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Early Childhood Educators' Perspectives on Executive Function of Children in Poverty

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Randi Dezaray Miller

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Walden University
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Abstract

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by

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MA, Hood College, 2013

BS, Shepherd University, 2008

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

Approximately 20% of children living in the United States are growing up in poverty. Children experiencing poverty, especially during early childhood, are more vulnerable to the negative effects of socioeconomic disadvantage, such as difficulties in cognitive development, social-emotional growth, and educational outcomes. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to understand prekindergarten and kindergarten teacher perspectives on their ability and self-efficacy in supporting children living in high poverty areas who demonstrate poor executive function. The conceptual framework for this study was Bandura's theory of self-efficacy. Data were collected through interviews with 11 prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers working in Title I schools in an eastern U.S. state and were analyzed through the use of thematic analysis. Results suggested that teachers are not prepared to work with children living in high poverty areas and need more resources to meet student needs. Teachers that necessary training and preparation were not provided in their schools and they had to seek out their own professional development opportunities. The results may provide early childhood educators with the support and training they perceive needing to increase their self-efficacy when working with children living in high poverty areas.

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this study to my daughter, Decker Rae. She may not have been the reason I started this journey, but she is the reason I finished. When I was a young child, I decided that I wanted to become a teacher, and I was lucky enough to achieve that dream. At the beginning of my doctoral journey, I didn't think I would be lucky enough to become a mom, so I focused on my education. Life has a funny way of proving us wrong. My daughter came into my life when I needed her the most! Decker became my driving force both in my everyday life and in my doctoral journey. I hope that one day she's proud of her mom and understands that everything I do is for her. If I can reach my goals, so can she!

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my husband, Carl, for helping me get through my program and taking on more responsibility than most people could handle. I really appreciate the sacrifices you made to help me reach the end of this journey; those sacrifices did not go unnoticed! A big heavenly thank you to my Pappy who always told me that an education is the one thing no one can take from you. I hope I made you proud. A big thank you to my Mimi, Ruthie, for always listening and supporting me from day one! My mom, Lisa, deserves a huge shout out for her support and encouragement! She was by my side the entire time and did everything in her power to alleviate my stress! I am forever grateful! I'm also grateful for the love from my daughter, Decker, which kept me motived! To my amazing friends who were completely neglected the last few years, thank you for loving me anyways!

I would like to thank my committee, Dr. Maryanne Longo, Dr. Patricia Anderson, and Dr. Barbara Schirmer. A big thank you to Dr. Longo for always being the calm in my storm and knowing just how to help me through each challenge I faced. Your kindness got me through this crazy journey, and I am forever grateful! Thank you, Dr. Anderson, for your deep reviews and your sense humor. I really enjoyed working with you! Finally, I want to share my appreciation for Dr. Schirmer who was able to share disappointing news in the kindest of ways. I appreciate your support!

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

In the United States, 20% of children live in poverty, including 14.7 million children in rural, urban, and suburban areas (Chung et al., 2016). Socioeconomically disadvantaged children tend to have developmental deficits in language, cognitive growth, and social-emotional growth (Sharkins et al., 2017). Early childhood is the stage when children are most vulnerable to the damaging effects of limited resources due to poverty resulting in negative cognitive development and educational outcomes (Chaudry & Wimer, 2016). Although classroom teachers are aware of how stress from poverty can affect children, educators are uncertain of their role and how to provide appropriate support to meet the individual needs of students (E.M. Anderson et al., 2015). To ensure that the needs of children living in poverty are met, it is necessary to understand the perspectives of early childhood educators regarding their ability to provide emotional and instructional support for these children (Mette et al., 2016).

In the state where the current study was conducted, 13.3% of children live below the poverty line. In the county where this study was conducted, 19.7% of children live below the poverty line as stated in by the state's alliance for the poor report. This county ranks eighth in the state for the highest poverty rate as described in an article published in 2016 by the newspaper in the target county. One of the Title I schools in the research county had a poverty rate of 74% for children in kindergarten, first grade, and second grade. Early childhood students in prekindergarten through second grade in the research area received 82% of the incident slips and 100% of the major referrals in a recent school year (School-Wide Information Systems, 2018). The county professional development

catalog from the target school district does not provide early childhood educators with information about supporting young children who demonstrate poor executive function.

Social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1993) provides information about how individuals assess their ability to perform behaviors to achieve a desired outcome. Self-efficacy is a subset of Bandura's social cognitive theory. Self-efficacy is a person's beliefs about their ability to perform a task that will affect how they feel, think, and behave, and their motivation to perform that task (Bandura, 1994). When educators have demonstrated a strong sense of self-efficacy, they are more likely to handle the needs of struggling students and set higher personal goals (Bandura, 1993; Zakeri et al., 2016).

Research exists on the effect poverty has on the executive function of young children (Zelazo et al., 2016) and the potential lack of understanding teachers have about supporting these students (Gorski, 2016). Executive function is a collection of skills developed during early childhood that includes working memory, inhibitory control, cognitive flexibility, and regulating emotions (Blair, 2016; Choi et al., 2016; Diamond, 2016; Duval et al., 2016; Martin et al., 2017). The gap in practice I addressed in this study was lack of understanding of teacher perspectives regarding their ability to support children with poor executive function living in high poverty areas. The findings from this study could provide the school board with information about early childhood educators' perspectives on their ability to support children living in poverty and what additional supports they may need to meet their students' needs. Findings from this research may provide early childhood educators with the support and training they need to increase their self-efficacy working with children living in high poverty areas. In this chapter, I

discuss the background, conceptual framework, problem statement, purpose, nature of the study, and research questions for the study.

Background

The development of executive function is essential to cultivate skills such as higher order mental processes including planning and attention-switching, along with inhibiting impulsiveness (Moreno et al., 2017). Executive function is a set of mental skills that influence planning, problem solving, working memory, self-monitoring, cognitive flexibility, and inhibitory control (Martin et al., 2017). Early childhood is an important developmental time for executive function and can hinder a child's behavior in social environments and relationships later in their childhood if these skills are not developed properly (Martin et al., 2017; McFarland, 2017). When executive function is not developed during early childhood, children have a difficult time with persistence, have high levels of impulsivity, and have poor attention span (Waller et al., 2017). Executive function plays an important role in a child's behavior and academic adjustment that directly impacts academic learning and achievement (Marques & Cladellas, 2018).

Executive function skills are developed through an amalgamation of cognitive development and the environment that children experience (Vernon-Feagans et al., 2016). There are poverty-related gaps in regard to school readiness and success in school, which are related to the influence of executive function development (Blair, 2016). Children living in poverty do not completely develop their ability to participate in complex social environments and have difficulty creating relationships, which can result in negative behaviors (McFarland, 2017). These negative behaviors related to underdeveloped

executive function as a result of children living in poverty are typically demonstrated when children enter a complex social environment such as a school (McFarland, 2017).

Teachers are known as frontline social service providers for their students, and even though teachers are not social workers, they are often expected to fulfill this role (Biddle et al., 2018). Educators with high levels of perceived self-efficacy feel confident in their ability to meet the demands of students living in various living situations (Šafránková & Hrbáčková, 2016). Self-efficacy is a person's perceived ability to organize and carry out specific actions or tasks and handle the effects of unpredictable and stressful elements of that situation (Bandura & Schunk, 1981). Preservice teachers and many in-service teachers do not have a clear understanding of the effect poverty can have on young children (Cho et al., 2015). Primary school teachers often feel that they are unable to alter the impact of negative external factors such as poverty, which causes educators to have unpleasant feelings and negative perceptions of these children (Šafránková & Hrbáčková, 2016). The current study was needed to close the gap in practice regarding understanding teacher perspectives on their ability to instruct and emotionally support children with poor executive function living in high poverty areas.

Problem Statement

The problem was a lack of understanding of the perspectives of early childhood educators regarding their self-efficacy in supporting children living in a high poverty area who demonstrate poor executive function. Lagasse et al. (2016) identified executive function skills as attention, inhibitory control, working memory, and set shifting that support self-regulation of behavior and emotion. Children who struggle with poor

executive function and behavior regulation often come from lower-income homes and demonstrate more difficulty in school (Vernon-Feagans et al., 2016). A child's executive function development is often affected by their environment, and families living in poverty deal with high levels of stress causing weakened interactions between parents and children resulting in executive function impairments (Lagasse et al., 2016; Martin et al., 2017; Piccolo et al., 2016). Problems such as poor emotional, behavioral, peer, and academic functioning during childhood are a result of impairments in a child's executive function (Martin et al., 2017).

During early childhood, children are particularly vulnerable to the adverse effects of family poverty resulting in negative cognitive development and educational outcomes (Chaudry & Wimer, 2016). Children raised in impoverished areas and in communities with high levels of violence demonstrate lower executive function (Wexler et al., 2020). Haft and Hoeft (2017) and Brandes-Aitken et al. (2019) suggested that children living in poverty could experience a wide range of psychological and environmental stressors causing damage to the structure of the prefrontal cortex of the brain resulting in poorer executive function. A negative correlation has been found between poverty-related risks and executive function development as a result of exposure to stressors related to these living conditions (Perry et al., 2018).

Although problem behaviors demonstrated in the classroom may be a result of previous trauma, behavior management strategies have remained the focus for handling such actions instead of the development of positive teacher–student relationships (E.M. Anderson et al., 2015; Brown & Patton, 2017; Costa, 2017). Quality student–teacher

interaction provides children with the ability to develop reasoning skills, build strategies, grow social skills, and display greater motivation (Duval et al., 2016). Despite the importance of providing an environment that meets the needs of all children, classroom teachers are uncertain about how to provide support for children who have experienced adverse situations (E.M. Anderson et al., 2015). Although teachers and other school staff are in an optimal position to provide interventions for children who exhibit poor executive function, school personnel often do not have the professional preparation or in-school support to offer these children what they need to be successful (Blitz et al., 2016). E.M. Anderson et al. (2015) suggested that for teachers to provide positive executive function supports, teachers must conceptualize their understanding of the causes of these behaviors. Poor executive function may be exacerbated by teacher actions as a consequence of their lack of support for early learners living in high poverty areas who exhibit poor executive function.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to understand the perspectives of early childhood educators regarding their ability and self-efficacy in supporting children living in high poverty areas who demonstrate poor executive function and what teachers feel they need to meet the needs of their students. There was a gap in practice regarding understanding teacher perspectives on their ability to instruct and emotionally support children with poor executive function living in high poverty areas. I used the constructivist paradigm in my qualitative study to focus on the participants' views on the topic (see Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The participant population was prekindergarten and kindergarten

teachers who worked in Title I schools in an eastern U.S. state. My purpose for conducting this study was to understand and describe early childhood educators' perspectives on their self-efficacy in supporting children with poor executive function living in high poverty areas. To address the purpose of my research, I focused on determining early childhood educators' perspectives on their perceived ability and self-efficacy in supporting children who display poor executive function and what supports educators feel they need to meet the needs of these children.

Research Questions

Two research questions (RQs) guided this study:

RQ1: What are the perspectives of early childhood educators about their self-efficacy in supporting children living in high poverty areas who demonstrate poor executive function?

RQ2: What types of support do early childhood educators believe they need to develop their capability and perceived self-efficacy to teach and emotionally support children living in high poverty areas who demonstrate poor executive function?

Conceptual Framework

The framework for this study was based on Bandura's (1977) theory of self-efficacy, which is a subset of Bandura's social cognitive theory (Rosenstock et al., 1988). Bandura (1994) described self-efficacy as beliefs that affect how a person will feel, think, and behave, and their motivation. According to Bandura (1993), the stronger an individual's perceived self-efficacy, the higher the goals that the individual will set for themselves and the stronger commitment they will make to attain those goals. Self-

efficacy plays a key role in the self-regulation of a person's motivation, including the beliefs about what they can do to guide their actions (Bandura, 1994). When teachers have a strong sense of self-efficacy, they are better able to work with struggling students, demonstrate more enthusiasm about teaching, and are more willing to experiment with new teaching methods to meet the needs of their students (Zakeri et al., 2016). Through the use of Bandura's (1977) theory of self-efficacy, I researched the perspectives of early childhood educators regarding their self-efficacy when working with children living in high poverty areas who demonstrate poor executive function.

RQs were developed to address the gap in practice and provide guidance when developing my interview questions. The understanding of early childhood educators' perspectives could provide insight into their perceived self-efficacy and what may be needed to support their development of self-efficacy to work with diverse learners. Bandura's (1996, as cited in Dell'Angelo, 2016) theory of self-efficacy aligned with the purpose of my study addressing how teacher beliefs influence their ability to teach and support students in their classroom. Additional information regarding Bandura's theory of self-efficacy is presented in Chapter 2.

Nature of the Study

The nature of my study was a basic qualitative study using interviews with teachers chosen through purposeful sampling. I selected a basic qualitative design to gain insight into the perspectives of early childhood educators regarding their self-efficacy when working with children living in high poverty areas exhibiting poor executive function, and what teachers believe they need to support these children. Percy et al.

(2015) stated that the generic qualitative design is used to investigate people's attitudes, opinions, and beliefs about a topic or experience from a representative sample of individuals. This qualitative approach allowed me to understand how the participants developed meaning through their environment and how their behavior influenced the establishment of that meaning (see Saracho, 2017). The goal of this study was to understand early childhood educators' perspectives on their ability to support children living in high poverty areas who demonstrate poor executive function.

Data collection consisted of 11 semi structured interviews using an interview protocol (see Appendix A) with certified prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers currently teaching in Title I schools. The interview questions addressed teachers' self-efficacy in providing instructional and emotional support for young children living in high poverty areas who demonstrate poor executive function, teachers' level of proficiency when supporting children exhibiting these behaviors, and what teachers believe they need to support these children. I interviewed teachers with various levels of teaching experience and education who worked with prekindergarten and kindergarten students. Because my study required specific participant criteria such as grade level and Title I placement, purposeful sampling was used for participant selection (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Member checking was employed to ensure the validity of the data collected (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The process of member checking involved providing the interviewees with preliminary findings and accumulating feedback from those interviewed (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). To ensure credibility of my data collection method, member checking was used to make certain that information provided

in the interviews was not misinterpreted. Interviews with participants were transcribed, coded, and analyzed to identify themes.

Definitions

Child poverty rate: How many children at a particular point in time are living in families with annual incomes that are below the poverty line (Chaudry & Wimer, 2016).

Early childhood: The period of time between birth and age 8 when brain development is at its peak (Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, 2021).

Executive function: A set of multidimensional purposeful skills in the domains of planning, problem solving, working memory, self-monitoring, cognitive flexibility, and inhibitory control (Martin et al., 2017).

Self-efficacy: How well a person feels they can organize and execute actions in a given situation and handle any unpredictable or stressful elements (Bandura & Schunk, 1981).

Assumptions

There were two assumptions that guided this dissertation. The first assumption was that participants would answer interview questions truthfully and honestly. To address this assumption, participants were assured of confidentiality and they were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time. The second assumption was that the participants would have a genuine interest in the research topic and would not participate to gain any job advances or recognition. To address this assumption, participants volunteered for the study and received no incentives for participation. These assumptions were necessary to determine accuracy in my study by ensuring that the

participants were provided with a sense of security and a feeling of confidence when sharing their experiences.

Scope and Delimitations

The purpose of this study was to understand the perspectives of early childhood educators regarding their self-efficacy in supporting children living in high poverty areas who demonstrate poor executive function. I explored whether teachers felt prepared to work with children living in high poverty areas who demonstrated poor executive function and what they felt they needed to support these children. This study was restricted to early childhood educators teaching in Title I schools working with prekindergarten and kindergarten students in an eastern U.S. state. One Title I school in the research district was excluded because the location did not have prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers. A second school was excluded because I currently teach at that location. Invitations to participate in the study were emailed to acquire volunteers at the additional Title I locations. During this study, participants were not offered any incentives for their participation, and their personal information remained confidential. To establish transferability, I used rich and thick explanations and descriptions of my findings as well as purposeful sampling.

Limitations

One limitation of my study was the small sample size and the limited geographic region. The participants include prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers from five elementary schools in the same county. The use of such a small number of participants does not reflect the perspectives of all early childhood educators in the county or in the

educational field. This sample has limited transferability because my findings could not be generalized to the larger population. Transferability was established through the use of thick descriptions, which provides information to readers to determine if the findings transfer to their personal situation (Ravitch & Carl, 2020). Although these limitations affected the transferability of the study, the findings have the potential to promote social change in the community.

Another limitation was personal bias. Because I was the researcher conducting the study, there was a possibility of potential bias on my part. I have worked as an early childhood educator in a Title I school for 14 years and have personally experienced the challenges educators face when working in this type of environment. My personal views about working with children living in poverty may have led to personal bias. In an effort to minimize bias, I reflected on my thoughts in a reflective journal throughout the research process. I conducted interviews using open-ended questions to avoid leading participants into specific responses and to encourage more detailed answers. Also, member checks with the participants were conducted to ensure my findings were plausible (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Peer debriefing was used during data analysis to avoid bias and to confirm that the results were reasonable.

Significance

This study could add to the educational field improve understanding of early childhood teachers' perspectives regarding their ability to teach and support children living in high poverty areas demonstrating poor executive function and what teachers feel they need to meet the needs of these students. Executive function skills provide children

with the ability to control higher order mental processes such as impulsivity control, planning, and attention-switching, which are important skills in a learning environment (Moreno et al., 2017). Individuals living in poverty are under stress and have difficulty developing executive function skills causing poverty-related gaps in school readiness and achievement (Blair, 2016). Deficits in executive function can cause problems with emotional, behavioral, peer, and academic functioning, along with self-regulation challenges in young children (Martin et al., 2017). Research showed that positive adult–child relationships play a vital role in the development of executive function, but many educators do not understand the effect poverty has on their students as learners (Cho et al., 2015; Duval et al., 2016).

Results from my research may provide insight into what early childhood educators feel they need to teach children who exhibit poor executive function, how prepared these educators believe they are to support these children, and how educators perceive their self-efficacy in this role. Findings from this study may provide the county school board members with an understanding of early childhood teachers' viewpoints on students living in high poverty areas who demonstrate poor executive function, teachers' level of proficiency when supporting children exhibiting these behaviors, and what teachers believe they need to support these children. The findings from this study may contribute to positive social change by providing early childhood educators with the support and training needed to increase self-efficacy for teachers working with children from high poverty areas. Knowledge gained from this study may also provide the local

school system with potential areas for professional development to provide support and training for teachers working with children from high poverty areas.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to understand the perspectives of early childhood educators regarding their ability and self-efficacy in supporting children living in high poverty areas who demonstrate poor executive function and what teachers feel they need to meet the needs of their students. To address this purpose, I focused on determining early childhood educators' perspectives regarding their perceived ability and self-efficacy in supporting children who display poor executive function skills and what supports educators feel they need to meet the needs of these children. To determine the perspectives of early childhood educators, I used a qualitative design and in-depth interviews.

In Chapter 1, I provided a description of the problem and addressed the need to understand early childhood educators' perspectives regarding their self-efficacy when working with children living in high poverty areas who demonstrate poor executive function and what those educators believe they need to meet the needs of these students. Also, I included the background and described the gap in practice demonstrated by lack of understanding of early childhood educators' perspectives regarding their self-efficacy when working with children from high poverty areas who demonstrate poor executive function. I provided the research questions and justification for choosing a basic qualitative design for my research. A description of the conceptual framework was provided, which encompassed Bandura's theory of self-efficacy. In addition, I addressed

the assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations, and the implication for positive social change. Chapter 2 contains a review of the literature supporting the problem statement and purpose of my study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

There was a lack of understanding about early childhood educators' ability and self-efficacy when teaching and supporting children demonstrating poor executive function and living in areas of high poverty. The purpose of this study was to understand the perspectives of early childhood educators regarding their ability and self-efficacy in supporting children living in high poverty areas demonstrating poor executive function. Educators play a vital role in the lives of their students. The interactions between teachers and students are essential for the development of students' executive function (Biddle et al., 2018; Choi et al., 2016). Children living in poverty and children who do not establish strong executive function skills can develop behavioral difficulties that can affect their learning (Blair, 2016; Chen et al., 2018; Collins et al., 2017). Educators working with children in early childhood need to have a strong understanding of social-emotional development, executive functioning, and how adverse experiences such as poverty can affect a child (Boatwright & Midcalf, 2019; Buettner et al., 2016; Diamond, 2016).

A teacher's self-efficacy is connected to their professional effectiveness, which influences the achievement of the students in the classroom (Chen & Phillips, 2018; DeJarnette, 2016; Pfitzner-Eden, 2016). For teachers to make a difference in the lives of their students, they need to believe they have the ability to make that difference (Dell'Angelo, 2016). Although teachers play an important role in the development of children in early childhood and need to be well prepared, more research on teacher perspectives regarding their ability to support diverse learners in their classrooms was needed. This literature review addresses the impact of poverty on young children, how

executive function is developed, the influence teachers have on the development of young children, teacher self-efficacy, teachers' knowledge of poverty, and educator preparation to work with low-income students.

Literature Search Strategy

The databases accessed through the Walden University Library to search for literature supporting my research included Education Source, ERIC, ProQuest Central, SAGE Journals, PsycINFO, PESDpubs, SocINDEX, and EBSCO Host. The search engine I used was the Thoreau database through the Walden University Library and Google Scholar. The keywords used to acquire articles for this literature review included *poverty*, *executive function*, *self-efficacy*, *teacher-efficacy*, *teacher preparation*, *teacher knowledge*, *teacher beliefs*, *teacher training*, *early childhood*, *social-emotional development*, and *teacher perspectives*. My initial searches consisted of the keywords *poverty*, *executive function*, *self-efficacy*, *early childhood*, *teacher perspectives*, and *teacher beliefs*. My secondary searches included the keywords *teacher-efficacy*, *social-emotional development*, *teacher preparation*, *teacher knowledge*, and *teacher training*.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework I used for my research was Bandura's (1977) theory of self-efficacy. Self-efficacy was a central factor of Bandura's social cognitive theory. Bandura's theory of self-efficacy addresses a person's belief in their capabilities to plan and execute an action with a desired goal (Appelbaum & Hare, 1996; Pfitzner-Eden, 2016). The higher an individual's perceived self-efficacy, the greater the goals set and the stronger the commitment to obtain those goals (Bandura, 1993). Teacher self-efficacy is a

belief in one's professional abilities to positively influence the classroom environment and influence the progress of children (Chen & Phillips, 2018; Pfitzner-Eden, 2016). Self-efficacy also determines the extent to which a person will go when faced with difficulties and obstacles while trying to achieve their goals (Pfitzner-Eden, 2016). A teacher's self-efficacy is related to their perceived ability to meet the needs of diverse learners.

Bandura's theory of self-efficacy connected to my research topic because the way teachers perceive their self-efficacy may affect their ability to teach diverse learners. A teacher's belief in their ability to motivate and support children may influence the learning environment they create, potentially affecting the progress of their students (Dell'Angelo, 2016). My research focused on a need to understand whether early childhood educators believed they were prepared and felt supported in teaching children in low poverty areas demonstrating poor executive function. For teachers to make a difference in the lives of their students, they need to believe that they can make a difference (Dell'Angelo, 2016).

The conceptual framework I chose for my study was Bandura's theory of self-efficacy. I chose Bandura's theory because it focused on perceived knowledge, understanding, and abilities of individuals, in this case the teachers in my study. Bandura's theory of self-efficacy includes material on support, motivation, goal setting, difficulties in reaching set goals, and overcoming obstacles (Bandura, 1993). These components were aspects of the teaching field that were discussed and addressed in my study. I analyzed the perspectives of early childhood educators regarding their self-

efficacy in supporting students living in high poverty areas demonstrating poor executive function. Through the application of this framework, I sought to understand early childhood educators' perceived self-efficacy in supporting and teaching children living in poverty demonstrating poor executive function. The conclusions developed from my interviews could provide the local school board with the perspectives on early childhood educators in regard to their self-efficacy and what they feel they need to develop self-efficacy.

Executive Function

For children to successfully participate in social settings such as a classroom environment, they need to develop their executive function. Executive function is a collection of skills developed during childhood that includes working memory, inhibitory control, cognitive flexibility, and planning (Blair, 2016; Choi et al., 2016; Diamond, 2016; Duval et al., 2016; Martin et al., 2017). These higher order mental processes allow students to demonstrate self-control such as inhibiting impulsive responses, regulating emotions, and refraining from making poor decisions (Blair, 2016; Choi et al., 2016; Moreno et al., 2017). Children who develop their executive function will exhibit abilities such as remembering instructions, holding onto their thoughts until it is their time to share, and shifting their attention between ideas and activities (Lawson & Farah, 2017; Moreno et al., 2017). Students who develop these skills throughout early childhood will demonstrate the ability to manage their behavior and not act on impulse, which is important for social and academic growth.

The development of executive function begins during early childhood and can provide a child with essential skills needed to participate in school activities and into adulthood. Development of executive function in young children begins between 3 and 7 years of age due to significant brain plasticity (Duval et al., 2016; John et al., 2019; Martin et al., 2017). When determining the school readiness of children in early childhood, there is a strong focus on what children understand academically without considering other influential factors (Zelazo et al., 2016). Executive function skills that young children acquire are more critical for school readiness than IQ or entry-level reading or math (Diamond, 2016). In a school setting, children who develop strong executive function skills are often able to sit still, pay attention in class, follow classroom rules, and assume new perspectives (Zelazo et al., 2016). These executive function skills allow young children to participate in a complex social setting leading to academic growth. Development of executive function skills has been tied to student success in school adjustment, school readiness, problem solving, academic achievement, and reduction of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder symptoms (Blair, 2016; Marques & Cladellas, 2018).

When children acquire limited executive function skills during early childhood, there can be many negative effects resulting in difficulties for children. Executive function impairments can cause children to demonstrate aggressive behavior, negative emotions, emotional outbursts, and undesirable social behavior (Choi et al., 2016; Diamond, 2016; Romero-López et al., 2017). Difficulties with poor emotional, behavioral, peer, and academic functioning are often a direct result of a deficit in the

development of executive function (Martin et al., 2017; Zelazo et al., 2016). If children

continue to lack growth in these executive function skills, additional challenges for these

children occur, causing continuous frustration as these challenges build upon one another

(Tough, 2016). When children struggle with the development of executive function, they

get discouraged, which affects internalizing and externalizing behaviors resulting in a

lack of judgment, poor memory, an increase in distractions, and impulsive behavior

(Romero-López et al., 2017; Tough, 2016). Children lacking executive function can

develop academic problems leading to poor behavior resulting in consequences causing

additional stress (Tough, 2016). Deficits in the growth of executive function can

influence child development in a variety of ways causing children additional stress that

can create a cycle of poor behavior in school (Tough, 2016). A child's executive function

skills are demonstrated in various ways, which can make it difficult for teachers to

identify possible deficits (E.M. Anderson et al., 2015).

Executive Function and Behavior

The development of executive function skills can help or hinder various aspects of

a child's life; these skills will continue to affect a child into adulthood. Insufficient

development of executive function skills can cause children to demonstrate problem

behaviors, be suspended from school, and be held back a grade level (Zelazo et al., 2016).

Young children need to cultivate their emotional control to prevent hyperactivity and

problem behaviors, both of which have become a mounting problem in recent years

(Romero-López et al., 2017). Executive function supports behavioral and emotional

regulation that allows children to stop, think, and decide on an action to meet a specific

goal (Duncan et al., 2017). The absence of these essential skills can be due to stressful home environments.

Often children lack executive function skills due to exposure to stressful environments that then can cause children to fight, act out, and shy away from connections with teachers and other students (Tough, 2016). Executive function deficits due to a lack of stimulation in a child's home environment can cause them to demonstrate disruptive behavior in the classroom (Sheridan & McLaughlin, 2016). Stressful home environments can cause difficulty for a child if they do not have high quality childcare to support behavioral regulation and executive function (Duncan et al., 2017). Student behavior in the classroom can be affected by the lack of executive function skills developed during the early years of childhood.

Academic Achievement

Executive function skills are a strong predictor of student academic achievement (Duncan et al., 2017; John et al., 2019; Marques & Cladellas, 2018; Moriguchi & Shinohara, 2019). Early childhood is an essential developmental time for executive function skills. Children who do not develop these skills are more likely to demonstrate poor academic and social ability throughout their life (Moriguchi & Shinohara, 2019). When children fail to develop executive function skills, they can develop poor internalizing and externalizing behaviors resulting in behavioral difficulties that affect academic achievement (Chen & Phillips, 2018). Negative behaviors demonstrated in the classroom as a result of a lack of executive function skills can cause academic challenges for the student and their peers.

Behavioral challenges often cause students to be removed from the classroom, which takes away from instructional time and negatively affects academic achievement (Fallon et al., 2019; Hartman et al., 2017; Zelazo et al., 2016). Also, children learning in the same classroom as students with behavior challenges have reported concern for their own learning as a result of these disruptions (Fallon et al., 2019). Student behavior is an important aspect of a child's level of school readiness and success early in their education (Hartman et al., 2017). Executive function is a predictor of behavioral challenges that potentially risk the education and development of many students during early childhood.

Poverty

Children living in poverty continue to be a factor in school systems; this adversity is causing a significant gap between children living in poverty and their peers living above the poverty line. Poverty levels in the United States are increasing and are twice as high as populations in the United Kingdom, Sweden, and France (Dreyer et al., 2016; Ullucci & Howard, 2015). The income-based achievement gap is significant in the United States, and this poverty gap continues to widen throughout the elementary school years (Burchinal et al., 2018; Morrissey & Vinopal, 2018; Plucker & Peters, 2018). Family poverty during early childhood development can cause long-term adverse effects on children (Morrissey & Vinopal, 2018). Young children growing up in poverty are affected in many ways, but supportive adults who work with these children are often unaware of the effects this form of adversity can have on behavior and development (Cho et al., 2015; Scholes et al., 2017; Ullucci & Howard, 2015).

The negative impacts of poverty on young children inhibit their physical development, mental growth, and possible academic achievement. Children living in poverty can be a challenge to educate due to an increase in levels of stress resulting in early childhood problem behaviors and reduced opportunities for learning (Blair, 2016; Collins et al., 2017; Tough, 2016). Family poverty has been shown to have negative long-term effects on a child's behavior, social skills, and social and emotional development (Burchinal et al., 2018; Morrissey & Vinopal, 2018; Ullucci & Howard, 2015). Poverty can also affect young children's health, physical development, stress levels, and safety (Dreyer et al., 2016; Izard & National Education Association, 2016; Plucker & Peters, 2018). Stress plays a substantial role in the development and behavior of a child in the classroom and within a child's everyday life. When a stress response is triggered in children, certain behavior patterns develop in a school setting, such as fighting, talking back, acting up, and difficulty connecting with teachers and peers (Tough, 2016). Behaviors exhibited in school can vary from loud and boisterous behavior to attempting to become invisible; these signs are indicators that help is needed for a child (Izard & National Education Association, 2016). In the classroom, children struggling with difficulties due to poverty can demonstrate a need for additional support in numerous ways, which can be challenging for teachers.

Research showed a strong connection between the effects of poverty and the development of executive function. Poverty is a predictor of a child's executive function, and lower socioeconomic status often results in lower executive function (John et al., 2019; Zelazo et al., 2016). Children from low-income homes are more likely to be

exposed to more stressors such as poor living conditions, single-parent households, unstable family lives, and inadequate childcare, resulting in elevated stress levels that negatively affect the development of executive function (Blair, 2016; Collins et al., 2017; Diamond, 2016; Tough, 2016). Due to the adverse effects poverty has on the development of executive function, it is essential to improve executive function skills through the use of effective, sustainable, and scalable strategies for children and early childcare providers (Diamond, 2016; Zelazo et al., 2016). To provide children with these strategies, educators need to be aware of challenges with poverty and executive function to provide these supports.

Research showed a connection between socioeconomic status and academic achievement (Boatwright & Midcalf, 2019; Burchinal et al., 2018; John et al., 2019; Morrissey & Vinopal, 2018). The detrimental effect poverty has on the development of executive function cause children to demonstrate poor academic achievement in school (Burchinal et al., 2018; John, et al., 2019). Schools serving low-income children can be emotionally intense and complex environments for children and staff, but through high-quality early care and education, the achievement gap can be reduced (Day & Hong, 2016; Morrissey & Vinopal, 2018). Young children growing up in poverty need additional support to develop necessary executive function skills and academic skills, but this cannot happen without the aid of knowledgeable teachers and staff in schools.

Effects of Poverty

Stress is a significant problem for children living in poverty-stricken areas because stress causes difficulties in various areas of critical development during early

childhood. Exposure to poverty increases stress levels in children that can impact the

development of executive function skills and the overall growth of young children (Blair,

2016; Haft & Hoeft, 2017). Through continuous stressors, children can become

chronically stressed, resulting in adverse effects on the development of the brain, student

behaviors, and cognitive growth during early development (Cedeño et al., 2016; Izard &

National Education Association, 2016; Rea, 2017). When children living in poverty

engage in complex social environments, such as school, they often demonstrate problem

behaviors that interfere with relationships and academic achievement (Hartman et al.,

2017; McFarland, 2017; Sheridan & McLaughlin, 2016). These problem behaviors

consist of aggression, anti-social behavior, easily distracted, poor memory, lack of

judgment, and an inability to regulate emotions (Choi et al., 2016; McFarland, 2017;

Romero-López et al., 2017).

　　　　As a result of negative behaviors in the classroom and an inability to focus due to

a lack of executive function skills, young children often fall behind in their academic

progress. Young children living in poverty are more likely to demonstrate poor school

readiness, which sets the stage for higher risk of academic challenges (Blair, 2016;

Burchinal et al., 2018; John et al., 2019). Children from poverty-stricken living situations

are likely to begin the school year four years behind their well-off peers (Rea, 2017).

Lower academic achievement is often a result of children growing up in low

socioeconomic homes, which can result in long term effects (Burchinal et al., 2018;

Cedeño et al., 2016; Hartman et al., 2017; Morrissey & Vinopal, 2018). When children

demonstrate low academic achievement they are less likely to graduate high school, have

difficulty finding employment, and continue the poverty cycle (Chung et al., 2016; Sheridan & McLaughlin, 2016). Even though many children living in a low socio-economic status demonstrate poor academic achievement, some of these students can reach academic success despite these life challenges (Williams et al., 2017). Students can achieve academic success, despite problems such as poverty, when they connect with a reliable and supportive adult (Haft & Hoeft, 2017; Post et al., 2019).

Connection Between Poverty and Executive Function

Poverty often plays a negative role in the growth of young children including the development of executive function. Studies show there is a connection between the children living in poverty and a lack of executive function development (Choi et al., 2016; Duval et al., 2016; Haft & Hoeft, 2017; Last et al., 2018; Moriguchi & Shinohara, 2019; Zelazo et al., 2016). These executive function discrepancies, as a result of living in poverty, can have long-term effects lasting into adulthood (Haft & Hoeft, 2017; Last et al., 2018). According to John et al. (2019), the lower the level of poverty a child lives in, the lower the executive function skills the child will develop.

Children living in poverty are exposed to extreme stress and adverse experiences that are harmful to their development during early stages of their lives. Due to these stressful environments, children come to school at a disadvantage because they are already behind on developing their executive function skills (Diamond, 2016). Teachers are in a position to provide a protective relationship that could prevent students from harmful effects on executive function skills due to poverty (Haft & Hoeft, 2017; Post et al., 2019).

Educators need to be aware of the vital role that they can play in the lives of their students, especially students that lack support at home. Teachers are considered to be in the most optimal position to identify and support children in school, especially those schools with limited resources (Biddle et al., 2018; Cedeño et al., 2016). Schools and educators play a critical role in the lives of children, and these interactions are essential for the development of executive function (Biddle et al., 2018; Choi et al., 2016). High-quality school environments and reliable adults, such as teachers, can be a protective factor for children living in poverty (Choi et al., 2016; Post et al., 2019).

Caring teachers have a strong influence over their students, and this is why teachers need to understand their students and match their teaching to student need (Cedeño et al., 2016; Longaretti & Toe, 2017). Vital concepts develop during early childhood, such as social and emotional development, and teachers drive the infusion of these skills in their classroom (Schonert-Reichl, 2017). Educators can provide children living in poverty with opportunities to grow their executive function skills through classroom activities and personal support. Building trustworthy teacher–child relationships is particularly important for higher risk children living in vulnerable communities (Chen & Phillips, 2018a; Collins et al., 2017; Longaretti & Toe, 2017). Teachers often provide the most stable relationships for many young children living in poverty (Post et al., 2019).

Teachers are able to influence student growth of necessary skills during early childhood, such as executive function skills, through teacher–student relationships resulting in more student success (Cedeño et al., 2016; Choi et al., 2016; Duval et al.,

2016; Williams et al., 2017). Through high-quality teacher–student relationships, children can develop social-emotional skills, self-regulation, and behavioral development (Chen & Phillips, 2018a; Collins et al., 2017; Post et al., 2019). Educators can inspire and influence academic effort and improve student behavior towards school (Williams et al., 2017). Through the development of close teacher–student relationships, along with appropriate classroom environments, academic success can be encouraged by the teacher (Schonert-Reichl, 2017). Even when children come from at-risk situations they can still overcome these challenges to reach academic success (Williams et al., 2017). It should not be assumed that children living in poverty cannot be successful; educators can help all children reach success if given the proper tools and support.

Teacher Beliefs

What teachers believe about their students, their abilities as an educator, and the impact they can make in their position as an educator all play a vital role in the classroom environment. Teacher beliefs about their students and how poverty affects their students' lives can influence the classroom environment, and a child's learning environment is as important as the content (Y.L. Goddard & Kim, 2018; Gorski, 2016). The environment provided for children sets the stage for relationships, comfort level in working towards personal growth, and the ability to take risks to learn new skills. Educators bring many beliefs and biases into their position, and it's essential that they are open to learning about themselves to provide their students with a safe and supportive classroom environment (Mette et al., 2016). New teachers entering the school system bring with them a set of beliefs about diversity and education in urban locations (DeJarnette, 2016). Often

teachers are unaware of how their personal beliefs affect their relations with individuals different from themselves, so educators need to examine their attitudes and beliefs when working with diverse populations (Mette et al., 2016).

Teacher beliefs are essential because they help determine the attitude of the teacher regarding their ability to support their students and the success of the students (Dell'Angelo, 2016). The way teachers view their students and their ability to teach their students directly affects socially disadvantaged students' achievement (Dell'Angelo, 2016; Šafránková & Hrbáčková, 2016). Educators are more likely to be successful if they believe they can make a difference (Dell'Angelo, 2016). Teacher self-efficacy is directly connected to the professional effectiveness of the educator, which correlates with student academic achievement (Chen & Phillips, 2018a; DeJarnette, 2016; Pfitzner-Eden, 2016). Classroom teachers feel that they cannot directly influence the adverse environments in which their students live (Šafránková & Hrbáčková, 2016). When teachers believe in their qualities and perceive fewer challenges due to preparation, student achievement is positively affected (Dell'Angelo, 2016). The success of students is directly connected with a teacher's belief in their ability to effectively support children living in adversity, such as poverty.

Teacher efficacy is an internal sense of confidence, resilience, and belief in their ability to handle teaching situations successfully, which results in positive teacher identity (Dell'Angelo, 2016; Y.L. Goddard & Kim, 2018). High teacher self-efficacy occurs in individuals who are more likely to attempt new teaching methods, exhibit self-confidence, and perceive student diversity in a positive manner (Šafránková &

Hrbáčková, 2016). Educators that have high self-efficacy often provide students with more organized and thoughtful teaching, and these teachers find more satisfaction in their career (Y.L. Goddard & Kim, 2018). To provide students with the care they need, teachers first need to feel prepared to meet student needs and feel confident in their ability to support all students.

Educators that have low self-efficacy may not believe they can make a difference in the lives of their students, exhibit less effective teaching practices, and may not perceive student diversity positively (Dell'Angelo, 2016; Herman et al., 2018; Šafránková & Hrbáčková, 2016). This lack of teacher efficacy can interfere with a teacher's ability to meet the needs of their students resulting in lower levels of student achievement (Y.L. Goddard & Kim, 2018; Herman et al., 2018). The development of teacher self-efficacy is related to instructional quality, job satisfaction, teaching performance, and student academic achievement but continues to be an under-researched area (Pfitzner-Eden, 2016).

Developing nurturing environments for the students, as well as relationships with the staff working with the children, is very beneficial for the school community (Herman et al., 2018). School leaders need to understand the perceptions of their teachers and build trusting relationships with their staff to improve the school climate (Mette et al., 2016; Tyler, 2016). The quality of the staff members in a school has a direct correlation with student achievement, and supporting teachers by providing professional development has a positive effect on teaching and teaching efficacy (Y.L. Goddard & Kim, 2018; Tyler, 2016). Teachers benefit from having opportunities to work together, resulting in personal

and professional growth, which in turn can lead to improved teaching efficacy (Y.L. Goddard & Kim, 2018; Herman et al., 2018). Educator beliefs are important to understand because teacher-efficacy affects their ability to provide the necessary education and support for young children.

Teacher Knowledge

Teachers are often well prepared to provide their students with academic support, but children living in poverty often need more than just the curriculum. Educators often do not understand poverty or how poverty affects their students, which creates less optimal learning opportunities to eliminate these barriers for students (Cho et al., 2015; Izard & National Education Association, 2016; Ullucci & Howard, 2015). Pre-service teachers enter the school system with a narrow understanding of poverty and often demonstrate stereotyping because many educators come from different backgrounds than their poverty-stricken students (Cho et al., 2015; Ullucci & Howard, 2015). Without adequate knowledge, skills, and strategies, educators are not prepared to work with children living in poverty, which will negatively affect students (Gorski, 2016; Izard & National Education Association, 2016; Longaretti & Toe, 2017). Teachers need proper preparation in identifying the signs of poverty and understanding how poverty affects children mentally, physically, and emotionally (Boatwright & Midcalf, 2019; Izard & National Education Association, 2016). Schools working with children suffering from poverty in their homes often are less likely than other schools to have access to teachers equipped to work successfully with this at-risk population (White et al., 2017). High-quality teachers and schools can have a positive effect on students living in poverty, but

currently, teachers are struggling with behavior and connections with these students due to a lack of knowledge (Rea, 2017; Scholes et al., 2017). Students living in poverty need more than the primary curriculum, they need well-prepared educators to provide them with the skills necessary to sit still, participate appropriately, understand information, and self-regulate their behavior before attempting to learn the curriculum (Boatwright & Midcalf, 2019; Buettner et al., 2016).

The development of executive function skills is an important factor in preparing students for school readiness, possibility more important than IQ or entry-level reading or math (Diamond, 2016). Educators need to be aware of executive function and develop their ability to identify the presence and absence of these skills to support their students (Moreno et al., 2017). Early childhood educators should have a strong understanding of social-emotional development, executive function, and how poverty can negatively impact a child's development (Boatwright & Midcalf, 2019; Buettner et al., 2016). Although students need to develop necessary executive function skills to achieve academic success, many teachers are not equipped to teach these skills and support children working on these skills.

The school community can have a strong influence on student performance and the adverse effects of socio-economic challenges (Scholes et al., 2017). Teachers need to understand the community in which they teach because their beliefs influence the classroom environment (Gorski, 2016; Longaretti & Toe, 2017). There are many challenges for teachers working in lower socio-economic school communities, such as personal experiences, expectations, working with diverse learners, and potentially a lack

of understanding of students in vulnerable environments (Longaretti & Toe, 2017).

Collaboration within the school environment can help build knowledge and teacher

resilience through school-wide relationships (Mansfield et al., 2016). Teachers need to be

prepared to work with students living in poverty, and these skills can be developed

through research-proven skills, strategies, and understanding (Izard & National Education

Association, 2016).

Teacher Preparation

For children living in poverty, their relationships with their teachers are often the

most stable relationships (Post et al., 2019). The preparation of teachers is crucial for the

overall growth of students in classrooms today, yet there are many different methods used

to train teachers. There are various types of teacher preparation programs, many online,

and one in five new teachers have obtained their degree in a non-traditional program

(Andrews et al., 2017). With these different types of teacher preparation methods, there is

a concern that these learning opportunities are not preparing educators to work with the

diversity of students they will encounter in their classrooms. First-year teachers often feel

unprepared to effectively manage their classroom and identify mental health challenges

in their students (Schonert-Reichl, 2017). Many in-service and new teachers feel ill-

prepared to work with children that have experienced trauma as a result of a lack of

knowledge or training (Humphries et al., 2018; Post et al., 2019; Schonert-Reichl, 2017).

Teacher preparation needs to provide information on pedagogies that support diversity

and educational disadvantages, but many preparatory programs focus on practical

teaching methodologies for the classroom (Dell'Angelo, 2016; White & Murray, 2016).

A lack of training in responding to children that have experienced trauma in high-needs schools can cause teacher stress (Post et al., 2019). These high stress levels for teachers in low-income schools is caused from emotionally intense learning environments and higher workloads that can result in teachers' physical and psychological absences from their work (Day & Hong, 2016; Herman et al., 2018; Humphries et al., 2018; Reddy et al., 2019). When educators become stressed in their working environment, it causes their students to become stressed and suffer from this additional tension (Herman et al., 2018; Schonert-Reichl, 2017). As teachers become stressed, they do not provide stable relationships for their students and inadvertently cause children additional hardship instead of alleviating their difficulties (Herman et al., 2018; Post et al., 2019).

There is a need to provide teachers with adequate preparation to work in low-income settings for the well-being of the children and the staff (Herman et al., 2018; Schwartz et al., 2019). Providing educators with new pedagogies specifically geared towards socially disadvantaged children, creating effective social networks, and providing support through coaching can improve teacher quality and reduce educator burnout (Herman et al., 2018; Izard & National Education Association, 2016; Reddy et al., 2019; White & Murray, 2016). Since teachers work directly with students daily, they are usually the first choice for delivering necessary skills through prevention and intervention programs (Humphries et al., 2018; Schwartz et al., 2019). Teachers need to be provided with knowledge about the possible diverse populations they may have in their classroom and be provided with supports to provide at-risk populations with a supportive classroom environment (Herman et al., 2018; Schwartz et al., 2019.

Relationships

Relationships are an essential part of the school community for students as well as teachers. Teachers need to build strong relationships with their school community members, along with their students, to develop teacher resilience (Mansfield et al., 2016). Providing a nurturing environment is imperative for the teachers, as well as the students, because when teachers are stressed their relationships with their students suffer (Herman et al., 2018). The role that teachers play in a child's life can often be the most stable relationships, especially for higher risk students (Collins et al., 2017; Post et al., 2019).

Positive relationships between teachers and students can positively affect social-emotional development, student behavior, development of executive function, school performance, and self-regulation (Chen & Phillips, 2018; Collins et al., 2017; Duval et al., 2016; Romero-López et al., 2017; Sharkins et al., 2017; Williams et al., 2017). Teachers can play an important protective role in the lives of children, especially at risk populations. Children are spending more time with early childhood caregivers and having a supportive relationship with a caring, predictable adult can help children living in adverse situations (Chen & Phillips, 2018; Post et al., 2019). When children do not have these supportive relationships they may demonstrate negative behaviors potentially causing long term challenges for the student. As a result of a lack of positive relationships in a child's life, children can have externalizing challenges such as aggression, impulsive behavior, and negative behavior in the classroom (Collins et al., 2017; Romero-López et al., 2017). Relationships with teachers and other supportive adults in a school setting can

be a protective factor for children living in impoverished environments (Chen & Phillips, 2018; Post et al., 2019).

Summary and Conclusions

Research suggested that executive function skills are vital for the success of children behaviorally and academically. Poverty harms the development of executive function during early childhood, and as a result, students need support while learning these skills in the classroom. Children's behavior is negatively affected by poverty, which causes difficulties in relationships as well as academic challenges; however positive relationships with an adult can counteract the effects of these harmful environments. The development of positive teacher–student relationships can encourage student academic success, but educators need to be prepared to work with at-risk populations. Teachers need to understand their personal beliefs and self-efficacy to prepare themselves to work with diverse learners. Although preparation for teachers is necessary to meet the needs of all students, many teachers do not feel prepared to work with at-risk populations resulting is stressful classroom and school environments.

The gap in practice that I addressed in this study was the perspectives of early childhood educators about what they need to support children living in poverty demonstrating poor executive function. My study could provide the school board with information about early childhood educators' perspectives on their ability to support children living in poverty and what additional supports they may need to meet their student's needs. In the next chapter, I will provide a description of the research design and methodology for my study. An explanation of the justification of the study design,

participant selection, sample size, and ethical protection for participants are included in

this chapter. Also, I include a discussion about procedures for data collection, data

analysis, and methods to ensure validity.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this study was to identify the perspectives of early childhood educators regarding their ability and self-efficacy to support children living in high poverty areas who demonstrate poor executive function. In this chapter, I review the basic qualitative research design used for this study. I also discuss the role of the researcher, methodology, participants, data analysis, and ethical procedures.

Research Design and Rationale

The research questions for my study were developed using Bandura's (1977) theory of self-efficacy. In Bandura's theory, the concept of self-efficacy is critical of knowledge as it addresses a person's belief in their ability to plan and implement the desired goal (Pfitzner-Eden, 2016). A teacher's self-efficacy is connected to their perceived ability to meet the diverse needs of their students (Chen & Phillips, 2018). The following RQs were developed using Bandura's theory of self-efficacy to guide this study in determining the perspectives of early childhood educator's self-efficacy when teaching students living in poverty:

RQ1: What are the perspectives of early childhood educators about their ability to support children living in high poverty areas who demonstrate poor executive function?

RQ2: What types of support do early childhood educators believe they need to develop their capability and perceived self-efficacy to teach and emotionally support children living in high poverty areas who demonstrate poor executive function?

The research design used for this study was a basic qualitative design using one-on-one interviews with prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers. Basic qualitative

research is conducted through interviews, observations, or document analysis, and how these methods are used depends on the study's framework (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). A basic qualitative design is used to explore individual reports on personal opinions, attitudes, beliefs, and reflections of experiences about a specific topic (Percy et al., 2015). A basic qualitative design was appropriate for my study because this method of data collection provided insight into participant beliefs and feelings about personal experiences on a topic. Because my focus was on the perspectives of early childhood educators regarding their ability to teach children living in poverty, this research design was appropriate to learn about individual beliefs and feelings.

Quantitative research methods include experimental, correlational, and survey, which focus on performance, attitude, observational, and census data (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Because my goal was to gain a deep understanding of teacher perspectives, personal interviews with the participants appeared to be a more appropriate method than survey and observational data. Although surveys would have allowed me to expand my population, I would have been unable to obtain a deep understanding of early childhood educators' perspectives regarding my topic.

Role of the Researcher

For this study, I acted as an interviewer/observer because I conducted the interviews and talked with the educators to develop inferences about real-world phenomena (see Yin, 2015). The information I gathered from these interviews served as my primary data source to answer my research questions. There are seven Title I schools in the research county, but my research took place in the Title I elementary schools in

which I did not teach. One of the six remaining Title I schools had to be eliminated from my research because that school did not have prekindergarten or kindergarten teachers. In the five remaining locations, I had no professional or personal relationships with any participants. All of the participants in this study were prekindergarten or kindergarten teachers teaching in a Title I school.

Although I did not have any previous relationship with the participants, I understood that there was a possibility for bias as a result of my personal experiences and feelings about the topic. My personal experience in a Title I school consisted of 12 years as a classroom teacher and 2 years as an intervention teacher in the same Title I school. Every research lens has the potential for subjective and objective qualities that need to be identified to avoid potential bias (see Yin, 2015). To avoid bias during my research, I recorded information in a journal to self-reflect throughout this process in an attempt to monitor my bias, assumptions, and the developing research relationship with the participants (see Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Ravitch and Carl (2020) stated that researchers can uncover and confront their biases through critical self-reflection and dialogue. Continuous critical self-reflection during my research helped me avoid researcher bias throughout my study.

Methodology

In this basic qualitative study, I used semistructured interviews with early childhood educators teaching prekindergarten or kindergarten in a Title I school. Five Title I locations in the same small county in an eastern U.S. state were used in this research. Purposeful sampling was used to gather the participants for this study (see

Etikan et al., 2016. This group of participants had to meet the selection criteria that included prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers who teach in a Title I school. Purposive sampling is appropriate when a particular criterion is necessary to reflect the purpose of the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Qualitative researchers often use purposive sampling to select specific participants and research locations to gather information to answer their research questions (Ravitch & Carl, 2020). For my study, I used homogeneous purposive sample as my specific type of purposive sampling. The homogeneous sample is used when the participants selected for the study all share a characteristic or set of characteristics (Crossman, 2019). Participants in my study shared two specific characteristics that included current prekindergarten or kindergarten teachers and taught at a Title I school.

The purposeful sampling method was appropriate for my study because it allowed me to recruit participants who met specific criteria. Participant criteria consisted of teaching at one of the five schools that were identified as Title I, which indicated that the school has a high poverty rate. An additional criterion for participation in my study was teachers teaching prekindergarten or kindergarten. I determined which participants met these criteria by using the list of Title I prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers on the county website, along with their school email address.

I planned to interview 10–12 prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers working in one of these Title I schools. A sample of 10-12 participants is the suggested sample size to reach data saturation in a qualitative study (Guest et al., 2006). Creswell and Creswell (2017) described data saturation as the point in analysis when no new themes

occur from collecting additional data, indicating an adequate sample size. There are no specific rules when selecting a sample size in qualitative research, and the sample size depends on what the researcher wants to know from the participants. The goal of qualitative research is to ethically and thoroughly answer the research questions developed for the study (Ravitch & Carl, 2020). My sample size allowed me to reach data saturation, which was determined when no new information emerged regarding my research focus (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

To locate participants for my study, I identified teachers who fulfilled the criteria of my study using the research county's website. The first step was to recruit participants by obtaining approval from each Title I school principal to conduct my study with their prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers. Once I collected this information, I contacted the teachers through their work email, inviting them to volunteer to participate in my study. Potential participants were asked to contact me via email if they were interested in participating in my study. I personally contacted each volunteer to give additional information about my study and provide them with a copy of the consent form before scheduling an interview.

Instrumentation

Two data collection instruments were used in my research, which included myself as the interviewer and my interview questions. While conducting interviews, I attempted to create an appropriate interview environment for this social interaction, which encouraged the respondents to share openly about their experiences (see Pezalla et al., 2012). Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, face-to-face interviews were not a safe form of

data collection, so I conducted the interviews using Zoom. Because I wanted the participants to share openly and honestly, I attempted to create a safe environment and remain consistent when conducting each interview. I chose to use an interview protocol while conducting the interviews to remain consistent throughout the interviews.

The second data collection instrument used in my research included researcher-produced open-ended questions used during my semistructured interviews. The semistructured interviews included an interview guide with specific questions with tailored follow-up questions that allowed for a deep understanding of the unique perspectives of the participants. BecauseI wanted to understand the individual perspectives of early childhood educators, semistructured interviews were appropriate for my study.

In preparation for my interviews, I developed an interview protocol (see Appendix A). This interview protocol included questions that supported my research questions and possible follow-up questions used to collect additional information. There were 11 main interview questions and 18 possible follow-up questions. Interview Questions 1 through 3 were used to gather information about the teaching experience of early childhood educators. Questions 4 and 5 were necessary to develop an understanding of a teacher's background in working with children living in high poverty areas and developing executive function in the classroom. Information gathered from Questions 6 through 9 provided data to answer RQ1. Lastly, Interview Questions 10 and 11 were developed to help answer RQ2. The interview questions demonstrated content validity through close alignment with my study's framework and research questions. Content

validity was also established through collegial review of my interview questions. A colleague with a doctoral degree and expertise in early childhood education was used for validation feedback. The sufficiency of data collection instruments was established through the use of my interview protocol that included eight interview questions with follow-up questions to ensure deep, rich data would be collected.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

Purposeful sampling was used to identify and recruit 11 early childhood educators currently teaching prekindergarten or kindergarten in a Title I school. The first step in recruitment was to obtain approval from each Title I school principal before contacting the prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers. Once I had the principal's permission, I sent an invitation to the potential participants via email for voluntary participation in my study. This email provided information about my research, an invitation to participate, and my contact information. Once participants showed an interest in my research, I sent them the consent form to review and sign before conducting the interviews.

The interviews were conducted through Zoom, a video conferencing tool, with each early childhood educator. Once I obtained written consent from the teacher to participate in the study along with permission to audio record them through the Zoom app, I described the interview process and allowed time for questions. The participants participated in one 25-45 minute one-on-one interview with me. After the participants had a clear understanding of the study and the interview process, I began the interview.

After the interview, I informed the participants that a copy of the transcript would be sent to them via email for review. Once the interview was complete, I transcribed the

audio recording immediately. I allowed time to schedule follow-up interviews if additional information was necessary after transcribing the initial interview. When the participants reviewed their transcript, I asked them to email me with any corrections or confirm the accuracy of the transcript.

Data Analysis Plan

I used qualitative data analysis to analyze my data collection. The goal of qualitative data analysis was to make sense of data collected through a selection of processes to develop themes to answer the research questions (see Ravitch & Carl, 2020). The interview questions asked during the teacher interviews were used to answer both RQs in my study. Interview Questions 4 through 9 provided information to answer RQ1: What are the perspectives of early childhood educators about their self-efficacy in supporting children living in high poverty areas who demonstrate poor executive function? Questions 10 and 11 provided data to answer RQ2: What types of support do early childhood educators believe they need to develop their capability and perceived self-efficacy to teach and emotionally support children living in high poverty areas who demonstrate poor executive function? Although the initial interviews shared similar questions, individualized follow-up questions were developed for use before and during the interview to gather information specific to each participant's experiences (see Ravitch & Carl, 2020). My interview protocol included questions and follow-up questions designed to elicit responses that could be used to answer my RQs and obtain a deep understanding of each participant's perspective. Data I collected from teacher interviews went through a coding process to analyze the information.

Data analysis involved a step-by-step procedure consisting of organizing and preparing for analysis, reflecting on initial data, beginning the coding process, developing themes, and representing descriptions and themes in the qualitative data (see Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Thematic analysis consisted of identifying relationships, similarities, and differences within the data (see Ravitch & Carl, 2020). Precoding was used to identify developing themes in my interview transcripts and notes taken during the interviews. Precoding is a form of open coding that involves a process of marking words and phrases that stand out to help generate potential codes (Ravitch & Carl, 2020).

I used open coding to identify what information stood out and the patterns within the data (see Ravitch & Carl, 2020). The process of open coding consisted of numerous readings of each of the interviews to determine the recurring information that could become a code. Once coding was complete, I used axial coding to create coding categories to see how the concepts connected to develop my findings (see Ravitch & Carl, 2020). I used the categories created during my coding process to create themes that addressed my research questions. I used manual coding and the data software Dedoose to organize the data collected from my interviews. Qualitative data software programs help researchers organize, sort, and search for specific information within the transcripts (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Possible discrepant cases were researched to enhance the validity of my study (see Yin, 2015). Discrepant cases were identified through member checking and peer debriefing. If discrepancies were found during the data analysis, these findings were researched in-depth and included in my findings.

Trustworthiness

While conducting qualitative research, it is necessary to ensure that the study demonstrates credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Collecting data through qualitative procedures is often subjective in regard to interpretation, so determining the trustworthiness of the research is essential (Yin, 2015). Yin (2015) said that it is necessary to establish a sense of trustworthiness in the generation of the data, not necessarily the truthfulness of the data.

Credibility

To ensure the credibility of this study, I conducted member checks with the participants in my research. My first step to establishing credibility was to send the participants the transcript of their interview to check for accuracy. After my initial findings, participants interviewed were provided with a two-page summary of my findings to gain their feedback (see Yin, 2015). These findings may include categories, interpretations, or conclusions about the data collected (see Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Credibility was established through peer debriefing to enhance the accuracy of the research. Peer debriefing involves a process that locates a qualified person to review and question the study so that the study resonates with someone other than the researcher (see Creswell & Creswell, 2017). I chose this person as my peer debriefer because she was a recent graduate of Walden University, held a doctorate in early childhood education and had recently become an author of an early childhood focused text. I provided my peer debriefer with my transcripts identified by participants' number, my themes, my current dissertation, and my findings. My peer debriefer was asked to review my transcripts,

themes, and findings to determine if the themes were plausible and determine if my

findings were accurate based on the transcripts.

Transferability

Although qualitative research is not used to generalize to other people or other

settings, transferability allows studies to transfer to broader contexts (see Ravitch & Carl,

2020). Transferability was established through a rich, thick description of the setting and

participants responses in the study (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Educators teaching

prekindergarten and kindergarten with various levels of experience and education

participated in this study, which provided a variation in participant selections. To support

the transferability of my research, I used purposeful sampling and provided a rich, thick

explanation and description of my findings that can be further explored by other

researchers. Credibility and transferability of my findings to other settings or contexts

was accomplished through member checks, thick descriptions, and variation in

participant selections. Merriam and Tisdell (2015) suggested that it is also the readers'

responsibility to generalize the findings and apply the information to their settings.

Dependability

Through the use of audit trails I ensured dependability, which described the

research steps taken in my study (see Korstjens & Moser, 2018). A log was kept to

monitor how data were collected, how categories are developed, and the steps taken in

the decision making process (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). I kept a personal log to

provide individuals with the ability to authenticate my research. Critical self-reflection,

was achieved by using a journal, providing insight into my biases, preferences, and

preconceptions as an early childhood educator who has been teaching in a Title I school

for 14 years (see Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The self-reflection

journal was used throughout my data collection and analysis which helped me reflect on

my decisions, steps in the research process, and determine the effectiveness of my study.

Interviews were consistent amongst all participants, the teachers participating in

the research were reminded that their participation was strictly voluntary, and they could

withdraw at any time. The questions for the interviews were directly aligned with my

research questions. Participants in this study had specific credentials that provided insight

into the perceptions of early childhood educators working in Title I schools.

Dependability was established through self-reflection and careful alignment of my

research to my research questions.

Confirmability

To ensure confirmability, I had to demonstrate that I had conducted my research

without bias. Through the use of a reflection journal, I was able to monitor any bias that I

may have had, or possibly developed during my research. The researcher needs to

understand their reflexivity and their relationship with their participants (see Yin, 2015). I

had an established data collection method, and I used an audio recording to ensure

accuracy. Once I transcribed the interviews, I sent the transcripts to the participants for

review. Member checks were conducted to ensure that information was collected

accurately and the results were a true reflection of the participants' perspectives.

Participants were provided with a clear understanding of the goal for my research and the

methods I am used to collect accurate findings. Confirmability was demonstrated through the use of clearly established data collection methods and a reflection journal.

Ethical Procedures

I gained approval and an assigned approval number from Walden University's Institutional Review Board (11-09-20-0440083) before conducting my research. Permission from school principals was obtained to contact the prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers in each of the Title I research sites. Next, I contacted the prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers in the five Title I schools for voluntary participation in my research. Participation in my study was strictly voluntary for early childhood educators, and participants were made aware they could leave the study at any time. The participants signed a voluntary informed consent form after they received exclusive information about the issue being researched and their roles as the interviewees, suggested by Yin, 2015. There were no incentives for participation in this study. As the researcher, developing trusting relationships with the participants was an essential component of my study.

Before contacting the prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers, I attempted to gain permission from each school administrator to contact the teachers. Teachers that volunteered to be interviewed were given a consent form and a description of my study prior to the interview. To ensure the protection of the participants, names of teachers, schools, and locations were kept confidential. Only members of my committee had access to the data, and all research materials were kept in a secured location. Member checks were used with the individuals participating in a study, so they were able to give their

thoughts on my preliminary and emerging findings to avoid misinterpretations of what the participants said in the interviews (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Participants were treated with respect, and they were reassured that they were being represented accurately.

Summary

In this section, I discussed the research methods, design, and methodology I intended to use to conduct my research. A basic qualitative design was chosen because I am interviewing teachers and looking for reoccurring themes within the data. The participants included 10–12 prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers from five Title I schools in the same county, and these participants were interviewed using a semi-structured format. To help organize my data, I utilized Dedoose, and the data was analyzed using thematic analysis. Dedoose is a data analysis program, used in qualitative research, which is used to sort and organize data to help the researcher find trends within the data and make sense of the data collected. Trustworthiness was determined through member checks and thick descriptions. Participants were protected through voluntary participation and confidentiality. Chapter 4 includes the research setting, data collection method, data collection analysis, results of the study, and evidence of trustworthiness. Chapter 5 will include the interpretation of the findings, limitations of the study, recommendations, and implications.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this study was to understand the perspectives of early childhood educators regarding their ability and self-efficacy in supporting children living in high poverty areas who demonstrate poor executive function, and what supports teachers felt they needed to meet the needs of their students. The following RQs guided this study in determining the perspectives of early childhood educators' self-efficacy and what supports teachers felt they needed when teaching students living in high poverty areas:

RQ1: What are the perspectives of early childhood educators about their ability to support children living in high poverty areas who demonstrate poor executive function?

RQ2: What types of support do early childhood educators believe they need to develop their capability and perceived self-efficacy to teach and emotionally support children living in high poverty areas who demonstrate poor executive function?

In this chapter, I present the study results by describing the study setting, the data collection process, analysis of the data, study results, and evidence of trustworthiness.

Setting

In this study, I conducted interviews with 11 early childhood educators teaching prekindergarten or kindergarten in a Title I school. I used county email addresses and Facebook groups to recruit participants for my study. Interested participants responded to my request through my Walden email or Facebook messenger. Ten of the participants communicated only through email, while one participant communicated through email and phone. I sent each participant a letter outlining the purpose and steps of my study, along with the informed consent. Informed consent was given by each participant through

the "I consent" reply via email, which was completed before all interviews. Five of the participants worked in the research county, and six worked in other locations in the United States. There was a lack of interest in participating in my study among local participants because of the pandemic, major holidays, and the sudden change from in-person teaching to virtual teaching due to a local increase in COVID-19 cases. After a month of actively recruiting teachers from the research county, I expanded my search to Facebook groups to find potential participants.

Data were collected through Zoom, a video conferencing tool, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. I conducted the interviews in a quiet area within my home where the interviews would not be interrupted. Participants were able to choose where they wanted to participate in the interview. Four teachers chose to participate in their classroom, and seven teachers elected to participate in their home. I gave each participant the option to keep their camera off during the interview however, but all participants decided to use their video. Although I took steps to minimize distractions, there were some distractions such as pets, children, and internet connections. During these disruptions, I remained patient and accommodating to participants' needs, making the atmosphere more relaxed during the interviews. I was able to complete all of the interviews despite unexpected but understandable interruptions.

Demographics

Eleven early childhood educators participated in my study. This group of early childhood educators consisted of seven kindergarten teachers and four prekindergarten teachers. All participants were currently teaching in a Title I school, and their years of

teaching experience in a Title I school ranged from 4 years to 22 years. The early

childhood educators were currently teaching prekindergarten or kindergarten, had various

levels of education and certifications, and had a variety of teaching experience both in a

Title I school and in schools not identified as Title I. The demographic information is

exhibited in Table 1.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Participant	Education background	Teaching experience (years)	Title I experience (years)	Grade level
P1	Master's	28	7	PK
P2	Master's	7	7	K
P3	Master's	12	12	PK
P4	Master's	13	4	K
P5	Bachelor's	11	11	K
P6	Bachelor's	25	22	K
P7	Master's	19	19	K
P8	Master's	15	4	PK
P9	Master's	18	18	PK
P10	Master's	4	4	K
P11	Master's	4	4	K

Data Collection

Participant recruitment took 2 months once I received approval from Walden

University's Institutional Review Board. Initially, I contacted each principal at the five

Title I schools in the research county for permission to contact their prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers. After receiving a response from only one principal, I began to recruit local early childhood educators through their public email addresses, which were available on the research county website. I recruited additional participants on Facebook pages with an early childhood focus. In both cases, I provided potential participants with a letter describing my study and the consent form. Participants contacted me through my email or Facebook messenger. Once the participants made the initial contact, I used my university email to communicate with them.

Eleven early childhood educators teaching prekindergarten or kindergarten in a Title I school participated in an interview for this study. Five participants were from the research county, and six participants were from different locations in the United States. I collected data through Zoom due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the interviews were recorded on an audio recorder. All interviews were conducted from my home, and the participants chose the location of their interview. Interviews were conducted between December 23, 2020, and January 13, 2021, and the interviews lasted between 25 and 45 minutes. The interview length varied based on minor interruptions, the depth of answers provided by the participant, and stories shared about the teacher's personal experiences. I had planned to take notes while conducting the interviews, but I felt that focusing on the conversation was more important. I did ask appropriate follow-up questions.

Once each interview was completed, I transcribed the interview and sent the transcripts to the participant for review. All 11 teachers reviewed and approved their transcripts, and only two transcripts needed minor corrections or additions. One

correction to a transcript was the number of years the participant taught each grade level. I caught this error before leaving the Zoom meeting and added the information after receiving the participant's permission. Another participant corrected their interview upon review; this participant realized that she had given me the wrong number of years she taught each grade level, so I corrected the transcript. Although I did have to expand my recruitment method due to unforeseen circumstances, my interviews progressed as described in Chapter 3.

Data Analysis

The data were collected for this study through the use of semistructured interviews. After the participants approved my transcription of their interviews, I conducted my thematic analysis using open and axial coding and the software program Dedoose to organize and store the data.

Data Coding

Ravitch and Carl (2020) suggested that the data source should be read in its entirety before coding the data. I read each interview individually and reflected on the overall content of the data. While reading each transcript, I wrote notes in the margin containing thoughts and ideas that stood out during the initial reading. This first step allowed me to become familiar with the content and reflect on the meaning within the data (see Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

I wrote down 231 keywords and key terms prior to precoding as potential codes for further analysis. Ravitch and Carl (2020) described precoding as a form of open coding that is an essential analytical process a researcher uses to familiarize themselves

with the data before formally coding them. During precoding, I read through each interview multiple times and manually wrote down notes, comments, and keywords that appeared noteworthy or repetitive. Once I completed my precoding, I uploaded all transcripts and my notes from my manual precoding to Dedoose. Once all of the data were organized in Dedoose, I read through the interviews and refined the codes and keywords I used to label the interview excerpts. During this data analysis, 55 open codes emerged (see Appendix B). Through the use of the Dedoose program, I started to identify similarities and patterns in the data to begin axial coding.

Axial Coding

Axial coding was described by Ravitch and Carl (2020) as a method of clustering codes or patterns to see how codes come together to form categories or themes. I read each interview multiple times using Dedoose to highlight words and phrases repeated throughout various interviews. While reading through the transcripts, I looked for information that would help answer my research questions. This process of axial coding involves narrowing the codes to create comprehensive categories (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). I then started to look for recurring patterns within the data. I searched for patterns within my codes to create categories or themes using codes developed during precoding (see Appendix C). Some of the codes used during precoding were eliminated or changed to sub codes during this process. Categories or themes should demonstrate recurring patterns within the data, and codes should be combined to create more comprehensive categories (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). After careful review of my data, I developed five themes for my study that are represented in my narrative. These themes included

executive function, poverty, teacher perspectives, understanding student situations, and what teachers need. Categories and themes are presented in Table 2.

During my data analysis, I found two possible discrepant cases. One case involved a kindergarten teacher assigned to a Title I school; however, due to the pandemic, she taught any students in her county who wanted to learn virtually. This change in position meant that she had some students who did not attend a Title I school. However, most of the students in her class lived in poverty at the time of the study. The second potentially discrepant case involved a prekindergarten teacher who taught in a transitional prekindergarten classroom that was grant funded and included 3-year-old children in the prekindergarten program. The funding for the grant was based on the high volume of migrant workers who lived in her school district. Although these two classrooms had special circumstances, the information collected still aligned with the experiences of the other participants interviewed, so I did not consider them discrepant cases.

Table 2

Data Categories and Themes

Theme	Category
Theme 1: Executive function	What is executive function
	Executive function skills
	Development of executive function skills
Theme 2: Poverty	What is poverty
	Different types of poverty
	Challenges
	Survival, not education
	Trauma
	Academics
Theme 3: Teacher perspectives	How able teachers feel
	Teaching understanding
Theme 4: Understanding student situations	Relationships
	Students as individuals
	Where students come from
Theme 5: What teachers need	Support
	What teachers feel they need

Results

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to understand the perspectives of early childhood educators regarding their ability and self-efficacy in supporting children living in high poverty areas who demonstrate poor executive function, and what teachers feel they need to meet the needs of their students. I collected data from semistructured interviews with 11 early childhood educators teaching prekindergarten or kindergarten in a Title I school. In the following sections, I organize my findings using my two RQs. Each participant was assigned a number during data analysis (e.g., P1, P2, P3), which is used throughout the results section.

Results for RQ1

The first RQ was the following: What are the perspectives of early childhood educators about their self-efficacy in supporting children living in high poverty areas who demonstrate poor executive functioning? Three themes emerged from the data analysis to answer RQ1: executive function, poverty, and teacher perspectives. RQ1 addressed the perspectives of early childhood educators regarding their self-efficacy as a teacher, their experience with children living in poverty, and their understanding of executive function skills in young children.

Theme 1: Executive Function

As shown in Table 3, all 11 participants responded to the questions asked during the interview describing executive function in their classroom and their experience with these skills. Executive function involves cognitive skills such as working memory, flexibility, self-regulation, and planning (Albert et al., 2018; K.L. Anderson et al., 2020). Three codes and four sub codes were developed from the participants' responses. Codes included what is executive functioning, executive functioning skills, and development of executive functioning skills. Sub codes included deficits in executive functioning skills, lack of background/experiences prior to the classroom, opportunity to build skills, and student coping skills.

Table 3

Research Question 1: Executive Function

Theme 1	Number of participants contributing	Number of transcript excerpts included
Executive functioning	11	93
What is executive functioning	11	21
Executive functioning skills	8	30
Development of executive function skills	11	42

What Is Executive Functioning. The participants discussed their definition and understanding of executive functioning. Participant answers focused on brain function, self-regulation or self-control, and the development of student independence. Four of the participants mentioned the function of the brain and mental ability of students when describing executive functioning. P1 said, "I think executive functioning is the brain's capacity to control actions and process actions to see what needs need to be met first." P5 connected these mental abilities to success beyond the classroom, "So my definition of executive functioning would be like the ability, the mental ability to learn, grow, manage all those skill sets that it takes to be successful in life." In connection with the mental ability of students, P6 stated, "I think executive functioning skills are those mental processes that are required to identify and carry out daily tasks." Lastly, P11 said, "So I think of executive functioning as kind of a set of skills and abilities, I don't know if abilities is the right word, about how your brain functions to make your life easier." Participants made a connection between executive functioning and necessary life skills.

Another aspect of executive functioning that participants shared was student self-regulation and self-control. P4 mentioned self-regulation of student behavior:

So for kindergarten it's kind of that ability to self-regulate their behaviors, not knowing…like for example the big thing this year was knowing how to we don't touch each other, and how we got to keep our mask on that was another thing this year.

P9 shared another classroom activity that needed self-regulation when she said, "How are they in transitioning from one activity or direction to another, would come under executive function and impulse control is a big one for little guys." P10 thought, "So at the kindergarten level I guess I'm thinking about like goal setting, self-monitoring, self-control are all part of that executive functioning kind of umbrella."

Participants in my study appeared to connect executive function skills with the development of independence in the classroom. The growth of executive function skills was discussed in some interviews, which described the change from following directions to developing independence. P4 discussed the need to develop independence:

as the year goes it becomes more than that, it's more of the independence factor, being able to complete things, showing that they're ready for first grade because we know what the first grade teachers expect when the students come in.

P7 simply stated, "Just being self-sufficient."

While participants discussed their definition of executive functioning and their understanding of executive function skills, they referenced questions they asked when identifying these student skills in their classroom. P2 referenced the following question,

"How am I organizing my thoughts, how am I planning my day, how am I just living my life and able to think about…?" P7 shared the following question when discussing executive functioning skills:

> And teaching them that you need to become independent, take care of yourself and speak up for yourself and work hard for things and even when something you don't understand or it's not easy or you might not like it, that there are some things that we have to figure out how we are going to get through it, how are we going to do it?

During my interview with P11 regarding the definition of executive functioning, she made this statement, "I think a lot of times we put executive functioning skills into kind of a maturity thing, if that makes sense." Each participant had a personal view of executive functioning that included skills necessary to self-regulate, demonstrate self-control, and develop more independence in the classroom.

Executive Functioning Skills. During the interviews, participants identified the executive functioning skills they saw their students demonstrate or looked for their students to display in the classroom. Participants shared many skills demonstrated in their classroom, such as organization, decision-making, and working memory. One executive functioning skill that many participants mentioned was their students' ability to remain organized in the classroom. Some participants recognized that organization is an essential focus in their classroom. P3 said, "A lot of the things in my classroom are, like I said, organization and flexibility." P9 stated, "The kids very quickly I think learn to understand what's expected and what's allowed in the classroom so they develop that self-control or

that organization or that working memory or whatever it is." P11 mentioned, "We try to keep them organized, try to get them to plan ahead and those kinds of things."

Another skill participants mentioned during the interviews was the student's ability to make decisions. Some participants felt that students had not had the opportunity to make choices and needed opportunities to work on those skills. P9 made a connection between executive function and student choice:

But executive functioning I see as their ability and experience to make choices, to regulate their behaviors and their bodies and the ability to make decisions and how they respond to any kind of situation would be an executive function.

P5 mentioned, "Also, decision making and impulse control, so am I going to use my red crayon or my pink crayon?" P6 shared an example of decision making in the classroom:

To be able to go to a center and be able to engage in a task and actually stay there for any length of time, sustain their attention, complete a task, know that they've completed the task and be able to then clean it up and go make another choice to go someplace else.

Along with decision-making, as an important executive functioning skill in the classroom, memory and retention were also important skills referenced in the interviews. P10 said, "The working memory and the retaining of information and applying what they know to new information is definitely something we work on in kindergarten and is definitely related to executive functioning." P5 indicated that "memory and retention is a big deal in kindergarten, there's so many skills we are trying to get them to have and then they have to remember information to be able to use that skill." Retention is essential in a

classroom environment for skills such as recalling procedures and expectations, which are supported by executive function. P11 discussed how working memory works in the classroom:

> But then you've got things like working memory is a really interesting piece of the puzzle I think in terms of what we do in kindergarten. There's not really a way to teach it but remembering just what you're supposed to do day to day seems to be really different for these kids if that makes sense.

Although retention is not identified as an executive function skill by definition, multiple participants made a connection between executive function and retention. Numerous executive function skills were identified throughout the interviews, as necessary skills for success in the classroom, including organization, decision making, and working memory.

Development of Executive Functioning Skills. Participants shared their experience with students developing executive functioning skills in their classroom. This section has four sub-codes: deficits of executive functioning skills, lack of background/experiences prior to the classroom, opportunity to build skills, and student coping skills. Below I discuss each of the sub-codes for this theme.

Deficits in Executive Functioning Skills. Participants were asked about how students living in poverty develop executive functioning skills. Information gathered from the interviews indicated that participants felt students had a deficit in executive functioning skills, a lack of skill development, and a lack of vocabulary development. Children that have prolonged experiences in poverty often experience delays in the development of executive functioning skills (Sasser et al., 2017; Willoughby et al., 2018).

Many participants shared that they believed there was a deficit in developing executive functioning skills among children living in poverty. P5 said, "Yes I think that there are definitely deficits that you can markedly see." P9 mentioned, "It [poverty] can strongly impact it in a negative way for sure but I think that again going back to the personality and the intrinsic value that the children hold within themselves can help them to rise above that." P11 stated, "I think, as a whole, I would say kids living in poverty are slower to develop those skills." Although multiple participants said there were deficits in developing executive functioning skills, they also mentioned that these skills could be developed and children could rise above these challenges.

When discussing how children living in poverty develop executive function skills, the participants mentioned skills their students lacked in the classroom. P1 stated, "I think that because students that are in poverty experience more trauma, that affects their brain and I think that because it inhibits the self-regulation skills." P2 shared some skills her students were lacking, "There's a lot of calling out, they just really have a lack of maybe understanding of how to behave and act in an environment that's a school environment." P5 also mentioned the skills her students were lacking:

> So there's a wide range, I will say that I feel like here in this community we get a larger percentage of kids who have a trouble time retaining information, who have trouble completing basic self-care skills, who have not sometimes been taught or have not been taught in an effective enough way to name colors, shapes.

Participants also felt that vocabulary development was often affected by poverty during early childhood. P1 said, "I feel like they're not talked to as much, they're not

read to as much, their vocabulary is often lower than what the students around them are."

P10 stated, "But one thing we've really noticed is like for example vocabulary

development is, that's a huge gap between students that are coming from I guess a

middle-class household verses students that are living in poverty." When children

experience poverty their brain development can be affected, resulting in a negative

impact on skills such as planning, thinking, problem solving, regulating emotions, and

attention (Dike, 2017). Based on participant responses, participants felt there was a

deficit in their student's development of executive functioning skills.

Lack of Background/Experiences Prior to the Classroom. When participants

were asked about their students executive functioning skills, participants discussed the

lack of background and experiences in their students' homes. P10 said, "A retention of

information and just because a lot of students that are living in poverty might not have all

these great background resources and knowledge that some of the other students might

have just from exposure." P1 stated, "you can almost tell that they've been in a sterile

environment because they have a lack of vocabulary and a lack of ability to respond." P3

shared a similar experience when she said, "Whereas the other little guy he didn't have

the same experiences, it appeared that no one ever really talked to him, no one ever really

set any expectations of him." P2 mentioned that, "They're not being read to, they can't

hold books but they want to play games and swipe on devices big time." This lack of

experiences in their homes is causing students to have executive function deficits coming

into the classroom.

Opportunity to Build Skills. The participants in my study described opportunities given to their students to develop these executive functioning skills, such as routines. P8 said this about the use of routines, "I have to spend a little extra time here of helping them understand protocol and policies and routine, and I always tease repetition is queen and routine is king in pre-k and so that is what I would say." P3 mentioned, "And work on building the trust and building routines with them and filling in those gaps with the vocabulary and the experiences and giving them the opportunity to have those things." P9 shared a similar idea about providing opportunities to build executive functioning skills in the classroom:

> Also in a regular classroom we establish the norms and the expectations of the
> classroom and develop that community and create those relationships and then the
> kids very quickly I think learn to understand what's expected and what's allowed
> in the classroom so they develop that self-control or that organization or that
> working memory or whatever it is.

Participants shared their beliefs in providing students with routines, protocols, and expectations to build their classroom community.

Student Coping Skills. During the interviews, participants described coping skills their students developed due to a lack of executive functioning skills. P11 mentioned a lack of executive functioning skills, "I think a lot of times they learn really interesting coping mechanisms for when they don't have them." P1 stated this about her students, "That their first goal is self-preservation and so they act impulsively and quickly because if you stop and think about it then you're going to lose whatever it is, so they act more

impulsively." P7 mentioned additional coping skills, "I feel they have that fight or flight response to a lot of things. They've learned that everything might be tough, they've learned maybe not to expect that support that fend for yourself kind of mentality." Students with a deficit in their executive functioning skills may develop and use less appropriate coping mechanisms.

Theme 2: Poverty

As shown in Table 4, during the interviews all 11 participants responded to the questions asked about poverty. Poverty is when individuals are denied the means to meet their basic needs, such as shelter, education, health, and security, for survival and sustenance (Hassan et al., 2020). Six codes and six sub-codes were developed from the participants' responses. The six codes are: what is poverty, different types of poverty, challenges, survival, not education, trauma, and academics. The six sub-codes are: communication with parents, staff in agreement, meeting basic needs, out of teacher control, parent education background, and parental involvement.

Table 4

Research Question 1: Poverty

Theme 2	Number of participants contributing	Number of transcript excerpts included
Poverty	11	102
What is poverty	11	11
Different types of poverty	7	12
Challenges	10	51
Survival, not education	6	9
Trauma	4	10
Academics	6	10

What Is Poverty. When discussing the definition of poverty during the
interviews, participants often described poverty as a lack of resources or a family unable
to meet their basic needs. P4, P8, P9, P10, and P11 defined poverty as lacking resources
or funding to meet critical basic needs. P8 provided examples of resources families in
poverty may be lacking:

> There's different types of poverty but the way that it's outlined is not having the
> resources to be able to acquire what you need, and maybe as simple as not having
> enough money to put food on your table and it may be as drastic of not being able
> to even have anything, you may have poverty where you end up sleeping on a
> street and not having food, clothes or anything.

P1, P2, P5, P6, and P7 shared that poverty is when a family is unable to meet the basic essential needs to survive. P6 shared some examples of basic needs that are challenging for families in poverty to meet, "I think poverty is the inability or the difficulty in meeting one's needs: food, shelter, clothing, transportation, all of those things." When discussing the meaning of poverty, all participants were consistent with their understanding of families living in poverty. P3 shared her thoughts on the definition of poverty:

> My definition of poverty is not exclusive to financial, as far as I'm concerned—poverty is when you have deficits in background knowledge, vocabulary, experiences, things like that not necessarily just in the skills and your desires to do things.

Participants shared similar ideas about the meaning of the word poverty, as well as the basic needs these families often lacked due to their circumstances.

Different Types of Poverty. Multiple participants felt that there were different types of poverty; poverty is not just financial difficulties. P2 shared her idea that there are inconsistencies in poverty:

> I feel like it is a lot of inconsistencies in poverty, there's a lot of kids that smell bad, they're not clean, they don't have clean clothes. And then there's kids you almost can't tell are in poverty because they still have a very big family value and support system even though they are still living in poverty.

P1 and P8 agreed with P2, stating that there are different kinds of poverty. P9 shared some examples of different kinds of poverty to consider:

The definition I wrote down was lacking the means or the money to get what we

need to get, or what we need to have—and that could fall under different areas of

poverty; could be economical, financial, it could be social, it could be educational,

it could be spiritual.

Another discrepancy in poverty could be rural and urban poverty. P1 shared her

experience, "poverty is different than urban poverty and so you see different

manifestations of that." P8 supported P1's idea of a difference between urban and rural

poverty, "So, like here they're different than they are in the city; way different than in the

suburbs in the city of Chicago, it's very different."

Challenges. Participants shared the challenges they faced when working with

children and families living in high poverty areas. This section has six sub-codes:

communication with parents, staff in agreement, meeting basic needs, out of teacher

control, parent education background, and parental involvement. Below, each of the sub-

codes for this theme were addressed.

Communication With Parents. Participants mentioned challenges such as

communicating with parents, creating a connection between school and families, and

working with parents to support their children. P4 has a large population of English

Learners (EL) families, and she discusses language issues, "So I think that's one thing,

my ability not to be able to communicate with them fully like I would with my English

[speaking] students kind of holds me back sometimes." P10 shared a lack of connection

and an inability to communicate with families:

Another challenge is, unfortunately for a lot of families that are living in high

poverty areas we don't have great connection between myself and the families

which is due to a lot of things. They're working multiple jobs which I understand,

phone number changes maybe every month or so, or their address changes so

communication there is difficult.

Several participants shared challenges they faced when trying to work with

parents due to a lack of trust and an absence of relationships. P11 said, "So some way of

connecting with families and making them feel more ownership in the process and I think

that would actually boil over into all aspects of life for them." P6 shared similar

challenges and expressed an interest in helping parents:

I really feel like the biggest challenge for me is a couple things. One thing is

developing relationships with parents so that I can help them, so that they trust me

so that I can see the needs so they will accept my help.

Letting parents know they are working together in the best interest of their child was

something expressed in an interview with P9:

So I think that sometimes puts parents at ease to know that we're on the same

team and I'm only there to help them, I'm not their enemy. And I've talked about

that I always work to build a relationship with the children but I try to build those

relationships with the parents too and just let them know that we're working

together.

Participants shared challenges they faced when communicating with parents and why

those communications were important or beneficial.

Staff in Agreement. With many people involved in a child's education, participants shared the need for everyone to be on the same page so student needs can be met. P1 shared, "I still feel like the challenges that education needs that is if everyone is on the same page then we can do so much more together even if we don't have any other resources." P10 shared a similar idea, "And I think that's the biggest challenge is just getting everybody on the same wavelength on what these kids need to be successful." Another participant brought up the idea that negativity can cause challenges, such as labeling children in an unpleasant way. P8 shared this feeling, "That's the hardest part about being an educator is portraying the good because it's like everyone wants to focus on the negative."

Meeting Basic Needs. According to some participants in my study, students often come to school without their basic needs met, and these needs have to be met before they can move on with their day. P8 said, "I think the one thing I noticed about kids in poverty is it goes with Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. You have to fulfill their needs, making sure they get fed, making sure they are properly taken care of." P6 had a similar experience with fulfilling the basic needs of her students:

> That makes it a lot more challenging, they do some of my kids do come to school
> hungry, some of them I have to feed before I can get them to learn. We clothe
> kids when they need clothing and that kind of thing, so we do step in.

Educating students can only happen once their basic needs have been met. P2 stated a clear distinction between children that aren't living in poverty and those that are living in poverty:

They know their numbers, their letters, their sounds a lot of them when aren't

living in poverty and so therefore they are actually ready to move on where

students living in poverty a lot of times we have to start with social-emotional

needs, and basic needs and they don't know even the letters of their name.

Some participants voiced their concern about student's basic needs not being met and

how they try to provide these necessities in the classroom.

Out of Teacher Control. A significant challenge when working with children

living in poverty is many circumstances are out of the teacher's control. P7 said, "So I

think that the things that are out of my circle of control are very frustrating, what can you

do about that?" P2 suggested one aspect of the classroom that is out of the teacher's

control, "It goes back to what I said earlier, it feels like if these kids seem to have the

biggest class sizes." P5 mentioned, "The biggest challenge that I face working with these

kids is lack of trained people." Class size and a lack of trained staff are just two things

out of the teacher's control. P5 shared her feeling about not being able to control what

she takes to heart:

It's hard to put it away because you want so badly to help these kids, it can really

get into your heart and then you try get the resources, you try to find ways to help

and that is incredibly hard sometimes.

Parent Education Background. Participants shared that a parent's educational

background can determine how their children interact in a school environment. Parents

sometimes lack the skills to support their students or do not value the idea of education.

P8 said, "I think it really depends on their parents and how well their executive

functioning is because if a parent is lacking those skills, they're not going to be able form

them." P1 agreed with P8, "And I feel like parents have fewer skills to teach them." P7

suggested that parents want to help their child but are unable to help:

> The parental support with their education many times it's their inability to help so
>
> it comes off as they're not helping, very often it's because they don't know how
>
> to, they don't have the experience with how to help their child even as young as
>
> five years old.

When parents have a poor educational experience, it can be a challenging idea to

change. P2 said, "I think the biggest challenges are parents that just don't buy into the

educational system. If they don't value education or they had bad experiences sometimes

that's really a hard mountain to climb over." P8 reinforced the same idea, "So that's what

I've noticed, I think it depends on the parents, I think it depends on their connectivity to

their children, and their input and value in education itself." P6 felt that parents weren't

active participants in their child's education due to fear, "I think part of the reason they

don't engage because they think that they are going to be laughed at or criticized or

looked down on if they admit things like that."

Parental Involvement. Many participants found parental involvement to be a

challenge and an essential part of a child's education. P9 said, "I think the biggest

challenge for me over the years has been connecting with the parents and helping them

understand that we're all on the same team." P11 found parental involvement to be

important:

So if we could do parent workshops or something like that to help parents know

how to help their kids and I know we've always talked about that kind of stuff but

I think this year has really underscored how important parents are to the equation.

P2 mentioned, "Parent's weight is much more than my weight." Even though parental involvement is important to their children's education, engaging with parents can be challenging. P6 shared her experience with parents who are not engaged in their child's education:

I find that a lot of times the parents are not as engaged with the education system

in that setting. They kind of hand the kids off to us to educate them and then they

don't see their role in part of that.

P7 said, "I know there is always going to be parents that struggle with parenting or how to communicate with me or to truly feel that yes I am here to help your child."

Survival, Not Education. Families that live in poverty have to prioritize their time, and education is often not the priority. P11 shared her experience, "Not that the parents don't want to work with them but it's just that the demands of everyday life are different when you live in poverty." P3 said, "A lot of them have had a lot of trauma in their lives and their focus is not on education. Their focus is on survival, so we have to meet their needs where they are." P4 and P10 stated that a significant challenge for parents is determining how to work and support their children while meeting the demands of everyday life. As a result of families focusing on survival, the children living in these homes may have different views. P1 said, "That their first goal is self-preservation and so they act impulsively and quickly because if you stop and think about it then you're going

to lose whatever it is, so they act more impulsively." P7 described the children's viewpoint, "They've learned that everything might be tough, they've learned maybe not to expect that support, that fend for yourself kind of mentality."

Trauma. Trauma often occurs when families live in high poverty areas. P10 stated, "We know that kids that are coming from poverty are experiencing some sort of trauma, just maybe not getting some of those needs met that they need met." P11 also made a connection between poverty and trauma, "I think so much of executive functioning is impacted by all of trauma in all of its forms including poverty." When children are exposed to trauma, it can cause issues with many executive functioning skills. P1 said, "I think that because students that are in poverty experience more trauma, that affects their brain and I think that because it inhibits the self-regulation skills that they have."

Academics. Participants described the negative connection between children living in poverty and their academic skills and school readiness. P6 shared her experience with the connection between poverty and academic skills:

> Academically the kids tend to be lower when they come to me, less prepared for school at the early age. Both academically and emotionally, as far as being able to sit and listen to a story, being able to interact with peers, those kinds of skills and they just have a lower/less vocabulary, less…some of them aren't counting or don't know or can't write their name yet.

P10 talked about the effects poverty has on the academic ability of her students:

So that effects long term their reading, absolutely their ability to that just retention

of information applying it to new skills, if they don't have a lot of oral vocabulary

skills their reading is really going to suffer, their writing skills and their writing

skills is a huge thing that we are seeing is suffering, especially for those kids that

aren't coming in with a lot of language.

Participants saw negative consequences when children were living in poverty, including

P11, who said, "So I have noticed we are struggling with low reading rates and math is a

struggle."

Theme 3: Teacher Perspectives

As shown in Table 5, 11 participants responded to the questions about teacher

perspectives. As teachers gain self-confidence, they can handle changing situations and

challenges such as adopting new district policies, adjusting curriculum to meet student

needs, managing classrooms, or complying with state and federal guidelines (Pearman et

al., 2021). Two codes and three sub-codes were developed from the participant responses.

The two codes are: how able teachers feel, and teacher understanding. The three sub-

codes are: feel capable to teach students, unprepared/not capable of teaching students,

and a different mindset.

Table 5

Research Question 1: Teacher Perspectives

Theme 3	Number of participants contributing	Number of transcript excerpts included
Teacher perspectives	11	37
How able teachers feel	9	16
Teacher understanding	10	23

How Able Teachers Feel. Participants shared their perspectives on how capable or prepared they felt to teach students living in poverty and demonstrating poor executive functioning skills. Two sub categories were developed for this theme: capable and unprepared/not capable. The participants had a mixture of feelings about their ability to work with children living in poverty. Below, each of the sub-codes for this theme was addressed.

Capable. Four of the participants felt "pretty" capable of teaching children living in high poverty areas and that demonstrate poor executive functioning. P10 said, "So I feel like here I feel pretty able to teach children that are living in poverty that show those poor executive functioning skills." P2 also felt capable, "I think I feel pretty good about it, I mean I actually prefer it. It's been my choice to be in the school I'm at." With all of her experience, P7 said, "I feel quite capable, I think over the years when the pendulum swings with what the big thing is in education or how to approach things, it's swung back several times." Another participant that felt "pretty" capable was P11, "I feel pretty capable. I think a lot of teaching is meeting your kids where they are."

Unprepared/Not Capable. Seven participants felt they were either unprepared or did not feel capable of working with children living in poverty that demonstrated poor executive function. Multiple participants did not feel prepared to work with these students because training was not provided during their educational courses or in professional development opportunities. P8 said, "Honestly if you would have asked me like when I first got out of school, you don't learn it in school to be honest." P1 agrees with P8 when she stated, "I think my skills are improving but I still feel like it's not something that is taught overall to teachers. I know I received no training." Another participant that did not feel prepared was P10 when she said:

> But I definitely was not prepared, it was also my first year teaching pre-k which you know that comes with its own things too but it was eye opening for me to realize what some of these kids were going through and how incredibly strong and resilient they were.

Some participants did not feel capable or struggled to work with children living in poverty that demonstrated poor executive function. P9 said, "I don't always feel capable and I've had some years and even days where I just struggle understanding where they are coming from." P6 was struggling when working with these students and families, "I'm struggling with it, I think I went through a phase of not understanding it because it comes so naturally for me." Some participants mentioned having missing components to their understanding, such as professional development and not having enough time and resources to meet the needs of their students. P1 felt that there was a lack of teacher training:

And it's not something that we've talked about really in our workshops and PDs within the county and I know the teachers I've worked with are often more worried about punishing a behavior rather than looking at what the cause of the that behavior is.

P5 mentioned that she felt she knew what needed to be done but still didn't have the ability:

I feel like I know what needs to be done but I feel like I don't always have A the time to do what I know needs to be done for a certain kiddo or B the resources to do what needs to be done for that kiddo or for that family.

Many participants did not feel prepared to support children living in high poverty areas due to a lack of preparation, lack of professional development, or a lack of resources.

Teacher Understanding. This theme includes what teachers understand or do not understand about working with children living in poverty and who demonstrate poor executive function skills. Participants felt there was a lack of understanding among teachers regarding these children. Since professional growth opportunities were not provided, participants felt the need to seek out their own professional development. P11 said there was a lack of training for new teachers about executive functioning:

has a pretty extensive new teacher orientation process that actually they do a like 5 year thing but never in any of those sessions that we've done have they talked about executive functioning which is surprising to me, like a lot of teachers don't know what it is therefore don't know how important it is.

P6 made this point, "It's hard to look for things you don't know you don't know."

Some participants mentioned that they felt there was a lack of understanding about working with children in a Title I school. P11 said, "But having some sort of training before you step into the classroom or as you step into the classroom would be helpful." P10 felt unprepared, "I think my first year I was a little taken aback to be honest because I didn't quite understand what it meant to work in a Title I school." P1 saw a lack of understanding with her co-workers:

> And what I think has happened is that it has come from the top saying this is what you're going to do and the people that don't understand they follow a checklist of what they have to do but in practice they are doing the same things.

Participants felt there was a need to find their training and professional learning opportunities because they were not provided with what they needed to work with their students. P8 said she had to seek out professional development to meet the needs of a child in her classroom:

> I only have what abilities I have, so I've learned to learn myself and the gain the skills I can like this summer I took classes on autism because I knew I was getting a child that had that. Because it's like I want to be the best teacher I can for the students that I have.

P1 shared a similar idea, "So I have no idea what younger teachers are receiving in their teacher prep courses but I know that the training I've has been because I've chosen to learn, I've chosen to read." P9 looks to colleagues when seeking help, "I go to my colleagues all the time and seek their help. I've taken classes, I've gone to workshops and seminars, read some books." Below, the sub-code for this theme were addressed.

Different Mindset. Some participants shared their lack of understanding of students living in poverty because, as teachers, they have a different mindset than their students and their students' families. P7 shared, "I consider myself somewhere in the middle class but just the mindset in very different with how those types of things are taught." A similar comment was made by P9, "Because I'm middle class and the biggest thing that she says is, all of our school systems and all of our classrooms are set up according to middle class standards and expectations." With a different mindset than their students, it's difficult for teachers to put themselves in their students' place to understand their situations. P3 felt that it was difficult to put herself into the shoes of her students:

> Some people don't see it that way, they feel like everything needs to be across the board but when you're dealing with these kids who come in with trauma and come in with things they've seen in their lives that you'll never see, you've never experienced, you don't ever want to experience, it's really difficult to put yourself in their place but you really have to try to and you have to meet them where they are.

P6 said, "I haven't stopped to think about it and I haven't really stopped to think how much these families are dealing with and how many advantages I have had in my life that they have not had access to." P2 suggested not judging a book by its cover, "Their values may be different, so sometimes it's a little hard to tell and you really can't judge a book by its cover I guess."

The participants were able to answer RQ1 with rich, thick responses to the interview questions. Participants shared a clear definition of what executive functioning

meant and the executive functioning skills that students demonstrated in their classroom.

Also, participants appeared to have a full understanding of the definition of poverty and

the numerous challenges due to poverty. There was a mixture of responses concerning

teacher perspectives on their ability to work with children living in high poverty areas

and demonstrating poor executive functioning. The participants believed there was a need

for more understanding about students living in poverty and about executive functioning

than currently provided by their school or district. With some participants not feeling

prepared to work with children living in high poverty areas and demonstrating poor

executive functioning, RQ2 provided insight into what these participants felt they needed

to support their students.

Results for RQ2

The second research question was: What types of support do early childhood

educators believe they need to develop their capacity and perceived self-efficacy to teach

and emotionally support children living in high poverty areas who demonstrate poor

executive functioning? Two themes developed from RQ 2: understanding student

situations and what teachers need. This RQ addressed the perspectives of early childhood

educators on their self-efficacy as a teacher working with children living in high poverty

areas and who demonstrate poor executive functioning. Also, this RQ addressed the

support teachers felt they needed to work with these students.

Theme 4: Understanding Student Situations

As shown in Table 6, 10 participants responded to the questions asked during

their interviews about understanding student situations. When teachers get an

understanding of their students through relationship building, it gives them a better

understanding of what they can do for those students (Dike, 2017). Three codes and two

sub-codes were developed from the participant's responses. The three codes were:

relationships, students as individuals, and understanding where students come from. The

two sub-codes were the importance of relationships and relationships with families.

Table 6

Research Question 2: Understanding Student Situations

Theme 4	Number of participants contributing	Number of transcript excerpts included
Understanding student situations	10	56
Relationships	7	19
Students as individuals	5	18
Understanding where students come from	8	19

Relationships. Participants expressed the need to develop relationships in their

classrooms to meet the needs of their students. Many participants discussed the

importance of relationships and how those relationships help students feel safe. Also,

participants discussed the need to cultivate relationships with students and their families.

Below, each of the sub-codes for this theme was addressed.

Importance of Relationships. P4 shared the importance of relationships:

I always knew how important the relationship aspect was but for kids in Title I

schools it's even more important because again for some of them it's the only safe

place for some of them school is the only place that they are getting a solid meal.

Making students feel comfortable and safe was brought up by multiple participants. P3 said, "So it's just about building a classroom of community, you know all my kids feel safe, they feel like they can reach out." P10 also recognized the importance of relationships:

> And for a lot of kids living in these high poverty areas that's our first step, especially in early childhood. Was how can we make sure that they're feeling comfortable and they're feeling safe, that they're making relationships with us and their peers, and a lot of that meaningful relationship has to happen before that meaningful learning can occur.

When students create relationships with an adult, they can develop that comfort and stability. P7 shared the need for students to have a connection with an adult:

> That I can't do it I'm not good enough sort of thing, that they can be whatever they want to be, that they don't see that it takes a lot where that real connection with an adult, whether it's at school or maybe their church or something to really make them see what they can become and they've learned not to expect much.

These students may not have had a good relationship with an adult, and as a result may have caused them to have lower expectations. P10 mentioned that students might not have had a steady relationship before:

> And like I said that just emotional needing to build a relationship, even that is a hurdle for a lot of these kids that might not have had a steady relationship before because they're living with grandma and then they're living with aunt and just wherever they can be supported.

P9 talked about what happens if we build those relationships, "It goes back to relationships, if we build those relationships with those kids they aim to perform for their teacher."

Relationships With Families. P2 and P6 both discussed the importance of building relationships with families. P6 addressed the importance of relationships with families:

> I guess just awareness and communication and relationships with the families I think is huge. You can't educate just the child, we have to get in their homes and be able to deal with the bigger picture as much as we can.

Building a relationship with parents is a way of working together to meet the needs of their children. P9 supported this idea when she said, "And I've talked about that I always work to build a relationship with the children but I try to build those relationships with the parents too and just let them know that we're working together." P6 discussed being able to help the parents as a result of those relationships, "One thing is developing relationships with parents so that I can help them, so that they trust me, so that I can see the needs so they will accept my help."

Students as Individuals. Participants felt that teachers need to look at their students as individuals and learn about them. The participants referenced the importance of learning what each student is bringing with them to the classroom and understanding the "why" in a student's life. P8 talked about the importance of understanding each child, "To take them for who they are not for where they come from because each child brings their own unique perspective on life." P9 felt that a lot depends on the individual student,

"…but I think that again going back to the personality and the intrinsic value that the children hold within themselves can help them to rise above that." P3 believed that her students living in poverty might need a little more than her other students:

I may give them a little more care, a little more understanding because fair in not always equal. They may need a little more of my time, they may need a little more help, a little more outside services that I can get for them.

Some participants felt that to help their students living in high poverty areas, they needed to understand the "why" in the students' lives. P10 stated, "So the biggest challenge is trying to figure out the reason why, like we can assess all we want but it's hard to figure out well why is that gap there and how can we overcome that." P3 shared a similar idea, "I feel like it's my job to find out the why that they act the way that they do and the then to meet them and build those things and build the trust and build the routines with them." Figuring out the root of the problems in the classroom can help a teacher support their students. P1 shared, "You have to look at the root of the issue, look at the root of what is causing their behavior rather than the behavior itself."

Understanding Where Students Come From. Participants felt that learning where students came from was essential to providing them with what they need to be successful;. P8 said, "It's the child, it's the parent and whole bunch of different things that go into each child cause I've had some kids that you would never know and there are other ones that need a little extra help." P10 shared a similar idea about the challenges of understanding where these students are coming from:

I think that we just need to go back and understand there is so much going on in

these kids and these families lives and I think that's just a challenge, it's just

understanding where these families are coming from, where these kids are coming

from.

P3 talked about learning where students come from starting in the first few days of

school:

So like I had said before, we meet them where they are you know we kind of in

the first couple of days of school we just get to know them, we get to learn where

they come from, what's their expectations of school, what they think school is

going to be like and we try to set the expectations of what we want them to get out

of being in school.

P10 felt that teachers need to understand what these students are going through, "I

think everyone in the county needs an understanding of what these kids are going through

and the hurdles to their learning. Especially when it comes to like the emotional support

that some of these kids need." Some participants felt certain things should be done to help

teachers learn about the background of their students. P4 felt that teachers should conduct

home visits, "I actually think that that should be required especially for teachers in Title I

schools. I think until you can really see where the student are coming from we don't have

the slightest clue how to teach them." While P6 thought that teachers needed to listen to

the families, "I think it's really in more in listening to the families to see what I don't

know or what needs do they have and then I can go look for how can I help them." P7

mentioned that teachers need to be aware of their students:

So just always remembering the baggage they're coming with and what they're

dealing with, that they are doing the best they can with what they know how. So

when I get little chances to give them support then I'm always going to do that.

Participants felt that they needed to understand where the students were coming from in

order to help meet the specific needs of their students. They found that getting to know

the families and getting to know the students as individuals was beneficial.

Theme 5: What Teachers Need

As shown in Table 7, all 11 participants responded to questions about what

teachers need to develop their self-efficacy and support their students in the classroom.

When teachers work together on curriculum, instruction, and professional development,

they taught in ways that were challenging, thought-provoking, and improved their self-

efficacy (Goddard & Kim, 2018). Two codes and eight sub-codes were developed from

the participant's responses. The two codes were: support and what teachers feel they

need. The eight sub-codes were: administration, school funding, seek additional support,

support staff, building relationships, more knowledge/resources, social-emotional

learning first, and working with co-workers (accountability partners).

Table 7

Research Question 2: What Teachers Need

Theme 5	Number of participants contributing	Number of transcript excerpts included
What teachers need	11	81
Support	11	24
Teachers feel they need	11	61

Support. Participants identified support in different forms such as administration, resources, support staff, and school funding. Participants felt supported by their administration but felt a need for more support staff in their buildings. Also, participants believed that school funding was a challenge for schools, and due to a lack of training, they had to find their own resources. Below, each of the sub-codes for this theme were addressed.

Administration. There was a positive response regarding the participant's administration. Participants felt lucky to have the administrator they have in their Title I school. P11 said, "I am lucky to work for an administrator who I think values my opinion or at least pretends to for me." P5 also had a positive attitude towards her administrator, "I will say that I am very lucky we got a new administrator, this is her third year, three years ago." P4 felt that if she needed training:

My principal will be the first one to step up and either find an answer or give me a

resource to help me find that answer and so I truly believe that my principal is

incredible on supporting her staff.

Multiple participants felt supported by their administration and had very positive

comments to make about the leadership in their school.

School Funding. Although Title I schools often get more funding, participants

voiced concern about the limitations on the school funding. P11 said, "I know it all boils

down to money and all of that, so working for a Title I school, sometimes that's not easy

to come by." P5 mentioned that schools need more flexibility in their Title I funding:

I know Title I and how you can use your Title money is so strict that sometimes

you can't…they say you can only use this for programs, well we need people or

we have great people in our district but we need this program and we're only

allowed to use this money for staffing. I think there needs to be more flexibility in

Title funding.

Due to limited funding and the specific use of these funds, participants felt the limitations

on what the school could provide them. When asked how equipped her school was to

provide her with the supports she needed P8 said, "I don't think they can because the

Title I money that they have, I think they do an awesome job with it." P7 shared a similar

thought, "I feel like they're doing what they can with the resources they have and the

funding they have. I mean there is always more to be done."

Seek Additional Support. When discussing how to get the support they needed,

participants shared how they seek out resources and additional support. P9 said, "I go to

my colleagues all the time and seek their help. I've taken classes, I've gone to workshops

and seminars, read some books." P1 shared a similar experience, "I know that the training

I've had has been because I've chosen to learn, I've chosen to read." P8 learned to find

her own learning opportunities, "I only have what abilities I have, so I've learned to learn

myself and the gain the skills I can like this summer I took classes on autism because I

knew I was getting a child that had that." P5 believed in being aware and active in the

educational community:

> I have to be aware what is going on in the education community so that, wider
>
> than my school, so that I can effectively advocate for the resources I need, the
>
> people I need, changes that don't make sense when it comes down to the school
>
> level from the state and all that stuff.

In order to get additional support, participants felt that they had to take the initiative to

find their own resources and support because it was not readily available to staff.

Support Staff. Participants discussed the support staff they had in their building

or felt they needed in their building. P10 discussed having "a community school liaison

and she is wonderful. She has really provided so much support to us and she is going to

be providing more." P7 discussed having a social worker in her school, but they need

more support:

> We have a social work person in our building, their funding technically makes
>
> them primarily for the special education population. She can provide ideas and
>
> activities and when she has interns they come and try to do things within our

classrooms or along with us. But I think we need a 100% time, full time social

work, I think we need mental health, people through our hospitals.

Additional participants felt they needed more support staff as well. P3 thought

more support staff was necessary for her school:

We need those counselors or those programs within our own school that they can

pull them out because you can teach them academically while you're doing those,

I'm not skilled in all of those things as to how they need to think about this or,

how to talk to them to get them through a trauma but you can still educate them

academically through those kind of things.

P1 felt that she did not have experts in her building from which to seek support, "but I

don't have any experts around me that I would feel comfortable going to. And I guess I

couldn't say that, I have gone to guidance counselors but I've not been terribly excited

about the responses."

Teachers' Needs. Participants shared ideas of what they felt they needed to

support their students and improve their self-efficacy. Those ideas included building

relationships with their students, the need for social-emotional development,

collaboration amongst co-workers, and additional knowledge and resources. Below I

discuss each of the sub-codes for this theme.

Building Relationships. According to the participants, understanding the students

allows them to meet student needs. P3 said, "But just anything I can do to better

understand where they come from, and meeting their needs." P7 shared why she thinks

it's important to understand her students:

But for the most part I do a good job of the building the relationships getting to know each kid and what their triggers are. When I can see it coming before it blows or before the shutdown might happen, that I can work with each kid individually enough to meet their needs so we can be successful and we can see growth throughout the year in every respect…emotional, academic.

Some participants felt that building relationships with families was just as important as building relationships with their students. P2 said, "Personally, just what I need is just to keep building relationships with my kids, with my families is really important." P6 felt that families need to be part of the equation, "just really seeing the family as part of the equation and being able to lean into the family and develop relationships with them." P10 shared a professional development experience that supported working with students and their families:

They really push the Milton Hershey School but it wasn't just about them, it was about families in poverty what resources they exhibit, what things that they need and it just provides just a little more empathy I think to understanding families and their situations.

Many participants found value in the development of relationships with their students and the families. These relationships were described as important for the success of their students.

More Knowledge/Resources. Participants spoke about the need for additional training, mental health support for their students, and paraprofessionals in their classrooms to support students. P1 said, "I still feel like it's not something that is taught

overall to teachers. I know I received no training." P10 mentioned the need for training,

"I thought a lot more within our county should receive trainings like that, should attend

trainings like that just as a reminder to be more empathetic and understanding about those

things and that really helped my teaching." P9 shared, "Maybe the answer to that

questions is a little bit more of that kind of training, going back to Ruby Payne." P5 felt

that the county needed to focus on investing in people, "I would say stop investing in

programs and invest in people, get us more hands, get these kids more time where we can

target where they need the extra help." P11 felt that additional learning for teachers

would be beneficial:

> But I think really learning about things like executive functioning and how it
>
> relates to trauma and being a trauma informed educator 'cause poverty can be
>
> traumatic for kids you know? So having the trauma background I think would be
>
> really, really helpful.

Multiple participants brought up the need, or the importance of mental health

professionals in the schools. P8 brought up the need for mental health professionals in her

school:

> We had a mental health professional that came out every once in a while to even
>
> have someone in the mental health field to be able to go okay I'm seeing this what
>
> else can you give me guidance on. Cause I'm not a mental health person, I didn't
>
> study that, I'm a teacher.

P7 agreed with the importance of mental health professionals, "So moving forward then

I'm a teacher, I'm not a mental health person so give me help with that. I think mental

health professionals would be helpful." P3 also mentioned the need for additional professionals in the schools:

> We need those counselors or those programs within our own school that they can
>
> pull them out because you can teach them academically while you're doing those,
>
> I'm not skilled in all of those things as to how they need to think about this or,
>
> how to talk to them to get them through a trauma but you can still educate them
>
> academically through those kind of things.

The need for aides or paraprofessionals in the classroom was discussed during the interviews. P5 said, "I think every Title I school in America should have an aide in every K, 1, and 2 classroom, period the end." P2 supported the same idea, "I think kindergarten classes should all have a paraprofessional because there's still a huge gap in those kids."

Social-Emotional Learning First. During the interviews, some participants felt that social-emotional needs should be met before academic instruction. P2 said, "I just feel like the first month of school shouldn't have much educational teaching but more social-emotional and life-skills." P8 also voiced the need to work on social-emotional learning, "I embrace the pyramid and I embrace social-emotional learning because unless I teach them, I may be the first one teaching them how to be able to work with another child, how to even play." P10 shared a similar thought about social-emotional goals:

> I feel like sometimes there's a lot of pressure coming down with these kids,
>
> especially now with reaching their same academic goals but it's hard for them to
>
> reach those academic goals when we're just working on some of those social-
>
> emotional goals now.

Some participants described the need to address social-emotional needs before helping students meet academic goals in order for students to be successful.

Working With Coworkers (Accountability Partners). Participants felt that working with their co-workers helped them grow in their field and develop their self-efficacy. P2 stated, "always having that network of teachers to go to." P1 said, "I would say partners, accountability partners to problem solve with and also, I mean it is stressful things happen and just because you recognize where it's coming from doesn't mean that's is always easy to deal with." P7 shared the same thought, "Probably more just my classroom experience, working with my colleagues, we have a great group that we share a lot of ideas." P3 mentioned a similar idea, "any kind of working with other people outside of the classroom to get strategies from them." P1 and P8 felt that having another professional to talk with and get feedback from was beneficial to them as educators.

The participants were able to answer RQ2 interview questions with rich, thick responses. Participants discussed that they wanted to understand the situations in which their students live. Many of the participants shared the importance of developing relationships with students and their student's families. With an understanding of their students, the participants felt they could then meet the needs of their students as individuals. Participants felt a lack of support due to the rigid use of Title I funding, a lack of support staff, and the need to find their own professional development opportunities. The participants voiced a need for more knowledge, more resources, flexibility in Title I funding, and collaboration with coworkers to prepare them to meet the needs of their students. Evidence of trustworthiness is critical in research. In order to

demonstrate creditability, transferability, dependability, and confirmability several steps were taken during my research process to provide evidence of trustworthiness.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Credibility

Ravitch and Carl (2020) described credibility as the researcher's ability to handle the complexities of a study related to the research design, instruments, and data. To establish the credibility of my research findings, I used semi-structured interviews to collect data and a reflection journal to identify any bias during the interviews. My research journal was used as a record-keeping tool for my reflections, steps taken during the research process, and any questions or concerns. Another method I used to establish credibility was member checking to determine the accuracy of my findings. After transcribing each interview, I sent each participant their transcript for review. The participants were asked to read through their transcript to determine if their transcript was accurate and determine if any changes were necessary. All 11 participants responded to my email approving the accuracy of their interview transcript, and only two transcripts needed a minor correction or addition. One correction was the number of years taught in each grade level; I caught this error before leaving the interview and added the information to the transcript once I received permission from the participant. Another interview was corrected upon review; this participant realized that she had given me the wrong number of years she taught each grade level, so I corrected the transcript. I sent a two-page summary of those findings to each participant to determine if the participants had any questions or concerns. No corrections were needed.

Credibility was also established through peer debriefing with a qualified professional in my field. Peer debriefing consists of locating a person to review and question your study to ensure the study resonates with someone other than the researcher (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The individual that participated as the peer debriefer for my study is a recent graduate of Walden University, holds an EdD degree in early childhood, and has written academic literature with an early childhood focus. This peer debriefer was asked to look for bias, and to review my themes and findings to determine if they were plausible. After her review, my peer debriefer found my themes to be plausible. However, she also found a misunderstanding on executive function that participants were having in regards to a major component in my research. During her review, my peer debriefer found that although participants could tell you the definition of executive function, they did not appear to understand what executive functioning skills were and how they were used in the classroom. Once this was brought to my attention, I revisited my transcripts to find this misconception about executive function and updated my findings to state that participants did not have a clear understanding of executive function. Credibility was established through the use of my reflection journal which included personal reflections, questions, concerns, and decisions during my research. Also, credibility was demonstrated through the presentation of clear data collection methods, member checking, and peer debriefing.

Transferability

Ravitch and Carl (2020) described transferability as a way that qualitative research can be applicable or transferable to other contexts. The researcher needs to

provide enough details about their study that readers can determine if the study is applicable to their specific situation or setting. In order for future studies to occur, readers need to be provided with enough specifics about the study to decide if their research environment is comparable to the research study in order for the research findings to be transferable. To achieve transferability, researchers can provide readers with detailed descriptions of the data collected and the context in which they were collected (Ravitch & Carl, 2020). These rich descriptions of the setting, participants, and findings, with evidence presented in the quotes, ensure the best possibility for transferability (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Transferability of my results to other settings can be accomplished through the use of thick descriptions of my participants and findings which are supported by quotes taken from the interview transcripts.

Dependability

I used audit trails and member checking to help establish dependability. An audit trail is used to describe the research steps taken when conducting a study (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). I kept a personal log of the step-by-step decision-making process while collecting and analyzing my data. This personal log can be used to provide individuals with the ability to confirm my research. My reflection journal was used to help me understand my biases, preferences, and preconceptions while conducting my study.

Interview questions were directly aligned to my RQs. Participants were aware that participation in the study was strictly voluntary, and they could withdraw from the study at any time. Once the interview transcripts were complete, I sent the transcripts to the corresponding participant for review and approval. All 11 participants approved the

accuracy of their interview transcript. Once I established my findings, I sent a two-page summary of those findings to each participant to determine if there were any questions or concerns. Dependability was established through an audit trail, a self-reflection journal, and member checking.

Confirmability

Qualitative researchers need to acknowledge and explore their biases with the goal of having confirmable data (Ravitch & Carl, 2020). To ensure confirmability, I demonstrated that I monitored my biases through my reflection journal while conducting and analyzing my data. Participants were provided with a clear understanding of my research goal and my data collection methods. Audio recordings were taken of each interview to make sure the interviews were transcribed accurately. After transcribing each interview, I sent the transcripts to the participant for review. Participants were asked to read the transcript and let me know if there was a need for any corrections. Confirmability was established through my reflection journal, the presentation of clear data collection methods, and member checking.

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Summary

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Participants in this study knew the definition of executive function but not how these skills were demonstrated in the classroom. Participants identified deficits in the development of executive function skills in children living in high poverty areas. Also, participants were aware of the definition of poverty and that poverty presents itself in a variety of different forms. Multiple challenges were highlighted as a result of children living in high poverty areas. Some of these challenges include communicating with

parents, providing children with their basic needs, and understanding that some things are out of a teacher's control. Teacher perspectives on their capability to teach children living in poverty and demonstrate poor executive functioning were mixed. Some participants felt capable, while other participants did not feel capable of teaching these students. There was a lack of teacher understanding about children living in poverty and how to support executive functioning in the classroom.

All the participants felt that they needed to understand their students and learn their background. Participants felt that relationships were important to build, not only with the students but also with the families. Understanding where the students are coming from and learning about them as individuals was a point made by multiple participants. The majority of the participants felt there was something they needed to improve their self-efficacy. These supports included more flexible Title I funding, training to meet the needs of the students they work with, and more support staff to work directly with the students. Participants felt that they needed additional knowledge and resources to meet the needs of their students. In chapter 5, I interpreted the findings, limitations of the study, recommendations, and implications for future research.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusion and Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to investigate the perspectives of early childhood educators regarding their ability and self-efficacy in supporting children living in high poverty areas who demonstrate poor executive function, and what supports teachers felt they needed to meet the needs of their students. I used a basic qualitative design for this study to address the gap in practice on the support needed for children living in high poverty areas demonstrating poor executive function. The RQs that guided my research included the following:

RQ1: What are the perspectives of early childhood educators about their self-efficacy in supporting children living in high poverty areas who demonstrate poor executive function?

RQ2: What types of support do early childhood educators believe they need to develop their capability and perceived self-efficacy to teach and emotionally support children living in high poverty areas who demonstrate poor executive function?

I conducted 11 interviews with prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers who were teaching prekindergarten or kindergarten in a Title I school in the United States. The perspectives of early childhood educators were investigated to determine the individual experiences and actions of the participants (see Saracho, 2017). Children living in poverty is a concern in urban, suburban, and rural areas of the United States (Chung et al., 2016). Although educators need to be prepared to work with children in poverty and understand how poverty affects different aspects of their development,

educators often lack training to support the needs of these students (Boatwright &

Midcalf, 2019; Izard & National Education Association, 2016; Post et al., 2019).

In Chapter 2, I reviewed research that focused on children living in poverty,

executive function in relation to poverty, and the preparation of teachers to work with

children living in high poverty areas. Previous research had been conducted on poverty,

executive function, and what background knowledge teachers bring to their job.

However, I found a gap on the perspectives of early childhood educators regarding what

they need to support children living in poverty who demonstrate poor executive function.

In Chapter 3, I described the methodology and the data collection procedure for my

research. In Chapter 4, I presented my results from the 11 interviews with early childhood

educators teaching prekindergarten or kindergarten in a Title I school. These interviews

provided early childhood educator perspectives on their personal self-efficacy for

teaching children living in poverty who demonstrate poor executive function, and what

teachers need to support these learners.

The executive function and poverty themes identified in my data analysis

suggested that most of the participants felt there was a deficit in the development of

executive function due to poverty. Teacher perspectives on understanding student

situations suggested that the participants believed there was a lack of understanding about

the issues of poverty and executive function. Teacher perspectives on what teachers need

to support the development of executive function indicated that most of the participants

did not feel that they had strong self-efficacy when working with students in high poverty

areas and that they needed additional support to meet the needs of their students. In

Chapter 5, I share my interpretations of the findings, limitations of this study,

recommendations for future research, and implications for positive social change.

Interpretation of the Findings

The early childhood educators who participated in my study all shared a similar

awareness of how to define executive function and the importance of the early

development of these skills. Definitions provided by the participants align with Martin et

al. (2017) who described executive function as purposeful skills in domains such as

problem solving, working memory, self-monitoring, and inhibitory control. Current

participants appeared to understand the value of executive function skills and how these

abilities could affect the academic and social skills of students living in high poverty

areas. Marques and Cladellas (2018) supported the idea that a child's executive function

affects academic learning and achievement and directly affects behavior and academic

adjustment.

Although the current participants shared key words associated with executive

function, their description of these skills seen in the classroom suggested that not all

participants had a clear understanding of executive function skills. Some participant

responses did not demonstrate a strong understanding of executive function, including

how it looked and affected the students in the classroom. Many of the participants voiced

concerns about the deficits they observed in their students, which they felt were a result

of living in poverty. These findings supported Allee-Herndon and Roberts' (2018)

research that indicated an association between poverty and the negative effects on many

developmental skills in young children, such as behavioral, emotional, and executive

function. Most current participants felt that students living in high poverty areas

demonstrated slower executive function development due to their living conditions.

As a result of children living in poverty, participants felt that their students lacked

executive function skills, such as how to behave in the classroom, retain information,

meet their basic self-care needs, and ensure self-control. These findings supported

Romero-López et al.'s (2017) study, suggesting a correlation between deficits in

executive function and attention span, memory, planning, maintaining information, and

emotional control. My findings indicated that early childhood educators felt that many of

their students demonstrated deficits in developing executive functioning skills as a result

of living in a high poverty area. Although participants in my study shared a clear

understanding of the definition of executive function skills, not all of the participants

demonstrated a strong understanding of the meaning of executive function skills in

relation to their students in the classroom.

The participants in my study described poverty as the inability of families to meet

their basic needs such as rent, food, clothing, medical expenses, shelter, and

transportation. These descriptions of poverty align with Hassan et al.'s (2020) definition,

which stated that poverty occurs when individuals are unable to fulfill basic needs to

survive, such as goods, shelter, education, health, and security. All of the current

participants described poverty as a lack of resources instead of simply an issue with

money, which demonstrates the strong understanding these participants had regarding

poverty. A number of the participants described different kinds of poverty that their

students' families dealt with when providing for their children. Some participants

identified different types of poverty as economic, financial, social, educational, spiritual, rural, and urban. Hassan et al.'s (2020) research aligned with these responses supporting the idea that poverty was not simply an economic issue; it is a multidimensional concept that can also consist of public utilities, public transport, health care, educational facilities, and credit. This idea of various kinds of poverty was not a topic I expected to encounter during the interviews, but I found the emphasis some of the participants put on this awareness to be very interesting.

There were many challenges these early childhood educators faced when trying to support their students and their families. Many of these challenges were focused on parental involvement, home–school communication, and parental support. I found the emphasis the participants put on the connection between home and school was surprisingly supportive of the purpose of my research. Another challenge the participants faced was the absence of parental support at home due to the parents' lack of skills. This idea aligned with Sanders-Smith et al. (2020) who stated that parents sometimes lack skills to support the developing skills of their children at home. Kao et al. (2018) stated that low socioeconomic status may influence a parent's ability to support executive function skills because the parents lack those skills themselves. My research findings confirmed that educators often believe that parents do not always buy in to the educational system due to their lack of skills, so they do not engage in the educational system.

Vukojevic et al. (2017) said when children grow up in a low socioeconomic environment, they often come from an unsupportive home environment that influences

their academic achievements. The current participants discussed a negative correlation between children living in poverty and their academic ability. The participants shared that their students came to school unprepared to learn and that their living situations caused a negative effect on basic reading and math skills. These findings supported Burchinal et al. (2018) and John et al. (2019) who suggested that poverty has a detrimental effect on the development of executive function, which can cause children to demonstrate poor academic achievement in school. My findings suggest that teachers understand what qualifies students as living in poverty and feel that these students face many challenges in the classroom, including a lack of basic needs and lower academic achievement.

Rice et al. (2017) commented on the need for teacher preparation to meet the needs of the students in the classroom because poverty has such a negative influence on child development. Four current participants felt "pretty capable" of teaching students who live in high poverty areas and demonstrate poor executive function. In comparison, seven participants did not feel capable. My findings suggest that many early childhood educators do not have strong self-efficacy when teaching children living in poverty. The reason behind this finding was that they were not provided with knowledge about poverty and executive function in teacher preparation programs or trainings in these areas. These findings support Setlhare et al. (2017) who said that when teachers are not prepared for socioeconomic challenges that may arise in the classroom, their self-efficacy can be negatively affected.

Bandura's (1977) theory of self-efficacy is a central factor in social cognitive theory. Bandura described a teacher's self-efficacy as their belief in their professional

abilities to positively influence the classroom environment and their students. A teacher's self-efficacy is directly related to their perceived ability to meet the needs of the diverse learners in their classroom. Pfitzner-Eden (2016) described a person's self-efficacy as being determined by strength of mind when faced with challenges and obstacles when trying to reach a specific goal. My findings suggest that although participants understood the meaning of poverty, little training was provided to educators about poverty or executive function before entering their Title I classroom, resulting in low self-efficacy to support these children. My research findings support Sudhaker (2019) who suggested that the failure to support children living in poverty is partly due to mistaken teacher beliefs, theories, and experiences with poverty. Several current participants shared that they had to seek out additional professional development to meet their students' needs because their school or county did not provide these opportunities.

My findings demonstrated that early childhood educators felt that understanding their students as individuals, through the development of relationships and learning about the home environment, was important to provide help and support for each child's specific needs. This supports Gorski (2016) and Longaretti and Toe (2017) who suggested that educators need to have a strong understanding of the community where they teach because their personal beliefs can influence their classroom environment. The current participants also suggested that relationships with students were essential because many students living in high poverty areas may not have had a solid, nurturing relationship prior to entering school. Post et al.'s (2019) research supported this finding

that the role teachers play in a child's life can often be the most stable relationship, especially for higher risk students.

Most current participants referred to understanding student circumstances as getting to know the "why" of the situation. These participants wanted to understand why their students were behaving a certain way so they could provide them with the skills they needed to address these challenges. Rice et al.'s (2017) research aligned with these findings that teachers need to develop empathy for their students and understand that their priority is to identify and attempt to eliminate challenges for students so they can focus on learning. Current participants discussed the importance of building relationships with parents, building trust with the families, and letting families know that they wanted to work together as a team. My research findings suggest that understanding students' home situations is essential in determining what is needed to support individual students.

Each participant shared what they felt was needed to meet the needs of their students living in high poverty areas who demonstrate poor executive function. Although administrators were often labelled as supportive, my findings indicated that teachers described a lack of flexibility in school funding and training specific to the needs of their school's population. These findings supported Gore et al. (2017) who suggested that professional development programs are often not clearly linked to classroom practice. Most of the current participants mentioned that they had to seek out their own professional development, training, classes, or professional reading to meet the needs of their students. Educators shared their concern with the use of Title I funding, suggesting that instead of programs often purchased by their districts they should invest in additional

support staff in the schools. My research findings suggest that participants felt there is a need for additional support staff such as social workers, counselors, and other mental health care professionals to help support their students. The participants did not feel they were qualified to provide some of the services expected of them, such as mental health services. This need for additional support professionals was supported by Nichols et al. (2017) who stated that the role of specialized support personnel such as school psychologists and counselors is crucial to academic and mental health.

Another support participants felt would benefit them was working with their coworkers for feedback and creating a teacher support network. One participant referred to this as having an accountability partner to continuously work with to improve teaching skills. R. D. Goddard et al. (2017) suggested that creating time for teachers to collaborate and allow teacher input into their professional development helps teachers meet the diverse needs of their students. Current participants felt that working collaboratively with their coworkers provided them with the additional support they needed to meet the diverse needs of their students. These findings support Y. L. Goddard and Kim (2018) and Herman et al. (2018) who said teachers benefit from having opportunities to work together, resulting in personal and professional growth, which in turn can lead to improved teaching efficacy.

The participants in my study shared their perspectives on their personal self-efficacy when working in Title I schools. All participants stated the need to continue developing their self-efficacy. Four participants felt capable of working with children living in high poverty areas demonstrating poor executive function. However, seven

participants felt unprepared or not capable of teaching children living in high poverty

areas. Although some participants felt that their self-efficacy allowed them to support

these students successfully, they also believed that additional support was needed.

Through the lens of Bandura's theory of self-efficacy, I was able to identify and

understand the importance of personal self-efficacy of early childhood educators. The

results of my study provided insight into what teachers needed to continue developing

their self-efficacy to meet the needs of students living in high poverty areas.

Limitations of the Study

Possible limitations in this study included small sample size, local sampling, and

my personal bias. The first limitation was a small sample size that initially was supposed

to include only five Title I schools with equal numbers of prekindergarten and

kindergarten teachers. Due to the pandemic, I had to expand recruitment beyond the five

Title I schools. My participant pool consisted of participants from ten different schools in

the United States. This change in geographic location allowed for a broader sampling of

early childhood educators in the United States. Another limitation was monitoring my

personal bias during the research process. To minimize bias, I sent a copy of each

transcript to the participants for review, and all participants approved their transcript.

Participants were also given a two-page report of my primary findings. A peer debriefer

was used to monitor bias in the data analysis process to ensure validity. The peer

debriefer did not identify bias in my analysis or findings but she provided additional

conclusions to my data analysis. I revisited the transcripts to look at her suggestions and

adjusted my findings based on this additional review. I maintained a personal reflection

journal to record my thoughts to avoid personal bias during the data collection and data analysis process. This journal included reflections about my decision making, steps taken in my research, feelings, questions, concerns, and interactions with the participants. Through the use of my reflection journal I focused on the purpose of my research and remain objective while remaining aware of my personal thoughts and feelings.

Recommendations

In this research study, I examined the perspectives of early childhood educators on their ability and self-efficacy in supporting children living in high poverty areas that demonstrated poor executive function. After completing my research, I considered other topics were identified as potential opportunities for future research. Therefore, I recommend that this study be replicated with different populations, in different areas, and with an additional focus to secure further information. In my study I focused on prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers. Replicating my research using preschool programs and first and second grade teachers could provide additional perspectives on executive function. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, I recruited participants from different locations within the United States. Potentially focusing on one specific geographical location would provide more insight into the needs of that certain county or school district.

During my research, participants discussed the consideration of different types of poverty when working with students in the Title I schools. Multiple participants discussed how rural and urban poverty were distinct from one another. I suggest replicating this study using participants from both rural and urban Title I schools to see if

the findings are similar or diverse. This information could provide insight into what early

childhood educators need when working with children from different types of poverty.

During data collection, another topic brought to my attention was the emphasis put on

relationships with families, and parents and the influence this had on their children. I

recommend a study focusing on student, parent, and teacher relationships in high poverty

areas in correlations with the development of executive function during early childhood.

This study could provide specific information about how students, parents and teacher

relationships could benefit students' executive function development and what teachers

need to support those relationships.

Implications

Results from my study indicate that a majority of teachers did not feel they had

strong self-efficacy when working with students in high poverty areas and that they

needed additional support to meet the needs of their students. My research could promote

social change by providing local school systems with information about early childhood

educators' self-efficacy and what supports they feel they need to successfully teach

students living in poverty. The results from this study could help school systems develop

potential professional development opportunities needed to support teachers working in

Title I schools. My research results indicated that teachers saw deficits in student

executive function due to living in high poverty areas. Participants identified numerous

challenges they encountered, including little parental involvement, basic needs having to

be met in the classroom, and a discrepancy in academic achievement. These findings

could provide Title I schools with an understanding of what supports teachers may need

in order to provide their students with the educational and emotional skills they may be lacking.

The majority of the participants in my study felt that they did not have the appropriate self-efficacy when teaching in high poverty areas. Many participants stated that they did not feel prepared to meet the needs of their students. They felt that they were seeking out professional development due to a lack of training in the school system. This information could promote positive social change by informing the school board or principals about the necessary professional development for teachers to meet diverse needs.

The findings from my study emphasized the importance of teachers understanding their students and the situations they are experiencing. Participants felt they needed to develop strong relationships with their students and develop an understanding of each child's situation to meet their needs. These relationships could positively affect children with poor executive function skills in Title I schools and in other stages of their life. Positive relationships and teacher understanding have the potential to create a supportive learning environment for students.

Participants felt they needed additional professional development opportunities to meet the specific needs of students in their classroom. Along with training, participants believed that hiring more support staff would benefit their students. The participants identified support staff as paraprofessionals, intervention teachers, counselors, and mental health care providers. My research findings could provide information about teacher

perspectives to various stakeholders in the county, possibly resulting in additional support for early childhood educators teaching in high poverty areas.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to understand the perspectives of early childhood educators regarding their ability and self-efficacy in supporting children living in high poverty areas ad who demonstrate poor executive function and what teachers feel they need to meet the needs of their students. Research exists on the impact poverty can have on the development of executive function and the potential lack of preparation for teachers prior to entering the classroom. However, there is limited research on early childhood educators' perspectives on their ability to support children living in high poverty areas. I interviewed 11 prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers currently teaching in Title I schools in the United States. The participants provided insight into their perspectives on poverty, executive function, and self-efficacy in teaching and supporting students living in high poverty areas. Five themes developed from my data collection which included executive function, poverty, teacher perspectives, understanding student situations, and what teachers need. The results of my study could help close the gap in practice on understanding teacher perspectives on their ability to support children living in high risk locations.

The participants demonstrated a strong understanding of what poverty and executive function meant. Also, participants understood the negative correlation between the development of executive function and children living in poverty that often exists. Although the participants had a clear understanding of the main issues, my results

suggested that the majority of early childhood educators did not have strong self-efficacy when teaching students with diverse backgrounds. Early childhood educators want to improve their teaching but they do not feel they are provided with the necessary tools. As a result of this lack of training, teachers need to find their own learning opportunities to develop their self-efficacy. Participants had an awareness of what they needed to meet the needs of their students but felt that they were lacking the training and support. This study provided insight into early childhood educator perspectives which could help administrators and community partners provide teachers with the tools they need to improve their self-efficacy resulting in improved learning environments for students.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Title of Study: Early Childhood Educators' Perspectives on Executive Function of Children in Poverty

Date:

Participant:

Position:

Location:

Introduction:

Thank you for agreeing to meet with me today. The purpose of this study is to learn about early childhood educators' perspectives on the executive function of children living in poverty. I am interested in your perspectives on your role as the teacher when working with children in poverty. To ensure that I gather accurate notes, I would like to audio-record your interview to transcribe later. Do I have your permission to audio-record this interview? I may take a few notes during the interview to revisit a topic for clarification. Please feel free to ask questions anytime during the interview. Do you have any questions before we begin?

I appreciate your willingness to participate in this interview. Let's begin.

1. What is your educational background? (Bachelors/Masters)

2. How long have you been teaching in a Title I School?

   Possible follow up question: Have you worked at other Title I Schools?
   Possible follow up question: Have you had work experience at schools that are not Title I?

3. What ages or grades have you worked with in Title I schools?

    Possible follow up question: With what age group have you had the most teaching experience?

4.   What is your definition of poverty?

5. Tell me about your experience with children living in poverty.

    Possible follow up question: How does your experience with students from a Title I school differ from your experience with students from a non-Title I school? Possible follow up question: As an early childhood educator, how have you felt about your experiences with children living in poverty?

6. What is your definition of executive functioning?

    Possible Clarification: For the purpose of this study we will describe executive functioning as mental skills including working memory, flexible thinking, self-monitoring, problem solving, and inhibitory control.

7. Tell me about the executive functioning skills your students demonstrate in your classroom?

    Possible follow up question: How do your students use these skills in the classroom? Possible follow up question: What executive functioning skills have you observed in your classroom?

8. How well do you feel children living in poverty develop executive functioning skills?

    Possible follow up question: What impact do you think poverty has on executive functioning?
    Possible follow up question: What differences do you see in the executive function of children living in poverty and children not living in poverty?

9. Describe how able you feel to teach children who are living in poverty that show poor executive functioning skills?

    Possible follow up question: What challenges do you face when working with children demonstrating poor executive function?
    Possible follow up question: What do you think would make you feel more able to teach these students?

10. As a teacher in a Title I school, what supports do you think are needed to develop your ability to teach and emotionally support children living in high poverty areas?

    Possible follow up question: How would these supports help you as a teacher in the classroom?
    Possible follow up question: How equipped do you feel your school is to provide you with this support?
    Possible follow up question: How would you seek additional support for yourself as the teacher?

11. Describe what you feel you need to develop your self-efficacy, as an early childhood educator, to teach and emotionally support children living in high poverty areas.

Possible follow up question: Describe your thoughts on your self-efficacy as a teacher working with children in poverty.

Possible follow up question: Do you feel that this is available in your school or school district?

Possible follow up question: How do you feel your self-efficacy has changed while working in a Title I school?

Possible follow up question: What challenges do you think you would face in supporting the needs of the children living in poverty?

Closure:

Thank you for sharing your experiences with me. I will transcribe your interview and send you a copy of the transcript soon. Please take a look at the transcript and let me know if any changes are necessary. If there is anything you think of that you would like to add, please let me know.

Randi Nash

Appendix B: Examples of Open Codes From Data

Open Codes	Participant	Excerpt
Academics	P6	"Academically the kids tend to be lower when they come to me, less prepared for school at the early age. Both academically and emotionally, as far as being able to sit and listen to a story, being able to interact with peers, those kinds of skills and they just have a lower/less vocabulary, less…some of them aren't counting or don't know or can't write their name yet."
Additional Support	P3	"We need those counselors or those programs within our own school that they can pull them out because you can teach them academically while you're doing those, I'm not skilled in all of those things as to how they need to think about this or, how to talk to them to get them through a trauma but you can still educate them academically through those kind of things."
Administration	P4	"If I need some training on something, if I'm curious about something my principal will be the first one to step up and either find an answer or give me a resource to help me find that answer and so I truly believe that my principal is incredible on supporting her staff."
Building relationships	P6	"For me I think it's been more of an awareness of what they're coming from, what they're dealing with, that all homes don't function like mine."
Capable	P10	"So I feel like here I feel pretty able to teach children that are living in poverty that show those poor executive functioning skills."
Challenges	P2	"once I hit the school system it was the balance of all those needs that kids
Children are Resilient	P10	

		have. Now I had to balance that with giving them an education."
		"But I definitely was not prepared, it was also my first year teaching pre-k which you know that comes with its own things too but it was eye opening for me to realize what some of these kids were going through and how incredibly strong and resilient they were."
Communication/connection with parents	P9	
Depends on individual child	P9	"I think the biggest challenge for me over the years has been connecting with the parents and helping them understand that we're all on the same team."
Development of Executive Function skills	P5	"It can strongly impact it in a negative way for sure but I think that again going back to the personality and the intrinsic value that the children hold within themselves can help them to rise above that."
Different mindset	P7	"I need to have professional development, I need to have opportunities for professional development that take into consideration the students that I am working with."
Different types of poverty	P9	"I consider myself somewhere in the middle class but just the mindset in very different with how those types of things are taught, I think the mindset is more of give me I'm not going to learn it for myself, just give it to me, what are you going to do for me kind of thing."
Everyone on the same page	P10	"different areas of poverty, could be economical, financial, it could be social, it could be educational, it could be spiritual"
Executive functioning skills	P3	"And I think that's the biggest challenge is just getting everybody on the same wavelength on what these kids need to be successful."

Executive function	P10	"being able to be flexible in our classroom, transition, be organized, be able to follow the routine, be able to think outside of the box, not just stay inside our box try to move a little outside of our box"
Flexibility	P2	"working memory and the retaining of information and applying what they know to new information"
Focus on social skills	P11	"I just feel like the first month of school shouldn't have much educational teaching but more social-emotional and life-skills."
How able teachers feel	P1	"I would love the ability to not just focus on academics all the time and worry about social skills and what skills they're learning outside of that academic bubble."
Importance of relationships	P4	"it's not something that we've talked about really in our workshops and PDs within the county and I know the teachers I've worked with are often more worried about punishing a behavior rather than looking at what the cause of the that behavior is"
Lack of background experience	P2	"create that relationship with them because when I have that relationship with them not only do they know that school is a safe place for a lot of my students, school is the only safe place they have."
Language	P10	"They're not being read to, they can't hold books but they want to play games and swipe on devices big time."
Meeting basic needs	P6	"So that effects long term their reading, absolutely their ability to that just retention of information applying it to new skills, if they don't have a lot of oral vocabulary skills their reading is really going to suffer, their writing skills and their writing skills is a huge thing that we are seeing is suffering, especially for those kids that aren't coming in with a lot of language."

More knowledge/resources	P1	"Some of my kids do come to school hungry, some of them I have to feed before I can get them to learn. We cloth kids when they need clothing and that kind of thing, so we do step in. I also see, it's very prejudicial to say this across the board, but I do believe there is a much bigger tendency of less effectively parented children in the lower economic schools."
Need more	P3	"I think we need a lot of training in keeping kids in the classroom, keeping kids in our space and accepting kids as they come to use rather than expecting them to be a certain way."
Negative impact	P11	"I may give them a little more care, a little more understanding because fair in not always equal. They may need a little more of my time, they may need a little more help, a little more outside services that I can get for them."
Need to develop self-efficacy	P11	
Not all resources are appropriate	P5	"I think as a whole I would say kids living in poverty are slower to develop those skills."
Opportunity to build skills	P3	"having some sort of training before you step into the classroom or as you step into the classroom would be helpful."
		"Not every program is going to work in a Title I school."
Out of teacher control	P7	"It's the play and too it's the flexibility because in pre-k it's a fast paced classroom so you have to be able to stop what you are doing understand that it's okay if you're not finished,
Parental involvement	P4	it's okay you can come back to it and we're going to move on."
		"So I think that the things that are out of my circle of control are very
Parental education background	P8	frustrating"
		"It really does depend on the parent because if the parents are helping them

Parental support makes a difference	P8	build that independence at home it transfers to school as well."
Relationships	P2	"I think it really depends on their parents and how well their executive functioning is because if a parent is lacking those skills, they're not going to be able form them."
Relationships with families	P6	"I think it really depends on their parents and how well their executive functioning is because if a parent is lacking those skills, they're not going to be able form them."
School funding	P11	"keep building relationships with my kids, with my families is really important."
School support	P4	"just really seeing the family as part of the equation and being able to lean into the family and develop relationships with them."
Seek additional support	P1	"I know it all boils down to money and all of that, so working for a Title I school sometimes that's not easy to come by."
Social-emotional learning first	P8	"if I need some training on something, if I'm curious about something my principal will be the first one to step up and either find an answer or give me a resource to help me find that answer and so I truly believe that my principal is incredible on supporting her staff."
Struggling with academics	P2	"I know that the training I've has been because I've chosen to learn, I've chosen to read."
Students as individuals	P1	"I embrace social-emotional learning because unless I teach them, I may be the first one teaching them how to be able to work with another child, how to even play and engage."
Student coping skills	P11	"where students living in poverty a lot of times we have to start with social-emotional needs, and basic needs and they don't know even the letters of their name."

Support staff	P3	"You have to look at the root of the issue, look at the root of what is causing their behavior rather than the behavior itself."
		"I think a lot of times they learn really interesting coping mechanisms for when they don't have them."
Survival, not education	P3	"We need those counselors or those programs within our own school that they can pull them out because you can teach them academically while you're doing those, I'm not skilled in all of those things as to how they need to think about this or, how to talk to them to get them through a trauma but you can still educate them academically through those kind of things."
Teacher understanding	P8	
		"their focus is not on education. Their focus is on survival, so we have to meet their needs where they are"
Transient families	P10	"I only have what abilities I have, so I've learned to learn myself and the gain the skills I can like this summer I took classes on autism because I knew I was getting a child that had that. Because it's like I want to be the best teacher I can for the students that I have."
Trauma	P1	"Transient families, families living with relatives, that are living in a hotel, that are living…a lot of students at our elementary school live in [low income housing] so they receive assisted housing but a lot of those families too they're moving in and out of different homes and living with different relatives which all bring their own unique hardships for these kids."
Unable to meet needs	P8	
Understanding student situations	P3	"I think that because students that are in poverty experience more trauma, that affects their brain and I think that because it inhibits the self-regulation skills."

Understanding where students are coming from	P4	"You have to fulfill their needs, making sure they get fed, making sure they are properly taken care of."
Unprepared/not capable	P1	"in the first couple of days of school we just get to know them, we get to learn where they come from, what's their expectations of school, what they think school is going to be like and we try to set the expectations of what we want them to get out of being in school."
Vocabulary	P1	"I actually think that that should be required especially for teachers in Title I schools. I think until you can really see where the student are coming from we don't have the slightest clue how to teach them."
What are executive function skills	P4	"I still feel like it's not something that is taught overall to teachers. I know I received no training."
What is poverty	P8	"you can almost tell that they've been in a sterile environment because they have a lack of vocabulary and a lack of ability to respond."
What teachers need	P1	"They can complete a task independently, that they can sit a certain way, that they know how to listen, be an active participant."
Working with co-workers/accountability partners	P2	"not having enough money to put food on your table and it may be as drastic of not being able to even have anything, you may have poverty where you end up sleeping on a street and not having food, clothes or anything." "I think that because students that are in poverty experience more trauma, that affects their brain and I think that because it inhibits the self-regulation skills" "always having that network of teachers to go to."

Appendix C: Examples of Open Codes and Categories From Data

Categories	Codes	Participant	Excerpt
Executive function	What is executive function	P4	"as the year goes it becomes more than that, it's more of the independence factor, being able to complete things"
	Executive function skills	P5	"they have to remember information to be able to use that skill. Also, decision making and impulse control."
	Opportunity to build skills	P3	"do a lot of that through play, a lot of it through interactions with each other."
	Student coping skills	P1	"their first goal is self-preservation and so they act impulsively and quickly"
Deficit in executive function	Development of executive function skills	P3	"It's the play and too it's the flexibility because in pre-k it's a fast paced classroom so you have to be able to stop what you are doing understand that it's okay if you're not finished, it's okay you can come back to it and we're going to move on."
	Deficits in skills	P11	"I think as a whole I would say kids living in poverty are slower to develop those skills."
	Lack of background/experiences	P1	"you can almost tell that they've been in a sterile environment because they have a lack of vocabulary and a lack of ability to respond."
Poverty	What is poverty	P6	"difficulty in meeting one's needs: food, shelter, clothing, transportation"
	Different types of poverty	P1	"rural poverty is different than urban poverty and so you see different manifestations of that"
	Trauma	P3	"A lot of them have had a lot of trauma."
	Academics	P11	"I would love the ability to not just focus on academics all the time and worry about social skills and what skills they're learning outside of that academic bubble."
Challenges	Connections/communication with parents	P10	"Unfortunately for a lot of families that are living in high

			poverty areas we don't have great connection between myself and the families which is due to a lot of things."
	Everyone on the same page	P1	"If we could just get on the same page where we all know where we are coming from I think we could help those kids so much more."
	Meeting basic needs	P6	"Some of my kids do come to school hungry, some of them I have to feed before I can get them to learn. We cloth kids when they need clothing and that kind of thing, so we do step in. I also see, it's very prejudicial to say this across the board, but I do believe there is a much bigger tendency of less effectively parented children in the lower economic schools."
	Out of teacher control	P7	"So I think that the things that are out of my circle of control are very frustrating"
	Parental education background	P8	"I think it really depends on their parents and how well their executive functioning is because if a parent is lacking those skills, they're not going to be able form them"
	Parental involvement	P4	"So when they have no parent involvement at all for example with that situation, again that priority list what's more important putting food on the table or helping my child with how behavior in the classroom and how to be a good listener and that sort of thing. So it comes down to that priority at this point."
	Survival, not education	P11	"Not that the parents don't want to work with them but it's just that the demands of everyday life are different when you live in poverty"
How able teachers feel	Capable	P10	"So I feel like here I feel pretty able to teach children that are living in poverty that show those poor executive functioning skills."
	Unprepared/not capable	P1	

	Different mindset	P6	"I still feel like it's not something that is taught overall to teachers. I know I received no training." "I haven't stopped to think about it and I haven't really stopped to think how much these families are dealing with and how many advantages I have had in my life that they have not had access to. So a lot of its just awareness I think and then now understanding that better I think I do have more of a compassion and an empathy and rather than judging I think that I can come alongside and make suggestions that might be helpful."
Relationships	Importance of relationships	P4	"create that relationship with them because when I have that relationship with them not only do they know that school is a safe place for a lot of my students, school is the only safe place they have."
	Relationships with families	P6	"just really seeing the family as part of the equation and being able to lean into the family and develop relationships with them."
Need support	Administration	P4	"If I need some training on something, if I'm curious about something my principal will be the first one to step up and either find an answer or give me a resource to help me find that answer and so I truly believe that my principal is incredible on supporting her staff.
	Not all resources are appropriate	P5	"Not every program is going to work in a Title I school."
	School funding	P11	"I know it all boils down to money and all of that, so working for a Title I school sometimes that's not easy to come by."
	Seek additional support	P1	"I know that the training I've has been because I've chosen to learn, I've chosen to read."
	Support staff	P3	

			"We need those counselors or those programs within our own school that they can pull them out because you can teach them academically while you're doing those, I'm not skilled in all of those things as to how they need to think about this or, how to talk to them to get them through a trauma but you can still educate them academically through those kind of things."
Understanding student situations	Students as individuals	P1	"You have to look at the root of the issue, look at the root of what is causing their behavior rather than the behavior itself."
	Understanding where students come from	P4	"I actually think that that should be required especially for teachers in Title I schools. I think until you can really see where the student are coming from we don't have the slightest clue how to teach them."
What teachers need to develop self-efficacy	Building relationships	P6	"For me I think it's been more of an awareness of what they're coming from, what they're dealing with, that all homes don't function like mine."
	More knowledge/resources	P1	"I think we need a lot of training in keeping kids in the classroom, keeping kids in our space and accepting kids as they come to use rather than expecting them to be a certain way."
	Social-emotional learning first	P8	"I embrace social-emotional learning because unless I teach them, I may be the first one teaching them how to be able to work with another child, how to even play and engage."
	Working with co-workers/Accountability partners	P2	"always having that network of teachers to go to."
Teacher perspectives	Teacher understanding	P8	"I only have what abilities I have, so I've learned to learn myself and the gain the skills I can like this summer I took classes on autism because I knew I was getting a child that had that. Because it's like I

			want to be the best teacher I can for the students that I have." "having some sort of training before you step into the classroom or as you step into the classroom would be helpful."
	What teachers need	P11	
Teachers need to improve self-efficacy	Building relationships	P2	"keep building relationships with my kids, with my families is really important."
	More knowledge/resources	P5	"I need to have professional development, I need to have opportunities for professional development that take into consideration the students that I am working with."
	Social-emotional learning First	P8	"I embrace social-emotional learning because unless I teach them, I may be the first one teaching them how to be able to work with another child, how to even play and engage."
	Working with co-workers	P1	"So having someone to be able to talk with but also get feedback from."