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Junior High General Education Teachers' Perceptions of Teaching Students with Mild Disabilities

Carrie Ablin
Walden University

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Walden University

College of Education

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Carrie Ablin

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
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the review committee have been made.

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Walden University
2020

.Abstract

Junior High General Education Teachers' Perceptions of Teaching Students with Mild
Disabilities

by

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MA in Educational Administration, Governors State University, 2010

MA in Special Education, Governors State University, 2002

BS in Elementary Education, Northern Illinois University, 1996

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Education

Walden University

December 2020

Abstract

Students with mild disabilities are usually educated in a general education environment. However, limited research exists regarding junior high general education teachers' perceptions of students with disabilities in the classroom. The purpose of this study was to gather junior high general education teachers' perceptions of teaching students with disabilities in the general education classroom in both inclusion and coteaching models. In line with Bandura's self-efficacy theory, the key research questions of this study focused on the perceptions of junior high general education teachers who teach students with mild disabilities regarding their competence and confidence to meet the needs of students with disabilities in their classrooms. The overall research design was a basic qualitative study, which included interviewing 10 junior high general education teachers who currently had students with disabilities in their classrooms. Interview data were transcribed, coded and analyzed for common themes. Participants in this study had positive perceptions of teaching students with disabilities in their classrooms, but felt they were inadequately prepared and trained to do so. This low perception of competence resulted in teachers' lack of persistence when these students failed to accomplish goals. District leaders may be able to use results from this study as a guide to develop various support systems for general education teachers to teach students with varying abilities in their classrooms. The research could result in positive social change for all students, regardless of their abilities as the district works to support development of teachers' self-efficacy competence and confidence to change instruction to meet all students' individual needs.

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Dedication

I am dedicating this study to my amazing loving parents, who always believed in me and pushed me. The strength, love, and support they have given me throughout my life has inspired me to achieve my dreams. My only wish is that my father was alive to share this monumental moment with me. I know he is proud of me.

I also want to dedicate this to my two wonderful children, Tyler and Peyton Ablin. You are the best thing that has ever happened to me. I hope that I am able to inspire you to make your dreams a reality someday.

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Table of Contents

List of Tables	iv
Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study.....	1
Background.....	2
Problem Statement.....	3
Purpose of the Study.....	6
Research Questions.....	7
Conceptual Framework.....	8
Nature of the Study.....	10
Definitions.....	11
Assumptions.....	12
Scope and Delimitations	13
Limitations	13
Significance.....	14
Summary	15
Chapter 2: Literature Review.....	17
Literature Search Strategy.....	17
Conceptual Foundation	18
Literature Review Related to Key Concepts and Variable	23
Education for All Handicapped Children Act.....	23
The No Child Left Behind Act.....	25
Every Student Succeeds Act	25
Summary and Conclusions	39

Chapter 3: Research Method.....	40
Research Design and Rationale	40
Role of the Researcher	42
Methodology.....	43
Participant Selection	43
Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection.....	43
Instrumentation	44
Data Analysis Plan.....	45
Threats to Validity	47
Trustworthiness.....	47
Credibility	48
Transferability.....	48
Dependability.....	48
Confirmability.....	48
Ethical Procedures	49
Summary.....	50
Chapter 4: Results.....	51
Setting.....	51
Participants.....	52
Data Collection	53
The Data Recording Process.....	54
Adjustments in the Data Collection Process.....	54
Data Analysis	54

Codes, Categories and Themes	55
Results	56
Codes for Research Question 1	57
Resulting Themes from Research Question 1 Codes.....	57
Code and Theme Descriptions	58
Codes and Resulting Themes for Research Question 2	62
Summary	65
Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations.....	67
Interpretation of the Findings.....	68
Research Question 1	68
Research Question 2	70
Limitations of the Study.....	71
Recommendations.....	71
Implications.....	73
Conclusion	74
References.....	76
Appendix: Interview Protocol.....	86

List of Tables

Table 1. Respondent Demographics	52
Table 2. Research Question 1: Participant Responses–Perceptions Toward Teaching Students with Disabilities: Preparation and Student Behavior	59
Table 3. Research Question 1: Participant Responses–Perceptions Toward Teaching Students with Disabilities: Preparation and Class Size.....	60
Table 4. Research Question 1: Participant Responses–Perceptions Toward Teaching Students with Disabilities: Preparation and Preservice Training.....	60
Table 5. Research Question 1: Participant Responses–Perceptions Toward Teaching Students with Disabilities: Preparation and Collegial Support.....	61
Table 6. Research Question 1: Participant Responses–Perceptions Toward Teaching Students with Disabilities: Professional Development and Training.....	62
Table 7. Research Question 2: Participant Responses–Perceptions Toward Teaching Students with Disabilities: Motivation and Preservice Training	63
Table 8. Research Question 2: Participant Responses–Perceptions Toward Teaching Students with Disabilities: Motivation and Overall Teacher Motivation.....	64
Table 9. Research Question 2: Participant Responses–Perceptions Toward Teaching Students with Disabilities: Motivation and Colleague Support	65

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

As students with mild disabilities are educated in general education settings, general education teachers are faced with a more diverse classroom population. Teachers' perceptions play an integral part in student education. As states move towards cutting funding for special education and an exclusive inclusion model (Keeley, 2015), general education teachers are faced with educating more students with diverse needs in their classroom with little support. The inclusive method can include general education teachers supplied with Individual Education Plans (IEPs) and support from a special education teacher or coteaching. Coteaching has gained popularity as one model for inclusive classrooms (Keeley, 2015). Funding for special education has decreased drastically over the past few years, resulting in an increased number of students with special needs who are receiving instruction in the general education environment (Keeley, 2015).

General education teachers' roles have changed over the years; they now have students with a wider variety of abilities and greater responsibility for developing and implementing IEPs (Rakap, Cig, & Parlak-Rakap, 2017). As teachers adapt to their expanded role, studies may help school district leaders understand how to effectively meet the needs of all students in their schools and influence general education teachers' perceptions of teaching students with disabilities in their classroom. This study focused on junior high general education teachers in a large, urban school district, who currently teach students with disabilities in their classroom in complete inclusive models and in coteaching models. This study on general education teachers' perceptions of teaching

students with disabilities in a general education classroom filled the gap in educational literature with research that focused on junior high teachers' perceptions. Understanding those perceptions may help district level administrators provide resources professional development to support to meet these teachers' needs. In addition, local universities may be able to utilize the research to structure general education programs to include more education on teaching students with disabilities.

Background

Placement of students with mild disabilities in the general education classroom has been a goal of many reform movements. Reform momentum began through the passage of legislative mandates during the past 40 years (Allday, Neilsen-Gatti, & Hudson, 2013). The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA; Illinois State Board of Education [ISBE], 2018) and the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002 (NCLB) included mandates that general education curricula and state standards apply to students with disabilities, as these students must make appropriate academic progress.

Both IDEIA and NCLB mandates brought about the rise of the education of students with mild disabilities in the general education classroom. Since the passage of Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in December of 2015, IEPs written for students with disabilities are required to align with state academic and grade-level content standards. Students with IEPs are held to the same state academic and grade-level standards as their nondisabled peers (ESSA, 2015). IEP goals and objectives must align with the common

core standards that pertain to the students' grade level and not performance level, which reflects higher standards for students with disabilities.

Administrators in a large, urban public school district recently eliminated the Special Education Block Grant and politicians have recently passed bills that eliminate funding for Special Education teachers. Special education teachers are critical to the success of students with disabilities and reimbursement funding for these teachers is critical in most districts to meet the needs of students with IEPs. It is crucial that general education teachers develop attitudes and beliefs that support effective teaching practices for students with disabilities in light of the fact that these students are not meeting proficiency of local and state assessment standards (Hind, Larkin, & Dunn, 2019).

Hind, Larkin, and Dunn (2019) have shown that the achievement gap in the level of academic growth for students with IEPs as measured on state standardized tests widens from elementary school to junior high school. In an analysis of achievement scores, Rakap, Cig, and Parlak-Rakap (2017) found that students with disabilities are not meeting targets for expected progress on local and state assessments. More training, or more specific, training in special education may raise the teachers' estimations of the abilities of students with disabilities.

Problem Statement

As more students with special needs receive their education in the general education environment, the importance of the confidence of general education teachers in working with special needs children has increased. General education teachers must feel confident regarding their level of preparedness to teach students with mild disabilities in

a general education setting. There is a concern among district administrators and teachers regarding what supports teachers require to meet the differing needs of all students in the general education classroom (Rakap et al., 2017).

Today's schools have mounting challenges in responding to national initiatives such as ESSA as well as state initiatives, particularly regarding focused monitoring (Barrio & Combes, 2015). Federal and state laws require states to monitor and enforce special education regulations. The process entails states selecting priority areas to examine for compliance and includes on-site visits, district generated data, staff interviews and surveys, parent interviews, student files, and classroom observations (Barrio & Combes, 2015).

Critical performance area 5A of the State Performance Plan addresses the educational environment of students with disabilities. The State Board mandates through the State Performance Plan that 80% or more of students with disabilities must be educated with their same age peers in the general education setting. Pressures from the state superintendent enforcing NCLB (2002) intensified the roles and responsibilities for professionals in teaching students with disabilities. In an era of accountability and increased consequences for high-stakes testing, school administrators face challenges regarding the performances of all students (Barrio & Combes, 2015). School districts have had to revise how students with disabilities are educated in the school system in order for the students to make sufficient progress. Districts must use a multitiered approach to early identification and support of students with learning and behavior needs. With ESSA (2015), the need to ensure that students with disabilities meet the same

standards, have the same high expectations, and be prepared for college, career, and life is even more pronounced.

Disability category and severity determine the education placement of students with disabilities, but students with mild disabilities are increasingly placed in general education classrooms (Hind et al., 2019). Educators must deliver education to all students, including students with disabilities, in a variety of ways. Whole schools must work together to solve the complex and sometimes unique challenges that students with disabilities may pose in the general education environment (Kozleski, Yu, Satter, Francis, & Haines, 2015). Special education is not an end placement; special education is a principle of practice (Kozleski et al., 2015). When including students with mild disabilities in the general education classroom, local and state administrators must address the need for general education teachers to be prepared to educate these students (Allday et al., 2013). Educating students with disabilities in general education classes requires more than the students' physical presence in the classroom.

More students with mild disabilities are educated in the general education classroom. Many of these students are not meeting proficiency standards, and achievement scores show that students with disabilities are not meeting established state targets. After more than 10 years of students with disabilities being included in the general education classroom, many students are not making progress towards meeting the proficiency levels (Rakap et al., 2017). Educational literature contains little about the perceptions of junior high general education teachers regarding their ability to educate students with disabilities. Knowledge of the teachers' perceptions towards students with

disabilities can provide an understanding in how to improve training of general education teachers who educate students with disabilities (Allday et al., 2013).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore junior high general education teachers' perceptions regarding teaching students with mild disabilities in their general education classrooms. As Midwestern states move towards complete inclusion, states have mandated that students with disabilities participate in general education classes in increased numbers. Teachers' perceptions are affecting teaching practices and the achievement of students with disabilities (Rakap et al., 2017). Teachers' personal beliefs regarding their ability to meet the needs of students with disabilities and meeting state implemented standards are problematic.

Teachers' perceptions towards inclusion of students with disabilities are different and range from acceptance to rejection with the severity of the disability adversely influencing the attitude of teachers (Hind et al, 2019). Some researchers have shown that students perform at the level that their teachers expect them to perform (Rakap et al., 2017). Beliefs about teaching come from teachers' personal experiences and from experiences in schooling and instruction (Hind et al, 2019). The purpose of this study was to fill the literature gap with rich, qualitative descriptions addressing teachers' perceptions regarding students with special needs in the general education classroom in order to fill the gap between perceptions and practice of general education teachers educating students with disabilities in their classrooms.

I interviewed general education teachers from an urban junior high regarding their perceptions about educating students with mild disabilities in general education classrooms with special education support. The teachers were interviewed regarding their self-efficacy concerning their abilities to teach students with disabilities in their classroom. This aligns with Bandura's (1977) social learning theory that posited that people learn from each other via observation, imitation, and modeling. The interviews were conducted in a mutually agreed upon location with 10 general education teachers with students with disabilities in their classrooms. The location chosen ensured the privacy and confidentiality of the participants.

The data were gathered through the interview process and analyzed to provide an understanding of beliefs. The interview process included a list of questions in a semistructured interview process. This format allowed me to respond and ask further questions for clarification (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The research from this study contributed to existing research regarding general education teachers' perceptions of students with disabilities in the general education classroom by focusing on the perceptions of junior high general education teachers.

Research Questions

Current literature includes findings that teachers' negative perceptions and reactions to educating students with special needs in a general education classroom produces negative behaviors and broadens a negative connotation regarding inclusion (Krischler, Powell, & Cate, 2019). A gap exists in qualitative data documenting what teachers perceive about teaching students with mild disabilities in a general education

classroom. To determine the perceptions of junior high general education teachers towards the education of students with mild disabilities, these questions provided the basis of the qualitative research.

RQ1: What are junior high general education teachers' perceptions about their ability to teach students with disabilities in their classrooms without a special education teacher present for most of the day?

RQ2: What are junior high general education teachers' perceptions of their motivation and persistence in meeting the needs of students in their classrooms?

Conceptual Framework

Creswell and Guetterman (2019) considered the conceptual framework the foundation of the research study and the blueprint for how the research problem is explored. It is a system of concepts, assumptions, and beliefs that support and guide the research plan. I have based this study on Bandura's (1994) self-efficacy theory. Self-efficacy falls under the social cognitive theory umbrella (Fiske & Taylor, 2013).

Bandura's work is the most cited with regard to self-efficacy, while other theorists have produced more current research, Bandura's concepts remain the backbone of countless modern studies.

Bandura (1986) offered a formal definition of self-efficacy: Perceived self-efficacy is defined as people's judgement of their own abilities to organize and execute courses of action required to obtain desired types of performance. Self-efficacy is grounded in the theoretical framework of social cognitive theory, emphasizing the evolution and exercise of human agency (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017). It is the idea that

people can exercise some influence over what they do (Bandura, 2006). Bandura maintained that people are self-organizing, self-regulating, proactive, and self-reflecting.

Self-efficacy theory is based on how people's beliefs about their capabilities to produce designated levels of performance exercise influence over events that affect their lives (Bandura, 1994). An individual with a strong sense of efficacy finds enhanced accomplishment and personal well-being; challenges are seen as tasks to be mastered, instead of threats to be avoided. This is in contrast to individuals who doubt their capabilities and are likely to shy away from difficult tasks.

Bandura (1994) theorized that individuals replicate actions that they observe. The individual becomes both a product of the environment and an influence on the environment based on motivation factors (Holzberger, Philipp, & Kunter, 2013). According to Bandura (1994), teachers' perspectives on teaching students with disabilities may affect student behavior and academic accomplishments. Teachers could have the ability to influence their own behavior and the behavior of students in the classroom.

Teachers' self-efficacy in the classroom is strongly related to their behavior in the classroom and student outcomes as a result (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2007). Student outcomes such as students' self-efficacy beliefs, motivation, and achievement are related to teacher self-efficacy. Evidence supports Bandura's (1977) theory that teachers' self-efficacy beliefs are related to the effort teachers invest in teaching and their goals and persistence when things do not go smoothly (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2007). Greater

efficacy enables teachers to be less critical when students make errors and to work with students who are struggling (Tschannen-Morrin & Hoy, 2001).

Teachers with a higher sense of self-efficacy exhibit a greater enthusiasm and a greater commitment for teaching (Tschannen-Morrin & Hoy, 2001). Students' self-efficacy, as presented by Bandura (1994), is based on teacher self-efficacy. Self-efficacy comes into play with teachers' perceptions regarding their ability to educate students with disabilities and the adequacy of their preparation. In this study, I asked general education teachers to describe their perceptions regarding their perceived abilities to teach students with disabilities in their general education classrooms without the presence of a special education teacher and whether they felt motivated in their efforts to teach students with special needs.

Nature of the Study

The selection of Bandura's self-efficacy model was based on the premise that people's beliefs affect their capabilities (Bandura, 1994). A person's belief in their own preparedness to teach is the strongest predictor of teaching efficacy (Ruppar Nepper, & Dalsen, 2016). This belief is particularly important when teaching students with diverse needs (Ruppar et al., 2016). For this study, I collected data through interviews and analyzed the data to investigate trends in perceptions. I chose Bandura's self-efficacy theory as the model according to social cognitive theory. Bandura's research (1994) in self-efficacy has shown there is a noteworthy relationship between teacher efficacy and student achievement, student behavior, and teachers' feelings of job fulfillment. This

study further explored junior high general education teachers' perceptions of students with disabilities in their classrooms.

Definitions

There are many terms and words used in education, particularly related to special education. Listed below are terms used in this study.

Continuum of service: IDEA requires that, to the maximum extent appropriate, students with disabilities are educated with students without disabilities. A continuum of services establishes programs and services available to students with disabilities (ISBE, 2018). The more severe the disability and the less that a student responds to standard education practices, the more divergent the services provided are from those standard practices.

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA): Law signed December 10, 2015, that requires that student performance targets and school ratings were to be state-driven and based on multiple measures, as opposed to No Child Left Behind (NCLB), for which performance targets and school ratings were set by the federal government and only used standardized assessments.

Inclusion: The practice of students with disabilities being taught with their nondisabled peers in the general education setting rather than in a separated, segregated setting (ISBE, 2018).

Individual Education Plan (IEP): A plan established to address the academic or behavior needs of a student (ISBE, 2018).

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1997 (IDEA): A federal act that ensures that people with disabilities were not excluded from educational settings and the resources provided to nondisabled people (IDEA, 2004).

Least restrictive environment (LRE): To the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities are educated with children who are not disabled, and special classes, separate schooling, or other removal of children with disabilities from the regular education classroom only occurs when the nature or severity of the disability is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aides and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily (ISBE, 2018).

No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB): A federal education act supporting standards-based education where the focal points were creating high standards and instituting measurable goals to hold schools accountable for enhancing all students' academic achievement (NCLB, 2002).

Teacher efficacy: Perceptions of teachers that could positively or negatively affect students' educational and behavioral outcomes (Ninkovic & Knezevic-Florice, 2016).

Assumptions

Assumptions are information that can be implied (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). For instance, I expected that the participants answered each question openly and honestly. I assumed that the participants were all state licensed within the state they worked and certified in their area of instruction. Additionally, I assumed that the participants were qualified to address the issues of this study based on their actual experiences with students in the classroom. These assumptions were implicit throughout the research.

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of a study refers to the parameters of the study (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Only junior high teachers at one school who taught students who had a documented disability in the areas of learning disability or emotional disability were included in this study. These teachers taught students who were included in the general education classroom for most or all of their school day. Another parameter of the study was that the teachers taught students who were enrolled in sixth through eighth grade.

Delimitations are those characteristics that may arise from the limitations of the scope of the study (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). This study included the perceptions of junior high general education teachers towards inclusion of students with disabilities in their classrooms. In this study, I focused on junior high general education teachers' perceptions of inclusion. I investigated a number of concerns connected to the attitudes and experiences of general education teachers regarding inclusion of students with disabilities. Another delimitation was the choice of basic qualitative study, which limited the number of participants in the study in order to obtain in-depth information.

Limitations

The limitations of a study are issues that arise that cannot be controlled by the researcher and may result in the limited generalizability of the study (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Qualitative studies are limited in nature and usually have a low number of participants. If participants are unwilling or unable to meet after their contractual hours, contractual time constraints place a barrier on when participants could be interviewed. The difficulty of replicating the study is a limiting factor; because basic

qualitative studies involve the behaviors of one person, group, or organization, a study may or may not be reflective of similar organizations (Simon & Goes, 2013).

Significance

This study provided data related to junior high general education teachers' perceptions of teaching students with disabilities in the general education setting, which may assist districts in providing appropriate support to teachers. Professional development to meet teacher needs could be developed once the perceptions of general education teachers are identified. Professional development would assist teachers in becoming more efficient and comfortable in their classroom. General education teachers participating in this type of professional development could lead students with disabilities to have more success accessing the general education environment. The benefits could include less teacher attrition and greater achievement for all students.

Essential training and collaboration among teachers enhanced and improved the achievement for all students, especially those with disabilities (Krischler et al., 2019). Results from this research could be used to design targeted professional development for teachers in educating students with varying needs in junior high settings. The training could enhance the way students with special needs are educated in a general education environment.

Educating students with disabilities in the general education classroom is an important topic in education. Laws and regulations have been passed at the state and federal level in order to drive reform efforts (Morningstar, Shogren, Lee, & Born, 2015). As a result, students with disabilities are placed in general education classrooms on a

more consistent basis throughout the United States (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). Coteaching has gained momentum as an approach to educating students with disabilities in a general education environment (Ricci, Zetlin, & Osipova, 2017). While students are increasingly being educated in the LRE, general education teachers must feel equipped to meet the needs of all students (Morningstar et al., 2015). As more teachers have students with disabilities placed in their general education classroom, the need for preparation for students with disabilities is essential (Morningstar et al., 2015).

Summary

In the past, students with disabilities were placed and educated in a separate classroom or a separate school (Hind et al., 2019). As times have changed, students with disabilities have been mandated to join the general education classroom. Results from this basic qualitative study can be used to understand the perceptions of general education teachers regarding teaching students with disabilities in the general education classroom. Understanding leads to better support for teachers who are educating students with mild disabilities in the junior high setting. For example, administrators could use the data garnered from this study to develop professional development to support teachers.

Identifying areas that general education teachers perceive they are lacking adequate skill and support enables district administrators and providers of professional development to gear presentations and activities toward those areas. The purpose of this study was to explore, in depth, general education teachers' perceptions of teaching students with disabilities in the general education classroom. In the remaining sections,

this paper includes the literature review, a discussion of the methodology for the study, and recommendations for impacting for social change.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

I employed a basic qualitative study to explore general education teachers' perceptions of their ability to teach students with disabilities in their general education classroom. Researchers have described in current literature an increased expectation for general education teachers to educate students with disabilities (Da Fonte & Barton-Arwood, 2017). Modern schools focus on inclusive models of education for students with disabilities that include higher expectations and increased teacher accountability (Da Fonte & Barton-Arwood, 2017). Many students with disabilities, however, are not meeting proficiency and achievement levels (Stites, Rakes, Noggle, & Shah, 2018). Teachers' perceptions of teaching students with disabilities in the general education classroom may be affecting teaching practices and the achievement of students with disabilities (Stites et al., 2018). In this chapter, I discuss the conceptual framework of the study and explore current literature drawn from peer-reviewed journals.

Literature Search Strategy

Publications for this literature review were gathered through Walden University's educational database, SAGE, ProQuest, Google Scholar, Education Research Complete, ProQuest, and ERIC. Governors State University and Mokena Public Library also served in locating sources for the study. I searched scholarly journals with keywords such as: *inclusion, special education, perspectives of teachers teaching students with disabilities in the general education classroom, general education teachers, coteaching, self-efficacy, teacher self-efficacy, inclusion and preservice or experienced teachers, successful inclusion versus unsuccessful inclusion, and history of inclusion*. I accessed additional

literature relating to laws and policies for special education students using the internet searches for documents and websites. Additionally, I conducted online searches for books related to the topic of the education of students with disabilities and other related topics. The goal of the literature review was to identify junior high teacher perspectives regarding the education of students with mild disabilities in general education classrooms and to seek ways to improve teaching practices for all students. I used archival research and cross-referencing to link topics and studies. I categorized results in an Excel spreadsheet.

Conceptual Foundation

Until well into the 20th century, special education remained separate from general education (Stites et al., 2018). Students with disabilities were educated with a different set of instructional practices than typically developing peers; all students were entitled to a free and appropriate education. Under a free and appropriate education policy (IDEA, 2004), students with disabilities had more extensive protection against discrimination. Education practices began to change in relation to students with disabilities, leading to many being placed in the general education environment.

Over the decades, students with disabilities have been included with peers who were not disabled to receive access to the general education curriculum. The purpose of the shift from separation to inclusion provided social integration with nondisabled same age peers and to provide LRE for students with disabilities (Zagona, Kurth, & MacFarland, 2017). Inclusive education provides students with disabilities the

opportunity to learn alongside typically developing peers in the general education classroom; their learning is aligned with grade level standards (Zagona et al., 2017).

Researchers suggested that without the proper elements in place, inclusion may not serve students with disabilities appropriately and teachers can potentially suffer the frustration of inferior performance results while developing beliefs that they are incapable of managing the education of students with special needs (Zagona et al., 2017). Minimal researchers have explored the preparation of junior high general education teachers to teach students with disabilities, although some suggest students perform in the manner that their teachers expect them to perform (Klehm, 2014). This correlates to the findings of Bandura (1977, 2006), that individuals have the potential to develop lower self-efficacy when outcomes are unsuccessful in earlier attempts. Bandura's research aligns with Klehm's (2014) research; individuals tend to perform in a manner in which is expected of them.

The self-efficacy theory comes from the groundbreaking works of Bandura (1977) and Gavora's teacher efficacy (2010). Bandura's research is the most cited regarding self-efficacy and is cited here due to its widespread acceptance. According to Bandura (1977), the idea of teaching self-efficacy refers to teachers' general perceptions that they possess highly effective instructional skills and abilities that benefit students' learning.

Self-efficacy falls under the social cognitive theory umbrella (Bandura, 1977). Social cognitive theory defines individual function with defined domains: cognitive and affective (emotional/physical) responses (Fiske & Taylor, 2013). Senler (2016) defined self-efficacy as an individual's judgments of their capabilities, including actions related

to organizing and executing processes required to attain their desired types of performances (Fiske & Taylor, 2013). An individual's ability to perform a task is related to their judgement of their ability to perform the task. For teachers, their ability to teach students with disabilities is related to their perception of their ability to meet the needs of students with disabilities in their general education classroom.

There are four common areas of efficacy building that are identified as influential in a teacher's ability to feel effective. This study addresses the perception of expertise or mastery based on experiences. Individuals generally sway towards activities only when they deem themselves proficient at controlling the stressors that otherwise cause avoidance (Bandura, 1977).

Teachers possessing high levels of self-efficacy uphold a masterful self-image when executing programs for students (Bandura, 1977). Boyle, Topping, and Jindal-Snape (2013) referenced Causton-Theoharris and Theoharis (2009), who indicated that general education teaching staff must be willing to accept and implement the curriculum in various levels and that doing so requires self-efficacy for teaching. The relationship between self-efficacy and the social cognitive theory permit interdependency of environment, personal beliefs, and behavior as the impetus for performance (Baguley et al., 2014).

Social cognitive theorists proposed that mediation occurs between an individual's knowledge of traits they possess, their personal skills, and the future actions they perform using reflections on self-performance (Baguley et al., 2014). Researchers have studied the notion of self-efficacy when educating students and have explored the connection to

perceived performance in the classroom for students with disabilities (Krischler et al., 2019).

Although experts indicated that strong self-efficacy benefits an individual, the construct also influences others and contributes to a greater collective efficacy (Krischler et al., 2014). Krischler, Powell, and Cate (2019) focused on the identification of perceived factors general education teachers rely on for effectively educating students with disabilities in their classrooms. Experts also relied on the perceived individual efficacy of teachers during implementation because they are self-reliant as regards instruction in classrooms with challenging students (Zagona et al., 2017). Educators' familiarity of inclusive education and their ability to self-evaluate their willingness to implement inclusive education could influence their attitudes and beliefs toward the practice of inclusion (Zagona et al., 2017). Boyle et al. (2013) suggested that the teacher-training stage is the most influential time when teachers develop their perceptions regarding students with special needs.

Theoretical frameworks affect a researcher's approach to research. There are a variety of learning theorists who have done research throughout the years using an array of approaches to study educational issues. One issue affecting special education is the inclusion of students with special needs in general education classrooms (Bialka, 2017). Researchers discovered that providing educators with knowledge to become better practitioners was essential in the success of students with disabilities (Bentley-Williams, Grima-Farrell, Long, & Laws, 2017).

Researchers found that state and federal governments must develop policies to address the education of students with disabilities (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). In some states, lawmakers have created and passed policies that mandate the number of students with disabilities who must be included in the general education environment. The majority of students with disabilities must spend 80% or more of their day in a general education setting (Bialka, 2017). Placing the majority of students with disabilities in general education classrooms is a matter of policy adhered to in school districts; doing so has changed the landscape of inclusive education (Bialka, 2017).

This study was grounded in the theoretical framework of Bandura's (1977) social learning theory. Social learning theory recognizes social interactions as an important base for learning. Bandura's social cognitive theory started from social learning theory. From observations and trial and error, individuals grasp concepts of what is socially acceptable and what is not socially acceptable; their self-efficacy develops into the belief and action that an outcome is possible.

Bandura's social cognitive theory detailed how the environment, psychology, and behavior affect development. If teachers have negative perceptions regarding inclusion, students will have the same perceptions. Teachers' perceptions toward the educational environment reflect in students' perceptions towards learning. According to Bandura's (1977) social learning theory, teachers' perceptions are exceedingly likely to affect students' learning.

Literature Review Related to Key Concepts and Variable

There were varied results from searches of literature relating to the education of students with disabilities in the general education classroom. The literature review begins with a historical perspective of educating students with disabilities. A discussion of the current state of education of students with disabilities as well as barriers such as preservice training of teachers and collaboration and communication follow.

Education for All Handicapped Children Act

The education of students with disabilities in the general education classroom has been advocated and practiced for over two decades in the United States. Prior to 1975, there was little concern for the education of children with disabilities (Stites et al., 2018). With the increased pressure of compulsory education, self-contained special education classrooms and programs emerged.

Growing pressure led to the passage of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (1978). With the passage of this law, two viewpoints regarding the education of students with disabilities emerged. One viewpoint revealed a firm commitment to the idea that all students should be educated in a regular, public school with the greatest contact with nondisabled students (Stites et al., 2018). The other viewpoint firmly argued that students with disabilities should be educated in a more sheltered and protected environment so that specialized services could meet their needs (Stites et al., 2018).

The continued debate led to the passage of the Education of All Handicapped Children Act (1978). This Act included the provision of LRE (Stites et al., 2018). Under

this legislation, districts must establish procedures in which students with disabilities are assured, that to the maximum extent appropriate, and educated with non-disabled students (Education of All Handicapped Children Act, 1978). Under this legislation, the term *continuum of service* emerged, which is a spectrum of special education services that range from segregated special education schools to placement in the general education classroom. Experts suggested that students with disabilities must not be just educated in an inclusive environment, but that it is important that they make a meaningful contribution to the school and the community (Boyle, Topping, & Jindal-Snape, 2013).

A decade after the enactment of the Education of All Handicapped Act, researchers reported that the consistent use of separate facilities for students with disabilities continue (Stites et al., 2018). Two separate trains of thought characterized the debate: One for placement of students with disabilities in a separate facility, and the other educating students with disabilities in the same schools as general education students (McLeskey, Waldron, & Redd, 2014). The data collected regarding placement of students with disabilities made an impact, as administrators provoked an in-depth investigation into the LRE principle and IDEA provisions (Stites et al., 2018).

Further action was needed in order to protect the rights of students with disabilities. Legislation holds schools accountable for students with disabilities receive education that is both exceptional and equitable in addressing the needs of all students (Stites et al., 2018). As schools become more inclusive, the role of schools and teachers change; a different approach to teaching in an inclusive environment must become more prominent (Boyle et al., 2013).

The No Child Left Behind Act

The NCLB was enacted to hold schools accountable for ensuring that all students, even those with disabilities, make adequate yearly progress on academic achievement benchmarks and measures while being included in the general education classroom to the greatest extent possible. It also mandated that highly qualified teachers provide this instruction. The IDEIA (ISBE, 2018), in concert with NCLB (2002), provided support for students with disabilities that allowed them to benefit from instruction in the general education classroom. The education of students with disabilities in the general education classroom has taken on new importance as a result of these two legislative mandates (Cosier, Causton-Theoharis, and Theoharis, 2013). While progress has been made towards including students with disabilities in the general education settings, little evidence exists that students have been successful (Hind et al., 2019). Some evidence exists indicating that schools have been effective in achieving positive outcomes for students in highly inclusive settings (Ballard & Dymond, 2017).

Every Student Succeeds Act

The passage of ESSA in December of 2015 further provided states an opportunity to reflect on their current systems of education, and to identify what improvements are still needed. The provisions in ESSA (2015) stated that much progress has been made over the last 40 years since the passage of the IDEIA, yet there is still so much work to do to ensure that all children, including children with disabilities, are prepared for success.

Proposed regulations under ESSA state that all students, including those with IEPs, must adhere to the state academic content standards for the grade level in which the

student is enrolled (ESSA, 2015). This ensures that students with disabilities are held to the same challenging state academic standards as their nondisabled peers. This legislation would require an increased number of students with disabilities educated in the general education setting with content area experts with supports and services. Students with disabilities would be required to take the same assessments as general education students (ESSA, 2015). While the percentage of students with disabilities educated within the general education classroom rose, the students' test data did not rise (Da Fonte & Barton-Arwood, 2017). With the landscape of today's classrooms changing, all educators are expected to support a wide range of learners including students with disabilities (Da Fonte & Barton-Arwood, 2017).

Those who favor separate schools argued that students with disabilities need an entirely separate educationally setting (Da Fonte & Barton-Arwood, 2017). The argument put forth that it is unrealistic to expect general education teachers to learn and implement instructional procedures that are required for students with disabilities (Stites et al., 2018). Embedded in this argument was the concern that the amount of time necessary to educate these students takes time away from the other students. Each student with a disability comes to the classroom with a unique and varied set of needs and a plan that affects the educational benefit received from instruction (Rakap et al., 2017). Teachers have been charged with the task of meeting the varied needs of all the students which takes additional time and resources (Zagona et al., 2017).

Amr, Al-Natour, Al-Abdallat, and Alkhamra (2016) suggested financial reasons were driving the push for the education of students with disabilities in the general

education classroom rather than the needs of students with disabilities. This may mean that there is an overreliance on teacher aides and their support in the general education classroom, which could be inadequate for both teacher and student.

Zagona, Kurth, and McFarland (2017) argued that school systems must seek alternative methods of effective resources for the education of students with disabilities in the general education environment to improve. Resources should be tailored to student need versus overreliance on teacher aide support, creating less of a financial burden on a school district. According to Kauffman (2015), the concern should be for what and how curriculum is taught, rather than where students are placed. This one size fits all approach is not in the best interest of students with disabilities and could have detrimental effects.

Another perspective in support of inclusion emphasized systems-capacity building to meet the needs of students with disabilities in the general education classroom; herein, general education is responsible and should take the lead for educating all students (Stites et al., 2018). School professionals must promote a culture of excellence that enables all students to explore and build upon their gifts and talents rather than focus on their weaknesses or disabilities (Amr, Al-Natour, Al-Abdallat, & Alkhamra 2016). This means finding creative and innovative ways to cater to the diversity of students in the classroom both with and without disabilities.

Educating students with disabilities in the general education classroom provides access to regular schooling for students with disabilities. Da Fonte and Barton-Artwood (2017) suggested all students benefit from effective and quality instruction in a classroom. Education in a general education classroom allow students with disabilities to

have numerous peer interactions to build upon social skills (Able, Sreckovic, Schultz, Garwood, & Sherman, 2015); students benefit from social skills while interacting with same age non-disabled peers.

Students with mild disabilities were educated in a general education classroom for more than two decades in the United States (Ballard & Dymond, 2017). NCLB (2002) called for highly qualified teachers for all students; the IDEIA (ISBE, 2018), in concert with NCLB (2002), provided support for students with disabilities that allowed them to benefit from the educational curriculum in the general education classroom.

IDEIA (ISBE, 2018) mandated that students be included in their LRE. This means that they are educated with students who are nondisabled to the maximum extent appropriate and removed only when the nature of their disability is such that this cannot be achieved successfully. LRE has placed students with special needs in the general education classrooms for part or all of the day (Ballard & Dymond, 2017). An increased number of students with disabilities in the general education classroom placed increased pressure on teachers to meet the needs of a significantly more diverse group of learners (Ballard & Dymond, 2017). Inclusion has taken on added importance.

The proportion of students with disabilities who spend at least 80% of their school day in the general education classroom has increased steadily in the past 20 years (Ballard & Dymond, 2017). The LRE mandate provided a preference for educating students with disabilities in a general education environment while providing services as needed to meet students' needs. This mandate was included in federal law to increase the access of students with disabilities to general education classrooms, while reducing the

practice of segregating students with disabilities, educating them in separate classes, or educating them in special facilities (Ballard & Dymond, 2017).

In principle this mandate has been met with acceptance and support from special educators and advocates; controversy emerged regarding the interpretation and practice (Caputo & Langher, 2014). Trends across age levels and disability categories varied, and research is still needed to identify the quality of instruction and success of the students with disabilities in general education. Access to general education and inclusion are not synonymous (Barrio & Combes, 2015). Practitioners have defined *inclusion* as a belief system in which all students feel as if they belong and are a meaningful part of the classroom community (Amr et al., 2016).

Many teacher preparedness programs provide instruction associated to the characteristics of students with disabilities; few programs offer actual courses specifically addressing the differentiation of instruction for students with disabilities (Amr et al., 2016). Meeting the requirements of diverse abilities require teachers possess attitudes and skills that could lead to positive changes in students' social and academic behaviors (Barrio & Combes, 2015). Dual training in general and special education could produce educators who are more willing and capable of dealing with students with diverse needs.

The education of students with disabilities in the general education classroom could be successful if both general and special educators view each other as equals (Da Fonte & Barton-Arwood, 2017). This perception could increase the likelihood that they would communicate meaningfully about all aspects of the education. The ability to communicate and collaborate effectively increases the likelihood that the inclusion of

students with disabilities would be successful (Da Fonte & Barton-Arwood, 2017). This collaboration benefits the students with special needs and benefits the student body as a whole (Caputo & Langher, 2014). Collaboration is also a good way for teachers to model effective communication to students.

The practice of educating students with mild disabilities in the general education classroom has placed an increased number of students with disabilities in these classrooms for part or all of the day (Caputo & Langher, 2014). The percentage of students with disabilities who are educated more than 80% or more of the day in the general education classroom has increased from 34% in 1990–91 to 58% in 2007–2008, and up to 60.5% in 2012 (Able et al., 2015). This means students with disabilities were included in general education classrooms for 80% or more of the day.

Increasing numbers of students with disabilities being educated in the general education classroom has placed pressure on both schools and teachers to meet the needs of all students (Amr et al., 2016). A small number of schools have been successful in both meeting demands for quality and equality in the education of students with disabilities in the general education classroom (McLeskey et al., 2014). Ward, Montague, and Linton, (2003) examined the issue of how the inclusion of students with special needs in South Texas was achieved in the midst of high stakes testing and accountability. General education teachers in the study were not interested in having a student with a disability in their classroom and were not confident in the ability of students with disabilities to test well on high-stakes testing.

In order for success within the schools where teaching students with special needs are working in collaborative classrooms, skilled teachers are needed. Teachers with skills that change students' education – academically, socially, and behaviorally. Among students with mild disabilities, learning disabilities are the most common disability that are placed in general education classroom. About 80% of students with a learning disability have a reading disability (Barrio & Combes, 2015). On average, these students read 3 to 5 years behind their grade-level peers (DeMatthews, 2018). As these students encounter increasingly complex content in middle grades and beyond, teachers should be prepared to meet their deficits.

There is evidence that students with disabilities are graduating at higher rates, scoring higher on high-stakes testing, and earning higher grades in school (Sagner-Tapia, 2017). Numerous factors contribute to the success of highly effective schools. One of the greatest factors is teacher attitudes and perspectives. Less than half of general education teachers supported the education of students with disabilities in the general education classroom. Support from general education teachers is a key factor in the ultimate success of inclusion (DeMatthews, 2018).

Barriers. Barriers to the education of students with mild disabilities in the general education classroom still exist. Specific attitudes play an important role in successful teaching. McGee and Wang (2014) concluded that teacher self-efficacy has a great impact on teachers' perspectives. Teacher self-efficacy is the belief that teachers hold regarding their capability to bring about desired instructional outcomes, including successfully educating difficult students (Zhang, Wang, Stegall, Losinki, & Katsiyannis,

2018). Efficacy beliefs have been shown to have a relationship with a large variety of school factors. Teacher efficacy has been positively correlated to higher academic achievement, effective teacher practices, increased family involvement, decreased referral rates to special education, and higher levels of teacher job commitment (McGee & Wang, 2014). General education teachers who have a positive self-efficacy believe they can be successful educating students with disabilities in their classrooms (Da Fonte & Barton-Arwood, 2017).

In order to hold positive attitudes about educating students with disabilities, all teachers need to believe that students with disabilities can learn to the best of their abilities (McGee & Wang, 2014). Teachers who had positive attitudes were more likely to include students with disabilities in the daily activities of the class, and students without disabilities were more likely to feel positive towards these classmates (Stites et al., 2018).

Stites, Rakes, Noggle, and Shah (2018) looked at the factors that contributed to the success of students with disabilities in the general education classroom and concluded that teachers' beliefs and perceptions were influential in meeting the needs of all students and how these beliefs were enacted in classrooms. The most repeated theme that emerged was the teachers' emphasis on meeting the needs of all of the students. In addition, they concluded that the administrators and teachers were devoted to meet the needs of each and every student who attended the school. Teachers who were interviewed had high expectations for everyone. Qualities such as responding with high expectations and skilled pedagogy were visible in teachers and administrators (Zhang et al., 2018).

Teachers collaborated, learned, and supported one another. Collaborative approaches enabled the teachers to have a positive attitude towards meeting the needs of all students in the classroom.

There is a significant relationship between collective teacher efficacy and student achievement; the same is true for student problematic behavior and job satisfaction of teachers (Ninkovic & Knezevic-Florin, 2016; Bandura, 1993). The positive effects of collective teacher efficacy on the student outcomes has been described as the result of the increased enthusiasm and perseverance of teachers (Ninkovic & Knezevic-Florin, 2016). A high level of collective teacher efficacy leads to the commitment of teachers towards common goals and objectives, the concept of high professional expectations, and acceptance of responsibility for their students' academic outcomes (Zhang et al, 2018).

When teachers feel positive about their collective capability to affect the quality of teaching and learning at school, this leads to the improvement of academic outcomes of the students. In contrast, a low collective teacher efficacy leads to lower student performance and, as such, collective teacher efficacy becomes even lower. A self-perpetuating cycle of failure affected both teachers and students (Ninkovic & Knezevic-Florin, 2016).

Attitudes towards teaching students with mild disabilities in the general education classroom can have an effect on the quality of instruction (Ninkovic & Knezevic-Florin, 2016). Teachers who develop a strong sense of self-efficacy can achieve more success with all students. They are able to adapt their instruction to meet the needs of all students, while differentiating their instruction to meet the needs of all students in their classrooms.

(Ninkovic & Knezevic-Florice, 2016). This requires accommodations and modifications to lessons and instructions.

Training that teachers receive during their preservice training is instrumental in their attitudes and perceptions of teaching students with disabilities in a general education classroom. Barrio and Combes (2015) investigated the self-reported preparedness of preservice elementary teachers in regard to response to intervention education and referrals of students to special education programs; they discovered a lack of consistency in preservice programs in colleges and universities across the United States. Zagana et al. (2017) suggested preservice teachers had a perceived lack of confidence in their ability to instruct students with disabilities. Inconsistencies in preservice teacher programs have implications on the teachers' self-efficacy and attitudes regarding educating students with disabilities in the general education classroom (Barrio & Combes, 2015).

Maximizing learning opportunities for all students in the classroom requires a general teacher to have the knowledge about the core content. These teachers must also have the ability to develop, collaborate, plan, and deliver individualized lessons for students receiving special services (Friend & Bursuck, 2012). The ability to communicate and collaborate learning strategies with special education teachers is essential for the progress of students with disabilities. These skills can be taught, developed, and practiced in the preservice program and through student teaching practicums.

Attitudes and beliefs can affect the education of students with mild disabilities. Krischler et al. (2019) reported that the majority of high school teachers in their qualitative case study expressed uncertainty, and at times negative attitudes in their

beliefs about the education of students with disabilities. These beliefs can have direct implications for the quality of the education of the students with disabilities (Da Fonte & Barton-Arwood, 2017).

Da Fonte and Barton-Arwood's (2017) main focus of their research was 26 preservice general education teachers' perceived lack of knowledge, competence, and confidence. They found the more challenging the disability was perceived, the more their attitudes were affected negatively. According to McGee and Wang (2014), the majority of general education teachers in their study supported the education of students with mild learning disabilities, mild physical, sensory, and medical disabilities in a general education classroom. Students with emotional and behavior disorders raised concerns among teachers. Contributing factors in teacher attitudes included practical considerations such as time, logistics, class load, and training, which all have an effect on the instruction in the classroom (Zagona et al., 2017).

Some of these attitudes are formed during preservice training. Despite the shift of students with disabilities into inclusive settings, general education teachers routinely do not receive adequate training for meeting their learning needs (Vitelli, 2015). Rakap et al. (2017) investigated the impact of two special education courses on teacher candidates' attitudes towards inclusion. A total of 29 teacher candidates participated in the study at a university in the United States; teacher candidates held slightly positive attitudes towards inclusion before they took any courses focused on special needs education. Initial positive attitudes increased slightly after the first course; completion of the second course

was associated with a large and statistically significant increase in teacher candidates' attitudes toward inclusion.

There are many effective practices in the education of students with disabilities in the general education classroom that can have a positive effect on student growth. The first is collaboration and communication (Da Fonte & Barton-Arwood, 2017). Shared leadership amongst all professionals working towards a common goal and feeling adequately supported in the classroom is important. In order to achieve this, teacher collaboration was viewed as a critical component of the equation (Pellegrino, Weiss, & Regan, 2015).

Collaboration and communication. General and special educators need to view each other as equals and have the ability to communicate and collaborate effectively with each other (Da Fonte & Barton-Arwood, 2017). Their positive perception of their roles increases the likelihood that they will communicate meaningfully about all aspects of the education. This collaboration not only benefits the students with special needs but benefits the entire student body as a whole (Zagona et al., 2017). When teachers work together to develop and deliver high-quality curricula attentive to diverse learning in their classrooms, students' achievement increases (Pellegrino et al., 2015).

Shared leadership. Teacher participation in decision making and sharing responsibilities is needed (Ninkovic & Knezevic-Florice, 2016). Shared leadership between the principal and teachers helped build successful communication and positive relationships. Viewing general education and special education teachers as unique individuals who both bring a set of skills to the classroom, helps build a successful team.

While the general education teachers may have more knowledge and content and curriculum, the specialized teacher may have more knowledge and understanding in individual learning styles and how to make modifications and accommodations to the materials so that they are appropriate for all students (Zagona et al., 2017). Sharing ideas would benefit general education teachers in feeling more prepared when educating students with disabilities in their classrooms (Pellegrino et al., 2015).

Common goals. Developing common goals is essential in the education of students with disabilities in the general education classroom (Ninkovic & Knezevic-Florice, 2016). Decision making and problem solving are easier when teachers and staff members share common goals. Conflicts and difficulties arise in all types of teaching situations. Resolving these issues as fairly and quickly results in serving the students better (Ninkovic & Knezevic-Florice, 2016). Planning together, sharing duties and tasks, communicating, sharing goals, and putting children first are actionable ways teachers can develop a successful inclusion program able to reflect student need (Zagona et al., 2017). Common goals should be discussed and revised often; educators are then able to plan instruction in the component skills to ensure achievement and growth for all students (Barrio & Combes, 2015).

Supports. The attitudes among the entire school staff are also important to the attitudes and beliefs of teachers. Caseload numbers, respective duties, and responsibilities affect the availability of special educators to collaborate with general education teachers (Giangreco, Suter, & Hurley, 2011). Stress has been identified as a key component in the perceived satisfaction of teachers towards the education of students with disabilities in

the general education classroom (Amr et al., 2016). A high rate of professional turnover in education, mostly due to job-related stress was also highlighted in literature (Caputo & Langher, 2014). These stresses include challenging situations, lack of administrative and parental support, not enough supplies, and too many students. In order to meet the needs of all students, supports must be in place to ensure all students' needs are being met (Celik & Kraska, 2017).

Collaboration, shared communication, leadership, common goals, and support from other staff could help meet the needs of all students (Caputo & Langher, 2014). These are just some of the effective practices in the education of students with disabilities in the general education classroom that could have a positive effect on student growth. Staff members had more positive attitudes towards the education of students with disabilities when staff were included in the decision making process (Amr et al., 2016). Self-efficacy and teacher perception of preparedness played a strong role in effective teaching of student with disabilities.

Common topics in the literature emerged, which included methods to assess the education of students with disabilities in the general education classroom and the attitudes and perceptions of the teachers and staff. Gilham and Tompkins (2016) assessed the knowledge of preservice elementary, secondary, and special education teachers regarding the education of students with disabilities in the general education classroom. They found course work and field work did not align to what teachers would encounter in the real-world. This contributed to teachers' lack of confidence in their ability to implement strategies in the classroom.

Bialka (2017) found that preservice teachers student teaching placements helped to shape attitudes and beliefs regarding teaching students with special needs. Bentley-Williams, Grima-Farrell, Long, and Laws (2017) examined perspectives of school leaders, special education mentors, and preservice teachers on fostering conducive experiences and qualities of inclusive teaching. Bentley-William et al. (2017) wanted to understand critical aspects of what types of professional experiences and qualities are necessary for preservice teachers in order to meet the needs of their inclusive teaching roles. They showed the need for promoting positive attitudes towards inclusion and highlighting the need to prepare teachers who are capable and dedicated (Bentley-Williams et al., 2017).

Summary and Conclusions

In this chapter, the literature review was presented, including the history of special education legislation, an overview of practices, and a review of past studies related to the research problem. In Chapter 3, the methodology and research design that were applied to explore the perceptions of participants are described. Descriptions include the data collection, analysis, and coding procedures.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The research method is the blueprint for the strategies and procedures that are used to collect, organize, and analyze the data. The methodology and procedures used for this basic qualitative study established a foundation to explore and examine teacher perspectives. The purpose of the research was to examine general education teachers' perspectives regarding their self-efficacy for teaching students with mild disabilities in the general education classroom. I interviewed general education teachers in this study to provide further data regarding these perceptions. With the trend in special education of moving towards fully educating students with disabilities in the general education classroom, this research is important in understanding the phenomenon and promoting social change. Demands on educators today are increasing; educators must be able to diversify their teaching methods to meet the needs of an increasing diverse population. It is essential to know general education teachers' perceptions about their self-efficacy for teaching students with mild disabilities in their classroom.

Research Design and Rationale

The study incorporated a qualitative research methodology with a basic qualitative study design. Qualitative research comprises a naturalistic setting as the direct data source, descriptive data in the form of narratives rather than numbers, concern with process versus outcomes, inductive reasoning, and searched for the meaning of how people interpret their lives (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Administrators and stakeholders enabled me to better understand teachers' perspectives of the education of students with disabilities in the general education classroom.

Qualitative research was appropriate for this study due to the attempt to understand the perceptions of general education teachers teaching students with disabilities in the general education classroom. I examined these perceptions in their social context. Although there are many categories of qualitative research designs, I used the basic qualitative study.

Basic qualitative researchers are interested in how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In a basic qualitative study, interview data can be collected and compared (Vannoni, 2015). It enables the study of practices and assumptions that underlie a constructivist paradigm (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This study on the perceptions of general education teachers towards teaching students with disabilities in their classroom allowed for a small sample size to obtain individual in-depth experiences.

Qualitative research is best used when there are no known variables and there is a need to engage in and make meaning of an activity or experience (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This research included an exploration of general education teachers' perceptions of the education of students with disabilities in the general education classroom. Researchers often use qualitative research methods to identify the perceptions of participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). For this study, participant perceptions of teaching students with disabilities in the general education classroom could lead to an improvement in the education of students with disabilities.

The basic qualitative study was the most appropriate method for this research due to the emphasis on developing a deeper understanding. Quantitative research was not appropriate for the purpose of this study because there was not a hypothesis or prediction regarding possible relationships between the perceptions of general education teachers and the success of students in their classrooms. Teachers' perceptions regarding students with special needs emerged through questioning during the interview process.

In this basic qualitative research study, general education teachers' perceptions regarding the education of students with disabilities in the general education classroom was studied along with their feeling of preparedness. To explore the perceptions of general education staff members, I used two main questions as the basis of the research:

RQ1: What are junior high general education teachers' perceptions about their ability to teach students with disabilities in their classrooms without a special education teacher present for most of the day?

RQ2: What are junior high general education teachers' perceptions of their motivation and persistence in meeting the needs of students in their classrooms?

Role of the Researcher

I took on many roles in the context of this study: observer, participant, and the participant-observer (Walden University Center for Research Quality, 2014). I took on the role of interviewer. This role aligned with the research questions and the basic qualitative research method. The fact that I was an administrator in the district did not affect participants' honesty. As a district officer administrator, I did not interact with the

junior high staff. I did not observe, nor did I evaluate the participants; participants' responses were not affected.

Methodology

Throughout this study, I gathered data through interviews of selected participants. The interviews focused on the perceptions of general education teachers towards having students with disabilities in their classroom and how well they felt prepared to meet the needs of the students with special needs.

Participant Selection

The participants were general education teachers from a junior high in an elementary district who currently taught students with disabilities in their classroom. Participants in the study included 10 junior high general education teachers selected from a large elementary district. Thirty teachers fulfilled the requirements for selection; 10 teachers volunteered for the study and were selected.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

I asked for volunteers from the junior high school and selected 10 teachers from the pool to gain a better understanding of each participant's perceptions towards teaching students with special needs in their general education classroom. To participate in the study, teachers must have had general education licensure in the state in which they teach, taught for at least 2 years, and had students with disabilities in their classroom. There was no conflict of interest as I had no supervisory role over the participants.

I sought permission from the superintendent to complete the study in the district, effectively proposing my study. The superintendent was given the basis and rationale for

the research along with documents that were used. Once permission was received, all junior high teachers who had students with disabilities in their classroom were contacted via e-mail and participants were chosen from those who volunteered. Those chosen received an e-mail with information regarding the study and were requested to sign an informed consent form before the initial interview. I gained approval from Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) prior to recruiting research participants or collecting any data. The IRB approval number was 11-13-19-0304146. IRB approval demonstrated that the potential benefits of this proposed study would likely to outweigh any risks or burdens being placed upon the participants in accordance with the university's ethical standards as well as United States federal regulations.

Instrumentation

Participants in the study must remain confidential in order to minimize bias. The participants were assigned numbers to maintain their confidentiality. A demographic questionnaire was given prior to the interview. The names of participants will not be shared. I adhered to a semi structured interview process to provide consistent results. I recorded the interviews and used a specific set of guidelines and questions. Experts in the field such as special education administrators and the superintendent of schools reviewed the guidelines and questions. I implemented additional probing questions to elicit additional extended descriptions and prompt the participants to elaborate and give further detail in their responses.

Data Analysis Plan

Prior to the interview process, an expert panel made up of a special education administrator, two general education teachers, and two special education teachers reviewed the interview questions. I purposely selected these professionals as experts in their field and reviewed the questions for clarity. I interviewed each participant to gather a rich, detailed description of teachers' perceptions. Data from the interviews were coded and organized utilizing NVivo and kept in hard copy at my residence, saved on my personal home computer, and kept confidential. All files and documentation will be destroyed after 5 years.

I interviewed the participants individually at their school site in a secure office area. This approach was more time consuming, but it allowed me to gather the most data. I scheduled interviews when the participants were able and willing. In addition, I performed member-checking via the district's secure e-mail system to ensure accuracy and credibility of the data. Member checking procedures involved providing each participant with a copy of the draft findings to review for the accuracy of my interpretation of their data and for viability of the findings in the setting.

The interview protocol contained the purpose of this study and provided assurance of the confidentiality of the information. The format of the interview was semistructured. During the interview process, I asked probing questions to get a deeper understanding. I recorded participants' answers via an audio recording device and handwritten notes.

Data analysis is the process of gathering all the data to make sense of what has been collected. Creswell & Guetterman (2019) described the process of analyzing qualitative data into four broad steps: organize the data, code the data, discover descriptions and themes, and report the findings. I used these steps in analyzing data from this study.

Oftentimes, even the shortest of interviews may result in many pages of transcription (Taylor, Bogdan, & DeVault, 2016). Organization of the data was essential in making sense of the information. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), organization can take on several forms. During the interview process, I wrote field notes and recorded the conversations. The audiotapes were converted into transcription via an upload to NVivo. Patterns and themes emerged and developed. I organized and analyzed these themes and patterns for emerging perceptions of teachers. The demographic data I gathered included the teachers' number of years taught and education level.

Coding the data is the process of segmenting and labeling text to form descriptions and themes (Taylor et al., 2016). Open coding was used for this research project, in which segmenting data into meaningful descriptions and describing them in single words or short sequence of words. I attached relevant annotations and concepts to these expressions. In order to achieve this, the software such as NVivo from QSR International (2014) was used to organize the data. I imported the transcripts of interviews to NVivo and NVivo organized the data with queries to search for text, analyze word frequency, and cross-tabulate data. NVivo created matrices, maps, and categorized the data (QSR International, 2014). After I categorized and mapped the data,

trends in data appeared and I organized this data using the Bandura's social cognition theory as the conceptual framework.

Threats to Validity

I used different methods to ensure credibility in the research. The first was spending an adequate amount of time interviewing the participants; the average time of the interviews was a half hour to an hour. Another was ensuring the interactions during the interviews were meaningful and I had built trust with the participant. I pledged to the participants their identity would remain confidential and information gathered would be used for educational purposes. I recorded audio files of the interviews in order to ensure reliable and valid interpretations of the conversations.

To ensure accuracy, I validated my findings through various strategies. I used member checking to ensure the accuracy of the information. Member checking procedures involved providing each participant with a copy of the draft findings to review for the accuracy my interpretation of their data and for viability of the findings in the setting. Member checking was implemented to validate my analysis of interviews. Interviewees were sent a copy of the transcribed interview and asked to validate whether their description was complete and realistic.

Trustworthiness

Interviewing study participants has its advantages and disadvantages. Some advantages emerged; the participants provided useful information that could not be directly observed. Advantages arose as the participants detailed and described personal information (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Some disadvantages to interviewing result

from the presence of a researcher, which could affect the interviewees, who may provide filtered information (Taylor, et al., 2016).

Credibility

Credibility refers to whether the participants' perceptions of the events match up with the researchers (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Making the participant feel comfortable, fostering trust, and spending meaningful time with the participants enabled me to minimize filtering and enhance relationship building. In addition, I used member checking to ensure my biases did not influence how the perspectives were portrayed.

Transferability

Transferability refers to the degree of similarity between the researcher's site and other sites as judged by the reader (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Examining the richness of the descriptions in the study, as well as the amount of detail provided, addressed the potential for transferability. The reader is the person who must judge transferability; the researcher's role is to provide readers with enough detail for them to decide whether similar processes would work in their school or community.

Dependability

To address dependability, I provided detailed explanations of how I collected and analyzed the data. I collected the data through an interview process and recorded audibly and with detailed notes. I analyzed the data using the computer software NVivo.

Confirmability

Confirmability is the researcher's comparable concern to objectivity (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). In order to ensure confirmability, I checked and rechecked the data

during the entire research process. I continually checked the data, in doing so, I increased the rigor of confirmability in my research.

Ethical Procedures

The ethical protection of participants is extremely important in research. Two issues dominate guidelines in research: the first is the participants give informed consent, and the second is the participants are protected from harm (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Informed consent is a statement that researchers provide to participants, promising or guaranteeing the participants of their rights. Researchers must gain approval from the IRB in order proceed with their study.

The participants signed the informed consent, acknowledged the protection of their rights, and agreed to participate in the study. Participants' rights included the ability to remove themselves from the study at any time (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). I gave participants the right to know what the study entails, and the risks associated with participation in the study. Participants had 24 hours to review the informed consent before signing consent. Participants returned their consent forms to me via e-mail. Participants were not coerced, and protected individuals (children, elderly, individuals with disabilities, and inmates) were not included in the study.

My professional role is that of district administrator. My role is not related to the current research study. I have no supervisory position over the study participants. No foreseeable issues affected the data collection procedures. Meeting with the participants established good rapport. I interviewed the participants in a mutually agreed upon

location in order to reduce stress. This location maintained the privacy and confidentiality of the participants.

Summary

The purpose of the research was to examine junior high general education teachers' perspectives regarding teaching students with disabilities in the general education classroom. I interviewed junior high general education teachers in this study to provide further data regarding these perceptions. The general education teachers have a license to teach general education students and have students with disabilities in their classrooms. This research was important in understanding and promoting social change, when considering the trend of moving towards fully educating students with disabilities in the general education classroom.

Demands on educators today are increasing. Educators must be able to diversify their teaching to meet the needs of an increasing differing population. It is essential to know what general education teachers' perceptions are regarding the education of students with mild disabilities in their classroom.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to identify general education teachers' perceptions regarding teaching students with disabilities in their classrooms. I investigated the perceptions of junior high general education teachers about their ability and their motivation to teach students with disabilities in their classroom. Two research questions were investigated. The first research question concerned the perceptions of general education teachers about their ability to teach students with disabilities in their classroom without a special education teacher present for most the day. The second question concerned the junior high general education teachers' perceptions of their motivation and persistence in meeting the needs of students with disabilities in their classrooms.

This chapter contains six sections. The first section contains the setting and participant demographics. In the second section, I discuss data collection characteristics, including the number of participants, location, frequency, and duration of data collection. The next two sections contain the data analysis process and the results of the qualitative data analysis. The final two sections of Chapter 4 include a presentation of the evidence of trustworthiness and a chapter summary.

Setting

The setting for this study was a school district in the Midwest. For the 2019 State Report Card, the state reported the district demographics as 84.6% African American, 11.1% Hispanic, 2.4% Caucasian, 0.3% American Indian, 0.8% Asian, 0.6% Multi-Race, and 0.1% Pacific Islander. The district is 95.2% low income with all students receiving

free breakfast and lunch. Other district demographic data included the percentage of students with IEPs at 14% and 4.2% English language learners.

Participants

I conducted the research in a setting that was natural to each participant. The settings varied from the participants' classroom, the junior high library, or a conference room in the junior high. Participants were given their location choice for the interviews. The participants of this study were employed in an urban junior high school for the 2019–2020 school year. During the data collection period, no personal or organizational conditions influenced participants. There were 10 participants in this study; nine females and one male. Participants' experience in teaching students with disabilities ranged from 4 years to 27 years. Table 1 contains a complete reporting of the available demographic information. Participants were randomly assigned numbers to protect their identity.

Table 1

Respondent Demographics

	<i>n</i>	% of Sample	Mean
Gender			
Male	1	10%	
Female	9	90%	
Education level			
Bachelors	4	40%	
Masters	2	20%	
Masters +	4	40%	
Years Teaching	10		15
Years Teaching Students with a Disability	10		14

Data Collection

This section includes a description of the location, frequency, and duration of the data collection process. A brief introduction to the study was mentioned to the building principal of a junior high school that contains Grades 6 through 8. A detailed invitation was sent to all 36 certified teachers at the junior high school electronically on December 4, 2019. I informed possible participants of the eligibility requirements and that their invitation could be collected or sent back electronically. The eligible participants were junior high general education teachers who had students with special needs in their classroom. All teachers who met the requirement were invited but not required to participate.

Of those who were invited and eligible, 13 teachers responded to the request to participate in the study. From the 13 respondents, the first 10 were selected for the study because the sample size was limited to 10. The interviews took place over an 8-week period that began December 9, 2019 and concluded January 31, 2020. The teachers were contacted to set up a date, time, and location to conduct the interview. The interviews lasted an average of 35 minutes and took place in the junior high school, either in the teachers' classrooms or the library. I conducted all the interviews, including the screening procedures, informed consent, and demographic information. The first 5 minutes were spent explaining the study and reading and discussing the informed consent. The next 5 minutes were spent collecting the demographic information. After gathering the demographic information, I asked the 10 questions, including probing following up questions. At the conclusion of each interview, the respondent was asked to participate in

member checking to determine the accuracy of the information collected. The audio recording was uploaded into NVivo and a copy of their transcript was sent to each participant to review within a week of the interview.

The Data Recording Process

The data were recorded using the voice record app on an iPad and through handwritten notes. I did not script responses. I occasionally wrote field notes during the interviews to identify personal feelings or reactions based on responses, write key words or phrases that I wanted to revisit, or to write down possible connections for further examinations during the data analysis stage. Each interview was recorded separately and transcribed using NVivo transcription software. When member checking, the transcribed notes were sent to each participant separately via district e-mail within a week of the interview. Participants were asked to clarify any inaccuracies in the transcription. Participants were also provided a copy of the draft findings to review for accuracy of my interpretation of their data and for viability of the findings in the setting. There were no unusual circumstances that arose from collecting the data.

Adjustments in the Data Collection Process

I arranged to interview the first 10 eligible teachers who volunteered to participate in the study. The data collection took longer than anticipated because of the 2-week holiday break. The extended time did not break with IRB protocol.

Data Analysis

This section provides a detailed account of the data analysis process. First, I uploaded the audio files to NVivo for transcription. I recorded all interviews using the

voice recorder app on an iPad. They were recorded and saved as an .mp3 file. I uploaded the .mp3 files into the NVivo transcription software and transcribed them to Word documents for coding. I performed all data analysis, including coding and theme development, inside the NVivo software. Each transcription was coded for common words and phrases using NVivo. I highlighted the coded sections and identified as perceived barriers or enablers towards implementing inclusion. I went through each code to look for themes that addressed the research questions of the study. As the transcriptions were separated, themes began to emerge.

Each interview question was developed so that responses could produce enough data to answer the research questions. I used pattern coding during the second stage of analysis to identify similarly coded data. I organized the whole body of data into combined categories that I used to identify emergent themes that included attributes of the conceptual framework and answered the research questions. To develop codes into categories, I applied several strategies using NVivo to triangulate data consisting of (a) rereading field notes for themes that emerged during interviews, (b) reviewing the analytic memos recorded during the coding stage in NVivo to emphasize the relationship to the theme, and (c) identifying notes of recurring data.

Codes, Categories and Themes

Holistic coding. Holistic coding is a method to identify broad themes or basic ideas found in the whole body of data and is meant as a precursory step to more detailed coding (Senler, 2016). During this step of coding, I compiled commonalities using NVivo in two categories: barriers and concerns. This strategy enabled me to compile and arrange

the holistic data in a logical format so I could scrutinize the data into smaller codes. The categories centered on barriers and concerns that general education teachers had when teaching students with disabilities in their classroom, which aligned with the purpose of this study.

For example, participants were asked a general question to describe the different disabilities in their classroom. The holistic idea generated from this question revealed all participants had a varied description of the disabilities in their classroom. All 10 participants noted that their classroom student population had mixed ability levels. Participant (P)8 described her classes as being all ability levels from second grade up to tenth grade. P6 described her classroom as cohesive by design. The teachers in her grade level grouped students by their ability level. P5 described her classroom as various levels and disabilities including slow learners, autistic students, and students with behavior issues.

Pattern coding. During the second stage of the analytic process, I used pattern coding to reorganize and combine similar ideas based on the emergent categories that were uncovered. The process was accomplished using NVivo to highlight and sort connections between the data and new substantive themes. I then established themes that emerged relative to the conceptual frame and research questions.

Results

The findings of this study were based on the perceptions of general education teachers towards teaching students with disabilities in their classroom. I conducted the research to investigate the thoughts, feelings, practices, and experiences of middle school

general education teachers regarding inclusion. Overall, I found several minor themes during the data analysis stage. I combined the minor themes to create overarching themes for each research question. Overlapping themes emerged with the research questions. In the following section I describe the themes that emerged from the data, which answer the research questions of this study.

Codes for Research Question 1

The first research question in this study was as follows:

RQ1: What are junior high general education teachers' perceptions about their ability to teach students with disabilities in their classrooms without a special education teacher present for most of the day?

I developed classification codes to identify responses that addressed this question either directly or indirectly. A code was developed and assigned to participants' responses that related to the research question directly.

Resulting Themes from Research Question 1 Codes

After the codes for RQ1 were developed, I read each code inside NVivo to determine what common themes were represented on the code topic. After I reviewed the transcripts and the several stages of coding, four themes emerged related to how the general education teachers perceived their ability to teach students with disabilities in their classrooms. The four themes that emerged for RQ1 were students' behavior, classroom size, training, and colleague support.

Code and Theme Descriptions

I began the process of identifying the specific codes that emerged from the data analysis and a sample of the association quotations. Research question 1 addressed the general education teachers' perspectives regarding their ability to teach students with disabilities in their classrooms. I used two codes to capture the different themes associated with research question 1. Preparation was the first code that emerged. This code identified the thematic comments related to teachers' feelings towards their preparation for teaching students with disabilities in their general education classroom. Several participants had responses related to their perception of preparation they received to teach students with disabilities in their classroom. The prevalence of these responses reflected the theme's importance, as all 10 participants spoke of their perceived lack of preparation. Student behavior was the first theme that emerged. Table 2 contains a sample of comments from the respondents.

Table 2

Research Question 1: Participant Responses—Perceptions Toward Teaching Students with Disabilities: Preparation and Student Behavior

	Participant responses
Participant 7	“A lot of what I've gathered was just from experience. Being thrown into it. You know, just getting to know the students at hand.”
Participant 6	“I didn't have a lot in college. You know they make you take like one or related to two classes and that's pretty much it. So, I really didn't have a lot of teaching experience before I went out into the actual real world with students.”
Participant 5	“Well, you receive one or two classes when I was in school you had to take that was specific to specialist to allow you to know more. There was a book. We had to go and do observation hours in the field to see things, but not a lot of training that would actually tell you how to deal with them on a day-to-day basis.”
Participant 10	“The knowledge acquired to meet the needs of students with disabilities was acquired during my tenure as an instructor through self-study, trial and error and through the observation of my colleagues.”
Participant 4	“I have students that are able to do the work but behavior wise, it's hard to get them to focus and do the work.”
Participant 1	“They do not prepare you for the emotional or behavioral challenged students.”

The next theme that emerged was classroom size. Seven of the 10 respondents stated that they felt overwhelmed teaching students with disabilities in what they perceived as large classroom sizes. Table 3 reflects sample responses from the interviewees.

Table 3

Research Question 1: Participant Responses–Perceptions Toward Teaching Students with Disabilities: Preparation and Class Size

Participant responses	
Participant 3	“It is just too much. I think 12 to 15 students should be the max.”
Participant 6	“You cannot effectively do anything because you have 20, sometimes 30 students in a classroom. It is a disadvantage to everyone.”
Participant 5	“For me it is all about the class size. They do not prepare you in school for teaching a full classroom and have students with disabilities included as well.”
Participant 2	“I do not need a class of a million. I need to be to address the students with disabilities.”
Participant 4	“A particular class that I had was really challenging. There was already 24 students in it and they added 6 extra students. These 6 students all had disabilities. It was a lot. If I had a smaller class, I could have fit those students in better.”

The third theme that emerged was preservice training. All 10 respondents spoke of their lack of preservice training. Table 4 contains various responses regarding general education teachings perceived lack of training.

Table 4

Research Question 1: Participant Responses–Perceptions Toward Teaching Students with Disabilities: Preparation and Preservice Training

Participant responses	
Participant 7	“My student teaching did not have any students with disabilities.”
Participant 6	“You receive 1 or 2 classes in school. You read books about disabilities and did some observation hours That was it.
Participant 5	“They gave you some case studies to read and most of them were antiquated. The terminology and everything has changed.”
Participant 3	“I’m really going to say I had no preparation or preservice training.”

The fourth theme that emerged was collegial support. Six of the 10 respondents stated that they have relied on their colleagues, both special education and general

education, to provide support as they taught students with disabilities. Table 5 contains responses from the interviewees.

Table 5

Research Question 1: Participant Responses–Perceptions Toward Teaching Students with Disabilities: Preparation and Collegial Support

	Participant responses
Participant 7	“I work with the Resource Teachers. They give me support and they visit my classroom often.”
Participant 7	“You just try to work with people and figure it out.”
Participant 8	“I seek out the teachers that I know have had the training. They give me students with strategies to work with.”
Participant 2	“I seek out my colleagues and try to spend time with them to make sure that the concepts are understood.”
Participant 4	“I seek out the Resource Teachers to give me ideas.”

Training was the second code that emerged from the interviews in relation to research question 1. All of the respondents indicated that professional development training related to students with disabilities occurred infrequently. Some mentioned that they had never had training in this area at all. Some mentioned possible trainings they would like to see occur in order to feel more prepared to teach students with disabilities. Table 6 includes responses regarding teachers perceived like of professional development regarding students with disabilities.

Table 6

Research Question 1: Participant Responses–Perceptions Toward Teaching Students with Disabilities: Professional Development and Training

	Participant responses
Participant 7	“I still go back and read my books from college and try to gather information. I struggle without training.”
Participant 5	“I would like a training on disabilities in general. When they introduce new labels or when new strategies come out. It would be nice to have before the student is right in front of you.”
Participant 3	“I feel as though we all could use more training. We are struggling.”
Participant 2	“We need to be trained in the beginning. It is unfair. We are given inadequate tools to address the population.”
Participant 9	“I do not feel as though I have adequate training. My knowledge acquired to meet the students of students was derived during my tenure as an instructor and through self-study, trial and error.”

Codes and Resulting Themes for Research Question 2

I progressed to code research question 2. The second research question was concerned with general education teachers’ perceptions regarding their motivation and persistence in meeting the needs of students in their classrooms. I read the transcriptions from NVivo to determine the common themes represented on the code topic. Three themes generated from this code: preservice training, teacher motivation, and colleague support. Participants’ responses associated with each of the themes confirmed the importance of emerging themes.

The first theme that emerged from the research for research question 2 was perceived lack of preparation or training. All 10 teachers stated they were extremely motivated to teach students with disabilities in their classroom. This theme was also evident in research question 1. The main challenge they face is their perceived lack of training and education. Some participants stated this had an impact on their motivation.

Some participants' statements regarding their motivation as it relates to professional development and training in shown in Table 7.

Table 7

Research Question 2: Participant Responses–Perceptions Toward Teaching Students with Disabilities: Motivation and Preservice Training

	Participant responses
Participant 8	“I am absolutely motivated to teach all of my students, including those with disabilities. I just lack some training on how to serve that population of students.”
Participant 1	“I always want to learn about my students, but I also believe its how you build a relationship with them. Learn about them and you can find ways to help them. You find the type of learning style that works for them. I know I am not a specialist and I have a lot to learn, but I believe in looking for all different ways to teach my students.”
Participant 9	“I just believe with more knowledge; I can reach my students.”
Participant 2	“I am quite motivated, but I need help.”

Teachers' overall motivation for teaching as a professional also had an impact on how some of the participants perceived their motivation towards teaching students with disabilities. A few participants made statements overall regarding their motivation for teaching or their motivation for teaching junior high students. A sample of the responses can be found in Table 8.

Table 8

Research Question 2: Participant Responses—Perceptions Toward Teaching Students with Disabilities: Motivation and Overall Teacher Motivation

Participant responses	
Participant 4	“I feel all of our children have a disability. As they get older you can’t make them do anything. They are so challenging, I am challenged every day. I am trying my hardest to find new ideas and things to do with them every day.”
Participant 1	“My personal belief is that if you care about teaching, you can meet all the students’ needs.”
Participant 7	“In the school I was teaching at last year, the students tried very to be successful. I don’t feel that here. These students cannot produce the same quality.”
Participant 6	“As long as they are willing to try, I am willing to help them succeed in whatever they do.”
Participant 5	“I believe that I can reach my students. However, I can’t care more than they do.”
Participant 3	“I just think teachers need to change.”
Participant 1	“I am motivated. I am motivated to teach.”

Collegial support was the final theme from research question 2, which was also present in research question 1. Respondents felt collegial support was essential in maintaining positive motivation when teaching students with disabilities in their classrooms. Responses are shown in Table 9.

Table 9

Research Question 2: Participant Responses–Perceptions Toward Teaching Students with Disabilities: Motivation and Colleague Support

Participant responses	
Participant 5	“I believe with knowledge and support; I can reach these students. Part of that is trying to find a way to encourage them so they realize they can succeed.”
Participant 5	“I would say that I am motivated, the highest number there can be. I work with a really great team that supports me so that I can support my students.”
Participant 7	“I talk to my team every day. We teach the same students. Some teachers may struggle with certain students and some may thrive. We continually talk about how we can be more successful. We all support each other and it is a good feeling.”

Summary

In summary, all of the general education teachers who were interviewed for this study stated they had positive perceptions of teaching students with disabilities in their classrooms. All respondents stated their perceived lack of preservice education and preparation affected the perceptions of teaching students with disabilities in their classrooms. Preservice training and preparation affected their motivation to teach students with disabilities in their general education classroom.

Collegial support was another theme common to both research questions. All general education teachers who were interviewed stated they relied upon other teachers, specialists, and their team to assist them with ideas, accommodations, and modifications for their students with disabilities. The participants stated this was not a substitute for preservice training and continuous professional development and support. The

respondents felt that being able to rely on others and a team provided them motivation to teach students with disabilities.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to obtain the perspectives of junior high general education teachers regarding teaching students with disabilities in their classroom. The U.S. Department of Education (2011) recommended to every extent possible, children should be educated with their same aged peers; unfortunately, funding for special education has decreased drastically over the past few years. As a result, an increased number of students with special needs are receiving instruction in the general education environment (Zagona et al., 2017). Research was limited on how junior high general education teachers perceive whether their preservice training and professional development has prepared them for the role of teaching students with disabilities. Zagona et al. (2017) found educators' familiarity with inclusive education and their ability to self-evaluate their willingness to implement inclusive education could influence their attitudes and beliefs toward the practice of inclusion.

The results of this study indicated general education teachers look favorably upon teaching students with disabilities in their classrooms if they get the preparation, training, and support they feel is necessary to help the students be successful. Participants indicated that general education teachers perceive they did not have enough preservice training during their college or university program. Most of the participants stated they were required to take one class that addressed the basic categories of disabilities, but the class did not go in depth regarding how to meet the educational and behavioral needs of students with special needs. They also felt the class did not prepare them for the reality of teaching students with disabilities in their classroom. Most participants stated that

students with motivation and school resistance issues were their biggest concern.

Bentley-Williams et al. (2017) noted participants concern about their preparedness to teach students with disabilities. Bentley-Williams et al. (2017) discovered that providing educators with knowledge to become better practitioners was essential in the success of students with disabilities.

Teachers believed they could use more professional development training.

General education teachers felt a successful inclusive program needed adequate staff with teachers and support professionals who are adequately trained and prepared to meet the needs of students with disabilities. Participants also stated they were motivated to teach students with disabilities but struggled at times with being able to do so successfully.

Interpretation of the Findings

Research Question 1

Based on the data I obtained from the semistructured interviews with junior high general education teachers, I discovered that the participants did not believe they had adequate preservice training. All respondents indicated they were required to take one course in their education program that touched upon special education. All respondents stated this single course did not prepare them to teach students with disabilities effectively. Amr et al. (2016) was concerned teacher preparedness programs provide instruction associated to the characteristics of students with disabilities, but few programs offer actual courses specifically addressing the differentiation of instruction for students with disabilities. Barrio and Combes (2015) investigated the self-reported preparedness of preservice elementary teachers in regard to response to intervention education and

referrals of students to special education programs; they discovered there was a lack of consistency in preservice programs in colleges and universities across the United States.

Most of the respondents shared two main concerns: how to deal with student behavior effectively, and how to address the students' social and emotional needs. These themes emerged in every interview. It is also important to note that most respondents stated they struggled with keeping students motivated and on-task. These behaviors took away from classroom instructional time for all the students. According to McGee and Wang (2014), the majority of general education teachers in their study also supported the education of students with mild learning disabilities and mild physical, sensory, and medical disabilities in a general education classroom, but not students with emotional and behavior disorders, which raised concerns among teachers.

The majority of respondents believed the classroom size affected their ability to teach students with disabilities. The teachers were concerned that the more students they had in a classroom, the more time was taken away from addressing the needs of students with disabilities (McGee & Wang, 2014). Zagona et al. (2017) found contributing factors in teachers' attitudes were practical considerations such as time, logistics, class load, and training. These all have an effect on the instruction in the classroom.

With a perceived lack of preparation and training, all respondents indicated that they relied on other colleagues to better prepare them for teaching students with disabilities. Every respondent stated they had gone to special education staff and other teachers in the building for support and assistance in teaching students with disabilities in

their classrooms. Each respondent stated they learned more from their colleagues about students with disabilities than they had in their teacher preparation program.

Research Question 2

Based on the data obtained from the semistructured interviews, all respondents stated they were motivated to teach students with disabilities in their classrooms. A major theme of the research was the lack of training and preparation needed to teach students with disabilities. Some participants stated this had a negative impact on their motivation to teach students, especially students who have behavioral needs. Inconsistencies in preservice teacher programs and professional development were found to have implications for the teachers' self-efficacy and attitudes regarding educating students with disabilities in the general education classroom (Barrio & Combes, 2015).

Some respondents felt they needed more professional development and training on motivating students. Many of the teachers stated their students with special needs lacked motivation, and sometimes found difficulty getting them to produce work. A few respondents indicated they needed assistance overall with classroom management and meeting their students' social and emotional needs. Da Fonte and Barton-Arwood's (2017) main focus of their research was 26 preservice general education teachers' perceived lack of knowledge, competence, and confidence. They also found that the more challenging they perceived the disability; the more their attitudes were affected negatively.

All of the respondents stated they relied on their colleagues to support them. Collegial support presented as themes in both research questions. The teachers stated they

had solid relationships with other professionals in the building who assisted them with accommodations and modifications as well as social and emotional needs of the students.

Limitations of the Study

The limitations of this study were that the findings may be difficult to generalize because the participants were limited to 10 junior high general education teachers in one urban school district. The respondents taught Grades 6 through 8 and had students with mild learning and behavioral disabilities. IDEA minimizes these limitations: IDEA requires the provision of inclusive education for all students with disabilities to the maximum extent appropriate (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). A study that investigates the perceptions of general education teachers regarding teaching students with disabilities could be conducted in any public education system in the United States and with any grade level population and disability.

Recommendations

This study could lead to further research focusing on junior high general education teachers' perceptions of teaching students with disabilities. One of the most frequently occurring themes was the teachers' perceived lack of preparation both in their preservice program and the district's professional development programs.

General education teachers communicated that additional training is needed for them to feel confident in their abilities to teach students with disabilities successfully. Without the proper support elements in place, inclusion may not serve students with disabilities appropriately, and teachers could potentially suffer the frustration of inferior performance results, while developing beliefs they are incapable of managing the task of

educating students with special needs (Zagona et al., 2017). All the participants in this study recommended further professional development and training in meeting the needs of students with special education needs. A few participants wanted training in how to motivate reluctant learners. Two other participants suggested additional training in differentiation of instruction within a classroom. The prevailing need amongst all the participants was classroom management. General education teachers specifically wanted more assistance with serving students with severe emotional and behavioral needs in a general education classroom.

The results aligned with the theoretical framework I used for this study. The self-efficacy theory is based on people's beliefs about their capabilities to produce designated levels of performance or exercise influence over events that affect their lives (Bandura, 1994). In this study, the respondents' perceived lack of preparation and training negatively impacted their confidence and motivation to teach students with special needs in their classroom.

Colleges and universities that have teacher preparation programs could benefit from the dissemination of the results of this study. Participants felt strongly that their respective programs did not adequately prepare them for teaching students with disabilities in their classrooms. School district administrators could also benefit from the results to formulate and prepare professional development and training regarding students with disabilities for their general education staff. These actions could benefit general education teachers as United States' education policies recommend inclusion for all students with disabilities.

Future research should focus on what steps colleges and universities could take so that teachers feel better prepared to meet the needs of all their students. Future research could also explore specific professional development recommendations that districts provide to better assure that general education teachers are prepared and comfortable teaching students with disabilities.

Research could be extended beyond junior high to include elementary, secondary school general education, and college level instructions. Gaining the perspectives of teachers who work with students in other grade levels could contribute to the understanding of trainings and supports. Creating opportunities for collaborative efforts are needed to successfully include students with disabilities into general education classrooms. Elementary and secondary teachers may have different experiences and insight, given that they work with either younger or older students.

Implications

This research has the potential to contribute to informed decision making, allowing for general education teachers to have additional training in colleges or universities for success in meeting the needs of students with disabilities. This research may support professional education programs that use qualitative data, identify the supports needed for general education teachers, and include students with disabilities in the general education setting. Teachers' personal beliefs regarding their ability to meet the needs of students with disabilities and meeting state implemented standards are problematic. The research collected in this study confirms that teachers' perceptions

regarding their preparation had a negative effect on their perception of their ability to meet the needs of students with disabilities.

This study has the potential to affect positive social change in response to the federal mandates to educate students in the LRE (IDEA, 2004) and local mandates that have put increased pressure on districts to include students with disabilities in the general education population. General education teachers who receive adequate training and supports have positive perceptions in regard to their ability to meet the needs of students with disabilities. General education teachers who are comfortable and knowledgeable contribute to social change; some purposefully increase the number of students with disabilities who are successfully educated with their same aged peers.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of the perspectives of junior high general education teachers about their education, training and motivation to teach students with disabilities in their classrooms. In 2017, the U.S. Department of Education restated IDEA's (2004) goal that all children with disabilities should have access to high-quality instruction with high expectations for learning outcomes. Understanding teachers' perceptions emerged as a critical factor of ensuring a positive education experience for students with disabilities (Able et al., 2015).

Through the results of this study, I found that general education teachers look favorably upon teaching students with disabilities in their classrooms. What concerned these teachers was their perceived lack of preparation and training. Teacher concern with

not being able to support and service children with disabilities, especially children with behavioral difficulties, allowed me to view the perceptions of general education teachers.

As a special education teacher and administrator, it was important for me to understand the thoughts and perceptions of general education teachers as they take on the task of education students with disabilities. This study changed the way I perceived how general education teachers felt about teaching students with disabilities. Prior to this study, I believed that general education teachers did not want students with disabilities in their classrooms. This belief was a personal bias I had upon entering this study.

I was relieved to hear from the participants that they were genuinely invested in teaching students with disabilities. All of the participants enthusiastically spoke about their beliefs that all students should have access to high quality instruction and be educated with their same aged peers. They communicated their concerns of feeling unprepared. Their perceived lack of preparation is a reflection on teacher preparation programs as well as district sponsored training and professional development. As a result of this study, I have prepared proposals for professional development that I have introduced to the superintendent.

This study was important to education because teacher perspectives affect the implementation of inclusion, and their attitudes affect the students' beliefs about themselves and their abilities (Able et al., 2015). Schools must understand how to address teacher perspectives while moving forward with inclusive practices. General education teachers are successful teaching students with disabilities when given the proper training and support systems.

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Appendix: Interview Protocol

Participant No.:

Please complete form. All information will be kept strictly confidential.

Study Topic: Perceptions of general education teachers regarding the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education classroom.

1. Gender? _____
2. What's your highest level of education? _____
3. How many years have you taught? _____
4. How many years have you taught students with disabilities?

Research Questions:

RQ1: What are junior high general education teachers' perceptions about their ability to teach students with disabilities in their classrooms without a special education teacher present for most of the day?

RQ2: What are junior high general education teachers' perceptions of their motivation and persistence in meeting the needs of students in their classrooms?

Interview Questions:

1. How would you describe your classroom?
2. How would you describe the different disabilities in your classroom?
3. What is your preservice training regarding students with disabilities?

4. Do you feel your preservice training adequately prepared you to teach students with disabilities?
 - a. Probing: Please explain why or why not.
5. How motivated are you to teach students with disabilities in your classroom?
6. Describe your persistence in ensuring that students with disabilities meet their goals in your general education classroom?
7. What are your concerns (if any) regarding students with disabilities in the general education classroom?
8. Do you believe a student with disabilities can be successful in the general education setting? (please explain)
9. How would you describe your self-efficacy (personal belief) regarding your ability to meet the needs of students with disabilities in your classroom?
10. Do you believe your self-efficacy regarding teaching students with special needs effects your classroom teaching.
 - a. Probing: Please explain how