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## General Education Teachers' Perceived Preparedness to Teach Students with Emotional Disturbance

Darleen Johnston  
*Walden University*

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# Walden University

College of Education

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Darleen Johnston

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,  
and that any and all revisions required by  
the review committee have been made.

Review Committee

Dr. Derek Schroll, Committee Chairperson, Education Faculty

Dr. Karen Clark, Committee Member, Education Faculty

Dr. Matthew Basham, University Reviewer, Education Faculty

Chief Academic Officer and Provost

Sue Subocz, Ph.D.

Walden University

2022

Abstract

General Education Teachers' Perceived Preparedness to Teach Students with Emotional  
Disturbance

by

Darleen Johnston

MEd, Grand Canyon University, 2013

BS, The University of Tampa, 2006

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

Walden University

March 2022

## Abstract

There is limited information regarding specific types of training general education teachers want or need to meet the needs of students with emotional disturbance (ED) in inclusion settings. Many teachers are assigned in inclusive settings without advanced training related to inclusion to effectively teach students with ED. Guided by Bandura's social cognitive theory, this study was used to determine general education teachers' perceptions of what types of training are needed to increase their perceived ability to effectively teach students with ED. Research questions helped determine what types of training general education teachers feel are needed to increase their self-efficacy to teach students with ED in the general education classroom. A basic qualitative case study design was used to select 11 general education teachers who teach or have taught students with ED in the general education classroom in a northern Georgia school district. Data for the study were obtained through interviews that were recorded and transcribed, then analyzed and coded using open and axial coding. Participants identified the need for training that focuses on de-escalation strategies, identifying triggers of students, and reasons for ED. This study may contribute to positive social change by identifying needed types of training for teachers who can increase their self-efficacy when working with students with ED. District personnel can use results to make decisions regarding training needed for general education teachers who work with students with ED in inclusion classrooms.

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## Dedication

This study is dedicated to the students who have helped me become the teacher I am today. It is also dedicated to my family; without your encouragement I wouldn't be where I am now. To my mom and dad, I know you have been watching over me and guiding me through this journey, especially during the harder times.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Under the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) of 2004, students with disabilities are required to have access to least restrictive environments (LREs; Eller et al., 2015). Often, services in LREs have led to students who have disabilities receiving their academic instruction in inclusive general education classrooms, including students with emotional disturbance (ED) issues (McKenna et al., 2019). Literature on serving students with ED has concentrated on struggles general education teachers face when meeting the behavioral needs of students with ED; however, few researchers have addressed general education teachers' perceptions of what is needed to be prepared to meet the behavioral needs of ED students in their classrooms. There are strong positive social change implications for improving general education teacher readiness and self-efficacy to meet behavior needs of students with ED.

Including students with ED in the general education classroom is one of the greatest challenges general education teachers can face (McKenna, et al., 2019). To be successful in meeting differing needs of students with ED in the general education classroom, general education teachers need to understand students' disabilities and how to meet their individual needs (Breeman et al., 2015). Results of this study may provide school administrators with insights regarding what general education teachers need to successfully teach students with ED in their classrooms.

In Chapter 1, I present background information regarding inclusion of students with ED, define the problem, and describe the significance of the problem. I also provide

limitations and assumptions of the study. Key definitions used throughout the study are defined and key research questions that guide the study are presented.

### **Background**

Inclusion is becoming prevalent in schools as students with ED transition from self-contained to general education classrooms. Mandated by the 2004 revision of the IDEA, students with disabilities are to participate in LREs to the maximum extent that is appropriate with nondisabled peers (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). In the United States, it is estimated that roughly “1% of school-aged children have ED” (Eller et al., 2015, p. 80), and most of these students are enrolled in mainstream K-12 public schools and can receive academic instruction in general education classrooms (McKenna, et al., 2019). As students with disabilities receive their education in general education classrooms, schools are required to maintain educational accountability (Leko et al., 2015).

General education teachers must be knowledgeable, not only regarding curriculum, but also accommodations that can be used in the classroom as well as be prepared to effectively use accommodations (Gilmour, 2018). General education teachers also need in behavior skills when working with students with ED (Harrison et al., 2018). However, teachers receive limited training that targets the unique needs of students with ED (State et al., 2019).

There is a gap in practice regarding meeting the needs of students with ED in the general education classroom. General education teachers want training to be more effective when students with ED are in their classrooms (Gilmour, 2018; Ruppert et al.,

2016). However, teachers are not receiving the trainings they want; therefore, they do not feel prepared to meet the needs of these students (Ruppar et al., 2016). Furthermore, researchers have not determined specific trainings wanted by general education teachers that would increase their self-efficacy when working with students with ED. This study was designed to investigate general education teachers' perceptions of what is specifically needed to help increase their preparedness and self-efficacy when teaching students with ED in the general education classroom.

### **Problem Statement**

General education teachers who perceive themselves as prepared to meet needs of students with ED have a higher sense of self-efficacy, which leads to increasing students' behavioral and academic success (Kuyini et al. 2016). However, general education teachers who have a lower sense of self-efficacy regarding their ability to teach students with ED exhibit less effective teaching strategies, thus affecting student achievement (Herman et al., 2018). According to State et al. (2019), there are "insufficient numbers of teachers with adequate training to competently address the needs of students with ED" (p. 108). Lack of training creates a low sense of self-efficacy in terms of teaching students with ED in the inclusive classroom setting (State et al., 2019).

Although researchers have addressed general education teachers needing training to serve students with ED in the general education classroom, the problem is they have not addressed specific types of training general education teachers feel is necessary to meet needs of ED students in their classroom. With a lack of understanding regarding what general education teachers need to be successful when teaching students with ED in

the general education classroom, there is a gap at the school district level to provide needed training for general education teachers. Results of this study could provide insight regarding specific needs of general education teachers to handle behavior concerns with ED students in the general education classroom.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to identify specific types of training general education teachers that teach in grades Kindergarten to fifth grade, in a northern Georgia elementary school, feel is needed to increase their ability to effectively handle behavior concerns with students with ED in general education classrooms. Results from the study will be used to identify research-based gaps in practice for preparing general education teachers to meet the needs of students with ED. Results will also be used to provide research-based recommendations to improve general education teachers' preparedness to teach students with ED and close the gap in practice by knowing specific trainings needed to increase self-efficacy.

### **Research Questions**

Research questions in this study are intended to help identify general education teachers' perceptions of supports needed to help them effectively work with students with ED in the general education classroom.

*RQ1:* What types of training have school district leaders provided to general education teachers to help them understand how to effectively work with students with ED?

*RQ2:* How do elementary general education teachers describe their self-efficacy regarding inclusion practices for students with ED?

*RQ3*: What specific types of training do general education teachers feel is needed to improve their inclusion practices for students with ED?

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework of this study is Bandura's social cognitive theory. Bandura (1993) said people's beliefs about their abilities produced their level of performance. If individuals feel they have the ability to be successful, they are more likely to be successful. Bandura (1977) said a specific course of action will produce specific outcomes; however, if one has doubts about their ability to perform the necessary actions, they may be hesitant to partake in activities. Teachers' beliefs reflect their feelings of preparedness and self-efficacy; thus, general education teachers need to have feelings of preparedness to implement effective behavior strategies when working with students with ED (Ruppar et al., 2016). When it comes to classroom teaching, "the strength of people's convictions in their own effectiveness is likely to affect whether they will even try to cope with given situations" (Bandura, 1977, p. 193). Bandura's social cognitive theory also involves the idea that how a person feels, thinks, and behaves are determined by their level of knowledge, and people develop beliefs about their abilities through lived experiences.

Bandura's theory of self-efficacy also pertains to this study since the theory suggests that a teacher's successful experience involving a task can produce success again. However, if a general education teacher perceives their ability to effectively teach students as not proficient, the teacher is less likely to attempt to teach in an inclusive classroom (Herman et al., 2018). Furthermore, self-efficacy is a teacher characteristic that



can be altered through cognitive restructuring and mastery experiences (Bandura, 1997). Thus, creating a higher sense of self-efficacy and improvement in terms of effective practices can allow general education teachers the ability to gain confidence regarding their teaching abilities when working with students with ED.

Teachers who work with students with ED have a higher level of stress than those who do not and are more dissatisfied with their jobs (Ruppar et al., 2016). These negative emotions have been found to have an impact on teachers in terms of lower self-efficacy (Koenen et al., 2019). General education teachers do not feel confident when teaching students with ED than general education teachers who do not work with students with ED (Odongo & Davidson, 2016; Kocbeker-Eid, 2016; Koenen et al., 2019; Ruppar et al., 2016). The theory of self-efficacy is discussed more in Chapter 2.

### **Nature of the Study**

A basic qualitative study design was used in this study. The study site, located in northern Georgia, is a suburban public elementary school that serves students in grades K through 5. There were 11 participants who were general education teachers who work in the inclusive classroom and teach or have taught students with ED. With the focus of the study on elementary general education teacher perceptions regarding needed training, individual and in-depth interviews were used to collect data. Interview questions were open-ended with follow-up questions as needed. Each interview was voice-recorded to ensure accurate transcription.

After interviews were conducted and transcribed, they were coded using open coding followed by a second cycle of axial coding. After interviews were coded,

information gathered from interviews showed trends and suggestions to increase self-efficacy for general education teachers.

### **Definitions**

*Emotional Disturbance:* A condition involving one or more of the following characteristics over a long period of time: inability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors, inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers, inappropriate types of behaviors or feelings under normal circumstances, general pervasive moods of unhappiness or depression, and a tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems (Reg. 200.8.c.4.i).

*Inclusive Classroom:* This term refers to inclusion in an LRE. Wrightslaw (2004) said “to the maximum extent appropriate, school districts must educate students with disabilities in the regular classroom with appropriate aids and supports” (p. 100).

*Professional Development:* Meaningful learning, in which teachers develop their conceptions and change their teaching practice (Makovec, 2018).

*Self-efficacy:* People’s preconceptions regarding their abilities to perform, which can affect their actual performance in a variety of contexts (Bandura, 1993).

*Special Education:* Specifically designed instruction at no cost to parents that meets the unique needs of children with disabilities (IDEA, 2004)

### **Assumptions**

One assumption of this study was that interview questions were not biased. A second assumption of this study was that participants understood and provided honest

answers to questions during interviews. I assumed teachers gave honest answers about their beliefs regarding professional development that can enrich their understanding of working with students with ED in the general education classroom.

### **Scope of the Study**

Participants who were invited to be a part of the study were fully certified to teach in a public school district in the general education classroom. Each teacher who participated works or has worked in a cotaught classroom that serves students with ED. Participants may or may not have their certificate to teach special education or have taught special education in the past. By studying general education teachers who teach in the cotaught setting and students with ED in their classrooms, more in-depth information can be gathered and analyzed. This in turn will lead to a more detailed understanding of what types of training are needed and can assist administration in terms of planning for and providing needed training to general education teachers.

### **Delimitations**

Delimitations are deliberate limitations in the study set by the researcher (Amanfi, 2019). This study involves interviewing teachers in a northern Georgia elementary school. The selection of participants is limited to elementary teachers that focus on grades Kindergarten to fifth grade who have taught in the co-taught classroom for a minimum of one year. Participants were certified teachers who currently work at the specific school site. Participants teach or have taught in the inclusive classroom and worked with students with ED.

### **Limitations**

There are some limitations to the study. Limitations are factors that can happen that are out of the control of the researcher (Amanfi, 2019). Qualitative methods typically have a smaller sample size, which impacts my ability to generalize findings. Another limitation involves selection of the participants. Participants consisted of only female teachers as none of the male teachers at the school volunteered to participate.

### **Significance**

In this study, I addressed concerns in special education research by focusing on what general education teachers feel is needed to effectively teach students with ED in the general education classroom. When students with ED are included in the general education classroom, teachers who are not properly trained can become overwhelmed due to behavior concerns exhibited by students (Eller et al., 2015).

When students with ED are sitting in the general education classroom, interventions need to be used to meet behavioral needs (Hunter et al., 2017). General education teachers are concerned about their ability to employ needed behavior interventions due to lack of professional development (Skarbetz & Kostewicz, 2015). With inclusive education being widely recommended to improve academic and social outcomes for students with ED, it is of importance to understand teachers' perceptions of their ability to implement effective behavior strategies as well as perceptions of training needed to meet the needs of students with ED.

Research conducted during this study has the potential to determine perceptions of what is needed to meet needs of students with ED. Results of this study can benefit

school leaders by increasing their understanding of why general education teachers feel ill-prepared to meet the needs of students with ED. The strongest predictor of teacher self-efficacy is their belief in their preparedness to teach (Ruppar et al., 2016). Potential findings of this study could lead to positive social change by providing recommendations to increase preparedness of general education teachers who have ED students in their classroom, thus increasing their self-efficacy. Findings can also advance professional development by providing specific training opportunities that can potentially increase all teachers' feelings of self-efficacy and preparedness.

### **Summary**

Through revisions and implementation of the IDEA of 2004, students with disabilities are required to receive their education in LREs. This can lead to students with ED receiving their academic instruction in the general education classroom, leading to general education teachers having the responsibility to effectively teach these students. However, there is a lack of training for general education teachers. This lack of training can lead to limited preparedness, which can mitigate the effectiveness of general education teachers when meeting needs of students with ED in the general education classroom (Gilmour, 2018; Harkins & Fletcher, 2015). In Chapter 1, the nature of the study was explored, key terms were defined, the study's significance was discussed along with the research problem, and research questions were presented.

Chapter 2 will address Bandura's social cognitive theory and theory of self-efficacy. Chapter 2 also provides an inclusive examination of current literature that focuses on students with ED, inclusion, and best practices for providing training to

general education teachers to increase the effectiveness of teaching students with ED in the general education classroom. I will also address gaps in special education practices related to the inclusion of students with ED.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter contains a review of current literature related to general education teachers' perceptions of preparedness to teach students with ED in the general education classroom. The literature review includes an overview of the history of inclusion, general education teachers' perceptions of inclusion, ED, and preparedness to teach students with ED in the general education classroom. The literature review also includes research regarding elementary general education teachers' perceptions of professional development.

### **Literature Search Strategy**

An extensive literature search has been conducted to provide support for the study and research problem. Information in the literature review was gathered using the Walden University Library, ERIC, Wrightslaw, and Google Scholar. Key search terms were *advantages of inclusion, disadvantages of inclusion, perceptions of self-efficacy, emotional disturbance, emotional behavior disorder, elementary education, inclusion, special education, general education, general education teachers, self-efficacy, professional development, and preparedness*. The literature search was refined to peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2015 and 2021.

### **Conceptual Framework**

Bandura (1993) said people's levels of performance was based on their beliefs regarding how well they could perform the task. People use self-reflection to not only make sense of their experiences, but also understand what they are capable of in order to help shape their actions (Bandura, 2009). Self-efficacy is the foundation of a person's

wellbeing, personal accomplishments, and motivation (Bandura, 2009). If one has doubts about their ability to perform a task, they may have a negative outlook regarding personal accomplishments and be less motivated to partake in a task. Bandura (1997) said a teacher's perceived efficacy can influence the classroom environment for students as well as their judgement about teaching tasks.

Self-efficacy refers to a person's confidence in their ability to complete given tasks to the greatest potential so they can attain specific goals (Catalano et al., 2019). Teachers' level of self-efficacy is related to their willingness and ability to perform a task. Bandura (1977) said "the strength of people's convictions in their own effectiveness is likely to affect whether they will even try to cope with given situations" (p. 193). If a general education teacher perceives that he or she can effectively teach students with ED in the general education classroom, they may be more likely to do so. General education teachers who have high self-efficacy are those who use highly effective teaching strategies, are more dedicated to their job, and may work harder with students with ED in the general education classroom, which in turn creates positive teacher-student interactions (Catalano et al., 2019; Koenen et al., 2019).

Teachers' feelings of preparedness are a strong indicator of whether they have high or low self-efficacy (Ruppar et al., 2016). Results of the study showed that general education teachers feel ill-prepared to meet the needs of students with ED in the general education classroom (Gregory & Noto, 2018). This feeling of being ill-prepared can increase the risk of teachers not wanting students with ED in their classroom. It is



essential that teachers feel prepared to implement effective strategies in the classroom if they are going to attempt these strategies (Ruppar et al., 2016).

### **Inclusion in General Education**

Inclusion refers to placement of students with disabilities in the general education classroom for academic and nonacademic activities (Westling, 2017). The practice of inclusion has changed dramatically throughout the history of special education.

Originally, students with disabilities were educated in self-contained classes with other peers who were identified as having special needs (Westling, 2017). As the need was seen for changing the way students with disabilities were taught, laws were changed to meet the needs of students. Laws now emphasize the need for a free and appropriate education (FAPE) in the regular education classrooms for students with disabilities (Agran et al., 2020). They also emphasize the need for regular education classrooms to meet differential needs of students with disabilities, expand services, and maintain instruction in LREs (Collins & Ludlow, 2018). As laws for special education have changed, public schools have developed services to accommodate students with special needs. Currently, about half of students who identified as ED receive instruction in the regular education classroom for 80% of their day (State et al., 2019).

Successful inclusion is possible when needed resources and supports are provided, which include support from other teachers, parents, and administration (Pit-ten Cate et al., 2017). Furthermore, successful inclusion requires general and special education teachers to work collaboratively. Each teacher brings their own expertise into the classroom, which allows the classroom to run smoothly and effectively (Westling,

2017). Inclusion can not only promote learning, but also promote social interactions for students with ED (Agran et al., 2020).

Students with ED are not accessing the general education classroom consistently (Argan et al., 2020; Olson et al., 2016). General education teachers refuse to teach inclusive classrooms because they are unfamiliar with effective strategies to teach and manage disruptive behavior (Collins & Ludlow, 2018). This presents a problem for students with ED receiving FAPE in LREs. With students with ED receiving part of their education in the general education classroom, it is essential that general education teachers are effective and have skills to effectively use evidence-based behavior strategies to improve student outcomes (Pit-ten Cate et al., 2018).

### **Benefits of Inclusion for Students with ED**

Some teachers feel that students with severe emotional concerns and behaviors should be taught in self-contained classrooms, away from their general education peers (Dev & Haynes, 2015). However, students with ED belong in the community and should be given the opportunity to be active participants (Westling, 2017). When students with disabilities are in general education classroom with peers, they become more engaged, increase their social skills, have positive self-esteem, and increase their academic progress (Agran et al., 2020; Kuronja et al., 2019; Westling, 2017). When students with ED are included in the general education setting, the learning they are provided is better aligned with grade level standards and provides increased expectations in terms of what they learn (Olson et al., 2016; Zagona et al., 2017). Furthermore, students with ED who receive their instruction in the general education classroom have opportunities to

participate in academic and nonacademic activities with nondisabled peers (Olson et al., 2016). Students with ED have higher dropout rates than their nondisabled peers (Cook et al., 2016). However, when students are able to receive part of their education in the general education classroom, they have a higher rate of being engaged in academic tasks that are linked to state standards. If they start to struggle with curriculum, they can receive support from their peers. This allows students to stay in school and graduate on time (Gilmour, 2018; Olson et al., 2016).

It is important to understand when students with ED display disruptive behaviors, there are usually reasons. General education teachers who perceive disruptive behavior as more than just students acting out can form close bonds with students. When a bond is created, a positive classroom environment is also created for the student, and the student feels safe in the classroom (McGrath & Van Bergen, 2019). Therefore, when negative behaviors occur, teachers can defuse these behaviors without making students feel like they are in trouble. Instead of dismissing behaviors, teachers can adapt instantly and manage behaviors without disrupting instruction (Ruppar et al., 2017). Observing teacher interactions also allows nondisabled peers the ability to learn how to interact with students with ED. As students interact with each other, social skills and self-confidence increase, allowing students to have positive outlooks in terms of social interactions with others (Westling, 2017).

Additionally, students with ED in the inclusive classroom can receive help from two teachers: general and special education teachers. Successful inclusion for students with ED requires the two teachers in the room working together. With successful

inclusion, the teachers can plan together and effectively implement lessons and manage behavior (Westling, 2017). Furthermore, having a special education teacher in the classroom, at the same time, is beneficial in the regard that if the general education teacher is unable to assist the student, the special education teacher can assist when needed (Collins & Ludlow, 2018).

### **Disadvantages of Inclusion for Students with ED**

With the advantages of inclusion, there are some teachers that do not find inclusion beneficial. One objection to having students with ED in the general education classroom is the idea that being in the general education classroom will cause behavior concerns (Agran et al., 2020). Disruptive behavior is one of the biggest stressors experienced by teachers (Nash et al., 2016). Teachers feel the main problem of inclusion is a student's behavior, it stops them from teaching (Martino et al., 2016). When the lesson gets interrupted, it can cause negative emotions of not only the teacher, but of the other students (Kuronja et al., 2019). Behaviors that cause negative emotions from teachers leads to students with ED receiving a decrease in support which can lead to the student becoming disengaged in the class, cause more disruptions, and be perceived negatively by their peers (McGrath & Van Bergen, 2019).

Educators feel students with ED can have a negative effect on the students without disabilities in the classroom (Westling, 2017). It can be a difficult to find the right balance between meeting the academic needs of students without ED while supporting the behavioral needs of students with ED (Zagona, 2017). If a teacher feels they must focus on the behavioral needs of a child, more than the academic needs of

students without ED, the focus of the classroom gets shifted. When this happens, students without disabilities may have lower academic outcomes (Gilmour, 2018). General education teachers feel students with ED choose to behave negatively and when a student disrupts the class, the teacher may punish the student instead of control the situation (Mitchell et al., 2019).

### **Teachers' Perceptions Towards Inclusion**

There is much literature that discusses the negative and positive perceptions of inclusion held by general education teachers. Teacher attitudes towards inclusion can affect the success of the inclusive classroom (Pit-ten Cate et al., 2018). General education teachers often have positive feelings about inclusion. General education teachers feel inclusion is a privilege for students with ED (Kirby, 2016). It is believed that inclusion can promote learning for students since the curriculum in general education classrooms is aligned with the state standards (Zagona, 2017). General education teachers also feel inclusion can also increase the opportunity for social interactions (Agran et al., 2020). Negative attitudes towards inclusion have also been discussed in the literature. Teachers often become hesitant to teach in the inclusive classroom, especially if there is a student with ED in the classroom, due to a lack of understanding of inclusion and behavior management (Zagona, 2017; Gilmour, 2018; Kurth & Forber-Pratt, 2017). The main factors that have influenced the negative perceptions towards inclusion include feeling unprepared to meet the needs of students, having limited resources, and having a low self-efficacy (Pit-ten Cate et al., 2018; Collins & Ludow, 2018; Ruppert et al., 2016).

In a related study, Gregory and Noto (2018) found a teachers' attitude towards inclusion was related to the success of the classroom. It was revealed that general education teachers had a lower self-efficacy because they didn't feel they had the needed resources to effectively teach in the inclusive classroom. Furthermore, when behaviors were a concern, teachers became negative towards teaching in the inclusive classroom. Buttner et al. (2016) found teachers feel they have limited skills to effectively teach students with ED. However, there were some teachers that felt confident in teaching in the inclusive classroom due to a high sense of self-efficacy. General education teachers who have a high sense of self-efficacy believe student success is in their control and have strong classroom management.

The most frequently mentioned issue general education teachers face is the lack of preparation. Kurth and Forber-Pratt (2017) report teachers are in favor of inclusion however, they feel there is a lack in trainings for teachers to effectively work in an inclusive classroom with students with ED. Teachers did not feel they can properly support students who require more than academic assistance. This lack of understanding prevents a challenge for successful inclusion. With the lack of understanding, teachers' attitudes towards inclusion started to turn negative. Celik and Kraska (2017) said teachers who have had previous trainings in inclusion show a more positive attitude towards inclusion, even with behavior concerns present in the classroom. Teachers felt that with more training, attitudes would become more positive about inclusion.

### **Teacher Perceptions of Preparedness to Teach Students with ED**

General education teachers' perceptions about their preparedness to teach students with ED is an indicator of their self-efficacy. If a teacher has a high self-efficacy, they are more likely to implement recommended practices for students with ED (Ruppar et al., 2016). In the general education classroom, general education teachers often have a diverse population of students. Instruction is focused on knowledge acquisition to ensure students are meeting state standards (Kuronja, et al., 2019). When disruptive behaviors occur, general education teachers may struggle to maintain classroom discipline. The most frequent reaction to disruptive behaviors in general education classrooms is ignoring the student, or avoidance, due to a lack of proper training on how to properly handle the disruptive behavior (Kuronja et al., 2019).

General education teachers' ability to regulate their own emotions, and express empathy, when working with students with ED allows them to have a positive learning environment. The positive learning environment can then lead to effective classroom management (McGrath & Van Bergen, 2019). When a teacher does not understand what causes negative behaviors, it presents a problem with managing the behavior. If a teacher understands why behaviors are occurring, the teacher is able to sympathize with the student and manage the behavior (McGrath & Van Bergen, 2019). However, teachers are not trained in how to determine the reason behind a behavior. Teachers have reported that trainings that are offered are not focused on behavior management, they are more focused on characteristics of the behavior (Kurniawati et al., 2017).

Many studies report that general education teachers feel more training is needed to effectively meet the needs of students with ED. Teacher training can offer unique opportunities to learn how to support students that show disruptive behaviors in class (Nash et al., 2016). Furthermore, teacher reservations about inclusion can be reduced since they will have a greater understanding of how to effectively work with students with ED. After being provided with trainings, teachers can become more positive about teaching students with ED in the inclusive classroom (Kurniawati et al., 2017).

Research shows there is a small number of teachers who are properly trained to proficiently address the needs of students with ED (State et al., 2019). Without the knowledge of effective practices, and the consistent use of said practices, teachers and students with ED can experience negative outcomes in the inclusive classroom. For general education teachers to increase their ability to effectively teach students with ED, it is essential they receive ongoing trainings that focus on effective strategies that can be implemented in the classroom (State et al., 2019).

### **Teacher Perceptions of Professional Development**

Celik and Kraska (2017) said teachers who have received specific training that focus on working with students with ED have a greater positive attitude towards inclusion than those who have not received training. The more knowledge general education teachers gain of how to successfully work with students with ED, a positive attitude can be had towards working in the inclusion classroom. However, general education teachers are hesitant to work with students with ED due to the lack of training that has been provided to them. Research shows there are different trainings that are



available to help gain a better understanding of students with ED. However, these trainings are mainly offered to special education teachers and not general education teachers (Kurniawati et al., 2017). Since general education teachers are not offered the chance to take the trainings, they miss the opportunity to learn how to effectively work with students with ED.

General education teachers feel training opportunities offered to them lack in teaching how to successfully work with students with ED (Buttner et. al, 2016; Kurth & Forber-Pratt, 2017). State et al. (2019) report “nine out of 10 U.S. teachers report only participating in one-size-fits-all PD opportunities” (p. 109). Furthermore, more than half of the teachers in the study felt the trainings they did go to did not focus on special needs or classroom management, which are the areas they felt were crucial to know (State et al., 2019). Instead of offering effective strategies and field experience, training focused on the characteristics of students with ED (Kurniawati et al., 2017; Kurth & Forber-Pratt, 2017). Furthermore, most of the trainings are short term and offer no follow ups trainings to see if the information has been used successfully (Kurniawati et al., 2017). General education teachers feel follow-ups would be beneficial so they can determine if what they are utilizing in the classroom has been effective and gain greater insight on different situations (Kurniawati et al., 2017). With proper training, the attitudes of general education teachers can increase, and they will be more willing to work in the inclusive classroom (Celik & Kraska, 2017).

## **Summary and Conclusions**

The literature reviewed in this study illustrated that many general education teachers feel inclusion can be beneficial, however, they are hesitant to teach in the inclusive classroom due to a lack of preparation (Buttner et al., 2016; Westling, 2017). The review started with a discussion on the framework of self-efficacy, followed by a discussion of inclusion. Advantages and disadvantages of inclusion of students with ED was also addressed. Teacher perceptions of inclusion, perceptions of preparedness to teach students with ED, and perceptions of professional development were also discussed in the literature review.

Section 3 contains a description of the research methodology, the research design and rationale, research questions, the role of the researcher, the data collection procedures, trustworthiness, and procedures for ethical protection of participants.

### Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to develop an understanding of general education teachers' perceived preparedness and self-efficacy, along with exploring specific types of training they feel are needed to teach students with ED in the general education classroom in a northern Georgia elementary school. Chapter 3 includes information regarding the research design and methodology that was used to develop an understanding of perceptions of preparedness. In addition to discussing the methodology, I describe data collection procedures and analysis plan that was used in the study. Trustworthiness and ethical considerations in relation to the study and participants are also discussed.

#### **Research Design and Rationale**

This study is a basic qualitative study. Qualitative research involves generating a theory to understand a phenomenon (Burkholder et al., 2016). Qualitative research also involves what is being studied through analyzing information, reporting detailed views of participants, and conducting the study in participants' natural environments (Burkholder et al., 2016; Creswell, 2012). Research questions involve perceptions of general education teachers regarding their preparedness in terms of teaching students with ED in the general education classroom. Research questions also involve what general education teachers feel is needed to increase their preparedness and self-efficacy. Since data were collected through interviews, a qualitative study design was appropriate rather than collecting quantitative data.

The goal of this study is to gain a greater understanding of perceptions of preparedness of general education teachers when working with students with ED in the general education classroom. The following research questions guided the study:

*RQ1:* What types of training have school district leaders provided to general education teachers to help them understand how to effectively work with students with ED?

*RQ2:* How do elementary general education teachers describe their self-efficacy regarding inclusion practices for students with ED?

*RQ3:* What specific types of training do general education teachers feel is needed to improve their inclusion practices for students with ED?

To answer the research questions, a basic qualitative study approach allowed me to focus on insights of general education teachers in grades K through 5. The study was conducted in natural settings which allowed participants to feel more comfortable. If they feel comfortable, participants are more likely to discuss their feelings and opinions freely (Burkholder et al., 2016).

### **Role of the Researcher**

As the researcher, I was the primary instrument to collect data for the study through my participation in interviews and analysis of information. During interviews, I audio recorded participant responses. After each interview, I listened to recordings and made notes. After notes were taken, interviews were transcribed and then data were analyzed. During interviews, I remained objective to help ensure accurate data transcription and analysis.

My personal bias involves students with ED being properly educated in general education settings. I feel students with ED should be included in the general education classroom with general education teachers who have had the proper training to effectively work with students with ED. My personal experiences working with general education teachers' who teach in inclusion settings also plays a role in the study. I believe some general education teachers are willing to work with students with ED in their classrooms; however, they are unsure if they can effectively manage behaviors that may cause problems in the classroom. Research is not related to teachers not knowing how to teach students with ED but rather they have not obtained the same training in most cases, as special educators. One way to ensure that my bias does not have affect research is to acknowledge my biases regarding the study without discussing them with participants and bracketing my beliefs during interviews. Additionally, I informed participants that, as the researcher, it was my job to listen to thoughts of participants while refraining from interjecting any personal opinions. Additionally, I kept an open mind regarding thoughts expressed by participants during interviews.

## **Methodology**

### **Participant Selection**

To select participants for the study, purposeful sampling was used. With purposeful sampling, individuals are purposefully selected to participate in the study based off specific criteria such as certain expertise, specific location, or specific knowledge on the topic. By using purposeful sampling, detailed information can be gathered from specific populations and locations. Participants in this study were general

education teachers in kindergarten through fifth grade who work or have worked in inclusive settings and teach or have taught students with ED. Participants work in a public school district located in a northern county in Georgia. Participants were invited to take part in the study through a general email sent to staff. Email addresses were obtained through the school web site staff list. Emails contained criteria needed to be able to participate in the study. Furthermore, participants were not invited to participate in the study until proper Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was obtained.

### **Instrumentation**

Semi-structured face-to-face individual interviews with participants were used to collect data. An interview protocol form that lists open-ended questions, accompanied by follow-up questions when needed, was used during interviews (see Appendix A). After each interview, I reviewed the recorded interview and made notes regarding participants' responses. Semi-structured interviews involve formal interviews between participants and researchers during which the researcher uses a guide that contains questions that focus on the topic of study (Creswell, 2012). For this study, research questions were created to focus on perceptions of preparedness to teach students with ED in general education classrooms. Questions also focused on what general education teachers feel is needed to increase their ability to effectively work with students with ED in their classrooms and increase their self-efficacy. Interview questions allowed participants to speak about their experiences, perceptions, and needs in relation to the identified phenomenon. Once information was gathered, transcribed, and coded, I provided a detailed explanation of findings.

### **Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection**

Before IRB approval, I had a letter signed by the principal of the school I would collect data at stating I could use the location for data collection after IRB approval was given. Before data were collected, I completed the IRB approval process. Once permission was granted, I sent an invitation to general education teachers via email inviting them to participate (see Appendix B). Along with the invitation to participate, an informed consent form was sent to staff. The consent form explained what the study was about, how data would be collected, and how results would help lead to positive social change. Furthermore, the consent form provided participants a description of steps I would take to ensure accurate data were collected. Additionally, I described my role as the researcher and informed participants that their participation would be completely confidential by making sure any information that could expose their identity would be eliminated and a pseudonym would be assigned. After teachers reviewed the invitation and consent forms, they responded with the words “I consent” via email if they wanted to participate in the study.

To collect data, I scheduled interviews with general education teachers who were interested in participating. Interviews were held after school, or on the weekend, in the setting of their choice via Zoom. This ensured participants were comfortable, and instruction was not interrupted. Interviews held lasted for approximately 60 minutes each. Before the interviews began, I informed the participants that the interviews will be audio recorded for accuracy and obtained their permission to record the interview. I informed the participants that the information is completely confidential, and the information

obtained will be kept in a locked cabinet at school, next to my desk, so no one can have access to the information. Furthermore, I provided an electronic consent form that included the topic of the study, a description of what the study is about, and my contact information.

During interviews, I focused on participants responses to questions to determine if there were any follow-up questions needed to gain a deeper understanding of their feelings and to gather as much information as possible. During interviews, responses provided by the participants were audio recorded and transcribed with the Otter program. After each interview was over, I reviewed the transcription for accuracy and made notes on the responses provided by the participant. Once the interviews were accurately transcribed, I analyzed the data. Once data was analyzed, I provided each participant a copy of the transcribed interview and the analyzed data to check for accuracy. This allowed me the opportunity to make sure all data is accurate.

### **Data Analysis Plan**

During the interviews, a program called Otter, recorded, and transcribed the audio recording of the interview. After the interviews were finished, I listened to the audio recording multiple times to check for accuracy of the transcription that was completed. Once all interviews were transcribed, I completed a cycle of open coding to chunk my interview data into key themes. After the first round of coding was completed, I reviewed the transcriptions a second time and used axial coding to determine a more specific trend in the data. After the first nine interviews, the responses were the same by each new participant and saturation was reached. The remaining two interviews were



completed to make sure saturation did occur and no new themes were found with participant responses. Triangulation of data occurred through notes taken and the analyzed data.

Once interviews were transcribed and data was analyzed, I used member checking to check for accuracy. Member checking is a process that allows participants the ability to determine if their thoughts have been heard and analyzed correctly. It allows participants the ability to clarify viewpoints if they were interpreted incorrectly by the researcher (Padgett, 2004). If there is a discrepancy in the information provided, corrections can be made so all the information in the data is accurate (Saldana, 2016; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Participants received a copy of the transcribed interviews to check for accuracy. They also received a copy of the analyzed data to check for accuracy. If a discrepancy in the information was found, I worked with the participant to make the corrections needed so the information was correct.

### **Trustworthiness**

Qualitative research relies on dependability, credibility, transferability, and confirmability to ensure trustworthiness (Burkholder et al., 2016). Dependability means there is “evidence of consistency in data collection, analysis, and reporting” (Burkholder et al., 2016, p. 75). To ensure dependability, the interview questions remained consistent with each participant. Credibility means the findings of the study are accurate and believable given the data provided (Burkholder et al., 2016). Credibility can be obtained through many different methods including prolonged engagement, member checking,

triangulation, and reflexivity (Burkholder et al., 2016). To create credibility in this study, I used member checking which was previously discussed in this section.

Transferability refers to providing a detailed description of the setting and assumptions of the setting (Burkholder et al., 2016). To create transferability in the study, I used thick description of the assumptions that are relevant to the research. By using the thick description, the reader may determine the findings of the study can be generalized to his or her own experiences. Confirmability includes the presentation of information free of bias from the researcher and confused on the information received from the participants (Burkholder et al., 2016). By reporting the findings from the interviews, using member checking, and leaving out my personal bias, I ensured confirmability.

### **Ethical Procedures**

A major part of a research is assuring that the participants do not come to any harm. To do this, it is of the utmost importance that the researcher behaves in an ethical manner (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The first way I behaved in an ethical manner was by being straightforward with participants and showing them respect. Participants were informed that interviews would be recorded and consent to record the interaction was obtained through electronic consent. Ethical behavior involves honoring promises (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). I behaved in an ethical manner by not making promises I was unable to keep. Furthermore, I made sure participants understood that their participation was completely voluntary and if at any point they wanted to stop participating, they were able to do so. Finally, I did no harm by not exploiting participants and not publishing anything that could cause them to lose their jobs or get in trouble with the law. The interviews and

identities of participants have been kept fully confidential. As the researcher, I am the only one with access to the data during the duration of the study.

### **Summary**

The purpose of this chapter was to provide other researchers enough information so they can replicate the study. In Chapter 3, I outlined the research design and rationale, discussed my role as the researcher, discussed the methodology when selecting participants, instrumentation, and discussed the procedures I took for recruitment, participation, and data collection. Furthermore, I discussed how I analyzed the data once it was obtained. I also addressed the trustworthiness and ethical procedures involved in the study. In Chapter 4, I will discuss the results of the study and the process that I was used to complete the study.

## Chapter 4: Results and Conclusions

This chapter contains an analysis of data regarding research questions presented in Chapter 1. Questions are meant to gain a deeper understanding of general education teachers' perceived preparedness to teach students with ED. Emerging themes from interviews were coded and analyzed to answer each research question. Each interview was audio-recorded using the Otter program, and member-checking was used for accuracy of responses.

### **Setting**

Research was conducted via Zoom, in a setting that was comfortable for each participant. The setting for each participant was personal residences or classrooms. Participants in the study were general education teachers in a northern public school in Georgia who teach or have taught students with ED in inclusive classrooms. Participants included 11 female teachers whose teaching experience range from 5 to 31 years of experience.

### **Data Collection**

Before data collection started, a summary of the study was provided to the district to obtain approval to use the specific school for data collection. The summary of the study was also provided to the school principal to receive approval to invite teachers in the school to participate. Once permission to use the school was granted, a detailed invitation to participate was sent electronically to general education teachers. Invitations included participants' rights, purpose of the study, potential risks, and benefits of the study. The invitation informed participants they could reply to electronic invitations by

responding with the words “I consent.” This would inform me which teachers were willing to participate in the study. All teachers who met criteria were invited but not required to participate. From the initial invitation, 11 teachers were willing to participate and gave their consent electronically. These 11 teachers were contacted via personal emails to set up dates and times to conduct interviews.

For data collection, I interviewed the 11 participants individually via Zoom. I audio-recorded interviews using Otter. Each interview followed a set of questions (see Appendix A) that were geared towards answering three research questions. As stated in Chapter 3, interviews were schedule to last approximately 60 minutes. The amount of time ranged from 30 to 60 minutes. During the interview, Otter was used to transcribe interviews while they were being recorded. I then sent transcribed interviews to my personal computer where I reviewed transcriptions and made corrections when needed to ensure accuracy of interviews. Corrections that were made focused on grammar and correct spelling. After interviews were transcribed, electronic copies were sent to each participant for their review.

### **Data Analysis**

To begin data analysis, I reread interview responses multiple times and highlighted specific words or phrases that stood out for each question. I then summarized responses to each interview question. Interview data was then analyzed to look for common themes throughout interviews. The first round of coding was open coding. During this process, I highlighted words and phrases that were relevant to research questions. I then grouped the phrases and words into smaller groups that were similar to

each other for each question. This allowed me to provide specific codes for each question. Once open coding was finished, I did a round of axial coding. During axial coding, I looked for connections between each code and created themes involving information provided. Coding of interviews involved three major themes: (a) trainings provided, (b) experiences leading to self-efficacy, and (c) trainings that were wanted or needed to increase self-efficacy.

The coded category of trainings provided pertained to any district trainings that were offered to teachers during the school year. This category was not divided into subcategories and was used to address RQ1. Even though the category was not divided into smaller subcategories, I did find a common theme. Participant responses involved no offered trainings.

The coded category experiences leading to self-efficacy involved participants' experiences that have led to their perceptions of self-efficacy when working with students with ED in the inclusive classroom. This category involved different experiences teachers had in the classroom with students with ED. It further involved how teachers' self-efficacy to deescalate a situation when it occurs in the classroom. Participant responses involved common themes such as physical aggression, verbal aggression, creating understanding of ED, social development, and loss of student learning. Participant responses that focused on self-efficacy to deescalate had common themes such as lack of understanding of how to work with students with Ed, lack of training that addresses effective ways to handle behavior concerns, and lack of support.

The final category of coding was training that general education teachers want or need to increase their self-efficacy when working with students with ED. Participant responses had common themes such as de-escalation strategies, understanding ED, and triggers. Interview question 6 focused on types of training that general education teachers feel are needed. To expand information, interview question 7 was used to gain a deeper understanding of what general education teachers wanted training to look like in terms of all year versus one day training).

## **Results**

### **RQ1**

This research question was addressed through responses to interview question 5. Based on responses (see Table 1), participants agreed that there have been no professional development opportunities offered to them during the school year from the school district. Many participants stated the only way they have strategies to work with students with ED is by talking to the teachers about the student or talking with district employees. Two participants mentioned quick training at the beginning of the school year. Participant #10 said it felt like a “one and done” and that was all the assistance that was offered, but it was not helpful. Participant #10 said it put more fear in her when working with students since the district employee who did the training stated it “was the teacher’s fault” if the teacher got hurt because the teacher “should not have gotten close to the student who was displaying physically aggressive behavior.” Participant #11 said the training from the beginning of the school year “helped a lot” and she was able to take away one good strategy from the training. Participant #11 said she learned to give

students space when they were frustrated instead of trying to fix the frustration right away. Through analysis of interview data, a common trend that was found is that the district has not provided training to general education teachers to assist in effectively working with students with ED.

**Table 1**

*Participant Interview Response to Interview Question 5*

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Question 5:</b> What professional development opportunities have been provided to you to help increase your understanding of how to effectively work with students with ED?
1	no trainings provided I talk with teachers to get strategies for students
2	no trainings provided I talk with teachers to get strategies for students
3	no trainings provided I talk with teachers to get strategies for students
4	no trainings provided I talk with teachers to get strategies for students
5	no trainings provided
6	no trainings provided I talk with teachers to get strategies for students
7	no trainings provided I talk with teachers to get strategies for students
8	no trainings provided I talk with teachers to get strategies for students
9	no trainings provided
10	no trainings provided there was a one brief one, but not very useful
11	no trainings provided there was one at the beginning of year

**RQ2**

This question was addressed through responses to interview questions 1 through 4. Through data analysis, 82% of participants feel that inclusion of students with ED is a



positive experience that can provide students with an equal opportunity for education and help increase social skills. Based on responses (see table 2), 91% of participants feel that the physical and verbal outbursts that can occur during the day has a negative impact on other students and contributes to a loss in academic learning for other students.

Participant #5 mentioned she feels having students with ED in the classroom, with challenging behaviors, is a positive experience for the general education students. She stated, “they enjoy working with new people...they embrace it”.

**Table 2**

*Participant Interview Response Summary to Interview Question 1 and Question 2*

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Question 1:</b> What are your perceptions of inclusive students with Emotional Disturbance? Please explain any experiences that have contributed to your perceptions.	<b>Question 2:</b> What behaviors from inclusive students do you see as challenging? Behaviors can mean social skills, following directions, physical outbursts, emotional outbursts, etc. How do you feel these behaviors impact other students learning?
1	provides an equal opportunity there is a lack of support students can have success in smaller groups	physical acts of aggression causes distracted learning there is a loss of instructional time
2	it's important for them to be included inclusion helps increase social development beneficial under the right circumstances	physical behaviors are challenging behaviors create fear in other students
3	inclusion is a good thing students grow	verbal outbursts are challenging there is a loss of instruction time
4	it's the purpose, to get students in gen ed builds positive relationships	verbal and physical outbursts are hard internalizing problems there is a loss of instructional time builds an understanding of differences
5	it's a great thing promotes diversity	not following directions is the hardest not willing to do work teaches others in the class compassion
6	it's good as long as triggers are avoided	physical outbursts are the hardest outbursts decrease learning creates fear in other students
7	I'm learning more while doing	physical aggression is the hardest creates inconsistent learning in the class
8	it's the unknown of teaching students can become overstimulated	physical outbursts are the hardest students that are out of control creates a loss of instructional time causes fear in other students

*(table continues)*

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Question 1:</b> What are your perceptions of inclusive students with Emotional Disturbance? Please explain any experiences that have contributed to your perceptions.	<b>Question 2:</b> What behaviors from inclusive students do you see as challenging? Behaviors can mean social skills, following directions, physical outbursts, emotional outbursts, etc. How do you feel these
9	students with ED should be included there should be a gradual increase into gen ed	larger outbursts are the most challenging students shutting down is challenging creates a loss of instructional time
10	it's a difficult job It's hard to include everyone	emotional outbursts are challenging physical outbursts are challenging other students become confused
11	requires additional support not always given Promotes social interactions	physical outbursts are challenging verbal outbursts are challenging not following directions behaviors hinder relationships creates a loss of learning

Based on participants responses (see table 3) half of the participants found themselves to be confident in de-escalating situations that are minor. However, if the challenging behavior was intense, more than just verbal aggression, they felt less confident in their self-efficacy of handling the situation. Participant #7 stated, “I feel I am good at de-escalating students when they can calm down... however, sometimes just talking to them doesn’t work”. Participant #3 felt she can de-escalate students since she has “firm boundaries” and “supports the students”. Participants that expressed they were not confident on de-escalating students felt they do not have proper training on how to handle student’s challenging behavior. Participant #5 stated, “I don’t feel as if I’m well trained to de-escalate a student, so I have to call someone if something is happening”. Participant #1 expressed, “I’m at a loss because it’s one person and I’m trying to teach everybody”. Furthermore, participants feel that a lack of knowledge, a lack of training, and lack of support prevents teachers from meeting the needs of students with ED in the inclusive classroom (see Table 3).

**Table 3***Participant Interview Response Summary to Interview Question 3 and Question 4*

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Question 3:</b> What are your perceptions of your ability to deescalate a student that is displaying disruptive behavior in the classroom?	<b>Question 4:</b> What may prevent a general education teacher from meeting the behavior needs of students with ED in the inclusive classroom?
1	in a smaller group I can de-escalate I'm at a loss with just me there is no time to stop to help	lack of additional support lack of proper training
2	confident with smaller outbursts unsure when students become physical	lack of proper training not having a good classroom environment
3	I'm confident with de-escalation I consistently support students (create bonds)	not knowing the students needs not knowing the triggers of the student
4	I'm comfortable when I know the child I'm challenged when it is a new student	lack of knowledge lack of communication with others lack of proper training
5	it's a weakness for me gap in teacher knowledge	lack of knowledge
6	confident due to good classroom management	lack of knowledge Lack of proper training
7	mediocre based on the level of student frustration	lack of support
8	confident in my ability I build a good relationship with students	lack of knowledge lack of support
9	not confident	not knowing triggers lack of understanding
10	it's an area of growth more training is needed to be confident	unknown of proper techniques fear of getting in trouble for doing the wrong thing
11	confident when knowing the students triggers	lack of preparedness close minded teachers

**RQ3**

This question was addressed through responses of interview questions 6 and 7. (see table 4). Through data analysis, 64% of participants expressed a need for receiving training in de-escalation strategies and common triggers. 36% of the participants expressed the want to have a training that focuses on the psychology of ED, the reasons of student's behavior. Participant #2 stated, "I would like to be trained on how to help the

student get out of the struggle they are in, like how to help with their internal struggle”. Participant #5 wants a training focused on “the basic psychology of the different types of emotional behavior disorders and what they can look like... explain the brain science behind it”. Two participants mentioned a desire to have on-going training throughout the school year instead of a one-day training. Participant #10 said, “you might need some ongoing training with someone..., someone that you can develop a partnership with to say here’s a specific idea you can use”. Furthermore, 27% of participants mentioned having CPI (crisis to intervention) training so they don’t have to rely on the small group teacher when students get physical.

**Table 4**

*Participant Interview Response Summary to Interview Question 6 and Question 7*

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Question 6:</b> In what specific areas do you feel you need professional development opportunities to better meet the behavior needs of students with ED?	<b>Question 7:</b> Explain trainings for general education teachers, that teach in the inclusive classroom, you feel is necessary to help them understand and control challenging behaviors showed from students with ED.
1.	when to engage with students that are frustrated how to avoid outbursts	when and where students will be included in gen ed.
2.	de-escalation strategies, trainings on modifications communication skills,	teach and demonstrate how to control physical outbursts, communication strategies for internal struggles
3.	antecedents and de-escalation strategies	how to create relationships with students, knowing the what triggers students frustration, calming strategies
4.	the basics of ED, what behaviors look and sound like, the why behind the behaviors	drills explaining and demonstrating de-escalation strategies, different types of ED and behaviors that may be shown by students
5.	de-escalation strategies	trainings on the psychology of ED, how to promote reinforcement in the classroom
6.	triggers and de-escalation strategies	why do the behaviors occur
7.	data recording, de-escalation strategies	overview of de-escalation strategies
8.	triggers, classroom environment, how to form relationships	how to detect triggers students may have, how to provide the support students and adults need <i>(table continues)</i>

Participant	Question 6: In what specific areas do you feel you need professional development opportunities to better meet the behavior needs of students with ED?	Question 7: Explain trainings for general education teachers, that teach in the inclusive classroom, you feel is necessary to help them understand and control challenging behaviors showed from students with ED.
9.	triggers of students, teacher reactions to behaviors, de-escalation strategies, understanding behaviors	the differences between the ED diagnosis's
10.	de-escalation techniques	ongoing training to help understand and control behaviors
11.	common triggers	how to de-escalate students, how to create a positive environment for ED students

Based on the responses for the types of trainings teachers wanted, 64% of the participants voiced a want to have trainings in de-escalation strategies and common triggers. To create a deeper understanding of how an increase in understanding of how to effectively work with a student with ED would help participants during instructional time, a follow-up question was asked. Participants were asked “how would an increase in understanding would help during instructional time?”. When asked the follow-up question, 91% of the participants stated that an increase of understanding would increase instructional time for other students. Participant #2 stated, “it will allow you to maximize your time and maximize their learning”. 100% of participants felt that it would increase the success of the students in the classroom. Furthermore, 64% of participants felt that an increase in understanding would reduce the outbursts that could happen in the classroom.

### **Evidence of Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness pertains to the amount of confidence in data collected, the interpretation of data, and the method used to collect the data (Connelly, 2016). To ensure trustworthiness of the study, criteria that needs to be considered. Credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability of the study (Connelly, 2016).

Credibility is achieved by showing that you have interviewed participants that are knowledgeable on the topic and focuses on the interpretation of data (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). To support credibility, I presented the method I used for the interviews and my role in the interviews, my involvement in the data collection, data analysis, and process. Dependability refers to the consistency of data obtained (Babbie, 2017). Data collection can be deemed dependable with the consistency of the interview questions that were asked to each participant. During the interviews, participants were asked the same questions to gain data.

Confirmability refers to neutrality of data presented in relation to the participants responses (Connelly, 2016). After coding the interviews, I utilized member checking to make sure the information presented was accurate. Transferability focuses on the usefulness of information to other people in different settings (Connelly, 2016). Transferability focused on using the information from the study for other general education teachers that teach students with ED in the general education classroom. The findings can be transferable to other's experiences they have had with students with behavior concerns.

### **Summary**

The purpose of this chapter was to present the results of the interviews and provide the data analysis based on the research questions previously presented. Responses from participants during the individual interviews revealed that participants feel inclusion is beneficial for students with ED since it can increase social skills and academic ability. Participants feel the most challenging behaviors they see in the general

education classroom is verbal and physical outbursts which cause a lack of academic instruction. Furthermore, it was found that participants have not been offered district trainings to assist in working with students with ED in the general education classroom. Trainings that focus on different behaviors that may be seen in the classroom, de-escalation strategies, and triggers would be beneficial to increase the understanding of students with ED. An in-depth discussion of participants' responses relating to the specific research questions is addressed in the following chapter as well as recommendations.

## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to create an understanding of how general education teachers perceived their preparedness when teaching students with ED in the general education classroom. Furthermore, the study was designed to create an understanding of specific professional development opportunities general education teachers want to increase their self-efficacy when working with students with ED in inclusive classrooms. An overview of the study, problem statement, research questions, and interpretation of the data appears in this chapter. Limitations of the study, recommendations, and implications are also discussed.

### **Interpretation of the Findings**

Based on information I collected from individual interviews, I was able to find themes to answer each of the research questions. Interpretation of findings is based on analysis of interviews. Findings from interviews are compared to the literature review in Chapter 2 with the intent to close the research gap of specific trainings general education teachers that teach in elementary education want to increase their understanding of how to effectively work with students with ED in the inclusion classroom.

#### **RQ1**

RQ1 involved types of training that the school district has provided to general education teachers to help them understand how to effectively work with students with ED in the general education classroom. General education teachers have a feeling of insufficient training to support students with ED in the general education classroom (McKenna et al., 2021). Furthermore, Gidlund (2018) said general education teachers are



unsure how to make inclusion successful due to lack of training. Through data analysis, a common theme that was found is that the district has not provided specific training to general education teachers to help them effectively work with students with ED.

Although some participants recalled a little training at the beginning of the year, they felt it was not real training. Participants described it as a quick meeting to review the basics of working with students with ED in the general education classroom. However, they expressed that quick training at the beginning of the year still did not prepare them for having students with ED in their classroom.

## **RQ2**

RQ2 involved perceptions general education teachers have of their self-efficacy when working with students with ED in inclusive settings. Gilmour et al. (2021) said general education teachers can be accepting of including students with ED in the classroom unless they display disruptive behavior in the classroom. Through data analysis, I found that general education teachers generally feel including students with ED in the general education classroom can be beneficial not only to students with ED but also other general education students. However, when students with ED are placed in the general education classroom, success is not always guaranteed.

Most participants said they felt confident they knew how to help students with ED academically. However, when students display externalizing behaviors such as physical and verbal aggression, it creates a sense of uncertainty with participants. Two participants felt they had good de-escalation skills when a student was starting to become verbally or physically aggressive. Participant #8 said, "I develop a positive relationship with students

which helps when they are frustrated.” 64% of participants said they were confident in terms of deescalating smaller situations in the classroom such as verbal outbursts. However, if situations become escalated, and students become physical, the general education teacher feels less prepared to help. 27% of participants said they did not feel confident in terms of working with students with ED when outbursts occur in the classroom. Most participants expressed they did not feel well-prepared was due to a lack of knowledge and training regarding how to deescalate student behavior properly and effectively. Additionally, participants felt that when behaviors occur, it creates a loss of instructional time for the rest of the class and hinders positive relationships that have been formed. Participant #10 said, “when students start having outbursts, it is hard to foster the positive relationships.”

### **RQ3**

RQ3 focused on specific types of training general education teachers want to improve their inclusion practices for students with ED. In general, special educators are more likely to receive training in terms of how to effectively teach students with disabilities than general education teachers (McKenna et al., 2021). Through data analysis, I found that participants have three types of training they would like offered. The first training session would focus on common triggers for students. Participant #6 said even though each student reacts differently to different situations, it is beneficial to understand different triggers that can cause frustration with students. Once teachers know and can recognize triggers, they have a greater chance of reducing frustration before students become overwhelmed and have an outburst. The second type of training that was

recommended by participants was focused on de-escalation skills. Participants said they can have a variety of de-escalation skills for students, they felt more prepared to handle escalated situations without waiting for help from another teacher. The third type of training that participants felt would be beneficial is one that focuses on different ways students with ED can express their frustration and reasons for behaviors. Participants expressed their desire to learn why students with ED react physically or verbally when frustrated. Participant #4 said, “specific training on what different types of ED disorders there are, what types of behaviors they exhibit, and explaining the brain science behind it.” Through the coding process, it was found that only 18% of participants wanted training on how to create a positive classroom environment that could help create an inviting environment for students with ED.

Furthermore, participants expressed their desire for training to be more than just a one-day event. Instead of having all information provided during a one day training, they would like training to be ongoing. Participant #10 said “you might need some ongoing training with someone you trust... this could develop a partnership to get specific ideas the week and then retouching base.” Participants mentioned having multiple trainings throughout the year that focus on different concerns and strategies they may experience in the classroom. This way, they can develop strategies they can use throughout the year.

### **Limitations of the Study**

Various limitations may be present in this study. Limitations are factors that are out of the control of the researcher (Amanfi, 2019). As stated, the purpose of this study was to develop an understanding of general education teachers’ perceived preparedness

to teach students with ED in the general education classroom and determine professional development opportunities to increase the preparedness of teachers. For this study, 11 participants were interviewed to collect data. While sometimes a small sample size can be considered a threat to validity, with this study, the sample size is not a threat. By reporting a large amount of data with a limited amount of people, the case study can help in terms of gaining a deeper understanding of the phenomenon.

Another limitation of the study involves selection of participants. For this study, participants were limited to only female teachers being interviewed. This limits generalization of results to just a female teacher's view. A male teacher may have different views on their ability to work with students with ED in the general education classroom. Results of the study will be difficult to generalize to male teachers. To fully understand general education teachers' perceptions of their preparedness to teach students with ED in the general education classroom, additional studies will need to include teachers that are male and female.

## **Recommendations**

### **Teacher Practice**

Students with ED can have a higher growth in academic achievement, social interactions, and self-determination skills when they receive their education in an inclusive setting (Agran et. al., 2020). General education teachers often have a positive outlook on having students with ED in the general education classroom (Pit-ten Cate et al., 2018). Through this study, I found that participants feel it is beneficial for students with ED to be included in the general education classroom. However, research has shown

general education teachers do not feel they are prepared to meet the needs of students with ED (Gregory & Noto, 2018).

Bandura (1993) said people's level of performance is based on their belief of their ability to perform the task at hand. Through the study, I found participants feel confident in providing academics to students with ED in the general education classroom.

However, they do not feel comfortable de-escalating situations when students are at a high frustration level and have become verbally and physically aggressive. Participants feel they are not well prepared to meet the needs of students with ED due to a lack of training. The lack of training focuses on creating positive environments and strategies that can de-escalate a student who is becoming frustrated in the classroom. If a teacher has a positive relationship with the student, and a higher quality emotional environment, students can become more successful (Rucinski et. al., 2018). It is recommended that teachers begin with learning how to create a positive relationship with the students with ED that are in their classroom.

### **District Practice**

A main concern general education teachers have, regarding students with ED in their classroom, is behavioral concerns (Argan et. al., 2020). It was found general education teachers feel there is a lack of proper training to support behavioral concerns students with ED display in the classroom. The most common reaction to disruptive behavior is to ignore the behavior since proper training has not been provided (Kuronja et al., 2019). To support teachers in the classroom, the district may want to implement on-going trainings focused on the needs of general education teachers that can provide the

information and resources needed to assist teachers when working with students with ED in the general education classroom.

Students with ED need effective behavior management to address problematic behaviors in the classroom (Cumming et. al., 2020). Kurniawati et. al. (2017) said trainings offered to general education teachers tend to focus on the characteristics of behaviors, what behaviors may look like. It has been suggested by participants that trainings need to focus more on student triggers, de-escalation strategies when behaviors occur, and the reasons of ED behaviors. Furthermore, it has been suggested that trainings are on-going throughout the school year instead of a one-day training. This will provide teachers the opportunity to further their knowledge and understanding during the whole school year instead of trying to remember everything from a one-day training. It can also provide teachers the ability to discuss different behaviors that have occurred and find different techniques to overcome the behaviors in the classroom.

### **Further Research and Inquiry**

While this study focused on the perceptions of general education teachers' perceptions of self-efficacy when working with students with ED, based on the limitations, it did not focus on teachers in higher grade levels. This study focused on general education teachers who teach in kindergarten through fifth grade that teach, or have taught, students with ED in the inclusion classroom. A possible area to further the research is to include the perceptions of self-efficacy teachers in grades sixth through twelfth. Teachers in the upper grade levels may have a greater self-efficacy if they feel they have been offered different trainings than teachers in grades kindergarten through

fifth. By including general education teachers in grades sixth through twelfth, it can provide a greater understanding of the needs for all teachers.

Positivity is critical during instruction (Ruppar et al., 2017). 18% of the participants mentioned a positive classroom can help lessen frustration levels in students. However, this study did not target classroom management or creating a positive classroom environment. Gilmour et. al. (2021) said students can flourish in a classroom that has a positive environment and strong classroom management. Although teachers have good intentions, their classroom management may not work well for students with ED and may be a contributing factor in frustration levels. Further research in classroom management that creates a positive classroom environment can provide additional information that helps to form perceptions of self-efficacy when working with students with ED.

### **Implications**

Positive social change occurs when benefits to society are presented. Through the results of this study, I provided insight into contributions to general education teachers' perceptions of preparedness when working with students with ED in the general education classroom. General education teachers tend to accept students with ED in their classroom when they feel prepared to meet the needs of the student (Gilmour et. al., 2021). I worked to gain a greater understanding of general education teachers' experiences with students with ED to determine their perceived preparedness to effectively work with them in the general education classroom. General education teachers expressed the desire for trainings that focus on triggers for behaviors displayed

from students with ED, how to de-escalate students that are physically and verbally aggressive, and the reasons behind ED.

Research shows there is a need to increase the success of inclusion classes for students with ED and one way for this to happen is to ensure teachers have a concrete understanding of inclusive practices can effectively implement these practices (Zagona et al., 2017). Unfortunately, teachers receive limited trainings that focus on the needs of students with ED (State et al., 2019). Through the results of this study, I hope that positive social change will occur through the implementation of professional development opportunities provided to general education teachers that focus on the expressed wants by general education teachers. Furthermore, it is my hope that general education teachers will be provided professional development opportunities that are ongoing and not a one-day training. General education teachers that have received specific training have a greater positive attitude towards working with students with ED and a higher sense of self-efficacy (Celik & Kraska, 2017). With an understanding of how to effectively work with students with ED, student success in the general education classroom can flourish, thus providing positive social change. It is my hope, with the results of this study and recommendations, positive social change can result in providing a greater knowledge and understanding of students with ED to general education teachers.

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this study was to gain a greater understanding of general education teachers' perceptions of preparedness when working with students with ED in



the general education classroom. IDEA mandates students with disabilities are to be educated with their non-disabled peers in the least restrictive environment (McKenna et. al., 2020). Students with ED present unique challenges to general education teachers that can influence a teacher's perception of their self-efficacy. This in turn can affect their classroom practices and even cause teacher burn-out (Gilmour et. al., 2021). It is necessary to gain an understanding of what general education teachers need to be more successful when working with students with ED, thus in turn, increasing their perceived preparedness and self-efficacy.

Through this study, I was able to determine that general education teachers do feel that inclusion of students with ED is beneficial and can be a positive experience for students with ED along with their non-disabled peers. Inclusion of students with ED can increase not only their academics, but their social skills as well. Unfortunately, when students have outbursts in the classroom, it can hinder relationships and cause a lack of academic instruction. Participants' responses provided an understanding of what they feel is the most complicated situations to handle in the classroom when students with ED are frustrated and disrupting the classroom. Responses provide an insight into how participants feel they are able to handle verbal and physical disruptions that arise in the classroom. Participants mentioned that when students become physically and verbally aggressive, they are unsure of what to do to de-escalate the student. Although participants stated that they receive support from special education teachers, the desire for specific trainings provided to general education teachers to help increase their understanding of students with ED and how to recognize triggers and de-escalate situations was expressed.

It was determined that teachers have a want for on-going trainings that focus on common triggers that can frustrate a student. Teachers also want trainings that focus on different de-escalation skills for different situations that arise in the classroom.

Participants understood that no two children are alike, so having a variety of techniques could be beneficial for the teacher. Furthermore, teachers voiced a want for trainings that focus on the types of behaviors and the reasons behind the behaviors. Teachers felt that if they had a greater understanding of why the student was behaving in a certain way, they would be able to help the child more effectively.

Positive social change happens when a benefit to society is presented. With the results of this study, I hope that positive social change will happen with the recommendations and implementation of specified professional development opportunities for general education teachers. This will provide teachers with a greater understanding of how to effectively work with students with ED. Furthermore, it can produce higher student success, thus creating positive social change in education.

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## Appendix A: Interview Protocol Form

The purpose of this interview is to further my understanding of your perception of the preparedness to teach students with Emotional Disturbance in the general education classroom. Responses will contribute to my study to help understand what general education teachers feel is needed to increase their preparedness and self-efficacy in teaching students with Emotional Disturbance. For the purpose of this interview, the term inclusive indicates students who are diagnosed with ED who receive academic instruction in the general education setting for one or more segments throughout the school day.

### **Interview Instructions and Details**

This interview will be conducted via Zoom. Each interview should last approximately 60 minutes.

The researcher will record the interview, which consists of the questions below. Furthermore, follow-up questions may be asked to obtain more detailed information.

I want to remind you that this interview is confidential, and your identity will remain confidential. Each participant will be assigned a fake name to protect your identity. Your honesty to the questions asked is greatly appreciated. Your perceptions are of valuable asset to this study and will help further the success of inclusion for students with ED. Lastly, I want to remind you that your participation is voluntary, and you have the right to end the interview at any time.

### **Interview Questions**

1. What are your perceptions of inclusive students with Emotional Disturbance? Please explain any experiences that have contributed to your perceptions.
2. What behaviors from inclusive students do you see as challenging? Behaviors can mean social skills, following directions, physical outburst, emotional outbursts, etc. How do you feel these behaviors impact other students learning?
3. What are your perceptions of your ability to deescalate a student that is displaying disruptive behavior in the classroom?
4. What may prevent a general education teacher from meeting the behavior needs of students with ED in the inclusive classroom?
5. What professional development opportunities have been provided to you to help increase your understanding of how to effectively work with students with ED?
6. In what specific areas do you feel you need professional development opportunities to better meet the behavior needs of students with ED?
7. Explain trainings for general education teachers, that teach in the inclusive classroom, you feel is necessary to help them understand and control challenging behaviors showed from students with ED.

**Probing Question Examples**

1. Describe any trainings that you have had that has helped you address the challenges students with ED have in your classroom.
2. Please describe, in more detail, the behavior challenges you have had in your classroom. What did they look like, how long did they last?  
How would an increase in understanding help you during instructional times?

## Appendix B: Invitation to Participate

My name is Darleen Johnston and I am a doctoral student at Walden University, and I would like to invite you to participate in my study. My research study is titled General Education Teachers' Perceived Preparedness to Teach Students with Emotional Disturbance. I will conduct my research through one-on-one interviews conducted through Zoom. The interviews will approximately 60 minutes. Through the interviews, I hope to determine what general education teachers need to feel better prepared to meet the behavioral needs of students with ED.

I am currently looking to conduct one-on-one interviews with teachers that teach general education in grades K through 5. Teachers that are interested in participating in the study should have experience teaching in the inclusive classroom with students with ED. Please understand that your participation in the study will be completely voluntary and any information will be strictly confidential.

Attached to this invitation is a consent form for participation. The consent form provides specific information about the study. It provides information on how the interviews will be conducted and any risks that may be associated with the study. Please take your time to review the consent form thoroughly. If you have any questions, please let me know.

Sincerely,

Darleen Johnston

### Appendix C: Statement for Committee

The committee has reviewed the guiding research questions and the interview questions and have agreed these questions will be sufficient in producing good data for this study.