfolio collection related to real problems.
4. Extended supervised clinical experience that includes expert modeling of practice in schools serving diverse student populations.
5. Strong, collaborative relationships with schools in order to provide powerful experiential learning opportunities for candidates.
6. Definite professional and performance criteria to direct and appraise coursework and clinical practice.
7. A solid foundational curriculum taught in the context of practice, grounded in knowledge of adolescent development and learning, and an understanding of curriculum, assessment, and subject matter pedagogy. (p. 548)

Darling-Hammond (2014) found these program characteristics make a difference in preservice teacher preparation. The study presented the challenges of creating productive clinical experiences for preservice teachers as well as strategies to confront these challenges. Darling-Hammond concluded that preservice teachers would generalize skills and knowledge to actual classroom settings when TPPs provided at least 30 weeks of supervised practicum and student teaching opportunities to support coursework. TPPs enable the generalization of skills with school partnerships designed to support exemplary practice and pedagogical learning for teaching diverse learners.

Research has shown the role of effective TPPs in building preservice knowledge and skills to implement EBPs. Chorzempa et al. (2019) agreed that TPPs play an important role in preparing teachers to implement EBPs, asserting, “The research to practice gap is exacerbated when preservice teachers experience a lack of exposure to and lack opportunities to practice RBPs in their fieldwork” (p. 83). The researchers posited that one way to combat this issue was for teacher education programs to teach candidates to use a problem-solving approach with practice-based evidence. Practice-based education is a flexible, problem-solving model for collecting and reflecting on instructional practices (Benedict et al., 2016). With practice-based education, TPPs provide opportunities for the application of skills and knowledge across varied settings using modeling, analyzing, and reflecting in a structured, systematic way. Practice-based education allows for the reinforcement of EBPs through application.

Mason-Williams et al. (2015) discussed the role of teacher education programs in building routine and adaptive expertise using capstone integration projects. When TPPs incorporate such projects, preservice teachers have an opportunity to develop the skills necessary to identify, implement, and assess the efficacy of an EBP as well as its implementation fidelity. Also, capstone integrated projects allow preservice teachers to demonstrate their routine and adaptive expertise within the realities and confines of a classroom.

Adaptive expertise refers to the ability to efficiently apply content knowledge with flexibility and creativity while using problem-solving and innovation to approach challenges in new ways (De Arment et al., 2013). Teachers with adaptive expertise can

adjust instruction after reflecting on their teaching practice. To successfully adapt practices, preservice teachers need to understand what makes a practice evidence-based or research-based. They should know how to locate information, independently reflect on the appropriateness of the intervention, and seek guidance from faculty members before choosing a specific intervention. Additionally, regular meetings with faculty provide opportunities for reflection and feedback to support students' development of adaptive expertise.

TPPs play an essential role in preservice special education teachers knowing how to locate EBPs, design interventions, implement them in the classroom, understand the importance of implementation fidelity (Mason-Williams et al., 2015), develop a strong sense of self-efficacy, and build mastery experiences (Bandura, 2004). Mastery and personal experiences are powerful ways to improve teacher efficacy and expectations of proficiency in future performance (Bandura, 1986). Mastery experiences contribute to teachers' beliefs they have the skills to succeed based on prior accomplishments. In experiencing success teaching students with disabilities, teachers' sense of efficacy grows.

Bandura (1997) suggested that self-efficacy is malleable during the first years of teaching. Further, it is important for preservice and novice teachers to establish high efficacy early in their career because once established, beliefs are hard to change (Bandura, 1997). Preservice teachers' self-efficacy increases throughout the TPP and during the student teaching practicum experience (Henson, 2002; Hoy & Spero, 2005; Woolfolk & Hoy, 1990). Self-efficacy is the most pliable in the preservice years

(Woolfolk & Hoy, 1990). As such, positively effecting teacher efficacy beliefs is improbable without long-term professional development for teachers to reflect on their practices and actively engage in behaviors that lead to instructional improvement (Henson, 2002).

Leonard et al. (2011) contended that individuals acquire mastery experiences through field experiences. Wingfield et al. (2000) examined the self-efficacy of preservice teachers attending a TPP at professional development schools. Preservice teachers learned effective modeling and engaged in authentic teaching experiences while receiving ongoing support and feedback. The pretest-posttest results of the Science Teaching Efficacy Beliefs Instrument showed that self-efficacy increased from the beginning to the end of the year. Wingfield et al. concluded that teachers' self-efficacy could improve if they engaged in context-specific experiences and received ongoing support from teacher preparation teachers and teacher mentors in the field.

Woolfolk-Hoy and Spero (2005) found an increased sense of efficacy among preservice teachers from the beginning to the end of the TPPs, but a decrease from the end of the preparation program to the end of the first year of in-service teaching. The researchers attributed the deterioration to the lack of support received in the TPP compared to the first year of teaching. Similarly, Barnes (2000) found that preservice teachers' sense of efficacy increased during their TPP but deteriorated as they advanced through their studies. The decline could be due to recognizing the complexity of teaching by the end of teacher preparation. Fallin and Royse (2000) found that negative field experiences can promote pessimistic attitudes about teaching and low self-efficacy in

preservice teachers. In contrast, comprehensive, well-designed field experiences develop positive attitudes toward teaching (Thomson, Beacham, & Misulis, 1992). Li and Zhang (2000) found higher self-efficacy scores among science teachers who engaged in early field experiences during science methods courses and whose field experiences connected to coursework than those who did not.

Professional Development

One threat to EBP implementation is the lack of effective professional development to support teacher acquisition and fluency in delivering EBPs (McKenna & Parenti, 2017). Mazzotti and Plotner (2016) investigated 592 transition service providers' access, training, knowledge, and use of EBPs and whether they felt prepared to use practices. The researchers defined transition service providers as local and state education agencies, state vocational rehabilitation services personnel, and others (e.g., institutions of higher learning, mental health, long-term care). Transition service providers often play a key role in offering services to youth and young adults with disabilities or prepare preservice teachers to provide these services to students with disabilities. Of the 592 participations who completed the survey, 224 were high school special educators, 56 middle school special educators, 122 transition specialists, 70 school administrators/special education program coordinators, 45 vocational coordinators, 36 rehabilitation counselors, and 39 other disability professionals. More than half (52%) of respondents reported they seldom or never received professional development related to secondary transition EBPs, and nearly half (46%) reported seldom or never receiving resources related to EBPs. Therefore, almost half of professionals providing services to

transition-aged youth with disabilities are not equipped with the knowledge and skills to implement EBPs.

Nearly one third of survey respondents were unsure of the differences between EBP-related terms (Mazzotti & Plotner, 2014). These findings aligned with Morningstar and Benitez's (2013) assertion that there is a need for professional development related to secondary transition EBPs. The study also showed that transition service providers were not receiving training on secondary transition EBPs in TPPs. Morningstar and Benitez and Morgan et al. (2014) posited that teachers should have access to transition courses and professional development opportunities to increase their competency in special education and transition. It is necessary for transition service providers to have the knowledge and skills needed to be successful in the field. Mazzotti and Plotner (2014) concluded that transition service providers should continue to access resources to build their skills.

Evidence-Based Practices

The passages of NCLB (2002) and IDEA (2004) required teachers to use scientifically based research practices and curricula to instruct students with and without disabilities. Researchers have identified numerous secondary EBPs proven successful for secondary students with disabilities, with established benchmarks that are essential for measuring transition efforts and improving postschool outcomes for students with disabilities (Kohler, 1993, 1996; Kohler et al., 1994). NTACT conducted two comprehensive literature reviews to identify EBPs (Test, Fowler, Richter et al., 2009) and

predictors of postschool success for students with disabilities (Test, Mazzotti et al., 2009).

Despite their frequent interchangeable use, the terms EBPs, RBPs, best practices, and recommended practices each has a distinct meaning (Cook & Cook, 2011) with an underlying purpose: to identify effective practices. EBPs are instructional and curricular practices proven to lead to successful postschool outcomes for secondary students with disabilities. EBPs are based on rigorous research designs that have undergone a systematic evaluation process using quality indicators to calculate the level of evidence (Mazzotti, Rowe, et al., 2013; Mazzotti, Test, et al., 2014). As Cook and Cook (2011) noted, generally, "EBPs are defined as practices that are supported by multiple, high-quality studies that utilize research designs from which causality can be inferred, and that demonstrate meaningful effects on student outcomes" (p. 73). Research-based practices have less high-quality research supporting effectiveness and causality and thus do not have the same rigorous requirements as EBPs. The terms RBP and EBP do not mean the same thing and are thus not interchangeable. Practices touted as best or recommended may not be research-based and are less likely to be evidence-based. Educators should neither describe practices in this manner nor trust the practices are empirically validated without evidence (Cook & Cook, 2011).

Although the use of EBPs has shown to increase the likelihood that students with disabilities will experience successful employment and postsecondary education outcomes (Mazzotti, Test, et al., 2014; Rowe et al., 2015; Sprunger et al., 2018), EBPs are not a panacea for all learners (Cook & Cook, 2011). EBPs are challenging to

implement. They are not the only factor to consider when making instructional decisions, and teachers could be confused about which practices are EBPs. Researchers have developed guidelines to assist teachers in selecting EBPs (Leko et al., 2019).

Selection of Evidence-Based Practices

Teachers should base instructional decisions on individual student needs, as determined by transition assessment as well as a set of core considerations rooted in research. Doing so will lead to more consistent and efficient student progress while minimizing educator and student frustration (Mazzotti, Test et al., 2014). Leko et al. (2019) suggested four critical considerations for selecting EBPs: evidence of effectiveness, cost, complexity and transferability, and contextual fit.

Evidence of Effectiveness. Terms such as EBP, RBP, and best practices each represents different levels of strength of evidence (Leko et al., 2019) and the scope of the underlying research base (Cook et al., 2015). Four key elements distinguish an EBP from an RBP. These are: (a) research design implies causality (i.e., the practice is linked to student outcomes), (b) the research design follows specific research design standards and quality indicators, (c) multiple studies demonstrate desired student outcomes, and (d) the study outcomes are significant and valid (Leko et al., 2019).

Assessing the Cost. After a teacher deems an EBP's strength sufficient for implementation, one factor to consider is its cost. The What Works Clearinghouse and NTACT websites identify some EBPs at no or low cost. Other practices require significant funding. Leko et al. (2019) suggested that teachers identify essential elements of an EBP and the conditions under which they will implement the EBP when

considering the cost of implementation. Some factors are often beyond the control of special education teachers, such as (a) the financial investment to purchase the EBP; (b) the investment in professional development, personnel, staffing allocations, materials, and classroom space; and (c) the time necessary to implement the EBP. District and building administrators will need to consider these factors when assessing the cost and benefits of implementing EBPs.

Complexity and Transferability. The complexity of the EBP and the degree to which other professionals, such as general educators and paraprofessionals, can implement the practice are additional considerations for special educators. Taking into account the complexity of an EBP includes understanding the steps for successful implementation, necessary materials, data collection requirements, and training to achieve fidelity (Brock & Carter, 2013). An EBP that requires minimal training or limited content knowledge is easier to transfer to another educator or paraprofessional.

Contextual Fit. The interrelationships among multiple factors in the school setting (e.g., available resources, time, student characteristics, educator preparation, administrative support) affect the effectiveness of EBPs (Leko et al., 2019). Fixsen et al. (2005) asserted that failing to consider the possible mismatches between the setting and the EBP features could diminish the EBP's effectiveness and compromise its success. Teachers' understanding of contextual fit is paramount to effective implementation of EBPs (Leko et al., 2019).

A first step in evaluating contextual fit is determining the alignment between students' characteristics (academic, behavioral, social-emotional, language, and cultural

needs) and the EBP (Leko et al., 2019). For example, using a reading intervention for adolescent struggling readers that is intended for younger, emergent readers is unlikely to be successful. It is also necessary to consider are the goals, priorities, and values of students and families by involving them in the decision-making process. After EBP selection, evaluating the effectiveness over time includes collecting data on the fidelity of EBP implementation and the EBP's effect on student outcomes. For example, if a teacher implements an intervention to address a specific skill but data show the student is not making sufficient progress, a different EBP could be necessary.

Implementation of Evidence-Based Practices

Implementation Fidelity

Cook and Odom (2013) referred to implementation as the critical link between research and practice. Researchers have found a disconnect between teachers' utilization of EBPs and students' outcomes, which could be due to the lack of implementation fidelity (Kretlow & Helf, 2013) and might negatively impact student learning (Guckert et al., 2016). Despite the challenges, teachers must implement EBPs with fidelity (Maheady et al., 2016; Wang & Lam, 2017). Implementation fidelity is the extent to which the delivery of an intervention is as intended (Harn et al., 2017). Additionally, implementation fidelity includes authenticating the quality of instruction, pinpointing professional development needs, and supporting effective practices to improve student outcomes (Wang & Lam, 2017). McKenna and Parenti (2017) asserted, "Maintaining a high degree of fidelity or closely adhering to the core components of a teaching practice or intervention is necessary to maximize student benefit" (p. 331). When teachers

implement EBPs with fidelity, students are more likely to experience successful outcomes (Abry et al., 2014; Leko, 2015).

Adapting EBPs to meet students' needs makes the intervention more effective (Castro et al., 2004; Webster-Stratton et al., 2011). Leko (2015) stressed that when adaptations keep EBPs core components intact, are intended to benefit students, and result from teachers' data-based decision making, there is a greater likelihood of EBP effectiveness and positive student outcomes. The core components of an EBP contribute to students' positive outcomes (Fixsen et al., 2005, as cited in Leko, 2015). Peripheral components are discretionary features that do not impact effectiveness if omitted (Leko, 2015). Therefore, implementers need to determine which adaptations are beneficial and which are not (Leko, 2015).

Harn et al. (2017) conducted a 7-month intervention study of two groups of at-risk kindergarteners to examine the nuances of fidelity related to student outcomes. Leading Group 1 was a less-experienced educational assistant who consistently delivered the lesson as scripted, and students were less engaged. The Group 2 facilitator was a licensed special education teacher who deviated from the lesson based on her students' needs and routinely skipped lesson components. The teacher understood the core components of the program and focused on evaluating how students responded to lesson delivery; as a result, students exhibited higher levels of engagement and growth. McHugo et al. (2007) asserted that teachers would adapt practices to match contextual factors (e.g., student needs, demographics, etc.) to deliver responsive instruction. The experienced teacher in Harn et al.'s study displayed a deep level of awareness of the EBP she was using,

adapting instruction to meet the needs of her students, who experienced growth as a result. Teachers' level of EBP awareness can lead to personalizing practices with a low degree of fidelity that could be detrimental to students with disabilities (Guckert et al., 2016).

Adaptations are an inevitable part of the implementation process when determining the contextual fit of an EBP (Harn et al., 2013). Fixsen et al. (2005, as cited in Leko, 2015) noted that adaptations were likely to occur by force, choice, or accident; therefore, the key is finding the right balance between implementation fidelity and EBP adaptation within the local context. Leko (2015) offered the following recommendations for implementing and evaluating adaptations:

1. Know the underlying principles for why an EBP works; know the EBPs core and peripheral components.
2. Begin by applying the EBP with as much fidelity as possible.
3. Collect ongoing implementation fidelity data.
4. Collect progress-monitoring data to determine whether the EBP is working.
5. Document adaptations made.
6. Determine if adaptations are resulting in desired student outcomes.
7. Seek assistance from someone knowledgeable about the EBP before adapting.
8. Access ongoing support (e.g., professional development, coaching, peer observations). The framework provided can assist educators in determining if adaptations are warranted and to determine if the EBP's core components are intact. (p. 81)

Torres et al. (2012) proposed a 10-step process to assist special educators in implementing EBPs effectively (see Appendix C). When students are not making desired gains, teachers need to ask themselves if they have tried the most effective practice available. In addition, using this 10-step guide can help teachers to systematically examine their practices and the processes they use to incorporate EBPs in the classroom (Torres et al., 2012).

Summary and Conclusions

The postschool outcomes of students with disabilities were a national concern decades before IDEA 2004 made transition planning a requirement for students with disabilities. The research discussed in this chapter showed the complexity of identifying and implementing EBPs with fidelity, the factors related to increasing teachers' level of awareness of EBPs and building teacher efficacy through mastery experiences. This review showed the critical role of teacher training through TPPs and professional development to prepare teachers to identify, master, and implement EBPs with fidelity. The taxonomy for transition programming provides a framework for planning, organizing, and evaluating transition education, services, and programs (Kohler, 1993). The practices described within the taxonomy are concrete strategies to operationalize transition practices. High-quality, correlational research shows evidence-based, in-school predictors of postschool success. If educators appropriately use data from multiple sources to identify students' needs, write clear and measurable postsecondary goals, and include interventions based on evidence-based instructional practices, then students will experience successful outcomes. What is concerning is that despite legal requirements for

transition planning and years of research discussing effective transition planning practices, students with disabilities do not achieve the same level of success as their nondisabled peers.

The literature for this study provided limited insight into teachers' perceptions of their level of awareness of EBPs. Boardman et al. (2005), Jones (2009), and Guckert et al. (2016) examined this topic, conducting studies with their own sets of strengths, weaknesses, recommendations for further research. Boardman et al. explored special education teachers' perceptions of research, how they made decisions about what practices and materials to use, and whether professional development provided them with methods that were useful to their students; also discussed was the extent to which special education teachers found research findings helpful. A strength of Boardman et al.'s study was that the special education teachers selected instructional strategies appropriate for their students; a weakness was that focus group facilitators were the study authors. The lack of peer reviewers, audit trails, and reflective journals could have compromised objectivity.

Jones (2009) examined novice special education teachers' views of EBPs, finding that teachers' awareness of research affected their level of trust in research. This study's strengths were that it highlighted the critical role of TPPs in explaining the research and providing opportunities to master EBPs. TPPs also offer preservice teachers opportunities to reflect on their practices and develop critical thinking skills, enabling them to implement and revise processes based on student needs and objective criteria. A weakness was that the sample of novice teachers, who may be less informed about EBPs,

was not representative of the entire population of special education teachers. In addition, all participants were women and all results were self-reported. Jones suggested further research to examine the link between the use of EBPs and student achievement; otherwise, it might be difficult to convince teachers to base their instructional decisions on EBPs. With such studies, researchers could justify the time and effort involved in utilizing EBPs. Finally, Jones highlighted the need for further research on novice teachers' perceptions of their teaching practices.

Guckert et al. (2016) extended Jones's (2009) findings. None of the researchers examined teachers' perceptions of why and how they personalize EBPs to teach transition-related skills to students with disabilities. An important contribution of Guckert et al.'s study was that although all teachers believed they were using EBPs, their differing levels of awareness affected their personalization of research. As a result, Guckert et al. developed a conceptual framework of teachers' use and perception of research. Their framework showed the connection between awareness levels and use of EBPs and how awareness affects teachers' instructional practices.

Guckert et al.'s (2016) framework was both a strength and a weakness. Its strength was in providing a visual representation of the connection between teachers' level of awareness and personalization of EBPs. Alternately, the findings have received neither validation nor use by other researchers, posing a weakness. Also, the sample of highly qualified teachers was not representative of the entire population of special education teachers, who may be less informed about EBPs. Another weakness is that the researchers relied on self-report with no other corroborating types of data collected.

Guckert et al. indicated the need to research teachers' varying levels of awareness of research with a diverse sample of teachers that includes novice and experienced teachers as well as continue to examine perceptions of their teaching practices. Guckert et al. asserted that little was known about how teachers personalize EBP research. Through my research, I addressed the gap in practice identified in the literature as a means to extend Guckert et al.'s findings, exploring why and how teachers personalize EBP research.

Chapter 2 showed the critical need to ensure students with disabilities experience successful postsecondary education and employment outcomes at the same rate as their nondisabled peers (Rowe et al., 2015; Wheman, 2013). The lack of successful outcomes created an intense governmental focus on understanding the factors related to successful transition outcomes, leading to the development of several federal transition-related policies (IDEA 1997, 2004; Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act, 2014; NCLB, 2002; U.S. Department of Education, 2010). IDEA (2004) served as the impetus for developing 64 EBPs to assist teachers in providing evidence-based instruction to improve transition-related skills (Mazzotti & Plotner, 2016). The organization of these EBPs has been into five categories within the taxonomy for transition programming, which provides a comprehensive, conceptual organization of effective secondary transition practices (Kohler, 1993, 1996; Kohler et al., 2016). Transition programming is a way to "guide the development, implementation, and evaluation of secondary transition programs" (Morningstar & Mazzotti, 2014, p. 7).

However, the identification of EBPs alone did not lead to positive outcomes. Because special education teachers are primarily responsible for the development,

facilitation, and oversight of the transition planning process, they must have an awareness of EBPs and the skills to implement them (Morgan et al., 2014). Teachers gain their knowledge of EBPs on the job by reading professional journals, pursuing professional development opportunities, and attending TPPs (Mazzotti & Plotner, 2016; Morgan et al., 2014).

Researchers have identified teacher knowledge and the use of evidence-based instructional practices to improve postsecondary education and employment outcomes of students with disabilities. However, teachers lack an understanding of how to effectively apply evidence-based instructional practices to design and implement secondary transition practices (Flannery & Hellemn, 2015). Guckert et al. (2016) identified a need to examine further special education teachers' perceptions of their practices for teaching transition skills to students with disabilities, including how teachers implement EBPs. This study was a means to expand upon those results.

Chapter 3 presents a detailed explanation of the research design and rationale to answer this study's research questions. I discuss my role as the researcher, recruitment procedures, participant selection, data collection tool, and data analysis plan. The chapter includes the strategies to establish credibility, validity, dependability, and confirmability and the ethical procedures followed to protect participants. Chapter 3 concludes with a summary of the main points.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore special education teachers' perceptions of why and how they personalize EBPs to teach transition-related skills to students with disabilities. This study addressed a gap in practice identified in the literature regarding examining teachers' level of awareness, use, and personalization of EBPs. Guckert et al. (2016) emphasized the need to explore special education teachers' perceptions of their awareness of EBPs and how they personalize EBPs to teach transition skills to students with disabilities. The major sections of the chapter are the research design and rationale, role of the researcher, methodology, trustworthiness, and ethical procedures, followed by a summary of the chapter.

Research Design and Rationale

The following research questions guided this study:

RQ1: What are high school special education teachers' perceptions of why they personalize EBPs to teach transition-related skills to students with disabilities?

RQ2: What are high school special education teachers' perceptions of how they personalize EBPs to teach transition-related skills to students with disabilities?

The central phenomenon was high school special education teachers' perceptions of why and how they personalize EBPs. I used a basic qualitative approach to explore EBP personalization and fidelity from the teachers' perspectives. A fundamental construct of qualitative research is to understand a phenomenon from the participants' perspectives, not the researcher's (Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2014).

As a qualitative researcher, I was the primary instrument for data collection (see Merriam, 2009). Therefore, it was essential that I monitored my bias and how it shaped data collection and interpretation. However, Merriam and Tisdell (2016) viewed researchers' direct interaction as an advantage, allowing them to expand and immediately clarify understanding, summarize information, check for accuracy, and examine unusual responses. This basic qualitative study provided an opportunity for rich, detailed descriptions of differing perspectives on program practices, showing implementation issues and disparities in the use of EBPs (see Hall et al., 2014). Qualitative data analysis allowed me to explore special education teachers' perceptions of why and how they personalize EBPs to prepare students with disabilities for successful postsecondary education or employment. I considered several other qualitative designs but rejected them as not appropriate or feasible.

A phenomenological study allows the researcher to examine participants' lived experiences, how they construct meaning in their actions within their context, and the shared essence of experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Phenomenological research is a time-intensive design requiring extensive data collection over time to guide the creation of questions through multiple interviews and opportunities for reflection (Usher & Jackson, 2014). I did not select phenomenology due to time constraints and the lack of multiple opportunities for participant reflection.

I considered and rejected several other qualitative designs. Ethnography enables the researcher to understand individuals' interaction with the culture and society in which they live (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). An ethnographic design was not appropriate for this

study because the focus was to understand teachers' perspectives, not their interactions with a specific culture. A grounded theorist seeks to build a substantive theory about the phenomenon of interest (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This design was not feasible for my study because I did not intend to build a theory about the teachers' level of awareness of EBPs. The narrative approach involves exploring the first-person experiences of participants as expressed through their stories or life histories in the form of a biography (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I rejected a narrative design because this was not a firsthand account of my story; rather, I sought to understand others' perceptions. The case study is an in-depth inquiry in a bounded system, such as a group, institution, community, or policy (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), requiring more than one data source (Yin, 2014). I did not select a case study because semistructured interviews were my only data source.

I also considered one of the quantitative designs characterized by collecting and analyzing quantitative data to identify relationships between variables, compare participants' responses and performance, and determine the effectiveness of interventions (Creswell, 2012). Researchers express quantitative data using numerical values. I did not use quantitative methodology because it would not have allowed me to explore participants' perceptions. A mixed-methods approach was inappropriate for the same reasons, as mixed-methods research incorporates quantitative and qualitative designs.

Role of the Researcher

I served several roles during this basic qualitative study. I recruited participants, conducted interviews, and collected data to examine teachers' perceptions of why and

how they personalized EBPs to teach transition-related skills. Also, I analyzed, interpreted, and reported study findings.

I have worked as a secondary transition specialist for a state education agency in the Western United States for 6 years. As a secondary transition specialist, I provide support, technical assistance, and training related to effective secondary transition practices in all districts within the state. I do not operate in a supervisory role and have no direct impact on program changes. I mitigated professional and personal bias by enlisting experts to review the interview protocol to ensure objectivity. Also, I recruited a peer debriefer to check data analysis and results and asked participants to ensure the accuracy of transcripts and themes. Finally, I used a reflective journal to track my methodological decisions and engage in reflexivity (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This documentation allowed me to critically reflect on my biases, preferences, and preconceptions (Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

Engaging in interviews required participants to provide private details of their experiences. Establishing rapport at the beginning of face-to-face interactions was critical in building trust (Guillemin et al., 2016). Interviews took place via Google Meet at the teachers' convenience to ensure minimal disruption to their workday. I treated each participant with honesty, respect, and genuine concern. I clearly defined the purpose of the study, used ethical interview practices, and maintained confidentiality. I shared information with participants through member checking to maintain transparency (Birt et al., 2016).

Methodology

Participant Selection

Purposive sampling was the means to select six high school special education teachers to participate in face-to-face, semistructured interviews. Purposive sampling was appropriate to increase the likelihood that participants had firsthand and detailed knowledge of the study topic (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), which was how they were using EBPs. Maximal variation sampling entailed selecting at least one participant from five schools to ensure a wide range of responses from varying perspectives.

All participants were teachers who have worked at the high school for at least 2 years and taught students with disabilities. It is typical to study a few individuals when conducting qualitative research (Creswell, 2012). In purposive sampling, informational considerations determine the sample size. A small sample enabled me to provide an in-depth picture and present the complexity of using EBPs to build transition-related skills. Redundancy was the primary criteria for sample selection (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I knew the sample was adequate when I reached data saturation—that is, when additional interviews would have produced no new insights (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

As more than six teachers expressed interest in participating, I chose the first six who met maximal variation requirements. A maximal variation involves purposefully selecting individuals at different sites or based on participant characteristics to ensure diversity and variation in perspectives (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Maximal variation sampling also enhanced transferability to other educational settings.

Federal requirements are that transition planning begins at 16 years of age (IDEA, 2004; Trainor et al., 2016). Therefore, the selection criteria were as follows:

1. The participant was a high school special education teacher who taught students with disabilities.
2. The participant had taught high school for at least 2 years.

Participants meeting these characteristics were able to offer pertinent information to answer the research questions.

Instrumentation

Data Collection Instruments

I scripted the semistructured interview protocol to ensure the inclusion of essential components. Semistructured interviews provided consistency across interviews and enabled me to probe answers. Interview questions allowed me to obtain the teachers' perceptions of how and why they personalized EBPs to teach transition-related skills to students with disabilities.

Content Validity and Data Collection Devices

Two national transition experts reviewed the interview protocol to establish content validity (Lodico et al., 2010). Each expert was a researcher who had published articles in national journals and worked as a college professor or for the NTACT. I provided each expert with a copy of the study proposal, including the interview protocol, making changes to interview questions based on their recommendations. (The interview protocol appears in Appendix D).

I asked participants for permission to record the interviews, which I did by using a digital recorder. Recording interviews enhanced the accuracy of data collection. Using a recording device allowed me to focus on gaining in-depth responses to the questions rather than worrying about notetaking accuracy. Upon completing each interview, I uploaded the audio files into NVivo, a qualitative data analysis software program (QSR International, 2019). NVivo helped with the tasks of transcribing and coding audio recordings. NVivo allows researchers to import audio files, electronically code data from digital transcripts, and organize coded data into electronic files or nodes. I compared the transcripts with the audio recordings to ensure I had a verbatim account of the interviews. I then sent the transcripts to the participants for review to ensure that their perspectives were accurately captured. (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Participants had 1 week to return any corrections to me via e-mail. Changes were made based on participants' feedback. In addition, I conducted member checking to assure the accuracy and credibility of my findings. I sent participants a copy of the preliminary findings. The participants did not provide any feedback on the findings.

I saved the interview recordings and transcripts on my password-protected personal laptop. The files did not include participants' names, only numeric identifiers. The names and the numeric identifiers were in a separate file on the computer to preserve participant confidentiality.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

I gained approval from Walden's Institutional Research Board (IRB). To prepare for this study, I completed the "Protecting Human Research Participants" online training

provided by the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (n.d.). This training made me aware of the steps to take to protect human research subjects from any negative consequences resulting from this study. While waiting for approval from Walden's IRB, I applied for and received approval from the school district's research review board on January 30, 2020.

I submitted IRB Form A on February 3, 2020, and received IRB approval on March 21, 2020, at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. I e-mailed principals at the four high schools having the highest proportion of students with disabilities, asking for permission to send an invitation to special education teachers in their buildings. Two principals provided permission, one declined, and one did not respond. When I did not receive all four principals' approval, I chose to expand my applicant pool outside of this district. I submitted a Change in Procedures request form to Walden's IRB on April 15, 2020. I received approval on April 28, 2020. The approval number is 03-24-20-0381938.

Next, I e-mailed an invitation to high school special education teachers in three additional school districts with a request for their participation. I provided the name of the study, purpose, goals, and benefits of participating. They were eligible to participate if they had taught students with disabilities in Grades 9–12 for at least 2 years and would receive a fifty-dollar gift card for their participation. I received a response from six teachers, whom I e-mailed to inform them of the following: (a) their participation was entirely voluntary, (b) they were free to withdraw at any time, (c) there was no pressure to participate in the study, (d) there were no adverse consequences if they did not participate, and (e) their involvement was strictly confidential. I asked interested

individuals to verify that they met the selection criteria and set up a time to discuss the next steps and schedule interviews. Via e-mail, the potential participants confirmed their eligibility and provided their phone numbers. Upon final selection, I called participants to review the informed consent form, which included the following information:

- They would be participating in a research study.
- The purpose of the study
- The study was voluntary
- How I would collect and use data
- How long each interview would take
- The risk and benefits of the study
- The procedures used to protect confidentiality
- I would record the interview with their permission.

Following the call, I e-mailed a copy of the interview questions and the informed consent form to each participant. Participants were to review and sign the form, keep a copy for themselves, and return the signed document to me. The informed consent form clarified the risks and limitations of the study, participant roles and responsibilities, voluntary participation, and the right to withdraw at any time with no detrimental effects.

Data collection. I used the telephone conversation to schedule participant interviews. I scheduled two interviews in case I was unable to pose all questions during the first interview. At the beginning of the first interview, I reviewed the informed consent and verified that I had their permission to record the interview. I used the second interview to ask any questions not covered during the first interview. Participants 1, 2,

and 4 completed the interview within 60 minutes. Participants 3, 5, and 6 required additional time. They completed the interview questions one week later. Participants received a copy of the transcript following the completed interview to ensure the accurate capture of their perceptions and ideas (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Also, participants were able to receive a copy of the study upon final approval from Walden University.

Semistructured interviews contain prescribed questions and an opportunity to probe participants‘ answers. During the interviews, I asked participants to reflect on the meaning of their experience with EBPs to explore their awareness of EBPs and why and how they personalize them to provide instruction to students with disabilities. The goal was to understand teachers‘ level of awareness of EBPs, training, mastery learning experiences, and feelings of competence to identify and implement EBPs with fidelity. This study was a means to understand how teachers made instructional and curricular decisions, particularly in the context of their level of awareness of EBPs. This interview structure allowed participants and the interviewer to make sense of their experiences, contributing to establishing validity.

Data Analysis Plan

The goal of this study was to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: What are high school special education teachers’ perceptions of why they personalize EBPs to teach transition-related skills to students with disabilities?

RQ2: What are high school special education teachers’ perceptions of how they personalize EBPs to teach transition-related skills to students with disabilities?

I transcribed the interview audio recordings and stored them in NVivo, a qualitative data analysis software program. NVivo is helpful for transcribing and coding audio recordings. NVivo allows the import of audio files with the opportunity to code data from digital electronic transcripts and organize coded data into electronic files, or nodes (QSR International, 2019).

Coding

Participants received a summary of the findings, including key statements made at the end of the completed interview, to ensure the accurate capture of their perceptions and ideas (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Participants' confirmation of the findings' accuracy and completeness adds credibility to the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I asked participants to read and return the transcripts within 1 week, after which I used open coding to identify units of data relevant to the study. Open coding is the process of reading through each transcript, making comments, observations, and questions in the margins that are related to the purpose and research questions and guided by the conceptual framework (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

For the initial analysis, I coded each of the interviews based on the conceptual framework, research questions, and interview questions. As I read through each interview multiple times, I looked for emergent ideas and themes to capture recurring patterns across the data, making notes of my thoughts in the margin and recording them in my journal as part of the audit trail (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Using coding software helped to minimize preconceptions and allowed new ideas to emerge. NVivo enabled me to

identify consistent patterns that surfaced in participants' responses. For each new category I created, I assigned a node.

Interview transcript coding occurred based on the descriptive categories within the interview protocol. A priori codes are appropriate for interview questions developed based on a preestablished framework (Yin, 2014). I defined each a priori code as a node in NVivo, assigning any interview data related to a particular category node to that node. This process allowed me to organize units of data within larger, descriptive categories of teacher efficacy and mastery experiences, EBPs, teacher preparation and education, perceptions of EBPs, implementation fidelity, and district policies. I created additional categories as I grouped the units of data initially identified based on similarity.

The identification of themes led to the development of categories that provided the foundation for axial coding, or the further disaggregation of data into more specific concepts (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). As categories emerged from overarching themes, I maintained a list of categories acquired during each interview. Rereading the data allowed me to make connections within the categories, distinguishing the language used by participants when describing their experiences. I combined codes into fewer, more comprehensive categories (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Throughout the study process, I kept an audit trail to document decisions, any necessary changes, and the rationale for the changes to confirm my actions, as appropriate. I kept track of all raw data, such as interview and observation notes and audio recordings, and documented the behaviors and actions of participants and other events that occurred during the data collection process (Anney, 2014; Lincoln & Guba,

1985). In addition, I documented the techniques used and my thoughts throughout, as well as my responses and role as the study progressed (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Also, I maintained records related to the research (e.g., the proposal, survey, and interview schedules; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). These records helped me determine if I had collected appropriate data, arrived at conclusions consistent with the data, and produced valid results (Anney, 2014; Connelly, 2016).

Discrepant Cases

Discrepant cases are contradictions in the data that can give rise to unexpected findings (Hsiung, 2010). In qualitative research, discrepant cases are negative cases in which the respondent's experience or opinion differs from the evidence (Hsiung, 2010). When negative cases arise in qualitative research, the researcher should explain why the case does not fit (Lodico et al., 2010). Discrepant cases underwent analysis and recoding to resolve any issues; if this did not work, I sought clarification from participants. When I could not resolve an issue, I examined the data to determine if personal bias was a concern or if further research was warranted. An explanation of the discrepant case appears in Chapter 5.

Trustworthiness

The primary goal of qualitative research is to provide an in-depth understanding of the perspectives of a small group, a limited setting, or an individual (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I established an in-depth understanding of special education teachers' perspectives through the rich descriptions gleaned from their interviews.

Credibility

Researchers establish credibility when they can accurately reflect the participants' thoughts, feelings, and actions (Connelly, 2016). Credibility in qualitative research pertains to whether research methods are likely to yield accurate and in-depth pictures of the research setting and participants. One aspect of credibility involves checking whether the researchers' interpretation of the processes and interactions in the setting was valid (Connelly, 2016). Member checking was the means used to confirm the accuracy of my findings. Participants reviewed and provided feedback regarding the transcripts and preliminary findings and whether the report was complete and realistic (Birt et al., 2016). In addition, I used reflexivity to critically reflect on my biases, preferences, and preconceptions (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). I maintained a reflective journal during the research process to track my methodological decisions and the reasons for them, record the study's logistics, and reflect on my values and interests (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Lastly, to improve the quality of the findings, I engaged a peer debriefer to examine background information, data collection methods, data management, transcripts, data analysis procedure, and research findings (Anney, 2014).

Transferability

Transferability refers to the extent to which individuals in other settings determine the findings useful (Connelly, 2016). I provided thick descriptions of participants' perspectives to assist the reader, district, or other researchers in determining the study's transferability. Providing detailed descriptions of the participants, experiences, resources,

and EBPs used helps readers determine the similarities between this study and their circumstances.

Dependability

Dependability in qualitative research refers to whether a study's findings are consistent with the data presented (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I established dependability by using a peer debriefer, researcher reflexivity, and audit trail. A colleague familiar with the topic of secondary transition and EBP implementation served as a peer reviewer to assess whether the findings were plausible based on the data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I also maintained a reflective journal during the research process to track my methodological decisions, the reasons for them, and the logistics of the study and reflect on my values and interests (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Researchers use reflective journals to keep a running record of interaction with the data as they engage in analysis and interpretation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I established dependability by providing a detailed description of the data collection and data analysis procedures, recording the interview, and making data available for review (e.g., an audit trail; Connelly, 2016). The audit trail included detailed explanations of data collection and analysis (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008).

Confirmability

Confirmability is the degree to which other researchers can support the research findings (i.e., the researcher clearly derives findings from the data; Anney, 2014; Connelly, 2016). Confirmability also reinforces the credibility (accuracy), validity (how well data will likely fit into a similar context), and dependability of the findings (Patnaik,

2013). One goal of confirmability is to acknowledge how researcher biases and prejudices influence data interpretations and address them through reflexivity. After each interview, I used the reflective journal to capture my observations, thoughts, and interpretations. A reflective journal allowed me to record my interactions with the data as I engaged in analysis and interpretation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Then, I conducted a structured analysis, bracketing my attitudes and responses to capture attitudes that might influence the research process (Patnaik, 2013). Using a three-phase method, I bracketed during the preparation stage to identify attitudes that might affect data collection, in-action bracketing based on emergent data, and on-action bracketing based on new insight in subsequent work (Dowling, 2006). I used an audit trail to identify decisions made throughout the research process using ongoing critical reflection and journaling (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008).

Ethical Procedures

Walden's IRB approved the study before I began data collection. I followed ethical procedures from the initial contact with potential participants and throughout the study. I adhered to the recommendations and mandates set by the National Institutes of Health. Therefore, I was fully aware of necessary measures, including securing each participant's informed consent, upholding confidentiality, and eliminating any potentially harmful effects of participation.

I maintained respect, justice, and beneficence for all special education teachers who participated in this study (Seidman, 2013). As the researcher, I respected each participant's right to make individual decisions and to withdraw from the study at any

time. I treated all participants justly, fairly, and equitably. I also equitably selected individuals to participate in the study by using prescribed selection criteria. Lastly, I structured the study to maximize benefit and minimize harm to participants. An advantage of taking part in the research was that participants might have gained a deeper understanding of their instructional practices. To minimize risk, I did not use participants' names or other personally identifiable information, and participants were able to withdraw at any time.

Informed consent minimized participant risk. When teachers agreed to participate, I e-mailed them for their contact information. Next, I contacted them by phone to discuss the study, including the purpose, procedures, voluntary nature of participation, right to withdraw at any time without penalty, potential risks and benefits, and remuneration for their participation. I discussed the steps I would take to maintain confidentiality in disseminating information about the study. I asked the teachers to confirm their desire to participate in the study verbally. I set up times for the interviews and e-mailed participants a copy of the consent form and interview questions.

I maintained open and honest communication with study participants. I reminded the teachers that they could end their participation at any time with no penalty to them. I used several approaches to avoid disclosing information that might reveal the participants' identity or any information that would violate confidentiality. For example, I ensured confidentiality by assigning each participant a numeric descriptor instead of a gender-specific name, using these identifiers in transcripts, analyses, and the discussion of results. I avoided using personal pronouns, such as "he" and "she," when discussing

their responses. I also did not use any terminology associating a participant with a particular school or district. As this study did not include special populations such as children, prisoners, or the mentally disabled, no additional protections were necessary. Other considerations included allowing participants to schedule the interview at a time that was convenient for them, outside of their school day.

The electronic files that I created in collecting data remain stored on my password-protected, personal laptop. I have all audio recordings, notes, and transcribed documents in a locked file drawer in my home. Five years after this study's publication, I will delete all data from my computer, and I will destroy all audio recordings, notes, and transcribed documents.

Summary

In this chapter, I discussed how I conducted the study. I reiterated the purpose of the study and the research questions and discussed the methodology. I described the procedures followed for recruiting participants, collecting and analyzing data, ensuring data collection and analysis trustworthiness, and following ethical guidelines to protect participants. Chapter 4 presents the results of the study.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore special education teachers' perceptions of why and how they personalize EBPs to teach transition-related skills to students with disabilities. This study extended Guckert et al.'s (2016) findings that, although teachers believe they are using EBPs, they personalize these practices based on their level of research awareness. That is, the more-aware teachers relied on and trusted research; in contrast, less-aware teachers did not often depend on or believe in research when selecting and personalizing their teaching practices. Guckert et al. found that teachers with greater research awareness personalized their practices in positive ways for student learning outcomes. In contrast, teachers with less awareness personalized in ways that could be detrimental. Guckert et al. did not explore why and how teachers personalized their implementation of EBP. My study addressed this gap in practice.

The following questions guided the collection, analysis, and interpretation of data:

RQ1: What are high school special education teachers' perceptions of why they personalize EBPs to teach transition-related skills to students with disabilities?

RQ2: What are high school special education teachers' perceptions of how they personalize EBPs to teach transition-related skills to students with disabilities?

This chapter begins with a description of personal or organizational conditions that could have influenced participants or their experience at the time of the study, thus affecting the interpretation of results. After discussing participants' demographics and characteristics relevant to the study, I describe the data collection and data analysis processes. Next, I present the findings and highlight the four major themes, describing

discrepant cases and their place in the analysis. In the results section, I address each research question, present supporting data, and discuss discrepant cases. Chapter 4 ends with a discussion of the evidence of trustworthiness, a summary of the answers to the research questions, and a transition to Chapter 5.

Setting

Due to a global pandemic (COVID-19), I could not conduct interviews in person, as intended. However, the pandemic presented the opportunity for participants to work remotely, which led to more flexibility in their schedules. I used Google Meet, a virtual platform, to conduct interviews. This change was an advantage because there was no need to identify a mutually convenient physical location. Participants were able to take part in interviews from the comfort of their homes. This change in data collection did not affect data interpretation.

I used purposive sampling to select six high school special education teachers who had taught at least two years to participate in the study. All six taught in local urban school districts in a Western U.S. state. Maximal variation sampling resulted in six participants from four high schools across two districts, allowing a range of responses from varying perspectives. Participants' teaching experience ranged from 3 to 12 years. Two participants had a Master's degree in Special Education, and four attended an alternative licensure program to teach special education. Two of the six teachers had taken courses specific to secondary transition.

Table 1

Participants' Number of Years Teaching and Training

Participant	Years teaching	Training in special education
1	6	MA Special Education
2	4	Alternative licensure program
3	12	MA Special Education
4	3	Alternative licensure program
5	3	Alternative licensure program
6	3	Alternative licensure program

Data Collection

Data collection for this study began after IRB approval on April 28, 2020 and ended June 1, 2020. I collected qualitative data from each of the six participants using a researcher-created interview protocol (see Appendix C) reviewed by two national secondary transition experts to establish content validity. I sent an e-mail to high school special education teachers in three local districts, with three potential participants responding to express interest in the study. I e-mailed potential participants to explain the voluntary nature of the study, to confirm they met the selection criteria, and to set up a time to discuss the interview process. I called each of the six participants to schedule two one-on-one, semistructured interviews, each for 60 minutes, with the second occurring within 1 week after the first. Although I expected to complete all interview questions during the first interview, I scheduled a second interview if participants needed more time. Interview scheduling was at the participants' convenience.

Each participant received a copy of the informed consent form and the interview questions via e-mail to review before the interview. Interviews began with an

introduction to the study, followed by a review of the consent form. I assured participants of the confidentiality of their responses and their right to decline to participate at any time. The six special education teachers provided verbal consent and e-mailed me the signed consent before the interview began. I designed the interview questions to address the research questions, which were:

RQ1: What are high school special education teachers' perceptions of why they personalize EBPs to teach transition-related skills to students with disabilities?

RQ2: What are high school special education teachers' perceptions of how they personalize EBPs to teach transition-related skills to students with disabilities?

The semistructured interview format allowed for consistency across interviews, permitting me to probe answers (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Interviews took place via Google Meet. I obtained each participant's permission to audio record the conversations using the voice recording app on my iPhone and a backup digital recording device. I continued to collect data until achieving data saturation, when no new data, codes, or themes emerged.

The interviews for Participants 1, 2, and 4 were 60 minutes, with all questions answered during the first interview. The other participants required a second interview to complete the remaining questions. Participant 3 provided very detailed responses over two interviews totaling 130 minutes; the interviews of Participants 5 and 6 were 95 minutes. I took time after each interview to note general impressions, reactions, and thoughts about the process. It was 5 weeks from the time I e-mailed participants until all interviews were complete. I downloaded the recordings to my computer and later

uploaded them to NVivo for transcription. I transcribed the recordings verbatim, typically beginning transcription within 48 hours of the interview.

COVID-19 hit as I began recruiting participants for the study. The district I had selected closed early for spring break, and teachers and principals were not accessible. After spring break, the district began a virtual learning model for the remainder of the school year. At first, I followed the sampling plan as written. I e-mailed four principals, and two provided permission to e-mail special education teachers in their building. After e-mailing teachers in those buildings and receiving no response, I realized I needed to expand my applicant pool. I submitted a Change in Procedures form to the IRB to remove the step of requesting a principal's permission to e-mail teachers with invitations to participate. Upon receiving IRB approval, I expanded my applicant pool to any high school special education teacher in a Western U. S. state, accessing social media groups and using the Walden University applicant pool. In addition, I submitted a second Change in Procedures form to the IRB so that I could compensate participants who completed the interviews.

The IRB did not approve the two-interview series that I had initially proposed. Seidman (2013) suggested that the two-interview series helps overcome possible inconsistencies in participant responses and provides time for personal reflection between interview sessions. The two-interview series would have required participants to review the transcript after Interview 1 and again after Interview 2. The IRB felt that asking participants to review transcripts twice posed an unnecessary burden on participants. Therefore, participants reviewed transcripts once, after the completed interview.

NVivo, a qualitative and mixed-methods data analysis software tool used by academics and professional researchers (QSR International, 2019), facilitated transcribing and coding interviews. I uploaded audio files into NVivo to create transcripts verbatim. I assigned each participant a unique identifier, removing any identifying information from the transcripts to maintain confidentiality. I checked the accuracy of the transcripts by reading the text while listening to the audio. I did not edit or clarify participants' responses in any way. If I had a question about wording or a portion of the interview was muffled, I asked for clarification. I sent each participant a copy of the transcript to ensure I had accurately captured their words and edit anything they felt did not reflect their ideas, asking them to respond within 1 week. Participants 1 and 2 made no changes and had no additional comments. Participant 3 clarified a remark and added additional information. Participant 4 revised some wording for ease of understanding. Participants 5 and 6 provided clarification for areas of the recordings that were muffled.

Data Analysis

I used the following steps to analyze and interpret the data: (a) prepared data for analysis (interview transcription), (b) conducted a preliminary analysis of the data (open coding), (c) grouped open codes into axial codes (subthemes), (d) grouped axial codes into selective codes (themes), (e) represented findings, and (f) interpreted the findings (Creswell, 2012; Merriam, 2009). The first phase began with preparing the data for analysis. I uploaded audio files to NVivo to create transcripts, which I checked for accuracy by reading the transcript while listening to the audio file. I transcribed the interviews verbatim.

The second phase involved conducting a preliminary analysis of the data. First, I identified nodes in NVivo based on the following a priori codes: EBPs, mastery experiences, teacher efficacy, teacher preparation, education, implementation fidelity, years of teaching, and perceptions of EBPs. I created additional nodes upon identifying units of data and grouping them based on similarity. There were also nodes created for each interview question, which allowed me to discover patterns in participants' answers and reference participants' responses to interview questions.

When coding the data, I focused on patterns and insights related to the research questions, study purpose, and conceptual framework. I read each interview multiple times, within NVivo and on paper, to find bits of information for a priori or newly created codes. I made notes, comments, observations, and questions in the margins, focusing on patterns and insights related to the purpose, research questions, and theoretical framework (open coding). Any codes I created on paper also went into NVivo, assigning any interview data corresponding to a particular node to that node. I identified 147 open codes during this phase.

The third phase involved comparing units of information to identify patterns within the data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The comparisons were ways to organize the bits of data into fewer, more comprehensive categories or axial codes (subthemes). I reconciled and collapsed a priori codes with open codes and categories. As a result, some open and a priori codes were renamed or discarded. This phase resulted in nine subthemes. In Phase 4, I used inductive reasoning to refine and organize axial codes (subthemes) into cohesive, carefully selected themes from the data, resulting in four

themes. I used excerpts from the interviews to build a rich description of the themes. I maintained a list of codes and their assigned categories and tagged each bit of data by participant number. An example of open codes, axial codes (subthemes), and excerpts of participants' words for theme one is included Appendix E.

Themes

Four themes emerged related to special education teachers' perspectives of why and how they personalized EBPs to teach transition-related skills to students with disabilities: (a) teachers recognize the importance of EBPs, (b) teachers adapt content-area EBPs based on evidence of effectiveness and in response to transition needs, (c) teachers perceive greater competence in using content EBPs than transition-related EBPs, and (d) teachers perceive a need for additional resources but not additional training.

Theme 1: Teachers Recognize the Importance of Evidence-Based Practices

The participants expressed similar perspectives regarding the importance of using EBPs, which they felt worked for them. Participant 6 stressed that it was "very, very, very important" to use EBPs, saying, "I always tell my students the best decision was an informed decision, and if you are not basing your decisions or your actions and whatever you do on evidence and grounded research, then it's not really a good decision." When asked to define EBPs, participants described them as practices with data behind them to support their effectiveness (i.e., grounded in research). However, Participant 4 defined EBPs as strategies proven to work only in certain circumstances. Most participants believed it was essential to use EBPs, though some found it challenging to meet their students' needs in doing so. Participant 1 remarked, "I think that evidence-based practices

are important, but I think one of the challenges had been meeting the needs of my students when using them." Participant 1 believed the curriculum sometimes made it challenging to meet the needs of students who do not have the cognitive ability to learn the content.

All participants discussed their use of and reliance on content-area, not transition-related, EBPs to provide instruction. When asked about the source of their EBPs, participants spoke of the curriculum they used or specific programs for which they had received training. All participants believed in using practices grounded in research; however, if those practices were not working, they turned to other methods they had identified as useful through their teaching experiences. Participants also trusted their collaboration with colleagues, their experiences with students, the information gained through student surveys, and their classroom observations to identify what worked and what did not.

Theme 2: Teachers Adapt Content-Area EBPs Based on Evidence of Effectiveness and in Response to Transition Need.

I asked participants the following related to their use and personalization of EBPs: (a) explain a time when they used EBPs, (b) whether they ever had to make adjustments to EBPs to meet their students' needs, and (c) how they made decisions about what to teach. Asked about a time they used EBPs, all participants mentioned the curriculum or a specific program they had used. Participants 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 used EBPs related to traditional content-area classes such as reading, language arts, or math. Conversely, three participants mentioned utilizing a curriculum that incorporates strategies to improve

students' preparation for work, postsecondary education, and independent living; however, participants did not specifically identify these strategies as EBPs related to secondary transition. Other participants used EBPs pertaining to programs and strategies to address students' needs, such as social-emotional learning, mental health first aid, culturally linguistic and diverse education, and various coteaching models. Participants 1, 3, 5, and 6 admitted implementing the EBP as written, but all teachers reported making adjustments to EBPs to meet students' needs. Participant 1 noted, "Changes are made all the time based on my knowledge of students and their academic levels." Likewise, Participant 5 reported "chang[ing] things all the time" to meet students' needs.

Participants indicated various considerations when deciding what to teach. Most participants followed the curriculum, and all referred to students' needs as the deciding factor. Participant 4 stated,

> If there is a way that I can add an accommodation for this student or if I can do something a little bit different that is going to make the student more receptive, then that's what I'm going to do.

The data indicated that participants adapted content-area practices and personalized practices to meet students' needs. Personalization occurred when teachers tailored instructional methods to a student's individual needs. When I asked the teachers about personalizing their instruction, Participant 1 spoke of personalization based on the IEP. The participant responded, "I think that individual student knowledge is where I start, then I start to tailor things to them, more just based on their IEP and their academic needs. So, it's really student by student." In addition, participants personalized for

content, and they personalized when content did not address transition skills. As Participant 2 stated, “It is teaching them what they need. So, what can we do to help them stay out of jail and to be successful?” Participants 3, 5, and 6 found it important to teach students the skill set needed to succeed after high school and to align instruction to postschool considerations.

One participant discussed omitting implementation steps when a student with significant support needs could not grasp the concept. Another discussed changes to a notetaking strategy to address how the student’s brain worked, and a third mentioned scaffolding instruction so that students can learn missing academic skills. Also, most participants believed they met their instructional objectives through the personalization of practices. Participant 1 added,

> I think there are times when I am able to make little or no changes along the way and I can still meet the objective; however, there are times when I might have to move the objective around based on the student’s needs.

Finally, participants cited grades and quiz scores, reduced suspension rates, and improvements in students’ reading level as evidence they had achieved their instructional objectives.

Theme 3: Teachers Perceive Greater Competence in Using Content EBPs Than Transition-Related EBPs

I asked participants if they felt prepared to implement EBPs and what experiences led to their feelings of competence. Most participants believed they were prepared to teach content-area and program-specific EBPs due to district-provided professional

development. Conversely, two participants felt the district provided very little professional development related to their content, and none of the participants reported feeling prepared to teach transition-related EBPs as a result of district-provided professional development. When asked about their feelings of competence to use evidence-based secondary transition practices as a result of their TPP, none of the participants reported feeling prepared. Regarding their feelings of competence to use EBPs due to their TPP, participants were evenly split on whether they felt prepared. Only two participants reported taking classes related to secondary transition EBPs; two others spoke highly of their practicum experience, which made them confident in their ability to implement EBPs.

Theme 4: Teachers Perceive a Need for Additional Resources but not Additional Training

To finalize the interview, I asked participants to describe any additional supports they felt they needed. None of the participants identified a need for training; however, most hoped for more resources. Participant 4 reported needing "somewhere I could find strategies to address the symptoms, where I could look at the symptoms of what's going on and then have a database of practices that will help me to address those symptoms."

Discrepant Data

I described my findings in a narrative, using a chart to augment the story and drawing upon excerpts from the data to support the findings. Throughout data collection and analysis, I looked for discrepant cases that did not fit into the emerging patterns and rival explanations that could have influenced the findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Identifying discrepant cases increases the validity of data analysis (Yin, 2014). Most of the participants shared similar experiences and perceptions, except for one response. Asked about perceptions of being prepared to teach transition-related skills, Participant 6 reported not being self-reliant to teach transition skills. Rather, the participant stated, "I'm working on utilizing other people's expertise and skills. I think of myself as a facilitator of connections." This could mean that Participant 6 does not feel prepared to teach transition-related skills, instead depending on others' expertise. However, facilitating linkages and connections is required by IDEA (2004) and is a crucial component of the secondary transition planning process. Therefore, this response did not change how I created the themes or analyzed the data. I found that all data aligned with the research questions and themes with no discrepancies.

Results

I collected data for this basic qualitative study from six high school special education teachers who have taught students with disabilities for at least 2 years. This presentation of the findings is in line with the two research questions.

RQ1: What are high school special education teachers' perceptions of why they personalize EBPs to teach transition-related skills to students with disabilities?

In response to RQ1, participants expressed the importance of using EBPs. In the interviews, participants were to define EBPs, the importance of them using EBPs, and whether they had made adjustments to EBPs to meet their students' needs. Participants' responses produced six subthemes: EBPs are important, EBPs are practices that work, EBPs are grounded in research, content EBPs appear to work for teachers, teachers

appear to be more knowledgeable about content EBPs than transition EBPs, and curriculum is not the only source of EBPs. These subthemes comprised Theme 1.

Theme 1: Teachers Recognize the Importance of EBPs

Five of six participants strongly believed in the importance of using EBPs and that EBPs worked for them. However, Participant 4 expressed reservations about EBPs' importance, saying, "It's kind of a half-and-half type thing." Participant 4 believed that using EBPs was essential and that certain strategies worked in certain circumstances; thus, it was important to have various tools in their toolbox. Overall, participants believed it was necessary to use EBPs, though some found it hard to meet their students' needs with EBPs. Participant 1 stated, "I think that evidence-based practices are important, but I think one of the challenges is meeting the needs of my students when using them."

Participant 1 believed that the curriculum could make it challenging to meet students' needs because they sometimes struggled to learn the content. Participant 3 shared, "My experience is when I don't, the students don't make as much progress. Unless I use practices that are evidence-based, my students with IEPs will never have access to so much that their peers have." Likewise, Participant 5 expressed,

> I feel like it's really important. Why would I spend a lot of time developing something that's not rooted in something that has been shown to work? I don't want to waste a student's time on something that's not going to help.

Participant 6 stressed that it is "very, very, very important" to use EBPs, continuing, "I always tell my students the best decision is an informed decision, and if you are not

basing your decisions or your actions and whatever you do on evidence and grounded research, then it's not really a good decision."

Each participant discussed the use of and reliance on content-area, not transition-related, EBPs to provide instruction. All participants believed in using practices grounded in research; however, if those practices were not working, they relied on others they had found effective. Participants thought other sources were just as important as the EBPs identified through research. For example, the special education teachers trusted their collaboration with colleagues, their experiences with students, the information gained from study surveys, and their classroom observations to identify what did and did not work.

Participant 3 touted the importance of teachers filming themselves teaching and taking time to reflect on their practices. Participant 3 explained that filming oneself is an EBP for developing more robust instructional practices. They often filmed themselves when trying a new teaching strategy to critique their instruction and students' response to their teaching. Participant 3 believed that taking time to reflect on personal practices led to better instruction.

Theme 2: Teachers Adapt Content-Area EBPs Based on Evidence of Effectiveness and in Response to Transition Needs

Participants answered several questions related to their use and personalization of EBPs. The goal was to delve into the teachers' perceptions of the EBPs used to teach transition-related skills. Teachers discussed a time when they used EBPs, whether they ever had to make adjustments to EBPs to meet their students' needs, and how they made

decisions about what to teach. Asked about when they had used EBPs, participants spoke about the curriculum they used or EBPs related to their specific content area. Participant 1 did not teach a traditional academic course, such as reading, math, or language arts, but skills to prepare students for success in postsecondary education, employment, and independent living. Although Participant 1 did not specifically refer to EBPs related to secondary transition, the teaching addressed students' transition needs.

Participant 2 was an affective needs teacher responsible for addressing the emotional issues impeding students' success. Participant 2 believed that students could not learn without addressing their social-emotional issues. Consequently, Participant 2's content focused on EBPs related to social-emotional wellness. Participant 4 was an affective needs teacher who also cotaught math. Participant 4 discussed specific content used to address students' social-emotional needs as well as the math content used in that class. Participant 3, a math teacher, spoke of the content used to provide evidence-based math instruction. Participants 5 and 6 taught language arts in addition to content related to preparing students for college. This content focuses on character development, communication, writing, inquiry, collaboration, organization, reading, and college preparedness. When most participants referred to content-area EBPs, there were speaking of their specific content areas. Despite the different content areas, participants adopted similar focuses to meet students' needs.

Student Needs Are the Primary Focus. Participants stressed the importance of addressing students' needs, including skill deficits in reading, math, and language arts. Because of skill deficits, students' may be unable to complete a task as written, requiring

the teacher to incorporate additional instructional supports to enable student success. Meeting student needs could involve strategies to address social-emotional wellness or culturally responsive practices, or to build transition skills and postsecondary workforce readiness. Making instructional decisions begins with knowing the curriculum requirements and understanding students' needs, then adapting or personalizing, as needed. Participant 1 discussed pushing students to see what they know, then making adjustments.

Sometimes participants implemented content-area EBPs as written but adapted them when evidence showed their instruction was not working, and students could not complete the task. For instance, Participant 3 spoke of needing to teach note-taking differently to allow students to develop a strategy aligned with how their brains worked. Participants recognized that content-area practices were not enough to meet students' needs. Notably, if the curriculum focused on college readiness, Participant 5 implemented it as written; however, recognizing that students needed to focus on career readiness or going into the military, the participant adapted the curriculum to address those needs. Similarly, Participants 1, 3, 5, and 6 spoke of implementing practices as they are and adapting them based on students' needs, such as to address academic level, social-emotional, and transition needs. Participant 6 stated, "I think any time you bring an evidence-based practice; you need to look at how you can differentiate it for your students." For example, Participant 6 surveyed students, finding they did not have basic computer literacy skills despite expectations to access the online English curriculum.

Because a lack of computer knowledge was a barrier to students' success, Participant 6 built time into the curriculum to improve students' computer literacy.

When addressing students' needs, Participant 4 explained,

> It is all about finding ways to help every student when they have specific struggles, and so I try to make informed decisions based on my experience when I'm making adjustments. If there is a way that I can add an accommodation for this student or if I can do something a little bit different to address a student's specific learning style, then that's what I'm going to do.

Participants 3 and 4 spoke of needing to address academic standards and preparing students to take the Scholastic Achievement Test (SAT) as reasons to personalize practices. When a strategy does not work, Participant 3 adapts it by providing more direct instruction. If students are struggling, Participant 4 personalizes practices to address specific challenges related to the students' social-emotional well-being.

Another reason Participants 3, 5, and 6 personalize practices is to teach students the life skills they need for the future. Participants personalize for content, and they personalize when content does not address transition skills. Participant 1 stated,

> The biggest thing is creating buy-in and ownership with students about those skills, and that's through life goal-setting and through them being a part of writing the IEP and through understanding their strengths and weakness, and then from there, just really taking it out into the world.

Similarly, Participant 2 reported, "It is teaching them what they need. So, what can we do to help them stay out of jail and to be successful?" Participants 3, 5, and 6 stressed the

importance of teaching students the skill sets needed to succeed after high school, aligning instruction to postschool considerations.

Objectives Met Through Personalization. Five of six participants believed they met instructional objectives by personalizing practices. Participant 1 stated,

> I believe there are times when I'm able to make little or no changes along the way and I can still meet the objective, but then there are times where we have to move the objective around and make it more of a moving target based on the student's needs.

Participants 2, 3, and 4 believed that adjusting strategies achieved their instructional objectives. Participant 5 determined success by quiz scores or students' grades; however, the participant also looked at what students read and whether their reading skills were improving. Notably, Participant 5 stated, "I think, for me, the biggest indicator is conversations they have with each other when they're in their groups." When students can have rich conversations about the books they are reading in class, Participant 5 had met the instructional objective.

Participant 3 works with students who often have high rates of suspension; therefore, the teacher remarked, "I know that the objective has been met when suspension rates drop for my students." Across the interviews, all participants placed a high priority on meeting students' needs. They will continue to seek resources to address students' needs and adapt and personalize practices until they find what works. As Participant 4 stated, "It is about finding ways to help every student when they have specific struggles."

RQ2: What are high school special education teachers' perceptions of how they personalize EBPs to teach transition-related skills to students with disabilities?

The second research question was specific to special education teachers' perceptions of how they personalize EBPs to teach transition-related skills to students with disabilities. There were two overarching themes for RQ2: (a) teachers perceive greater competence in using content EBPs than transition-related EBPs and (b) teachers perceive a need for additional resources but not additional training. RQ2 related to participants' perceptions of how they personalize practices as well as their competence and efficacy for teaching transition-related skills. Also, participants discussed their need for additional resources to support students.

Theme 3: Teachers Perceive Greater Competence in Using Content EBPs Than Transition-Related EBPs

All six participants believed they were more competent in teaching content-area EBPs as a result of the professional development or instruction received in their college program. Similarly, four participants felt qualified to teach content-area EBPs based on their experience and success. Participant 1 related,

> When I was teaching AVID, I felt very prepared, and with specific district curricula, here's what I want you to do. Here is how you do it; now go try it. We're not using it anymore, but it was a beneficial training model.

When Participant 2 rated their level of preparedness as 10/10, they were referring to content-area EBPs. Participant 2 had learned about EBPs related to social-emotional learning in a bachelor's program, not a TPP. Because the district offered few professional

development opportunities related to the participant's particular content area, the teacher relied on 15 years of experience to effectively implement content-area EBPs.

Four of the six participants did not feel prepared to teach evidence-based, transition-related practices by their TPP. Participants 1, 2, 5, and 6 had not received instruction on identifying and implementing evidence-based transition practices. Only two of the teachers, Participants 3 and 4, spoke of taking courses related to teaching transition-related skills; however, although they had taken the courses, they did not feel prepared. Participant 4 shared,

> My experience was a little different than someone who got their bachelor's in teaching. In my teacher-in-residence program, the first 2 years, I was teaching while also going through my preparation program. So, I learned a lot of things from trying and failing. In addition, I gained experience and learned what worked and what did not. So, it was really helpful for me to implement what I learned into my classroom while going through the program. Although there were a lot of situations that I was not prepared for, I think I am better now for it. I would say that the opportunity to teach while learning was more beneficial than the teacher preparation program itself.

When asked to discuss a time they had used EBPs, participants provided examples of how they personalized practices to meet students' needs. Participant 1 explained, "The biggest thing is creating buy-in and ownership with students about those skills, and that's through life goal-setting and through them being a part of writing the IEP and through them understanding their strengths and weaknesses." Participant 1 has

used Cornell Notes to teach note-taking and providing community-based instruction (i.e., teaching that occurs in the student's natural environment). Also believing in the importance of building relationships, Participant 2 has used social-emotional learning strategies to reduce suspension rates. The participant explained, "For me, it's always about building relationships with them because if the kids can't trust you, it doesn't matter. They're not going to want to work with you."

Two of Participant 3's personalized practices were a calculator to increase students' success and annotated notes to improve problem-solving skills in math. For example, when Participant 3 introduced a calculator, students were able to shift their focus from math calculation to improving math problem-solving, thus achieving success in higher-level math courses. Likewise, Participant 5 supplements the curriculum, implements career-readiness activities, and uses culturally responsive practices to meet students' needs.

Various experiences led to participants' feelings of competence to implement EBPs effectively, both content-area related and transition-related. Four of the six teachers believed a combination of training and practice led to competence; in comparison, two attributed their competence in implementing EBPs to a combination of student success and college programs. Participant 1 had opportunities to learn, practice, and receive coaching when trained to implement AVID and during practicum. Participant 2 was adamant that 15 years of experience teaching social-emotional learning strategies created confidence in implementing EBPs effectively. Participant 3's confidence grew based on observations and feedback from others, as well as students' greater success in math.

Participant 4 stated that watching others implement EBPs provided the confidence to do it, too. Participant 5 felt prepared to teach EBPs based on experiences, trainings, and curriculum used. This participant had a self-reported good understanding of EBPs and several resources based on research. Finally, Participant 6 spoke of being prepared for various coteaching models, AVID, English, and culturally linguistic and diverse education based on training and experiences.

Theme 4: Teachers Perceive a Need for Additional Resources but not Additional Training

I asked the teachers what supports they might find helpful. Although most participants would like the district to provide additional resources, none noted a need for further training to identify and use transition-related EBPs. Participant 1 felt the support of a paraprofessional in the classroom would allow them to work with different skills in different groups. Participant 2 would like the opportunity to work with families more. The teacher explained,

> It would be working with the parents because the biggest thing is you can teach the kids as much as you want to, [then] they go back home, and the parents are drug-addicted or in jail or absent or whatever. Then the kid can only flourish so long until they're back down.

Participant 3 would like "the kind of collaboration time that allows us to learn about other instructional practices and to be able to observe each other, others observe us when we are trying research-based practices so we can refine them." Finally, Participants 4, 5, and 6 would appreciate having a database or bank of resources to meet students' needs.

Participants were confident in their ability to implement EBPs to teach transition-related skills to students with disabilities and believed themselves prepared to do so; however, they would like additional resources. Participant 4 perhaps worded it best:

> It would be great to have a database of resources to choose from to address the symptoms. I think that the more EBPs you have in your toolbox, the greater your ability to address the needs of a wider variety of students.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Credibility

To establish credibility, I used a peer debriefer to review the findings' accuracy (Anney, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The peer debriefer was a colleague with knowledge of secondary transition and EBP implementation. The peer debriefer received a copy of the research findings that included a chart of the open, axial, and selective codes, as well as the participants' words that led to the conclusions. In addition, I provided the peer debriefer with a written description of my data analysis and results. The peer debriefer could not find evidence to support my conclusion on three of my findings. I verified the accuracy of my findings by reviewing the data to ensure that I had evidence to support the findings. In addition, the peer debriefer asked for clarification of terminology in one of the tables. I removed that table and incorporated the data into the chart in Appendix E. The peer debriefer concluded that the analysis was accurate based on what I provided in the data collection chart (Anney, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Transferability

To increase the potential for transferability of the findings to another setting, I provided a detailed description of the educational setting, participants, and findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I included the participants' voices when discussing the results. Last, I had participants who varied by gender, age, education, and years teaching. This information will enable readers to determine the similarity and applicability to their setting. Also, I provided detailed descriptions of the resources and EBPs used by participants, further assisting readers in determining the similarities between this study and their circumstances (Connelly, 2016; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Dependability

I established dependability with a peer debriefer, researcher reflexivity, and an audit trail. A peer debriefer read and provided feedback on study findings. A colleague who is familiar with the topic of secondary transition and EBP implementation examined the data to assess whether the conclusions were plausible based on the data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I used a reflective journal to keep notes during the research process, tracking my methodological decisions and their reasons, the logistics of the study, and reflections on my values and interests (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). A reflective journal allowed me to keep a running record of my interaction with the data as I engaged in the analysis and interpretation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I further established dependability by providing a detailed description of the data collection and analysis procedures, recording the interviews, and making data available for review (i.e., an audit trail;

Connelly, 2016). An audit trail is a detailed explanation of the processes, from data collection to analysis and interpretation (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008).

Confirmability

To ensure confirmability, I used a reflective journal to capture my observations, thoughts, and interpretations. A reflective journal is a way for researchers to record ongoing interactions with the data as they engage in analysis and interpretation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Then, I conducted a structured analysis, bracketing my attitudes and responses to capture attitudes that might influence the research process (Patnaik, 2013). I used a three-phase process: I bracketed my bias during the preparation stage to identify attitudes that might influence data collection, in-action bracketing based on emergent data, and on-action bracketing of new insight in subsequent work (Dowling, 2006). I used an audit trail to record the decisions made throughout the research process with ongoing critical reflection and journaling (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008).

Summary

My analysis of the interview data provided answers to the research questions posed for this study. Following is a summary of the interview responses by research question.

RQ1: What are high school special education teachers' perceptions of why they personalize EBPs to teach transition-related skills to students with disabilities?

In this study, the teachers believed in the importance of using practices identified as effective by research and personal experience, collaboration with colleagues, observation, others' feedback, and student success. Participants primarily used EBPs to

provide instruction, as required by their districts. They implemented content-area practices as written, but when evidence showed the approach was not working, they adapted content-area practices for content, personalizing them to include transition-related material. Although participants implemented the required curriculum, students' needs were an important factor in instructional decisions. Therefore, when content-area practices do not include EBPs related to teaching students' transition-related skills, teachers supplement the curriculum.

Personalization of practices occurs when teachers understand each student's strengths, weaknesses, and level of functioning. Teachers reported personalizing to include instructional practices related to each student's IEP goals, life skills needed to experience successful postsecondary outcomes, real life, cultural responsiveness, and align to postschool aspirations. In addition, participants believed they achieved their instructional objectives when they adapted content-area EBPs and personalized practices to meet students' needs.

RQ2: What are high school special education teachers' perceptions of how they personalize EBPs to teach transition-related skills to students with disabilities?

Participants reported using various methods to adapt and/or personalize practices, including (a) creating buy-in and ownership, (b) making adjustments after implementing the strategy as written by omitting a step or adding in additional supports, (c) reinforcing classroom instruction within a community context, (d) incorporating strategies to address the skill sets needed to succeed after high school, (f) including culturally responsive pedagogy, and (f) scaffolding instruction to address skill gaps. In addition, participants

believed themselves prepared to teach content-area EBPs through a combination of professional development, college preparation courses, TPPs, and teaching experiences. Only two participants had taken courses related to secondary transition during their TPP. Despite personalizing practices to meet transition needs, participants did not express knowledge of EBP practices identified by NTACT. Nevertheless, the teachers were confident in their competence to implement content and transition-related practices and did not believe they needed further training on transition-related EBPs. Rather, the majority of participants wanted additional resources.

In this chapter, I discussed the study's findings pertinent to the setting, data collection, data analysis, results, and evidence of trustworthiness. Chapter 5 presents a summary of the key findings, followed by an interpretation of the findings, limitations of the study, recommendations for further research, and implications for positive social change. The chapter concludes with a message that captures the key essence of the study.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

A basic qualitative design was appropriate to explore teachers' perspectives of the phenomenon of EBP personalization and the fidelity of EBP implementation in instruction. I identified how teachers interpreted their experiences with EBPs and the meaning they attributed to their experiences. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore special education teachers' perceptions of why and how they personalize EBPs to teach transition-related skills to students with disabilities. I extended Guckert et al.'s (2016) findings that, although teachers believed they were using EBPs, they personalized these practices based on their level of awareness of research. I addressed a gap in practice evident in the literature regarding special education teachers' perceptions of why and how they personalize EBPs to teach transition-related skills to students with disabilities.

Researchers have focused on how teachers' varying levels of awareness of EBPs lead to personalizing practices (Guckert et al., 2016). Guckert et al. suggested that teachers with greater research awareness personalize their practices in positive ways for student learning outcomes. In contrast, teachers with less awareness personalize in ways that could be detrimental. Teachers in this study perceived having a high level of awareness of EBPs and adapted and personalized practices as needed to meet students' needs. Likewise, most participants believed they met their instructional objectives when doing so. In addition, teachers were extremely focused on meeting students' needs. They

would do whatever they needed to do, whether that meant changing an instructional strategy, scaffolding a lesson, or adding accommodations.

Although teachers in Guckert et al.'s (2016) study believed they were using EBPs, they personalized these practices based on their level of awareness of research. Findings showed that more-aware teachers relied on and trusted research. In contrast, less-aware teachers did not often rely on or trust research in selecting and personalizing their teaching practices. In this study, the teachers had high levels of awareness of EBPs, believed it was important to use EBPs, and relied on and trusted research. However, they trusted their experiences and interactions with students to identify effective practices. For example, if a student experienced success due to an implemented EBP, they would now consider this practice an EBP. Sometimes teachers focused on what worked, not the research evidence behind each practice.

Two central research questions guided this study: What are high school special education teachers' perceptions of why they personalize EBPs to teach transition-related skills to students with disabilities? and What are high school special education teachers' perceptions of how they personalize EBPs to teach transition-related skills to students with disabilities? The findings showed that students' needs are a strong influence on teachers' instructional decisions. Students' needs guided everything the participants did, whether implementing content-based EBPs, adapting content-based EBPs, personalizing practices to address transition needs and IEP goals, or changing an ineffective approach.

The special education teachers who participated in this study perceived being able to implement content-based or transition-related EBPs to provide effective instruction.

They believed they met their instructional objectives when they adapted or personalized practices. Participants felt competent in content-area EBPs as a result of training, experiences, and success; therefore, they did not see a need for additional training. However, most teachers felt they lacked some of the resources needed to address their students' varied needs.

Interpretation of the Findings

Instructional programs and practices should have their roots in scientifically based research (Simpson et al., 2004). Some teachers believe they use EBPs, whereas others report using instructional practices with minimal evidence of effectiveness (Kretlow & Helf, 2013). Comparatively, Guckert et al. (2016) found that teachers reported varying levels of awareness of EBPs. However, previous researchers did not address teachers' perceptions of why and how they personalized practices to teach transition-related skills to students with disabilities. Addressing each of these topics in this study, I uncovered teachers' perceptions of why and how they personalized EBPs.

Evidence-Based Practices

Teacher Knowledge of EBPs

Simpson et al. (2004) discussed the need to ground instructional programs and practices in scientifically based research. Each teacher in this study used and relied on content-area EBPs to provide instruction. However, some found it difficult at times to meet their students' needs when using EBPs. Researchers asserted that teachers had various beliefs regarding their use of EBPs, including (a) they were using EBPs (Kretlow & Helf, 2013); (b) they used instructional practices with minimal evidence of

effectiveness (Kretlow & Helf, 2013); and (c) they had varying levels of EBP awareness (Guckert et al., 2016).

Teachers in the current study reported similar beliefs regarding their use of EBPs. The six special education teachers perceived they were using EBPs because they used district-provided, evidence-based curriculum, programs, and content-area EBPs learned through training, experience, and research. However, it is possible teachers were using instructional practices with minimal evidence of effectiveness when they relied on their observations, conversations with colleagues, or experiences in adapting or personalizing practices to meet students' needs. The results of my study showed that teachers had varying levels of awareness of EBPs. All reported knowledge of content-area EBPs but did not specifically identify any of their practices as transition-related EBPs. Although some teachers discussed personalizing practices to align with postsecondary considerations or develop the skill set necessary to be successful after high school, they identified greater awareness of content-area practices than transition-related ones.

According to Cook and Odom (2013), EBPs are "practices and programs shown by multiple high-quality experimental or quasi-experimental research to have substantial effects on student outcomes" (p. 135). EBPs must meet prescribed, rigorous standards (Cook & Cook, 2011). The teachers in my study similarly defined EBPs as practices or strategies proven to work, with research and data to confirm effectiveness. Sciuchetti et al. (2016) highlighted the need for teachers to identify what constitutes an EBP. The researchers emphasized educators' need to clearly understand the term "EBP," not knowing whether teachers could define what made a practice evidence-based. Sciuchetti

et al. confirmed their hypothesis that teachers tended to lack an awareness of what constitutes an EBP. They posited that if the only criterion to define an EBP was that the practice be based on research, one third of their sample would have provided an accurate response. Sciuchetti et al. attributed the research-to-practice gap in part to teachers' lack of awareness and knowledge about what constitutes an EBP.

Four of the participants described EBPs as practices tied to research or data showing the method is effective. Participants explained that they know that a practice is effective because of their research. If the only criterion to define an EBP was its basis in research, the four participants would be correct in their assessment.

Educators should not trust that practices are empirically validated and have not met rigorous research standards (Cook & Cook, 2011). Rather, they need to identify practices as evidence-based by analyzing the methodological quality and the magnitude of available research supporting practices (Cook, Carter, et al., 2014; Cook & Cook, 2011). Notably, Participant 5 stated that EBPs are grounded in empirical research that included both quantitative and qualitative data and was shown both effective and reliable. The other participants in my study did not refer to the method, quantity, quality, or magnitude in their definition of EBPs. Participant 3 identified EBPs as "The experiment of the learning strategy has been implemented, was thought out, implemented, research gathered, and then presented in a peer review format. Evidence has determined that this strategy is effective." The remaining participants were confident in their knowledge of what constitutes an EBP and perceived that they accurately identified effective practices to use in their classrooms. However, it was unclear whether all participants had an in-

depth knowledge of what constituted an EBP or whether they had learned to identify EBPs in the manner described by Cook and Cook (2011) and Cook, Carter, et al. (2014). When teachers make instructional decisions based on their students' individual needs, a critical consideration for selecting EBPs is the level of evidence that the practice is effective (Leko et al., 2019). Therefore, educators should not trust that practices are empirically validated without evidence (Cook & Cook, 2011).

McLeskey et al. (2017) maintained that effective special education teachers use their professional judgment and the best available evidence to provide individualized instruction to meet students' needs. However, Leko et al. (2019) recommended that teachers should also consider the alignment between students' characteristics (academic, behavioral, social-emotional, language, and cultural needs) and the EBP. Teachers in this study let students' needs drive instructional decisions, which they made based on knowing curriculum requirements and understanding students' needs, then adapting or personalizing, as necessary. The teachers described using their professional judgment and the best available evidence to provide individualized instruction, adapting or personalizing practices based on levels of effectiveness.

Sciuchetti et al. (2016) found that educators relied on peers rather than research to identify and access EBPs. This finding was noteworthy, as a low percentage of educators accurately defined the term "EBP." There is some truth to Sciuchetti et al.'s results as related to my study. I found that participants relied on the evidence-based curriculum the districts required them to use. For example, the participants began with the necessary evidence-based curriculum; if the curriculum did not meet students' needs, they selected

practices not necessarily defined as evidence-based through research. I found that participants relied on various methods to identify EBPs. They observed and collaborated with their colleagues to identify instructional practices that worked. They also reflected on their approaches and relied on their experiences to help them to identify effective practices. Participant six surveyed their students, using student feedback to determine what did and did not work. Overall, the participants used various methods to identify and access EBPs not grounded in empirical evidence.

Teacher Training

Teacher Preparation Programs

TPPs are one of the most influential variables in ensuring the postschool success of students with disabilities (Morgan et al., 2014). Chorzempa et al. (2019) agreed that TPPs played an essential role in preparing teachers to implement EBPs. TPPs can help teachers build the knowledge and skills to deliver instruction using EBPs (Detrich & Lewis, 2012). Also, TPPs prepare preservice teachers to become well-informed professionals who understand and select practices with empirical support and implement them as intended (Detrich & Lewis, 2012).

The teachers in this study reported mixed reviews of their TPPs. Three of the teachers felt prepared, one felt somewhat prepared, and two did not feel prepared to provide instruction using EBPs. Of the two teachers who had attended a traditional TPP, one felt prepared and the other one did not; however, both believed themselves to be unprepared to implement transition-related EBPs. The remaining four special education teachers received training through an alternative teacher licensure program, which they

described as an on-the-job training program. The TPP enabled them to incorporate what they learned into practice immediately; even so, only two felt prepared to implement EBPs related to special education instructional practices, one did not feel prepared, and one felt somewhat prepared.

Morningstar and Benitez (2013) found that transition service providers did not receive training on secondary transition EBPs in TPPs. Teachers in this study reported that their TPPs had not included training on evidence-based transition practices; however, all were expected to implement EBPs to address their students' transition needs. In addition, participants did not speak of preparation to use EBPs related to their specific content areas (e.g., social-emotional learning, math, and English). Although their TPPs did not focus on specific content, there was a focus on special education pedagogy. Even so, five of six teachers in my study believed that their TPPs prepared them to provide effective instruction to students with disabilities.

Clinical practice. Darling-Hammond (2014) emphasized the importance of strengthening teacher approaches using supervised clinical practice. According to Scheeler et al. (2016), when TPPs provide opportunities for preservice teachers to learn about and use EBPs as well as provide clinically rich field experiences, preservice teachers learn to generalize newly acquired skills into classrooms and alleviate the research-to-practice gap. Each teacher in this study had the opportunity to learn, apply, and generalize new skills through supervised learning experiences; however, only one of the traditional TPP attendees spoke positively of the practicum experience. In comparison, three teachers who attended an alternative licensure program identified the

value of teaching while learning. Additionally, two of the teachers in this study spoke positively of their practicum experience, but not the TPP program itself. This study's findings confirm those of Scheeler et al., as two thirds of the participants spoke positively of their practicum experience to learn and generalize newly acquired skills.

Effective training in EBPs increases the likelihood that preservice special education teachers can implement such practices when they begin to teach (Scheeler et al., 2016). The teachers in this study felt prepared to use EBPs based on special education pedagogy as a result of the TPPs. In contrast, Morgan et al. (2014) and Morningstar and Benitez (2013) found that many teachers acquired their knowledge of transition through professional development, trial and error, and colleagues rather than formal training programs. My findings confirmed those of Morgan et al. and Morningstar and Benitez. The teachers in this study did not acquire knowledge of transition-related EBPs through their TPP programs or district-provided professional development. Instead, participants learned about transition-related EBPs through professional development provided by entities outside of the district, trial and error, personal research, and colleagues. Students with disabilities have consistently experienced less-successful postschool outcomes than their nondisabled peers (Morningstar & Benitez, 2013). Thus, it is essential that TPPs, whether traditional or alternative licensure programs, provide effective training to preservice teachers to increase the likelihood that students with disabilities will experience successful postschool outcomes.

Adaptive expertise. TPPs build adaptive expertise and implementation fidelity through classroom instruction and clinical practice (Mason-Williams et al., 2015).

Teachers in my study believed that instruction, practicum, and/or on-the-job learning opportunities provided during the TPP prepared them to implement EBPs and adapt practices as needed to meet students' needs. Four participants spoke of opportunities to implement EBPs based on special education pedagogy during their practicum or on-the-job training experience in their alternative TPP. In practicum and on-the-job learning experiences, teachers had an opportunity to work with TPP personnel or a mentor teacher to implement what they learned in the classroom, discuss their instruction, and make changes as needed.

Practicums and on-the-job learning experiences also provided an opportunity for teachers to apply their knowledge with flexibility and creativity. TPP capstone projects allowed preservice teachers to identify and implement EBPs and then assess the efficacy and implementation fidelity within the realities of a classroom (Mason-Williams et al., 2015). The teachers in this study valued their capstone project (practicum) and on-the-job learning experiences. Participant 1 spoke of the benefit of working with a mentor teacher to identify, implement, and receive feedback on instruction. Participant 4 found the practicum experience more beneficial than the actual classwork because the practicum provided an opportunity to apply their learning. Participants 5 and 6 were able to apply their learning in the realities of their classrooms and to receive feedback from TPP personnel and classmates.

De Arment et al. (2013) believed that teachers with adaptive expertise could adjust instruction after reflecting on their practices. Four of six teachers in this study thought they were prepared to identify and implement EBPs with fidelity, adapting their

practices as a result of their TPP. They also felt confident in adapting content with flexibility and creativity to address their students' needs. However, I found it difficult to determine whether all participants had an in-depth knowledge of what makes a practice evidence-based. Teachers need to identify what makes a practice evidence-based if they are to successfully adapt practices (De Arment et al., 2013).

Teacher efficacy. TPPs help preservice special education teachers develop a strong sense of self-efficacy and build mastery experiences (Bandura, 2004). I asked participants to describe experiences that led to their feelings of competence to use EBPs in providing instruction to students with disabilities. Four teachers indicated their TPPs and the opportunity to generalize practices in a classroom setting. Bandura (1986) asserted that mastery experiences and personal practices are powerful ways to build teacher efficacy and expectations for future proficiency. As teachers experience success in teaching students with disabilities, their sense of efficacy grows (Bandura, 1986). Teachers in this study had high levels of efficacy based on their training, experiences, and levels of student success.

Bandura (1997) suggested that self-efficacy is malleable during the first years of teaching. Bandura asserted the need for preservice and novice teachers to establish high efficacy early in their career because established beliefs are hard to change. Henson (2002), Woolfolk and Hoy (1990), and Hoy and Spero (2005) believed the self-efficacy of preservice teachers increases throughout the teacher education program and during student teaching practicum experience. I found that four of six teachers in this study reported an increase in efficacy because of their practicum and on-the-job training

experiences. In addition, all teachers reported an increase in efficacy as a result of teaching experiences and student success.

Similarly, Woolfolk and Hoy (1990) reported that self-efficacy is the most pliable during preservice. As such, positively affecting teacher efficacy beliefs is improbable without long-term professional development requiring teachers to reflect on their teaching practices and actively engage in behaviors that lead to instructional improvement (Henson, 2002). On the contrary, my participants' efficacy seemed to increase with experience and student success. For example, three of six stated that the district-provided professional development is inadequate. Two stated that their practicum experiences lead to a positive efficacy and two stated that the on-the-job training experience provided through their TPP lead to a positive sense of efficacy. However, all participants reported how their efficacy levels grew due to years of experience and student success, not long-term professional development.

Hoy and Spero (2005) and Barnes (2000) found an increased sense of efficacy from the beginning to the end of the TPP, but a decrease from the end of the preparation program to the end of the first year of in-service teaching. In contrast, teachers in this study reported an increase in efficacy as a result of experience and student success. Although research on field experiences is scarce, Fallin and Royse (2000) found that negative field experiences can promote pessimistic attitudes about teaching and low self-efficacy among preservice teachers. Teachers in this study did not discuss negative field experiences; rather, they commented that their field and on-the-job training experiences were beneficial.

Professional development. McKenna and Parenti (2017) believed that one factor threatening EBP implementation was the lack of effective professional development to support teacher acquisition and fluency in delivering EBPs. Sciuchetti et al. (2016) stated that teachers found professional development inadequate, instead using practices that they felt comfortable implementing. This study's participants had mixed views on the quality of professional development they had received. For example, four of six participants felt prepared to teach the required evidence-based content and curriculum due to professional development.

Morningstar and Benitez (2013) identified a need for professional development related to secondary transition EBPs. Approximately half of the transition service providers in Mazzotti and Plotner's (2016) study reported seldom or never receiving professional development related to secondary transition EBPs, and nearly half said they were rarely or never provided resources related to EBPs. In this study, I asked the teachers if they felt prepared to teach EBPs related to secondary transition based on district-provided professional development. Participants reported not receiving professional development related to secondary transition EBPs. When I asked about their knowledge of the transition-related EBPs identified by NTACT, teachers reported having no awareness of these practices.

Morningstar and Benitez (2013) and Morgan et al. (2014) asserted that teacher training matters. Teachers should have access to effective instruction on identifying and implementing evidence-based secondary transition practices through TPP courses and professional development opportunities. Such training will increase teachers' competency

in special education and transition, ensuring that transition service providers have the knowledge and skills needed to be successful in the field.

Implementation of Evidence-Based Practices

Implementation Fidelity

Implementation fidelity is the extent to which an individual delivers an intervention as it was intended (Harn et al., 2017). McKenna and Parenti (2017) asserted, "Maintaining a high degree of fidelity or closely adhering to the core components of a teaching practice or intervention is necessary to maximize student benefit" (p. 331). Harn et al. (2017) found adaptations to be an inevitable part of the implementation process when determining an EBP's contextual fit. Adapting EBPs to meet students' needs makes the intervention more effective (Castro et al., 2004; Webster-Stratton et al., 2011).

All teachers in this study adapted or personalized practices based on students' needs. Participants considered the contextual fit of a practice by reviewing the content in relation to students' needs. If teachers found that the content was insufficient to meet students' needs, they adapted it. Leko (2015) stressed that when adaptations keep EBP core components intact, are intended to benefit students, and result from teachers' data-based decision-making, they are more likely to enhance EBP effectiveness and promote positive student outcomes. Participant 4 believed that all instances of EBP use must entail consideration of how to differentiate for students and stay true to the practice's basic foundation and structure. Participant 1 found it hard to maintain fidelity while meeting students' needs, seeing many of their students struggled with EBP implementation as

directed. Although all teachers in this study believed in implementing the content as written, they also layered in supports to meet students' needs.

Fixsen et al. (2005) noted that adaptations are likely to occur by force, choice, or accident; therefore, the key is finding the right balance between implementation fidelity and EBP adaptation within the local context. Leko (2015) provided a framework to help teachers determine whether adaptation was necessary, and the core components were intact. In addition, Torres et al. (2012) identified steps teachers could take to implement EBPs effectively. I asked participants to describe how they knew they had implemented an EBP with fidelity. Four teachers cited student success as evidence, and one pointed to student feedback; the sixth participant focused on student success, not fidelity. Only one teacher described a systematic process for evaluating the fidelity of EBP implementation. Teachers' responses indicated no systematic way to assess whether they were implementing EBPs effectively.

Limitations of the Study

One of the limitations of this study was the sample size. Although valuable information emerged regarding special education teachers' perspectives of why and how they personalized EBPs to teach transition-related skills to students with disabilities, the use of only six participants limited generalizability. Another limitation was the potential for researcher bias to influence data collection, analysis, and interpretation. To mitigate bias, I used member checking, an audit trail, a reflective journal, and peer debriefing. In addition, I acknowledged and bracketed my biases by identifying and setting aside any attitudes that might influence data interpretation. Also, conducting a study during a

pandemic presented challenges, such as finding participants and securing access to conduct the interviews. Instead of meeting in person, I conducted all interviews via Google Meet, which allowed me to see the participants and read body language. Finally, there is a certain degree of skill needed to conduct interviews. For example, it can be challenging to determine enough probing to obtain answers. I found that, with each interview, I became more skilled in asking predetermined and follow-up questions. Although piloting interview questions with a small group is time-consuming, it would have provided the needed practice before conducting participant interviews.

Recommendations

Additional research is needed to examine why and how special education teachers adapt and personalize all EBPs, including those related to secondary transition practices, using a larger sample to enhance generalizability. The effective implementation of EBPs is critical to the success of students with disabilities; therefore, teachers must receive training to identify EBPs, select practices to meet students' needs, and implement the EBPs to maintain the integrity of the practice while layering in necessary supports. Therefore, I recommend that future researchers focus on teachers' training to incorporate evidence-based transition practices into the context of their everyday academic instructional practices. Also, because TPPs and professional development are integral to teacher preparation, future research is necessary on how TPPs and district-provided professional development opportunities incorporate the adaptive expertise of participating teachers. A quantitative study comparing the impact of teachers' adaptive expertise on

the postschool outcomes of students with disabilities would be beneficial for understanding how teachers' adaptive expertise affects student success.

Implications

Teacher knowledge of how to effectively identify, select, and implement EBPs with fidelity has significant implications for students with disabilities. Teachers should receive the training they need through TPPs that include opportunities to build adaptive expertise and self-reflection. When this happens, they will be better able to develop the necessary skills for effectively incorporating EBPs into their academic instructional practices to address students' needs. In addition, district-provided professional development would offer further opportunities for skill development; therefore, districts share the responsibility for providing effective professional development. If teachers do not have these skills, students with disabilities will not experience successful postschool outcomes.

Conclusion

This study extended the findings of Guckert et al. (2016) regarding whether teachers' level of awareness affected EBP implementation by focusing on why and how teachers personalized EBPs to teach transition-related skills to students with disabilities. The six teachers in this study adapted or personalized instructional practices based on students' needs, which requires a great deal of skill and expertise. Teachers with adaptive expertise can adjust their instruction after reflecting on their teaching practice (De Arment et al., 2013). That teachers primarily learned adaptive expertise through practicum experiences underscores the crucial role of practicums in teacher skill

development. As such, preservice teachers may need additional time to develop this skill. This training can be in the form of an extended guided practicum experience with expert mentor teachers.

Delving into how teachers adapted and personalized practices, over half teachers in this study reported implementing the practices as written, layering in supports, as needed. Teachers believed that adapting EBPs was inevitable when working with students with disabilities. Although a key component of effective EBP use is implementation fidelity, teachers might need to personalize practices based on students' academic and functional performance. Teacher efficacy plays an essential role in identifying, implementing, adapting, and personalizing practices to achieve student success. Participants in this study reported high levels of self-efficacy based on various factors, including training, experiences, and levels of student success (i.e., their mastery experiences). Notably, teachers expressed that they did not receive extensive training during their TPP to identify and implement transition-related EBPs for teaching transition skills to students with disabilities. Their district also had not provided professional development yet held each of them responsible for this instruction. For this reason, effective TPPs and district-provided professional development are needed to provide the training, support, and resources for teachers to develop the skills to implement EBPs that lead to student success. The current study could lead to positive social change by informing professional development design to increase teacher awareness of secondary transition EBPs and how to personalize them effectively, facilitating successful outcomes for students with disabilities.

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Appendix A: Level of Evidence

Evidence-Based Practices	• Based on group experimental, single-case, and/or quasi-experimental correlational research designs
	• Requires the greatest number of studies demonstrating effectiveness.
	• Contributing studies:
	  o Must utilize methodologically sound research designs
	  o Must adhere to quality indicators for evaluation
	  o Include 60 participants in group experimental studies and 20 participants in single-case study designs

Research-Based Practices	• Based on group experimental, single-case, and/or a priori correlational research designs
	• Requires moderate number of studies demonstrating effectiveness.
	• Contributing studies:
	  o Must utilize methodologically sound research designs
	  o Must adhere to quality indicators for evaluation

Promising Practices	• Based on group experimental, single-case, a priori, or exploratory correlational, or qualitative research designs
	• Requires the fewest studies demonstrating effectiveness
	• Contributing studies:
	  o May or may not utilize methodologically sound designs
	  o May or may not adhere to quality indicators for evaluation

Unestablished Practices	• Based on anecdotal evidence or professional judgment • Could include evidence of negative effects from methodologically sound research studies

Adapted from "National Technical Assistance Center on Transition," 2018; derived from Council for Exceptional Children, 2014; Helsel, Hitchcock, Miller, Malinow, & Murray, 2016; Twyman, 2008 (https://www.transitionta.org/effectivepractices)

Appendix B: Effective Practices and Predictors Matrix

Level of evidence	Relevant outcome area	Practice or predictor description title
Evidence-based practices	**Education**	**Student-focused planning practices**
		Published curricula to teach student involvement in the IEP to students with disabilities
		Self-directed IEP to teach student involvement in the IEP meeting for students with disabilities
		Student development (academic, employment, and life skills) practices
		Anchored instruction to teach math to students with disabilities and learning disabilities and intellectual disabilities and other health impairments
		Graphic organizers to teach science to students with disabilities and students with learning disabilities
		Mnemonics to teach math to students with disabilities and students with learning disabilities
		Mnemonics to teach science to students with disabilities and students with learning disabilities
		Peer tutoring to teach science to students with disabilities and students with learning disabilities
		REWARDS program to teach decoding, vocabulary, and reading comprehension
		Schema-based instruction to teach math to students with disabilities
		Self-determined learning model of instruction to teach goal attainment to students with disabilities and students with intellectual disabilities
		Strategy instruction to teach reading comprehension to students with disabilities and students with learning disabilities
		Using technology to teach math to students with learning disabilities
		Time delay to teach science to students with disabilities and students with intellectual disabilities

Level of evidence	Relevant outcome area	Practice or predictor description title
	Employment	**Student-focused planning practices**
		Published curricula to teach student involvement in the IEP to students with disabilities
		Self-directed IEP to teach student involvement in the IEP meeting for students with disabilities
		Student development practices
		Self-determined learning model of instruction to teach goal attainment to students with disabilities and students with intellectual disabilities
Research-based practices	**Education**	**Predictors of postsecondary education**
		Inclusion in general education
		Occupational courses
		Paid employment/work experience
		Transition program
		Vocational or career and technical education
		Youth autonomy and decision making
		School completion practices
		Academic support and enrichment for dropout prevention
		Accelerated middle schools for staying and progressing in school
		Adult advocate for dropout prevention
		Check and connect for staying and progressing in school
		High school redirection for school completion
		Student-focused planning practices
		Check and connect to promote student participation in the IEP meeting for students with emotional-behavior disorders
		Published curricula to teach student involvement in the IEP to students with autism, emotional-behavior disorders, intellectual disabilities, learning disabilities, or other health impairments

Level of evidence	Relevant outcome area	Practice or predictor description title
		Self-advocacy strategy to teach student involvement in the IEP meeting to students with disabilities and students with learning disabilities
		Self-directed IEP to teach student involvement in the IEP meeting for students with intellectual disabilities and students with learning disabilities
		Student development (academic, employment, and life skills) practices*
		Anchored instruction to teach math to students with disabilities and learning disabilities and intellectual disabilities and other health impairments
		Computerized concept mapping to teach social studies to students with disabilities, students with emotional-behavior disorders, and students with learning disabilities
		Corrective reading to teach fluency, decoding, word identification, and vocabulary
		Corrective reading to teach reading to students with disabilities and students with emotional-behavior disorders
		Direct instruction of main idea to teach reading comprehension
		Embedded story structure to teach reading comprehension
		Graduated sequence of instruction to teach math to students with disabilities and students with learning disabilities
		Graphic organizers to teach reading comprehension
		Graphic organizers to teach reading comprehension to students with disabilities and students with learning disabilities
		Peer-assisted instruction to teach math to students with disabilities and students with learning disabilities
		Reading comprehension strategy plus attribution retraining concepts and strategies to teach reading comprehension skills

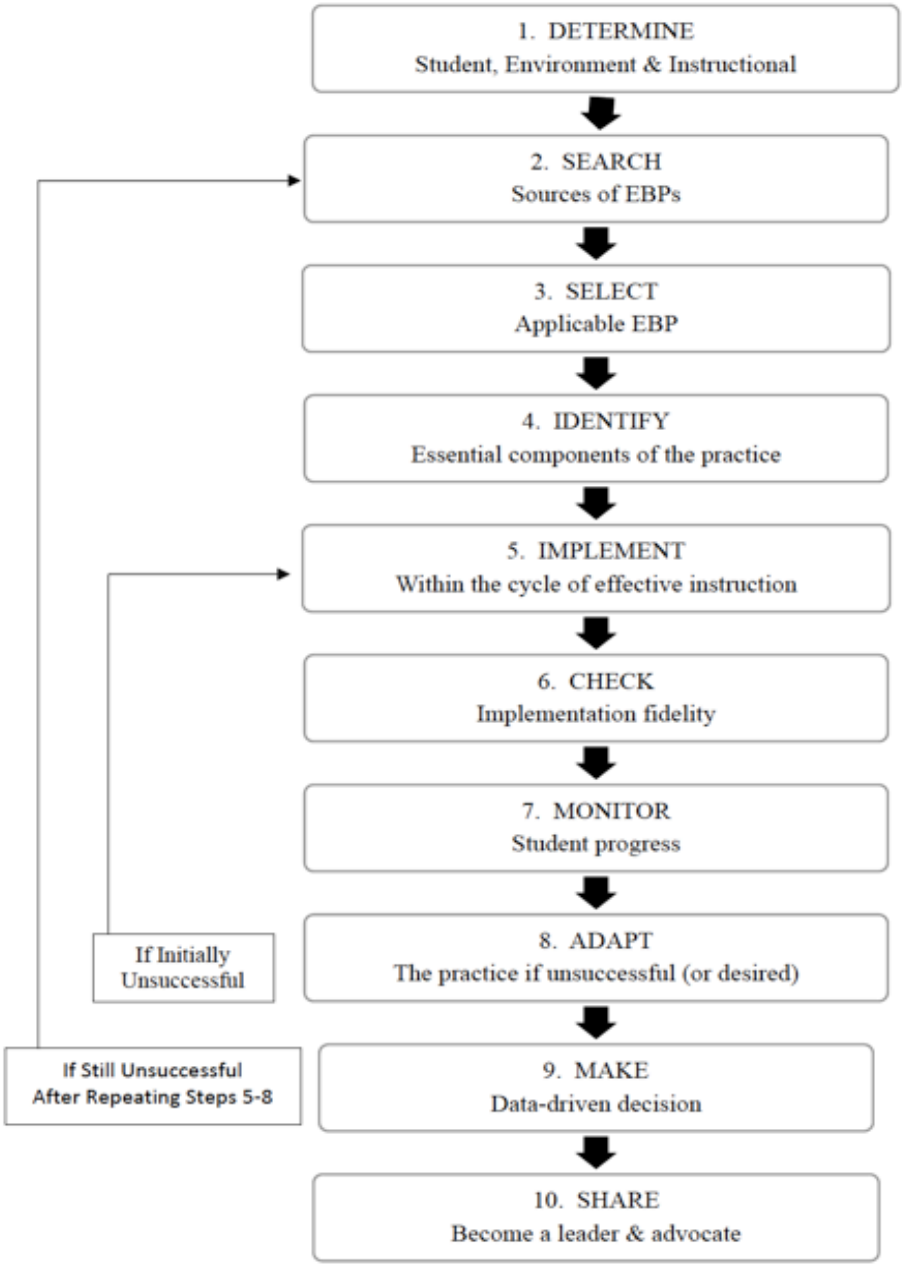
Level of evidence	Relevant outcome area	Practice or predictor description title
		Reading comprehension strategy to teach reading comprehension skills
		Repeated reading to teach reading fluency and comprehension to students with disabilities and students with learning disabilities
		Schema-based instruction to teach math to students with learning disabilities and intellectual disabilities
		Self-determined learning model of instruction to teach goal attainment to students with autism and students with learning disabilities
		Self-management to teach math to students with disabilities and students with emotional- behavior disorders
		Self-monitoring to teach reading comprehension, productivity, and accuracy
		Self-regulated strategy development (SRSD) to teach math
		SOLVE-IT to teach math
		Structured inquiry to teach science to students with disabilities
		Supplemental materials to teach history content to students with disabilities and students with learning disabilities
		TouchMath to teach math to students with disabilities
	Employment	**Predictors of postsecondary employment**
		Inclusion in general education
		Occupational courses
		Paid employment/work experience
		Vocational or career and technical education
		Work-study
		Student-focused planning practices
		Check and Connect to promote student participation in the IEP meeting for students with emotional-behavior disorders

Level of evidence	Relevant outcome area	Practice or predictor description title
		Published curricula to teach student involvement in the IEP to students with autism, emotional-behavior disorders, intellectual disabilities, learning disabilities, or other health impairments
		Self-advocacy strategy to teach student involvement in the IEP meeting to students with disabilities and students with learning disabilities
		Self-directed IEP to teach student involvement in the IEP meeting for students with intellectual disabilities and students with learning disabilities
		Student development practices
		Community-based instruction to teach communication skills to students with disabilities
		Computer-assisted instruction to teach job-specific skills to students with intellectual disabilities
		Constant time delay to teach job-specific skills to students with intellectual disabilities
		Response prompting to teach employment skills to students with disabilities and students with intellectual disabilities
		Self-determined learning model of instruction to teach goal attainment to students with autism and students with learning disabilities
		Self-management to teach job-specific skills
		Simulation to teach social skills to students with disabilities
		System of least-to-most prompts to teach job-specific skills to students with intellectual disabilities
		Vocational rehabilitation collaborative practices
		Counseling and the working alliance between counselor and consumer
		Interagency collaboration
		Vocational rehabilitation employment practices
		Supported employment

Level of evidence	Relevant outcome area	Practice or predictor description title
		Vocational rehabilitation professional training practices
		Counselor education
		Vocational rehabilitation service delivery practices
		Services to a targeted group
Promising practices	**Education**	**Predictors of postsecondary education**
		Career awareness
		High school diploma
		Interagency collaboration
		Parent expectations
		Self-advocacy/self-determination
		Self-care/independent living skills
		Social skills
		Student support
		School completion practices
		Career academies for school completion

Adapted from "Effective Practices and Predictors Matrix," National Technical Assistance Center on Transition, 2019. (https://www.transitionta.org/effectivepractices)

Appendix C: Flowchart for 10-Step Implementation Process



From "A Special Educator's Guide to Successfully Implementing Evidence-Based Practices," by C. Torres, C. A. Farley, and B. G. Cook, 2012, *Teaching Exceptional Children*, *45*(1), 64-73. Copyright 2012 by SAGE.

Appendix D: Interview Protocol

Study Topic: Teachers' Perspectives of Evidence-Based Practice Implementation

Introduction

Good afternoon. I would like to thank you for volunteering to be interviewed. I am Gail Lott and I'm a doctoral student at Walden University.

You were asked to talk to me because you are a special education teacher who has been teaching at least 2 years. I believe that you will provide valuable insight into teachers' experiences with evidence-based practices (EBPs), including varying levels of awareness of EBPs how teachers personalize (alter) them. The purpose of this basic qualitative study is to examine special education teachers' perceptions of why and how they personalize EBPs to teach transition-related skills to students with disabilities. I will explore teachers' level of awareness of EBPs, training, mastery of learning experiences, and their feelings of competence to identify and implement EBPs with fidelity. I am also interested in how teachers make instructional and curricular decisions, particularly in the context of teacher level of awareness of EBPs and current policies around EBPs.

The information you give me today will help me understand what works and what doesn't for students with disabilities. I will use this information to help future special education teachers who select and implement EBPs to teach transition-related skills to students with disabilities. I really appreciate that you are taking the time to help.

Intro: How long have you been teaching?

1. How long have you been a high school special education teacher?

2. What is your highest level of education?

3. Do you have a degree in special education?

4. How much training have you had that is related to the secondary transition services?

Evidence-based practices

5. There is a lot of talk these days about evidence-based or research-based practice. Practitioners, researchers, and policymakers have different interpretations of this idea. What do these terms mean to you?

    Prompt: How do you describe EBPs?

    Prompt: How do you know when the practices you are using are evidence-based?

6. What sources of information about EBP do you find useful?

7. How prepared are you to use EBPs?

    Prompt: How much training have you had related to EBPs?

    Prompt: Where did you receive your training?

    Prompt: What specific experiences did you have that led you to feeling competent to implement EBPs with fidelity?

    Prompt: Please describe opportunities you had to practice identifying and implementing EBPs while in your TPP program.

8. Describe the role of professional development in preparing you to use EBPs.

    Prompt: How has professional development increased your knowledge of EBPs?

Perceptions of EBPs to teach transition-related skills

9. Tell me about a time when you used EBPs.

    Prompt: Please explain how you knew the practice you selected was evidence-based.

    Prompt: How did you find it?

Prompt: Please explain how you knew that the practice was implemented with fidelity?

Prompt/probe: Did the EBP achieve your teaching objective?

Prompt: How important is it that you use EBPs? Please explain.

10. When you have implemented EBPs, have you ever needed to make adjustments to meet the needs of your students?

    Prompt: Explain how you made a decision to change the EBP.

    Prompt: What about it did you change?

    Prompt: Did the adjusted EBP achieve your teaching objectives?

11. How do you approach teaching?

    Prompt: How do you begin to decide what to teach?

    Prompt: How do you decide what you identify as important or necessary to teach?

    Prompt: What are your perceptions of being prepared to teach secondary transition skills effectively?

12. What is your perception of how to best teach students the skills they need to experience successful postsecondary education, employment, and independent living outcomes?

13. What is your perception of being prepared to teach secondary transition skills effectively?

    Prompt: What is your perception of the preparation you received in your teacher preparation program to identify and implement EBPs?

    Prompt: What is your perception of the professional development you received in your district to identify and implement EBPs?

Additional factors

14. What is your perception of how other factors have affected your implementation of EBPs?

    Prompt: What district resources and supports do you draw on? (probe for these kinds of things: curriculum, time, specialist)

Prompt: How have students' demographics (e.g., race, ethnicity, socioeconomic, and/or culture) affected your implementation of EBPs?

Prompt: How is administrative support provided that will assist you to identify and implement EBPs?

Closing

15. In an ideal situation, how might you imagine using evidence-based practices?

    Prompt: What kinds of supports would be most helpful?

16. What have I forgotten to ask you that you think important for me to understand about these issues?

17. What recommendations do you have to improve how teachers use evidence-based practices?

Appendix E: Themes, Subthemes, and Excerpts

RQ1: What are high school special education teachers' perceptions of why they personalize EBPs to teach transition-related skills to students with disabilities?

Themes	Subthemes	Open codes	Participants' words
Theme 1: Teachers recognize the importance of EBPs	EBPs are important The best decision is an informed decision It is important to use EBPs (5/6) On the fence (1/6)	Important (P1)	I think that evidence-based practices are important, but I think one of the challenges is meeting the needs of my kids when using them. (P1)
		Very important (P2)	Oh, very much so, because I know it works. (P2)
		Important (P3)	My experience is when I don't, the students don't make as much progress. When the students don't make much progress, their post-high school outcomes are more limited. So, unless I use practices that are evidence-based, my students with IEPs will never have access to so much that their peers have. (P3)
		Somewhat important (P4)	So, it's kind of a half-and-half type thing. (P4)
		Really important (P5)	I feel like it's really important because you don't want to do something without having an understanding of if it will work or not. Why would I spend a bunch of time developing something that's not rooted in something that has been shown to work in some capacity? And I also don't want to waste a student's time on something that's not going to help. So, it's really important for sure. (P5)

Themes	Subthemes	Open codes	Participants' words
		Extremely important (P6)	Very, very, very. Yes. I always tell my students the best decision is an informed decision. And so, I think especially when I look at being a teacher, what we do is important, and it does impact students somewhat and we might not even notice it. (P6)
	Define EBPs as practices that work and are grounded in research (6/6) Content vs. transition-related EBPs Content EBPs appear to work for teachers More knowledgeable about content practices than transition practices	Tried-and-true practices/ data behind them to show effectiveness; proof of effectiveness (P1)	The first thing that comes to mind [is] just tried-and-true teaching techniques that have data behind them to show their effectiveness. (P1) **Current source:** AVID curriculum, CE curriculum, specific district curricula curriculum, mentor teacher during practicum, limited PD training plus demonstration (P1) EBPs have proof of effectiveness and RBP is more the research behind why the EBP is effective; why a Socratic seminar is effective, why versus how (P1)
		Practices that work (P2) Current curriculum, SEL, depends on experience (P2)	Practices that work. I know this because of the research I've done, because of the things that I've seen with me putting it into practice for the last 15 years. Example: 9/10 suspended before I arrive. My second year with the EBPs that I've been using, I've been able to cut that suspension rate by 80%. (P2) **Sources:** Current curriculum (P2)

Themes	Subthemes	Open codes	Participants' words
		Thought-out, researched evidence to determine the strategy is effective (P3)	Without the implementation of research-based practices, the students are limited in what their post-high school outcomes can be because of their limited access to learning opportunity. That the experiment of the learning strategy has been implemented, was thought out, implemented, research gathered, and then presented in a peer-review format. Evidence was determined that this strategy is effective and that if you try it, you will improve. If you try fidelity, you will improve student outcomes. (P3)
			Current sources: A math researcher; The state education agency offered a series of trainings many years ago. I participated in that training through a college in a western state. I also attended a Math Teachers Circle course where I learned about the research supporting greater inquiry-based mathematics learning. (P3)
			Professional resources (P3)

Themes	Subthemes	Open codes	Participants' words
		Proven strategies to work in certain circumstances (P4)	I think there are strategies that have been proven to work in certain circumstances. While it may not be the perfect thing for every student or for every situation, I think that the more evidence-based practices you can be familiar with and practice with. That's just like having more tools in your toolbox and can help you reach a wider variety of students based on their needs (P4) **Sources:** District resources, specific district curricula training; PLCs (P4)
		Grounded in empirical research and shown to be reliable (P5)	When I think of evidence, I think of a little bit more concrete data, maybe more quantitative. I know I'm echoing here, but there's importance for both quantitative and qualitative data. An evidence-based practice, in terms of teaching? Is it something that has been grounded in some kind of empirical research, something that has been shown to be effective with reliability? It's not just, oh, this one school in this one town, in this one state, and it worked something that's a little bit broader. (P5) **Sources:** CLDE training, TPP, PD (not transition related), AVID curriculum, English content

Themes	Subthemes	Open codes	Participants' words
		Solid practices (P6) RBP = EBP (P6)	The thing that worries me is that there are two terms, and what I would love for them is just like a research-based…is based in evidence. Evidence-based practices should be based on research, as well. They should be interchangeable terms, not two totally different terms. (P6) **Sources:** AVID, English
	EB curriculum is not the only source of EBPs (6/6) Teachers believe in using the most effective practices available; however, if they are not working, they will select practices that are not necessarily identified as effective. Colleagues (3/6) Observing others (2/6) District resources (1/6) Study surveys (2/6) Experience (2/6) Film themselves teaching (1/6) TPP (2/6) Teacher reflection (1/6) Professional resources (1/6)	TPP (P1) Observing others (P1)	I think it's useful to see it in demonstration. If I'm given something to read about how to do it and see it in action and in the classroom, I think the pairing of those two is the most useful. I really think immediately of AVID. A lot of the techniques are evidence-based practices, and they are really heavy on that idea of structuring things in the classroom that do lead to success in student performance. (P1)

Themes	Subthemes	Open codes	Participants' words
		Depend on experience (P2)	It took me 3-4 months to get my principals on board with that, but once I showed them that it was evidence-based and that it aligned with what their outcomes were, they were let me use it. (P2)
		Colleagues Teacher reflection (P3) Math researcher (P3) Professional resources (P3) Film themselves teaching (P3) Student surveys (P3)	I access a mathematical researcher. I collaborate with colleagues, too. I had filmed myself teaching so I can see how I am doing the instruction. The state education agency offered a series of trainings many years ago. I participated in that training through a college in a western state. I also attended a math teachers' course where I learned about the research supporting greater inquiry-based mathematics learning. (P3)

Themes	Subthemes	Open codes	Participants' words
		District resources (P4) Colleagues (P4) District has shared site (P4) Experiences with students (P4) Collaboration (P4)	Our district kind of has like a shared site that has a lot of different practices and stuff like that, which is helpful when you can kind of see what other teachers are using. Working with students or other teachers in my department and then learning about what they do and how they help and collaborating together as through PLCs has been very helpful, as well. (P4)
		TPP (P5) PD-CLDE training (P5) Colleagues (P5)	There are some things through the district. Truthfully, I think I receive most of it from the TPP but also colleagues. The CLDE training is super rooted in research. There is a mix of school and then organizations and college. (P5)
		Colleague conversations (P6) CLDE PD; student surveys-build my own curriculum around students (P6) Classroom observations (P6)	AVID has an entire website that is based on evidence-based learning. I utilize a lot of surveys and track throughout from Grades 9-12 to teach skills needed to be successful after high school. I build a curriculum around the student. It is important to give them the skill to be able to live the lives they want as adults. Math instruction can be tied to employment skills. (P6)

Themes	Subthemes	Open codes	Participants' words
			I would say that if they are using it in the classroom, I guess I was having a conversation with a colleague, and then this is what I've been seeing directly with my students, my classroom. This is what's driving that decision. I guess, like take the data from the surveys and use that to drive the curriculum or the instruction just based on student needs. (P6)