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Early Childhood Teachers' Perspectives of Their Relationships With Students With Emotional Behavioral Disorders

Tyesha Greene
Walden University

Walden University

College of Education

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Tyesha S. Greene

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Review Committee
Dr. Donna Brackin, Committee Chairperson, Education Faculty
Dr. Terri Edwards, Committee Member, Education Faculty
Dr. Mary Howe, University Reviewer, Education Faculty

Chief Academic Officer and Provost
Sue Subocz, Ph.D.

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Abstract

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MA, Gallaudet University, 2014

BA, Trinity Washington University, 2012

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Abstract

General education early childhood (EC) teachers may find it challenging to build positive teacher-student relationships (TSRs) with students with emotional behavioral disorders (EBD). There is a gap in practice regarding general education EC teachers' TSRs with students with EBD and the support they need when teaching these students. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore the perspectives of general education EC teachers regarding their TSRs and the support they need when teaching students with EBD. The conceptual framework was Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory of human development. Participants were nine general education EC teachers who were currently employed in a public school district located in a U.S. metropolitan area with 3 or more years of experience teaching students with EBD. Data were collected from semistructured interviews and analyzed inductively using open coding. Three themes emerged: general education EC teachers believe that applying rules and discipline consistently and using incentives improved their TSRs with students with EBD, EC teachers need professionals and paraprofessionals when teaching students with EBD, and EC teachers require parental involvement to understand EBD students' individual needs and family dynamics to build good TSRs. The results of this study have the potential to bring about positive social change by providing school administrators and educational leaders with information to initiate the implementation of strategies, techniques, and programs to support teachers who work with students with EBD and improve the academic success of these students.

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to the Holy Trinity, who is head of my life and who guided me throughout my entire education journey. To Bishop Ross, who has inspired and encouraged me with words of wisdom and knowledge. First Lady Dovie Ross, thank you for your time and effort. To my parents, who have been extremely supportive and understanding in everything that I have set forth to accomplish in life. To Torrey, I appreciate your words of advice and help during this process, and, to my godparents, thank you for always being there. Orane, thank you for your encouraging words, strength, patience, and support. Ms. Dawn, thank you for pushing and challenging me to do better. To Shantel Parker, thanks for your generous heart. Thanks to the community of people who have helped me be successful, I truly thank you for everything you have done for me.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

In the field of early childhood (EC) education, *emotional behavioral disorder* (EBD) is a term used to identify individuals experiencing chronic inappropriate behaviors or feelings under normal conditions (Aboagye, 2020; Individuals With Disabilities Education Act [IDEA], 2018). In addition, depression, conduct disorder, psychotic disorder, anxiety disorder, bipolar disorder, oppositional defiant behavior, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, and posttraumatic stress disorder are all classified as EBD (Ringeisen et al., 2016). In the field of EC education, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, reauthorized in 2004 as the IDEA (revised in 2018), describes EBD as a condition where one or more chronic characteristics could adversely shape relationships. Students who experience EBD demonstrate characteristics of chronic emotional or behavioral problems or adverse emotional reactions and often have long-term negative relationships in the classroom with their teachers (Gagnon et al., 2019; Sutherland et al., 2018).

Students with EBD are increasingly entering classrooms around the world (Aboagye, 2020; Georgiou et al., 2017). In the United States, a significant number of children experience some form of behavioral health issue in their childhood (Mitchell, 2017). The student's failure to establish effective interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers under normal circumstances is an example of EBD, which may result in both personal and school difficulties (Council for Exceptional Children, 2018). Teachers may feel inadequate and struggle to develop successful approaches to individual and classroom management when teaching students with EBD (Flower et al., 2017; Schonert-

Reichl, 2017). A lower level of confidence (i.e., self-efficacy) among teachers can lead to higher levels of disruptive behaviors, negative perceptions, and feelings among students and contribute to adverse teacher-student relationships (TSRs) in the classroom (Archambault et al., 2017; Georgiou et al., 2017; Mikuyu et al., 2020; Zee et al., 2017).

Researchers need to address teachers' needs and help them enhance their TSRs to minimize EBD among students, according to Poulou (2020). Poulou (2017a, 2017b) also stated that teachers need assistance to develop their professional skills or practices to address students' behavioral problems so they may build constructive relationships with students with EBD. In a seminal article, Poulou (2015) indicated there was a gap in the literature on practice concerning teachers' perspectives of their TSRs and what they need for support when teaching these students. The gap in practice for this study was teachers' perspectives of their TSRs with students with EBD and what teachers need for support when instructing these students.

In this basic qualitative study, I explored general education EC teachers' perspectives regarding their TSRs and their needs when teaching students with EBD. Mazenod et al. (2019) indicated that a best practice for teachers working with students with EBD is development of a positive TSR. The best TSRs include trust, affection (caring), warmth, and social-emotional support; as a result of their participation in these TSRs, students with EBD have exhibited positive social-emotional behaviors (Becker et al., 2017; Hughes & Im, 2016; Skinner et al., 2014). Effective TSRs lead to higher academic achievement, positive social-emotional behaviors, the ability to self-regulate, and lower levels of aggressive and disruptive behaviors for students with EBD

(Hernández et al., 2017; Oberle, 2018; Rucinski et al., 2018; Sointu et al., 2017). The results of this research provided greater insight into the perspectives of EC teachers of students with EBD as well as identify what they need to support their students. Information from this study could also contribute to positive social change by improving understanding of TSRs with students with EBD and by identifying the support that general education EC teachers need when educating these students. The study may provide information to support teachers' professional growth. This study provides data that education policy makers can use to enhance early learning resources, techniques, and strategies to support teachers who work with students with EBD.

In Chapter 1, I review the background, problem, and purpose of this research. This chapter includes the research questions (RQs) that underpinned the study and the conceptual framework that grounded it. Discussion regarding the nature of the study, assumptions, limitations, scope, delimitations, implications for social change, and significance are also included.

Background

The research literature that provides a background for this study is limited concerning EC teachers and students. It is also not specific to EC education regarding teachers' perspectives of their TSRs and students with EBD. Where articles were specific to EC, I specify this in the narrative. The literature reviewed includes studies from the United States and other countries as well as special education and prekindergarten (pre-K) to Grade 12 teachers.

Teachers have the important role of educating students with EBD. This includes facilitating support and fostering positive engagement, learning (i.e., reading skills), and social-emotional development (Bettini, Cumming, Brunsting, et al., 2020; Crnic & Neece, 2015). Teachers are also the most important influence on the academic, social, and emotional outcomes of students with EBD, making their role an essential and unique aspect of the TSR.

Emotional support is one feature of a quality relationship between general education EC teachers and students. Oberle (2018) and Jennings (2015) suggested that preschool and Head Start teachers should provide emotional support because it creates a supportive classroom and school atmosphere that improves academic success and enhances learning opportunities. Emotional support also facilitates the development of positive relationships, self-regulation, and social skills for students with EBD (Jennings, 2015; Oberle, 2018). Zee et al. (2020) noted that among students with EBD in the third through sixth grades, emotional support and its outcomes were predictors of academic success for students while in school and beyond.

Hernández et al. (2017) examined students in kindergarten, and Rucinski et al. (2018) examined third- through fifth-grade students and their teachers. Both noted that in dynamic classrooms, TSRs are connected to children's positive social outcomes, adjustment skills, and development. Researchers have suggested that positive and nurturing TSRs in the classroom decrease problem behaviors and increase students' self-control and academic achievement (Sointu et al., 2017; Van Loan & Garwood, 2020).

When students with EBD engage in disruptive behaviors, such as being disobedient, leaving their seats, and disrespecting peers, they present a challenge for teachers and may cause them to distance themselves from these students (Breeman et al., 2018; Shin & Ryan, 2017). In a study regarding middle school students and TSRs, Duong et al. (2019) found that disruptive behaviors, such as calling out, talking to other peers when not allowed, distracting peers, and engaging in off-task behaviors (e.g., playing with objects) during instructional time may be the underlying reasons teachers distance themselves from students with EBD. Teachers can become emotionally exhausted and less likely to have a positive relationship with students with EBD, which is also not conducive to positive learning experiences (Hopman et al., 2018). Aldrup et al. (2018b) noted that as secondary teachers become emotionally fatigued, they are also less enthusiastic about working with misbehaving students. As a result, disruptive behaviors contribute to poor academics, deterioration of social and self-regulation skills, and increased negative perceptions about school and the TSR (Hernández et al., 2017; McGrath & Van Bergen, 2015). Negative behaviors contribute to poor TSRs and outcomes for students with EBD, resulting in a lack of involvement during instructional practices or tasks (Gage et al., 2018; Kauffman & Landrum, 2018).

Teachers' interactions with students with EBD promote positive social-emotional skills for these students. Teachers are considered leaders in charge of fostering positive interactions, which makes the TSR an essential aspect of the teacher's role in the classroom (Breeman et al., 2015; Farmer et al., 2019). Multiple researchers have stated that instructors who positively interact with students with EBD play a vital part in

shaping social-emotional domains concerning school adjustment and behavioral development (Aldrup et al., 2018a; Liew et al., 2018; Rucinski et al., 2018; Suprayogi et al., 2017). According to Black et al. (2017), relationships are a significant feature of childhood development for students 5 years old and under. They noted that relationships are deemed "maturational and collaborative processes that influence cognitive, linguistic, motor, socioemotional and self-regulation skills of children in EC" (Black et al., 2017, p. 2). Reinke et al. (2016) and McKinnon and Blair (2019) found that the relationship between a student and teacher is bidirectional: experiences between teachers influence students, and the interactions between students lead to the way teachers communicate with students, both negatively and positively.

Working with students who demonstrate challenging behaviors can be a significant problem for instructors (Breeman et al., 2018; Shin & Ryan, 2017). In a study of students with EBD aged 6 to13, Markelz and Taylor (2016) found more than 20% of these students had experienced a difficult interaction with their teacher and peers. Cadima et al. (2015) noted that in kindergarten and first grade, these problematic interactions are directly related to a negative classroom environment, which adversely influences students' social-emotional behaviors and the quality of experiences with their teachers.

Negative interactions can lead to inappropriate behaviors that, when left unattended, can weaken, and cause a breakdown in TSRs (C. R. Cook, Coco, et al., 2018). Students engaged in chronic problem behaviors develop negative relationships and interactions with their teachers at a higher rate than their peers who do not exhibit these tendencies (Graham, 2017). As a result of forming poor relationships with their teachers,

students with EBD are more inclined than other students with disabilities to develop early learning issues, behavioral problems, academic failure, and negative school outcomes (Gage et al., 2018; Graham, 2017; Zolkoski, 2019). Crum et al. (2016) found that in elementary school, challenging student behaviors among children ages 5 to 12 years old contribute to reduced classroom engagement, low academic achievement, poor prosocial skills, and other behavioral problems. Disruptive interactions between teachers and students with EBD can also lead to poor on-task behaviors, which influences the relationships that teachers have with these students.

In EC, positive interactions can lead to better experiences for EC students with EBD concerning on-task behaviors and academic achievement, including productive TSRs (Perle, 2018). McLean et al. (2016) and McLean et al. (2020) found that when young children with behavioral problems spent more time-on-task and less time transitioning in the classroom, they experienced better academic outcomes. The way teachers directly engage, react, respond, or behave regarding challenges in the classroom demonstrates their ability or inability to deal with students with EBD and their behaviors (McLean et al., 2018; McLean & Connor, 2018; Zee & Koomen, 2017).

In studies by Becker et al. (2017) and Walker and Graham (2019), student behaviors such as frequent high levels of frustration and anger or poor self-regulation were predictive of teacher-student conflict. If these actions persisted, friction between teacher and student led to additional negative interactions in their relationship. In a study by Van Loan and Garwood (2020) on intervention strategies with students with EBD, the authors stated that when teachers become aware of the reasons for or contributions to

these poor exchanges, they are able to intervene and make the necessary changes in their TSRs to prevent or deescalate potential conflicts. Shillingford and Karlin (2014), in a study on preservice general and special education teachers, examined teacher training and strategies regarding EBD students and found that with training, teachers can use strategies to manage disruptive behaviors to control negative conduct in the classroom. Frequent and prolonged frustration, anger, and poor self-regulation among students with EBD contribute to negative TSRs. However, as teachers understand how these negative behaviors influence negative interactions, they can use their training skills (i.e., strategies) to decrease disruptive behaviors regarding students with EBD.

Teachers have many roles to fill and face various challenges and obstacles to their own learning and development. This study is needed due to a gap in practice concerning teachers' perspectives of their TSRs and what they need for support when instructing students with EBD (see Poulou, 2015). The participants for this study were EC classroom teachers in pre-K) through third grade who have experience teaching students with EBD. In this study, I sought to expand the research on TSRs and the support that teachers need when instructing students with EBD in EC classrooms.

I found only a limited amount of research on practice concerning EC teachers' perspectives of their TSRs and what they need to support their instruction of students with EBD in academic databases or using internet search engines when using the terms *early childhood*, *teacher-student relationship*, and *EBD*. Researchers examined factors including

- childhood maltreatment and educational outcomes concerning young children who have suffered abuse (Romano et al., 2015),
- the interplay of teacher-child closeness and autonomy regarding children's vocabulary and self-regulation in preschool (Cadima et al., 2019),
- the influence of teachers' socialization behaviors on children's emotional competence in preschool (Denham & Bassett, 2019), and
- EC teachers use video-interaction guidance as a tool for social exchange in the classroom with preschool children (Jilink et al., 2018).

These studies, however, do not address TSRs or EBD in EC. Although these factors are important to EC research, they are not applicable to this study.

Teachers need to improve their TSRs with students with EBD. Jilink et al. (2018) suggested there is a need for improvement in the quality of support teachers provide students. According to Scott, Gage Hirn, and Han (2019), future research needs to focus on instruction and behaviors of teachers to provide a better understanding of the nature of these relationships with students with EBD. Focusing on instruction will help teachers to teach, relate, and interact with students with EBD as well as help them understand how their behaviors influence relationship and developmental skills (Cadima et al., 2019; Jilink et al., 2018; Scott, Gage, Hirn, & Han, 2019). The limited research in this area and the suggestion for future studies supported the need for this study. This study's findings could bring about positive social change by providing information that supports the professional growth of teachers and that clarifies TSRs. The results of the study also may help to identify the support that teachers need when educating students with EBD and

provide data that education policy makers can use to enhance early learning resources, techniques, and strategies to support these teachers.

Problem Statement

In a seminal article, Poulou (2015) noted the gap in the literature and practice regarding general education EC teachers' perspectives of their TSRs with students with EBD and the support they need when teaching these students. Poulou (2017a, 2017b) stated that teachers need help to develop their professional skills or practices to address students' behavioral problems and build positive TSRs with students with EBD. A review of the literature showed that this research is needed in the field of EC, as over the past decade, the number of children exhibiting EBD has increased in several countries (Idris et al., 2019). As of the year 2020 in the United States, 8.3 million children have been identified as having emotional or behavioral difficulties by school staff (Council for Exceptional Children, 2018). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2019), for students aged 3 to 2, data for preschool were separated from total received services for emotional disturbances under the IDEA Part B. According to researchers, disruptive behavior disorders was the most commonly diagnosed condition among school-age children and students in preschool (Idris et al., 2019; Ogundele, 2018). In EC, on average 7.4 % of children have behavioral or conduct problems that begin at age 3 and continues into adolescent years (Ghandour et al., 2019). Data from 2016 to 2017 show that in the metropolitan area that was investigated in the present study, 23% of children under the age of 18 had more than one emotional or behavioral condition (Kids Count Data Center, 2020).

For students with EBD, a quality TSR has many advantages. In studies of fourth- and fifth-grade general education teachers' effects on complex cognitive skills and social-emotional competencies, Kraft (2019) and Alzahrani et al. (2019) stated that teachers contribute to students' behaviors, achievement and development, motivation, adjustment, behaviors, social-emotional well-being, and competence. Walker and Graham (2019) explored TSRs and the behaviors of children in the first year of formal school. The researchers noted that a close TSR is characterized by warmth, open communication, and support. According to Cipriano et al. (2018), in a positive TSR, teachers are pivotal for providing guidance and optimal interactions that facilitate young children's development. Several researchers have noted that high levels of positive TSRs are linked to increased student academic achievement and gains in other academic areas, including social-emotional competence (Becker et al., 2017; Ettekal & Shi, 2020; Xu & Qi, 2019).

The gap in the literature on practice demonstrates that more information is needed regarding EC teachers' perspectives of their TSRs with students with EBD and to identify the support they need when working with these students (Poulou, 2015). Further studies by Poulou (2020) indicated that to minimize EBD among students, researchers need to address teachers' needs to help them enhance their TSRs. Poulou (2017a, 2017b) also stated that teachers need assistance to develop their professional skills or practices to address students' behavioral problems so they may build constructive relationships with students with EBD.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore the perspectives of general education EC teachers regarding their TSRs and the support they need when teaching students with EBD. There is a need to explore EC teachers' perspectives regarding their TSRs and to identify the support they need when instructing students with EBD (Poulou, 2015). Teachers need assistance to develop their professional skills or practices to address behavioral problems so they may build constructive relationships with students with EBD (Poulou, 2017a, 2017b). The number of students with EBD in the United States is increasing (Gottfried et al., 2016; National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). If students with EBD do not experience positive TSRs, they may encounter academic difficulties, such as poor grades and be at increased risk for emotional and behavioral problems in EC and adulthood, including dropping out of school (Capern & Hammond, 2014; Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, 2017; Ştefan et al., 2015).

Basic qualitative research is the most common type used to describe, construct, and understand people's experiences in a meaningful way. Merriam (2009) argued that when choosing a method of study, the researcher must concentrate on interpreting the how and what of these experiences. Social constructivism was the paradigm that informed this research. I explored the experiences and perspectives of general education EC teachers regarding their TSRs and identified their needs when teaching students with EBD. A tenet of social constructivism is that individuals' reality differs because worldviews and perceptions are created by encounters with others (Valentine et al.,

2017). Social constructivists contend that awareness or experiential knowledge takes place by interactive signals that can affirm or refute understanding (Tam, 2000). In qualitative research, social constructivism supports a research approach that relies on the participants' perspectives and experiences of the phenomenon (Merriam, 2009). Valentine et al. (2017) stated that social constructivists rely on organic techniques, such as interviews, to describe changing interpretations and understand reality construction. To obtain comprehensive answers, the social constructivist researcher uses open-ended questions to gain an understanding of the research subject (Saha, 2014). According to Günbayi and Sorm (2018), social constructivism allows researchers to investigate the social world and find realistic solutions to practical problems. The purpose of this basic qualitiative study was to explore the perspectives of general education EC teachers regarding their TSRs and the support they need when teaching students with EBD.

Research Questions

I sought to answer the following RQs in this study:

RQ1: What are general education EC teachers' perspectives regarding their TSRs with students with EBD?

RQ2: What are general education EC teachers' perspectives of the support they need when teaching students with EBD?

Conceptual Framework

I drew from Bronfenbrenner's (1974) ecological systems theory. Bronfenbrenner's ecological paradigm has been used extensively in psychology and education. According to Bronfenbrenner, human development occurs through a process

of progressive and complex interaction that is bidirectional—between a human and another person within their immediate environment—and known as the proximal processes. The ecological systems relate to the educational environment as the theory goes beyond the individual child and extends to different elements within the ecological systems (Neal & Neal, 2013). Children learn, engage, and interact through a set of forces or systems that reciprocate with each other (Bronfenbrenner, 1974). The microsystem is the immediate interface and closest setting for the child and includes direct relationships with teachers. It is comprised of the developing person, their characteristics, and their environment (e.g., school, home, peers, and teachers), which are important aspects of students' school experiences and a good education (Cook & Jennings, 2016; Sugden, 2014). Inside the microsystem, the school setting is the physical space where teachers and students participate and engage with one another for extended time throughout the day. Students also have face-to-face experiences through direct relationships and social structures attached to the child through school, teachers, and peers (Bronfenbrenner, 1974; Espelage, 2014; Rosa & Tudge, 2013).

The mesosystem is the second environment that constantly encourages interactions with the microsystem. The mesosystem is a supraordinate system in which there is a focus on the exchange of two or more microsystems (i.e., relationships) that connect families and school life (Bouchard & Smith, 2017; Dishion et al., 2019). This includes relationships such as child-family, child-teacher, child and school personnel, child and teachers other than their own, child and peers from other classrooms, child-family and school, and child-peers in the community. According to McKinley et al.

(2008), the mesosystem is the domain that provides the support and care that influences relationships in the microsystem. These relationships shape the behaviors of a developing child inside the classroom (Bronfenbrenner, 1974; Taylor & Gebre, 2016). According to Espelage (2014) and Krishnan (2010), teachers influence the relationships of the learners, which suggests that the environment forms the child, and the child shapes the environment through interrelated systems. This demonstrates how the microsystem and mesosystem help influence relationships and shape behaviors that are connected to the individual within their environment.

The conceptual framework (microsystem and mesosystem) is reflected in the interview questions regarding general education EC teachers' perspectives. I excluded the exosystem, chronosystem, and macrosystem because I did not focus on psychological changes, maturation, or changes in the environment. I also did not address the external environment to which children have limited access or specific contexts that influence existing cultures or subcultures (Bronfenbrenner, 1986; Vélez-Agosto et al., 2017).

I used the constructs of the conceptual framework to develop the RQs in this basic qualitative study. My goal was to further understand teachers' perspectives of their TSRs with students with EBD and the support they need when teaching these students in the classroom at the microsystem and mesosystem levels. The interview questions were aligned with the RQs and connected to the conceptual framework to explore the participants' perspectives in these areas within the microsystem and mesosystem. The rationale for using Bronfenbrenner's (1974) ecological systems theory as the conceptual framework was to clarify (a) that the microsystem is where relationships are developed

and maintained by the developing person, which determines how students with EBD and teachers relate and interact in the classroom setting; and (b) that the mesosystem is where various environments connect and influence relationships and behaviors regarding students with EBD and teachers in the classroom. Because of these factors, the conceptual framework influenced my choice of a basic qualitative approach to explore the perspectives of general education EC teachers regarding their TSRs and the support they need when working with students with EBD. Understanding relationships in these systems solidified the purpose of this study.

Nature of the Study

A basic qualitative approach was appropriate for this study to explore the perspectives of general education EC teachers regarding their TSRs and the support they need when teaching students with EBD. The study consisted of semistructured interviews with open-ended questions. Over the past decade, the number of children with EBD has increased (Idris et al., 2019). In EC, EBD manifest fighting, arguing, aggressive behaviors, and temper tantrums among young children (Ogundele, 2018; Ringeisen et al., 2016; Schindler et al., 2015). A TSR is a bond between teachers and students with EBD that is linked to various areas of development and learning in EC (A. J. Martin & Collie, 2016; Hagenauer et al., 2016; Hagenauer et al., 2015; Zendarski et al., 2020), such as socioemotional and psychological support, emotional competence, academic achievement, language, and social and self-regulation skills (Day & Connor, 2016; Hernández et al., 2017; Jones & Kahn, 2017; Kiuru et al., 2016; Tilbe & Gai, 2020; Uitto et al., 2018).

There is limited literature on EC teachers and students. The research is also not specific to EC education regarding teachers' perspectives of TSRs and students with EBD. Because of minimal research on the gap in practice, in this study, I explored the perspectives of general education EC teachers regarding their TSRs and identified their needs when teaching students with EBD.

Lodico et al. (2010) stated that the purpose of a qualitative study is to explore the perspectives of participants through in-depth descriptions and interviews that answer what and how questions. In a basic qualitative study, the interview process is informal with open-ended questions that focus on perceptions (Moustakas, 1994). For this study, I conducted semistructured interviews with open-ended questions with nine participants to explore general education EC teachers' perspectives. Data were analyzed thematically using open coding. Transcripts were color coded to identify emerging codes (common words and phrases). Open coding revealed categories that I used to form themes.

Definitions

EBD(s): A condition involving extreme behaviors, chronic problems, and violations of social and cultural expectations (Hallahan et al., 2009). In this study, a child was considered to have an EBD if they exhibited more than one of these characteristics over a long period and if the experience had adversely affected their academic performance in ways that could not be understood by preexisting mental, sensory, or health factors. EBD also includes the child's failure to develop and maintain relationships with peers and teachers (IDEA, 2018; Ogundele, 2018). Inappropriate behaviors exhibited under normal circumstances, pervasive moods, self-injury, physical and verbal

aggression, failure to comply, disruption of the environment, and inappropriate vocalizations are all forms of EBD (Ogundele, 2018).

Mesosystem: The ecological system in which there is a focus on the processes taking place between two or more microsystems (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Härkönen, 2007). The mesosystem is also defined as layers that create the connections between different microsystems (i.e., teachers, classrooms, schools, and peers) in which the developing child spends time (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). The concept of the mesosystem is useful when considering how various environments influence a child's thinking, attitudes, behaviors, learning, and relationships (Bronfenbrenner, 2005).

Microsystem: An ecological system that involves the classroom setting where the developing person experiences patterns of behaviors, activities, roles, responsibilities, and interpersonal relationships in a close and personal environment with direct contact with immediate structures (Härkönen, 2007; Paquette & Ryan, 2001). Bronfenbrenner's (1974) theory regarding the microsystem is that it contains different settings and processes where various people participate in different roles and relationships, which profoundly influences the child. In the microsystem, the teacher's focus is the child and how they relate to and reciprocate their interactions with the developing child (Härkönen, 2007).

TSR: A special and close interaction between a teacher and a student that is formed through interpersonal relationships (Frenzel, 2014). TSRs create positive changes and improve the well-being of individuals (specifically, students) in the microsystem and mesosystem (Nasr et al., 2014). These interpersonal relationships mature gradually in

stages from initial contact, interaction, friendship, and bond-building between teachers and students, which contributes to the formation of TSRs (Hagenauer et al., 2015; A. J. Martin & Collie, 2016).

Assumptions

The participants for this study were general education EC teachers of pre-K through third-grade students who had experience with students with EBD. An assumption was that the participants would provide information by sharing their perspectives regarding teaching students with EBD. Another assumption was that the participants would be forthcoming with information and answer all interview questions in an open and truthful manner. These assumptions were important to the data collection process as I relied on the participants' responses to gain insight into their perspectives regarding teaching students with EBD.

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of this basic qualitative research was the exploration of pre-K through third-grade general education EC teachers' perspectives regarding their relationships with students with EBD and to identify the support these teachers need to instruct these students. This study focused on general education EC classroom teachers in a large metropolitan area in the northeastern part of the United States; the participants were currently employed in a school district with 3 or more years' experience teaching students with EBD in public schools. This study is important because its findings can be used to support teachers' professional growth, help them develop a better understanding of TSRs, and identify the support they need when working with students with EBD.

Due to the boundaries of this study, I excluded special education teachers at all levels and general education teachers of later childhood grades, fourth and up. I was specifically focused on general education EC teachers in pre-K through third grade because of their experience, knowledge, and expertise when teaching with students with EBD in the classroom. Due to the scope of the study, general education teachers who fit the study criteria but lived outside the metropolitan area were also excluded.

Developmental theorists have focused on various aspects of human development by studying the social, emotional, and cognitive growth of children. I considered using the theories of Piaget, Bandura, Bowlby, and Vygotsky for the conceptual framework of this study but opted not to do so. Piaget's cognitive theory was not appropriate for this study because it focuses on child development from birth to adulthood (Hanfstingl et al., 2019). Bandura's social learning theory was also not appropriate for this study, as this theory concentrates on three elements: behavioral learning, cognitive learning (i.e., personal factors), and environmental factors (Yılmaz et al., 2019). Bowlby's attachment theory was rejected because it centers on infancy and relationship attachment (Bowlby, 1973; Capaldo & Perrella, 2018). Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory was also not applicable, as this theory focuses on the significance of culture and its' influence on social interaction and communication. Bronfenbrenner's (1974) ecological system theory provides a means to understand young children's development through multidimensional systems in EC education (Elliott & Davis, 2020). Because this study focused only on the microsystem and mesosystem, using Bronfenbrenner's theory as the conceptual framework was appropriate to specifically explore the perspectives of general education

EC teachers regarding their TSRs and identify the support they need when teaching students with EBD.

The results of this study may be transferable to other populations of teachers and students who fit the research criteria of this study. This study is specific to teachers and students with EBD located in the eastern region of the United States. Transferability was achieved by providing thick, rich descriptions and sufficient details to allow the reader to make judgments regarding study similarities or draw conclusions concerning the participants, school, culture, resources, setting, time, and situations (see Lodico et al., 2010; Pandey & Patnaik, 2014).

Limitations

According to Price and Murnan (2004), limitations are characteristics related to the design or methodology of a study that could influence interpretation of the data collected during research. Roberts (2010) defined limitations as a weakness in the study, such as an area that a researcher cannot control that may negatively influence the transferability of results. The limitations of this study include methodology constraints, sample size, and bias.

In basic qualitative research, data collection typically involves methods that rely on participants' reports concerning their ideas or situations (Percy et al., 2015). In qualitative research, interviews are the most common method of gathering data (Creswell, 2012) and for the participants to express their views in their own voice (Percy et al., 2015). Before the interviews began, I asked the participants to answer all questions honestly and objectively. It is important note that I attended a summer youth program

with two of the participants, but I did not know most of them or hold a supervisory position that might have affected their responses. Participants were able to answer the questions clearly based on the study's criteria and provide important information pertaining to the study. During the interviews, the researcher's presence may influence the participants' responses (Anderson, 2010). To address this, I encouraged the participants to be open and forthcoming with information during the interview process.

In basic qualitative research, the sample size could be considered a limitation. Sample sizes are typically small but provide rich information about the phenomenon under investigation (Percy et al., 2015). The sample size for this study was nine general education EC teachers who had experience with students with EBD to explore their relationships with these students. Patton (2002) noted that a minimum of 10 to 15 participants are reasonable to investigate a phenomenon. A small sample size of nine participants was sufficient to answer the RQs, to keep the study manageable, and to gather thick descriptions of participants' perspectives to learn more about the topic under investigation (Hennink et al., 2017; Lodico et al., 2010). According to Anderson (2010), small sample sizes are necessary to explore the topic in-depth. A sample of nine participants was large enough to obtain needed information to address the RQs.

Bias is also considered a limitation in qualitative research. Anderson (2010) stated that researcher bias and idiosyncrasies could influence research quality. I was previously employed as a teacher's assistant in a summer program in the school district where this study took place. Based on this experience, I have developed the following biases: (a) general education EC teachers are reluctant to teach and build relationships with students

with EBD because of their poor behaviors, and (b) students are mislabeled as EBD. It is important to highlight my past role because the participants considered for this study were colleagues. Two participants may have been willing to participate in the interviews due to our rapport established during the summer program, and, as a result, they may have answered the interview questions to satisfy me as the researcher. I was clear I wanted their honest and straightforward answers to collect truthful and relevant information important for this study. I provided a summary of my findings so each participant could check this for accuracy.

To address my biases, I used a reflective journal before, during, and after data collection. During the interview process, I used this journal to contemplate and write out my thoughts and opinions rather than vocalize these to the participants and to help ensure that my biases did not influence the direction or outcome of the study (see Lodico et al., 2010). After the data collection phase, I used the journal to reflect on the entire research process, including my rationale for methodological decisions. I used it to document any biases, including any issues that occurred after data collection and during data analysis. To ensure that biases were controlled and accounted for during data collection and analysis, I used an expert reviewer to examine my reflective journal and a summary of findings for thoughts and attitudes or identify any issues that may have occurred. The expert reviewer served as an external auditor for doctoral students at another university located in the eastern region of the United States.

Significance

Teachers spend considerable time with their students, making them important people in students' lives (Fecser, 2015). As a result, TSRs are a unique aspect and an essential part of teachers' roles as educators. Without caring and supportive TSRs, students with EBD may have lower grades, experience failure in class, have increased chances of being diagnosed with a learning disability, and ultimately drop out of school (Büttner et al., 2016; Dunn et al., 2017; Murphy et al., 2019; Zolkoski et al., 2016).

A positive TSR has benefits, yet, teachers who work with students with EBD spend more time, attention, and energy correcting and controlling behaviors, which can result in negative experiences and less time to foster engagement with students who exhibit problem behaviors (Chow et al., 2020; Özgan, 2016; Sointu et al., 2017). TSRs that are positive may not eliminate disruptive behaviors but may potentially reduce them by promoting and fostering caring relationships that are relatable and emotionally supportive for students with EBD (Coulombe & Yates, 2018; Skinner et al., 2014; Walker & Graham, 2019). Developing a healthy relationship with students with EBD has been connected to academic potential and achievement outcomes (Martin & Collie, 2016). This connection might help narrow the achievement gap for these students (Jennings, 2015; Metsäpelto et al., 2015; Zimmermann, 2018) in reading and mathematics in EC education (Birgisdottir et al., 2020; Metsäpelto et al., 2015).

A positive TSR can serve as an intervention to address inappropriate behaviors and social-emotional and academic issues. If effective, it can assist teachers in supporting relationship building and encouraging positive patterns of behaviors (Fitzsimmons et al.,

2019; Gregoriadis & Grammatikopoulos, 2014). Gregoriadis and Grammatikopoulos (2014) noted that identifying positive or negative patterns in a TSR with kindergarten students could improve their social-emotional, behavioral, and academic issues. Karabay (2017) added that a close and warm relationship with teachers could change the attitudes of students with EBD toward school as teachers are a point of support in the classroom. Positive TSRs can be beneficial for students who have EBD when their instructors demonstrate warmth, care, and security. The findings of this study advanced knowledge in the field of EC education by exploring the perspectives of teachers regarding their TSRs and the support they need when teaching students with EBD.

This study's findings may also contribute to positive social change with information that supports the professional growth of teachers, provides a better understanding of TSRs, and identifies teachers' needs when working with students with EBD. This study provided data that education policy makers can use to enhance early learning resources, techniques, and strategies to support teachers who work with students with EBD. Understanding the perspectives of general education EC teachers regarding their TSRs as well as their needs when instructing students with EBD may help them build positive TSRs. In this basic qualitative study, I sought to explore these perspectives to identify the support these teachers need when working with students with EBD. This study provides material to stakeholders who could develop appropriate support for these general education EC teachers.

Summary

In TSRs, teachers have an important responsibility to build relationships with students with EBD**.** A positive TSR can be used to address poor behavior as well as social, emotional, and academic issues. Positive TSRs can also be used as a strategy to help teachers build supportive relationships while promoting positive behaviors among EBD students (Fitzsimmons et al., 2019). Understanding the importance of positive TSRs is vital as the number of students with EBD is increasing (Gottfried et al., 2016). Students with EBD and teachers are likely to encounter negative TSRs (Sprouls et al., 2015), while teachers continue to struggle with building positive and supportive relationships with these students (Jenkins et al., 2015). As a result, students with EBD continue to demonstrate negative behaviors (Gage et al., 2018; Kauffman & Landrum, 2018). Poulou (2015), noted a gap in the literature on practice pertaining to teachers' perspectives regarding their TSRs and what they need for support when teaching students with EBD. Poulou (2017a, 2017b) also noted that teachers need help to develop professional skills or practices to cope with students' behavioral problems and build positive TSRs with these students.

While studies exist regarding students with EBD, understanding the specific perspectives of general education EC teachers was addressed in this study. Chapter 1 included the background for this basic qualitative study regarding TSRs and students with EBD. I identified the research problem and purpose, listed the RQs that underpinned this study, discussed the conceptual framework, nature of the study, and its significance.

Chapter 2 will include a review of the research literature pertaining to TSRs and students with EBD.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

As of 2019 in the United States, 8.3 million children have been diagnosed with EBD and receive IDEA support for emotional disturbance issues (Council for Exceptional Children, 2018; National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). Researchers have reported that disruptive behavior disorders are the most commonly diagnosed condition among preschool students (Idris et al., 2019; Ogundele, 2018). According to Ghandour et al. (2019), approximately 7.4 % of children have behavioral or conduct problems that begin at age 3 and continues into adolescent years. Statistics for 2016-2017 show that 23% of children under the age of 18 in the metropolitan area under investigation in the current study had more than one emotional or behavioral condition (Kids Count Data Center, 2020). The problem addressed in this study is the gap in practice concerning teachers' perspectives of their TSRs with students with EBD and identification of what teachers need for support when instructing these students.

When conflicts occur between teachers and students with EBD, students tend to develop dissatisfaction with their relationship with their teacher due to their perceived lack of teacher support (Breeman et al., 2015). According to Ştefan et al. (2015), the lack of teacher support could be a result of preschool teachers' lack of knowledge and understanding of students with EBD. For these students, the lack of positive TSRs increases the risk for emotional and behavioral difficulties, failure to complete schoolwork, absences, and dropout rates when compared to other populations of students with disabilities (Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, 2017; Ştefan et al., 2015). Poulou (2015) stated there was limited information on teachers' perspectives

regarding their relationships with students with EBD and what they need for support when teaching these students. Further studies by Poulou (2020) noted that to minimize EBD among students, researchers should address teachers' needs and help them enhance their TSRs. Poulou (2017a, 2017b) also stated that teachers need assistance to develop their professional skills or practices to address students' behavioral problems so they may build constructive relationships with students with EBD. Poulou (2015) specified that there is a gap in the literature on practice concerning teachers' perspectives of their TSRs and what they need for support when teaching these students. This indicates a gap in practice concerning teachers' perspectives of their TSRs with students with EBD and what teachers need for support when instructing these students.

Positive TSRs are vital for students with EBD. Research by Dusenbury and Weissberg (2017) on socioemotional learning in elementary grades and by Zendarski et al. (2020) on TSRs and students with and without attention deficit hyperactivity disorder in EC supports the value of these relationships for this student population. Both sets of researchers suggested that fostering strong TSRs is an essential aspect of teachers' roles that contribute to students' socioemotional, behavioral, and academic functioning in school. In a TSR, the teacher plays a critical role in providing activities, guidance, instruction, and the best interactions to facilitate the student's development (Banks, 2014; Cipriano et al., 2018) while shaping the student's adjustment to the school environment (Portilla et al., 2014; Skinner, 2016). Roorda et al. (2017) conducted a study on affective TSRs, student engagement, and achievement of primary and secondary school students. They found that positive and negative TSRs were connected to students' engagement and

achievement. It is through these actions that teachers can communicate and develop relationships with students (Banks, 2014).

TSR development is a unique and essential aspect of teachers' roles as educators (Gehlbach & Robinson, 2016). Through TSRs, teachers can facilitate, monitor, redirect, support, and foster engagement for students with EBD (McLean et al., 2018; McLean & Connor, 2018; McLean et al., 2020; Van Uden et al., 2014). A supportive TSR should increase student engagement by promoting academic, behavioral, and emotional success in school, including social-emotional support to help regulate behavior and promote problem-solving skills (Becker et al., 2017; Breeman et al., 2015; Capern & Hammond, 2014; Gottfried et al., 2016; Harbour et al., 2015; McCormick et al., 2015; Yoleri, 2017). According to Leckey et al. (2016), developing a TSR encourages social skills development and better behavioral adjustment skills, which occurs when teachers support and foster engagement for students with EBD. Other researchers have reported that a supportive TSR has the potential to help students with EBD with behavior adjustment as it relates to externalizing and prosocial behaviors during the early years of education (Coulombe & Yates, 2018; Roorda et al., 2014). Anyon et al. (2018) and Cook, Fiat et al. (2018) added that welcoming students with positive, personalized greetings or having morning meetings at the start of the school day is a good way to communicate with students with EBD in a nonacademic manner and create positive TSRs. For educators, these actions help support students' skills and needs.

Negative interactions may lead students with EBD to have poor relationships with teachers and other peers in the classroom (Barton-Arwood et al., 2016). Breeman et al.

(2015) suggested that negative interactions in a TSR are connected to undesirable outcomes, such as loneliness, isolation, and fewer interactions with the teachers and peers in the classroom and in school. According to Barton-Arwood et al. (2016) and Hyland et al. (2014), adverse TSR interactions may also contribute to the child's lack of adjustment at school to their teachers and peers. Students with emotional disabilities could be at a higher risk of experiencing negative TSRs.

Educating and supporting students with EBD presents several challenges for teachers. In EC, disruptive behaviors by students with EBD often cause teachers to isolate themselves from these students and neglect the TSR. Poulou (2015) stated that there is a gap in the literature on practice and what teachers need for support when working with students with EBD. Collecting data from general education EC teachers may help to clarify these needs.

In this chapter, I review the research on key variables and concepts related to the study. I also provide overviews of the literature search strategy and the conceptual framework. The literature search strategy includes information on the key terms and databases that I used to locate literature related to this study. The conceptual framework was based on Bronfenbrenner's (1974) ecological system theory and focused on education support, the school environment, environmental influences, and behaviors. In the literature review, I present an overview of EBD in EC education, EBD diagnosis, educational placement, and EBD in schools and EC classrooms. The various roles of general education EC teachers concerning EBD and TSRs—the classroom, academic

performance, psychological well-being, and challenges—are addressed. I also explore conflict in TSRs in EC and social interaction.

Literature Search Strategy

I obtained the literature reviewed for this study from Walden University's research databases. These included EBSCOhost, Education Source, ProQuest Central, Taylor and Francis, SAGE Premier, Social Science, Academic Search Complete, and APA PsycArticles. I also used Google Scholar. Search terms were narrow and focused specifically on interaction, TSR, and students with EBD. Specific search terms included *early childhood teachers' role in education*, *early childhood teachers' role*, *quality TSR in early childhood*, *early childhood teachers' role in academic achievement*, *early childhood role in psychological well-being and EBD students*, *early childhood teachers*, *conflict and teacher-student relationship*, *teacher-student relationship*, *teacher-child relationship*, *teacher-pupil relationship*, *student-teacher relationship*, *child-teacher relationship and maladaptive behaviors*, *challenging behaviors*, *emotional behavioral disorder*, *interaction and teacher-student relationship with EBD students*, *teacher-student relationship in early childhood*, *teacher-student relationship*, *and interaction with EBD students*, *interaction*, *early childhood with EBD students*, *educational placement of students with emotional behavioral disorder*, and *how are students referred for special education.*

I also used terms related to EC in all databases and internet search engines to locate research on practice concerning teachers' perspectives of their TSRs and what they need to support their instruction of students with EBD. However, limited research in

these areas was located. Instead, the focus of the studies was on (a) childhood maltreatment and educational outcomes concerning young children who have suffered abuse, (b) the interplay of teacher-child closeness and autonomy regarding children's vocabulary and self-regulation in preschool, (c) the influence of teachers' socialization behaviors on children's emotional competence in preschool, and (d) EC teachers using video-interaction guidance as a tool for social exchange in the classroom with preschool children (Cadima et al., 2019; Denham & Bassett, 2019; Jilink et al., 2018; Romano et al., 2015). These sources did not pertain to TSRs, EBD, or EC; therefore, they were not used in this study as its purpose was to explore the perspectives of teachers concerning their TSRs and the support they need when teaching students with EBD.

Conceptual Framework

For the conceptual framework for this study, I drew from Bronfenbrenner's (1974) ecological systems theory, which emphasizes the connection between behavior and the environment as well as identifies the importance of relationships. Over the decades, Bronfenbrenner's work has been applied by other researchers as its focus is on environmental influences and behaviors that support education and affect students' actions and the school environment. In this theory, every system has a two-way effect on children's well-being (Paquette & Ryan, 2001). This theory was appropriate for this basic qualitative study because the framework is structured to emphasize the importance of different environmental levels that influence the development and well-being of children in EC classrooms.

In Bronfenbrenner's (1974) ecological systems theory, there are five environmental elements: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem. Each contributes to development in EC. The microsystem concerns a child's development within their immediate environment. The mesosystem comprises two or more interrelating settings that involve the developing child, while the exosystem is one or more settings that do not directly involve the child. The macrosystem is the specific context that influences culture, belief systems or ideologies, and regulations (Vélez-Agosto et al., 2017). The chronosystem is the evolution, environmental events, and transitions that occur throughout the developing child's life (Bronfenbrenner, 1974; Härkönen, 2007). Bronfenbrenner's theory is connected to the EC classroom because each system provides an explanation or interpretation of how different levels of the environment influence the way children grow, develop, learn, interact, and build relationships in a classroom setting. For this study, the focus was on the microsystem and mesosystem.

The microsystem is the most intimate area of a child's ecological system. Bronfenbrenner (1974) stated that the microsystem is the immediate and recognizable setting that includes the child's school, teachers, and home environment. It is in this setting that relationships have a profound influence on children (Paquette & Ryan, 2001). The mesosystem involves the interaction of different microsystems concerning the child, such as the school, peers, and teachers. The mesosystem is a functioning microsystem process in which elements are interrelated and act together to influence the child's behavior (Bronfenbrenner, 1974; Taylor & Gebre, 2016). Paquette and Ryan (2001)

noted that if conflict occurs within these layers, any changes have the potential to cause negative or positive events in each ecological system. Using Bronfenbrenner's theory, it was possible to identify the support that general education EC teachers need when working with students with EBD and where this support is needed.

I used the conceptual framework as a guide in constructing the interview questions to specifically examine the needs of teachers when instructing students with EBD and the relationship and interaction between them. General education EC teachers' perspectives and needs when teaching students with EBD were explored within the microsystem and mesosystem. The interview questions focused on these two systems. Bronfenbrenner's (1974) ecological systems theory encompasses five systems; however, the RQs specifically focused on general education EC teachers' perspectives and their need for support.

Interactions are embedded in the mesosystem, where school relationships occur that involve general education EC teachers and students (Iruka et al., 2020; Tudge et al., 2017). A nurturing and supportive interaction can positively contribute to behaviors in students with EBD as well as their relationships with teachers (Fitzsimmons et al., 2019; Richter et al., 2018). Positive social skills, behaviors, and TSRs are embedded in the microsystem, where there is a direct relationship between how students and general education EC teachers behave in the classroom (Fitzsimmons et al., 2019; Raufelder et al., 2016). A healthy TSR can often contribute to positive social skills, behaviors, and relationships for teachers of students with EBD.

The support that general education EC teachers need is potentially in the mesosystem, as the school and/or district can provide supportive programs or training techniques. These resources may help general education EC teachers establish supportive and nurturing TSRs, which could promote positive behaviors and improve academic achievement among students with EBD (Fernandez & Nichols, 1996). When general education EC teachers are given proper training, they employ useful techniques with students with EBD, which will reduce the occurrence of problem behaviors, minor behavioral infractions, academic failure, and dropping out of school (Conroy et al., 2015; Kennedy & Haydon, 2020). I conducted a basic qualitative study in which I conducted interviews to learn about general education EC teachers' perspectives and their need for support when teaching students with EBD.

Researchers in other areas have also used Bronfenbrenner's (1974) ecological systems theory. In a study on problematic internet use among adolescents, E. L. Anderson et al. (2017) used Bronfenbrenner's theory as the conceptual framework to emphasize that behaviors change due to the interplay between the individual and contextual factors over time. A review of the literature regarding Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory supports the research of Anderson et al., which demonstrated that negative behaviors change and evolve from social isolation to antisocial behaviors. The results of the study showed that when teachers provided students support and opportunities for independent decision-making, they were less likely to engage in poor behaviors.

Although the research by Anderson et al. (2017) focused on behavior in adolescent years, the findings also confirm the gap in the literature on practice that more support from general education EC teachers could reduce student social isolation in the classroom and increase social activity and interaction in relationships for students with EBD. Hosan and Hoglund (2017) noted that students in kindergarten through third grade demonstrated higher school engagement as a result of experiencing a positive TSR. Several researchers have added that positive relationships contribute to school engagement and positive psychological well-being (Collins et al., 2017; Gasser et al., 2018; Hosan & Hoglund, 2017; Muñoz-Hurtado, 2018; Portilla et al., 2014). Students who receive positive support from teachers may be motivated to engage in school and less likely to develop negative behaviors.

Barghaus et al. (2017) used Bronfenbrenner's (1974) ecological systems theory to identify the school as the primary institution that encourages engagement through interactions between individual students and their environment. Interactions create a trajectory for cultivating skills that lead to prosocial and social-emotional behaviors. The theory describes the classroom as a multifaceted building linked to school performance and achievement (Barghaus et al., 2017). In the classroom, social-emotional skills are components of behavioral engagement and interaction. Positive social and emotional behaviors help students relate to others and adjust to school expectations, academics, and social engagement. Social engagement involves practices that help students follow rules, achieve academically, and interact with teachers and peers in the classroom. Using Bronfenbrenner's theory, Barghaus et al. (2017) found that within the school

environment, there was a clear link between educational well-being and engagement (i.e., interaction). The multidimensional elements of the school and positive interaction provided by teachers can also support social, psychological, and prosocial skills in the classroom for students with EBD.

In developing ecological systems theory, Bronfenbrenner's focused on individuals within their environments (Wallace & Chhuon, 2014). In conceptualizing human development and the environment, I define the microsystem as the setting for one-on-one relationships where TSRs are connected to the classroom. The mesosystem is the setting for these relationships and involves two or more events, which creates a new dynamic between teachers, students, and the school. Bronfenbrenner's theory benefited the current study as I applied elements of this ecological system. In the microsystem, a positive classroom environment increases social activity, social-emotional skills, and prosocial behaviors. In the mesosystem, positive interaction can reduce social isolation and foster social engagement at school (Anderson et al., 2017; Barghaus et al., 2017).

Bronfenbrenner's (1974) ecological system theory has been applied in research by Anderson et al. (2017), Wallace and Chhuon (2014), and Barghaus et al. (2017). Each has used Bronfenbrenner's concepts to articulate the importance of behaviors, the environment, the school, and human development. Anderson et al. looked at individuals and their behaviors in both the microsystem and mesosystem and indicated that focusing on a TSR in these systems is a valid way to explore behaviors. Wallace and Chhuon explored human development and individuals in their environment in the microsystem and noted that looking at the TSR in this system is an appropriate way to explore these

areas. Similarly, Barghaus et al. concentrated on the school and how it related to the classroom, academics, social-emotional skills, and social adjustment. The researchers demonstrated that viewing TSRs in the mesosystem was an effective way to explore areas related to the classroom, academics, social-emotional skills, and social adjustment in the context of TSRs. Currently, there is limited research to fill the gap in practice concerning general education EC teachers' perspectives of TSRs based on the microsystem and mesosystem. This research gap on practice is linked to the lack of information regarding what teachers need for support when working with students with EBD.

Literature Review Related to Key Variables and Concepts

Overview of Emotional Behavioral Disorders in Early Childhood Education

EBD can manifest in many forms: depression, conduct disorder, psychotic disorder, anxiety disorder, bipolar disorder, oppositional defiant behavior, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, and posttraumatic stress disorder (Ogundele, 2018; Ringeisen et al., 2016). In EC, externalizing behaviors are referred to as a group of aggressive and disruptive actions, such as fighting, arguing, temper tantrums, or harming others (Ogundele, 2018; Ringeisen et al., 2016; Schindler et al., 2015). To be diagnosed with an EBD, the student must present one or more of these emotional or behavioral characteristics. In addition to these characteristics, to be diagnosed with a mental, behavioral, or developmental disorder in EC, symptoms must occur frequently and for an extended period, become more intense in the classroom, and significantly interfere with educational performance (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020).

Diagnosis of Emotional Behavioral Disorders in Children

An accurate estimation regarding the occurrences of EBD varies in the United States (Williams et al., 2018). According to Ogundele (2018), the prevalence of EBD varies due to the lack of research, assessments, and various definitions used. In the United States, 20.9% of children 17 and under have disruptive behavior disorders (Ogundele, 2018). The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2020) reported that students between the ages of 2 and 8 (approximately 17.4%) had been diagnosed with EBD. In the metropolitan area, during 2016-2017, 23% of students were categorized as having disabilities related to emotional disorders (Kids Count Data Center, 2020). For EC education, this creates a problem for the schools and teachers because approximately 10% of students between 2 and 4 years of age have been shown to experience serious emotional disturbances in the classroom and are later diagnosed with EBD (Gottfried & Kirksey, 2019).

Despite the frequency of serious emotional outbursts in the classroom, there is still no definitive tool or standard to diagnose students with EBD in EC. Instead, students must exhibit symptoms of externalizing behavior, such as hyperactivity, poor control of emotions, social skills deficits, and academic difficulty, before they can be diagnosed with an EBD (Gottfried & Kirksey, 2019; Sheaffer et al., 2020). The process of detecting or diagnosing students with an EBD includes collaboration and integration of multiple experts who provide comprehensive assessments (Ogundele, 2018). A comprehensive assessment involves observation of the child's behaviors as well as their medical, developmental, educational, emotional, and family history with confirmation by an

individualized educational plan team (Ogundele, 2018). Other assessments include vision, auditory, and motor skills screening and cognitive evaluations (Gottfried & Kirksey, 2019; Ogundele, 2018). After careful examination, collaboration, and a clear diagnosis of EBD, provisions for special education services are necessary to better serve these students, thus making their educational placement essential in EC.

Educational Placement

Educational placement is essential for students with EBD because it sets the trajectory for academic and developmental success. Many factors contribute to the special education placement of students with EBD. Educational placement requires a team that includes the child's parent(s), preferably one general and special education teacher, school psychologist, paraprofessional located at the school, a representative from a local educational agency, and others who are aware or knowledgeable about the student's disability to collaborate and determine the degree of behavioral problems (i.e., verbal, physical, aggression, and noncompliance) that defy normal standards for behaviors (Brock, 2018; Buchanan et al., 2016; Gottfried et al., 2016). Each individual must be present to determine eligibility for educational placement.

Although there are specific requirements for educational placement regarding students with EBD, students are usually placed in general education classes followed by a change to a self-contained setting in a mainstream school due to severe behavioral problems (Knowles et al., 2017; Morningstar et al., 2017). According to Brock (2018), the individualized education program (IEP) team considers the following for classroom placement:

- Students' individual learning and educational needs.
- The extent a general education classroom can meet the needs of the student(s).
- Whether alternative placements are the best option when the needs of student(s) cannot be met or addressed in a general education classroom.
- The time the student(s) spends in general education (inclusion) versus the time the student(s) spends in a special education classroom (non-inclusion), which only includes those students with EBD.

A proper classroom environment is vital for educating, supporting, and addressing students with EBD' different abilities, specific goals, and unique learning needs (Acer et al., 2016; Fardlillah & Suryono, 2019; Gidlund, 2018). Fardlillah and Suryono (2019) indicated that a proper classroom environment influences students' early learning and development. Proper education and placement ensure that students with EBD are fully equipped for the future and receive the appropriate classroom support. In classrooms, specifically, those with students in EC, EBD are usually addressed by using behavioral strategies, social skills and anger management techniques, classroom management, and individual behavior intervention plans (Cook, Rao, & Collins, 2017; Garwood & Vernon-Feagans, 2017; Majeika et al., 2020; Ogundele, 2018; Sterrett et al., 2020; Wills et al., 2016). Therefore, placing students with EBD in the proper classroom leads to a good education and the support they need to be successful.

Placing students with EBD in the best educational setting is a challenging and important task for the education community. Selecting an appropriate classroom is critical because students with EBD spend greater than 80% of their time in regular

education classrooms, while less than 40% are in a separate school (Morningstar et al., 2017). Placing students with EBD in an appropriate classroom may benefit TSRs and influence their academics and behaviors (Kestner et al., 2019).

General education EC teachers play an important role in identifying students for special education (Marsh, 2016). The identification process for placement into special education begins when teachers refer students who demonstrate externalizing behaviors that disrupt the classroom (Caldarella et al., 2019; Flower et al., 2017; O'Connor et al., 2016). Girvan et al. (2017) and Okonofua et al. (2016) noted that teachers' biases, perceptions, stereotypes, beliefs regarding students' behaviors, and placement of students with EBD undermine children's learning experiences, opportunities to learn, and may result in life-long negative social-psychological issues, such as aggression, bullying, and noncompliance with behavior expectations. It is important for teachers to be objective in the referral process as their biases, perceptions, or beliefs could result in a negative school experience for the student.

Emotional Behavioral Disorders in Early Childhood Classrooms

There are several problems that students with EBD encounter during their education. According to Gage et al. (2018) and Maggin et al. (2016), over time, serious emotional disturbances in the classroom have led to academic failure, poor social adjustment, delinquency, disconnection from school, and dropping out of school. Seventy percent of EC students with behavioral disorders have been shown to have developmental delays related to academics (Campbell et al., 2018; Ogundele, 2018). In EC, externalizing behaviors are a concern in the classroom because these consume a significant amount of

teachers' time and effort (Schindler et al., 2015). According to Chow et al. (2020), preschool teachers have reported that they spend a large portion of their attention and time managing disruptive behaviors on a daily basis during instruction time. Disruptive behaviors in the classroom have led to lower grades, academic failure, and grade retention among students with EBD (Dunn et al., 2017; Fu et al., 2016; King et al., 2019; Larson et al., 2017). Several researchers have noted that the loss of instructional time could be the leading cause of academic underachievement in students with EBD (Amstad & Müller, 2020; Gilmour et al., 2018; Haydon et al., 2018). Multiple researchers have also reported that students with EBD have a higher rate of dropping out of school (Büttner et al., 2016; Zolkoski et al., 2016). Students with EBD are more likely to leave school, have no desire to complete their education, or attain higher education when compared to other students with disabilities (Gage et al., 2018; Maggin et al., 2016; Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, 2017).

As students with EBD continue to face problems in areas related to academics, misconduct, poor social adjustment, delinquency, disconnection from school, school dropout rates, and lower levels of high school completion (Cartledge & Robinson-Ervin, 2016; Gage et al., 2018; Gidlund, 2018; Maggin et al., 2016), many teachers will continue to find working with these students challenging. Teachers may find that working with students with EBD difficult because they lack the skills to interact with these students in the classroom (Breeman et al., 2018; Gidlund, 2018; Shin & Ryan, 2017). Students with EBD are also challenging for teachers because they are the most complex

and difficult group to interact with and instruct (French, 2019; Gidlund, 2018; Gidlund & Boström, 2017).

Students with EBD are the most difficult to educate because many general education EC teachers lack the ability to communicate, connect, and interact with these students. According to Gidlund (2018) and Zinsser et al. (2016), general education EC teachers are missing the appropriate training to interact with students with EBD. If general education EC teachers are adequately trained to communicate and interact with students with EBD in the classroom through positive TSRs, this may resolve problems, such as academic failure, school disconnectedness, poor adjustment, and delinquency (Caldarella et al., 2019; Gidlund & Boström, 2017; Rubow et al., 2019; Sutherland, Conroy, McLeod, et al., 2019).

Researchers have reported that a positive TSR is an integral part of a caring school, which is embedded in the ecological environment (i.e., microsystem and mesosystem) with its own culture, rules, norms, beliefs, expectations, and values (Granger et al., 2020; Madden & Senior, 2018; Sutherland, Conroy, Algina, et al., 2018). A positive TSR may help meet the needs of students with EBD (Cartledge & Robinson-Ervin, 2016), which is vital to their social-emotional skills development, behaviors, academic achievements, and relationship building (Becker et al., 2017; Caldarella et al., 2019; Dusenbury & Weissberg, 2017; Hughes & Im, 2016; Rubow et al., 2019; Zendarski et al., 2020).

When general education EC teachers build quality (positive) TSRs with students with EBD, their academic achievement increases in the classroom. Alzahrani et al. (2019)

and Hernández et al. (2017) noted that the quality of students' relationships with their teachers is associated with academic achievement and social competence. When general education EC teachers provide students with emotional support, these students have more classroom interactions and experience better academic achievement and social-emotional development (Alzahrani et al., 2019; Becker et al., 2017; Conroy et al., 2015). High-quality TSRs have been shown to nurture students' self-regulation, which, in turn, supports or contributes to positive classroom behaviors and academic growth among students with EBD. As a result, general education EC teachers need to build quality TSRs that support students with EBD (Becker et al., 2017; Hernández et al., 2017; Rucinski et al., 2018).

The research literature includes lists of the characteristics of EBD, its symptoms, and descriptions of how it manifests in students. Often these students are placed in regular education classes followed by a placement change to a self-contained classroom due to their behavioral problems and aggressiveness, which are later identified as EBD. This pattern was important to this study because data from 2016 to 2017 showed that the EBD population in the metropolitan public schools, where this study took place, was 23% (Kids Count Data Center, 2020). It was possible that more students in the metropolitan area have EBD; however, due to estimate variations on the prevalence of EBD, minimal research, and different assessments used to diagnose these students, it is difficult to confirm how many students in this area have this disability (Gottfried & Kirksey, 2019; Ogundele, 2018; Williams et al., 2018).

Roles of Early Childhood Teachers

The Role of Teachers in a Teacher-Student Relationship With Emotional Behavioral Disorder Students

As an educator, the teacher's role in a TSR includes many components that support a student's skills and needs. Phajane (2014) examined the roles and responsibilities of EC teachers and found that they are expected to be flexible and participate in many roles. These roles include counselor, family supporter, specialist, infant/toddler caregiver, mentor, agent, confidant, friend, parent, protector, leader, and architect (Archbell et al., 2019; Muñoz-Hurtado, 2018; Phajane, 2014). In a study of teachers' beliefs regarding supporting seventh and eighth graders' psychological well-being, Jiang et al. (2019) noted that teachers' confidence regarding their roles in a TSR makes them responsible for meeting and supporting students' skills and needs. For example, in theory and practice (e.g., the school environment), teachers act as role models and supportive figures to students, which makes their function in EC education complex and diverse in TSRs (Pyle & Danniels, 2017; Romano et al., 2015).

There are several perspectives regarding the teachers' roles. According to Chang et al. (2016) and McClintic and Petty (2015), the primary role of general education EC educators is to maintain safety, foster cooperation and social development, and facilitate interaction between students in EC classrooms. Becker et al. (2017) and Ferreira et al. (2016) noted that a teacher's role in EC might include providing trust, warmth, affection, support, encouragement, protection, open communication, and response to the student's social-emotional or academic needs. In preschool, teachers also serve as temporary or

emergency attachment figures who represent security for students (Vancraeyveldt et al., 2015). In a qualitative study, Ştefan et al. (2015) noted that teachers are agents who are supposed to prevent emotional and behavioral problems in a classroom TSR. Teachers have multifaceted roles as educators, and each role contributes to every aspect of students' education and development within the school environment (Archbell et al., 2019; Muñoz-Hurtado, 2018; Phajane, 2014).

The Role of Teachers in the Classroom With Emotional Behavioral Disorder Students

In the EC classroom, a teacher's role is to encourage relationship success. According to Bouchard and Smith (2017), teachers are the force that helps shape students with EBD in every aspect of relationship building, which puts them in a unique position to build a quality TSR with these students. Teachers can encourage this by creating a classroom that supports relationship development while being aware of students with EBD' needs in this area (Breeman et al., 2015; Gottfried et al., 2016; Marsh, 2016). According to Grant (2016), the classroom should be divided into two constructs—relational and behavioral—to provide students with EBD with every opportunity for success and relationship building. Both constructs contribute to how teachers and students feel toward one other in a relationship, how students build relationships, and how students behave in the classroom. In a seminal study by Reeves and Le Mare (2017), they found that teachers should continue to support and encourage relationship success because it is the foundation for positive behaviors and learning for students with EBD.

Teachers are responsible for helping students develop relationship skills that are linked to learning. According to Reeves and Le Mare (2017), when teachers encouraged

learning and positive behaviors, students with EBD' relationship skills were enhanced. In the classroom, teachers support these skills by modeling and constructing classroom norms, fostering intellectual development, providing guidance, encouraging experimentation and thinking, preparing students to collaborate with others, forming groups, promoting classroom friendships, providing encouragement and motivation, advising, and comforting students with EBD (Bakadorova & Raufelder, 2016; Chang et al., 2016; Phajane, 2014).

According to Cooper et al. (2015) and Haslip et al. (2020), teachers are gatekeepers for constructing a dynamic learning environment that contributes to students' learning and relationship skills. As gatekeepers, teachers have the ability to view their relationships with students with EBD as a tool for establishing structured activities that enhance or match students with EBD' relationship needs (Arhin & Laryea, 2018; Haslip et al., 2020; McNally & Slutsky, 2018). McNally and Slutsky (2018) found that preschool teachers are able to meet students with EBD' relational needs by providing a safe environment while disciplining negative behaviors in the classroom. One way that teachers foster learning and relationship skills is by providing students with EBD with a structured, engaging, and supportive environment with specific activities in the classroom focused on these behaviors (Arhin & Laryea, 2018; McNally & Slutsky, 2018).

Teachers also provide positive feedback, encouragement, and praise for appropriate behaviors in the classroom or to maintain performance (Caldarella et al., 2019; Downs et al., 2019; McLeskey et al., 2017). This is particularly important for students with EBD who struggle with building relationships. Often students with EBD

lack relationship skills, which cause problems with learning, engagement, and relationship building in the classroom. Because students with EBD lack relationship skills, they are less likely to collaborate with other students and form groups during instructional time, which is where teachers help develop these attributes. When teachers take the time to teach relationship skills, they help students with EBD understand that lacking these abilities influences relationships, learning, and engagement in the classroom.

In the EC classroom, teachers have an active role as a disciplinarian, which directly influences and shapes students with EBD' behaviors (Jilink et al., 2018). Thornberg et al. (2018) found that in Grades 4-6, a teacher often assumes this function, and this is an important aspect in the way children behave and build TSRs. Because teachers directly influence behaviors in EC (i.e., preschool and elementary), they should create activities and an instructional environment where the appropriate social behaviors are communicated (Barnett, 2018; Gregg, 2017). Gregg (2017) and Humphries et al. (2018) noted that in EC, teachers in preschool and pre-K through third grades should create an environment where building self-confidence and socioemotional learning are a part of instructional time in the classroom. Therefore, teachers are expected to effectively teach, support, and facilitate social competence by demonstrating behavior in the classroom (Lam & Wong, 2017; Van Uden et al., 2014). De Swart et al. (2019) reported that classroom norms are interrelated to form students' behaviors. For example, teachers can establish and reinforce classroom rules and procedures related to behaviors as well as express their expectations for desired behaviors and outcomes.

One of the most effective ways of controlling and managing behaviors is to constantly apply consequences for misbehavior and explain the consequences for such behavior (Alter & Haydon, 2017; Van Loan & Garwood, 2020). Consequences encourage proper behavior and help students with EBD take responsibility for their unacceptable actions in the classroom (Alter & Haydon, 2017; Van Loan & Garwood, 2020). Developing and reinforcing rules and setting expectations is vital for teachers to be able to manage behaviors (Alter & Haydon, 2017). Rules set the tone in the classroom and disobeying them creates consequences for the students; teachers' expectations guide students with EBD to act in a manner conducive to classroom norms (Alter & Haydon, 2017). Teachers' authoritative approach contributes to an atmosphere that shapes and corrects students' behaviors while establishing and implementing behavioral guidelines that parallel positive social behaviors (Raufelder et al., 2016; Rose et al., 2019). Marlow et al. (2017), in a study of psycho-educational approaches for preservice teachers and their relationships with students with EBD, found that when rules were effectively communicated and limits clearly defined, teachers were able to use appropriate methods and techniques to correct students' behaviors. Not only do teachers correct behaviors, they also address social skills in the classroom.

A teacher's role is to create a classroom learning environment that fosters social skills. According to Hu, Zhou, et al. (2017), preschool teachers have a meaningful and effective role in helping students build their knowledge to support and develop social skills as they are known to shape behaviors in the classroom. Teachers are accountable for students' social development by creating a classroom environment that is guided by

expectations. These expectations should provide opportunities for students in the classroom (microsystem) to improve their social skills by managing classroom interaction and encouraging constructive involvement for all students. For example, the quality of the relationship forged between teachers and students plays an important role in students with EBD' adjustment, social-emotional learning and competence, and in forming positive TSRs (Becker et al., 2017; Ghaemi & Abdullahi, 2017).

Teachers have an important role in interpersonal skills building. In a TSR, teachers have the power to develop and enhance interpersonal skills (Martin et al., 2017). Arhin and Laryea (2018) and Liew et al. (2018) stated that teachers have a profound role in establishing interpersonal relationships with students with EBD. This influence allows teachers to help students with EBD develop active listening skills, communication skills, and the ability to engage in teamwork. Creating interpersonal skills improves constructive dialogue in TSRs while decreasing poor student behaviors (Liew et al., 2018). Interpersonal skills are important because the ability to develop and maintain positive relationships and teacher interactions are crucial to how students with EBD connect and respond to other relationships (Liew et al., 2018). Those teachers who encourage interpersonal skills help develop, support, and encourage relationships with students with EBD (Liew et al., 2018; Martin & Collie, 2016).

Teaching students with EBD interpersonal skills has many benefits. For example, interpersonal skills help these students to listen, communicate, and collaborate during teamwork. Having interpersonal skills not only helps students with EBD in their education and school environment but also benefits them throughout their lifetime (Liew

et al., 2018). As students with EBD develop their interpersonal skills, this becomes a part of their behavior and helps them to interact with peers and teachers in a TSR (Martin et al., 2017). Support for interpersonal skills building may help general education EC teachers and students with EBD create positive TSRs (Liew et al., 2018).

The Role of Teachers in Emotional Behavioral Disorder Students' Academic Performance

General education EC teachers play a large role in the academic achievement of students with EBD and the way they learn. Teachers have a role in determining the student's motivation, learning behaviors, and learning outcomes. According to Rudasill et al. (2016), preschool students benefit from a teacher's active and supportive role in their academic success, and a positive TSRs establishes the trajectory for this success. According to several researchers, the purpose of EC education is to provide students with high quality support for early cognitive development, academic success, and access to positive TSRs, which leads to academic gains in mathematics and reading (Ansari & Purtell, 2017; Cortázar, 2015; Islam et al., 2016; Lin & Magnuson, 2018).

In EC, students with EBD are less motivated in the classroom due to poor behaviors and a lack of concentration, which impedes academic achievement (Stoutjesdijk et al., 2016). Therefore, motivating academic achievement among students with EBD is an essential role for teachers. In a quantitative study, Raufelder et al. (2016) found that the teacher's motivational role in the classroom was connected to students' motivation and academic achievement. In research on students with EBD in secondary grades, Garwood (2020) found that given the difficulty of teaching students with EBD,

teachers play a significant part in motivating students academically. Teachers can motivate and help students with EBD achieve academic success by encouraging them through positive responses, verbal accolades, and rewards, which can influence their self-perceptions and their perspectives of the school, teachers, and TSRs (Koca, 2016; Niswaty et al., 2017; Schonert-Reichl, 2017; Sointu et al., 2017; Tella, 2017). It is important that in EC, students with EBD have teachers who actively motivate learning and promote academic success. Motivation contributes to learning, concentration, academic success, and better education through positive TSRs (Koca, 2016; Niswaty et al., 2017; Schonert-Reichl, 2017; Sointu et al., 2017; Tella, 2017).

Educators play an important role in students with EBD' academic performance (Balagová & Haláková, 2018). In this area and in a TSR, it is important that teachers support and motivate students' perception about school and academic performance (Sointu et al., 2017). Often students with EBD perform poorly academically and view their school and teachers negatively (Garwood & Vernon-Feagans, 2017). When these students view their teacher and TSR as supportive and motivating, they may become more interested in learning and in their schoolwork and develop a positive perception of their academic success, learning, and education (Ansari & Purtell, 2017; Islam et al., 2016; Lin & Magnuson, 2018; Niswaty et al., 2017; Sointu et al., 2017; Tella, 2017).

A teachers' positive role in academic achievement may have an influence on students with EBD. According to Sointu et al. (2017), this positive role could have more of an effect on students with EBD than other students who succeed academically. For students with EBD, a teachers' part in a quality TSR is vital for academic success

(Wentzel & Muenks, 2016). Poulou (2017a) noted that in EC, a teacher's role in a quality TSR could potentially influence students' academic achievement.

In separate research by Battey et al. (2016) and Hajovsky et al. (2017) regarding second- and third-grade teachers, both researchers indicated that the importance of the teacher's role in facilitating a quality TSR is also true for students with EBD, specifically for their achievements in mathematics. A teachers' function in a quality TSR lays the foundation for and encourages gains in mathematics in students with EBD (Zhou et al., 2020). This is supported by Martin and Collie (2016) and Wubbels et al. (2016), who found that the positive role of teachers in a TSR contributes to good academic skills. Specifically, when teachers participate in a positive TSR, they are more aware of a student's attitude and behavior toward mathematics. As a result, a positive TSR contributes to students with EBD developing mathematical resiliency throughout primary school (Battey et al., 2016; Suri & Herman, 2020). Downer et al. (2016) specified that pre-K teachers could influence students' mathematical skills and literacy development; therefore, because of the positive role teachers play in academic achievement, students with EBD are more successful in mathematics and in reading (Downer et al., 2016; Garwood et al., 2020; Hajovsky et al., 2017; Ma et al., 2018), which are important for progress in both the classroom and society.

There is some doubt, however, about a teacher's role in a quality TSR and the positive influence it has on students with EBD' academic achievement. According to Rimm-Kaufman and Sandilos (2019), focusing only on the role of the teacher and improving these students' TSR will not produce academic success. Lin and Magnuson

(2018) indicated that EC teachers' ability to teach does not predict classroom quality or children's academic outcomes. Thornberg et al. (2018) and Sointu et al. (2017) added that a teacher's role in a TSR does not support general instruction and does not guarantee mastery of skills in mathematics. Gage et al. (2017) noted that poor academic performance in mathematics and reading did not improve over time in students with EBD. However, Rimm-Kaufman and Sandilos (2019) stated that improving the teacher's function in a TSR is important and has positive long-term effects for students with EBD' academic gains. Cooper and Scott (2017) and Varghese et al. (2016) noted that the link between the teacher's role of managing behaviors and academics was not linked to good instruction for students with EBD but effective for managing behaviors in the classroom.

The Role of Teachers in Emotional Behavioral Disorder Students' Psychological Well-Being

Caring for students with EBD' mental health and psychological well-being is a high priority for teachers (Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development, 2018; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2017). Collins et al. (2017) indicated that in a TSR for children in grades first through sixth, one of the teacher's roles is to provide psychological security and, in doing so, provide students with emotional security. In a study of the upper elementary grades, Gasser et al. (2018) noted that a TSR is important to students' psychological well-being. Securing the psychological well-being of students with EBD has led to fewer externalizing behaviors, a reduction in emotional and behavioral problems, and better social interdependence, social skills, and psychological health (Liu et al., 2019; Mansoory et al., 2019).

Psychological security is also a necessity for promoting feelings of belonging, safety, and calmness in the classroom and for positive relationships (Nash et al., 2016; Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development, 2017, 2018; Riley, 2017). In the elementary grades, belonging is an extension of psychological security. According to Quin (2017), feelings of belonging are common among young children. Quin added that belonging provides students with a sense of connectedness among peers and in social environments. Students with EBD have less psychological security due to their negative behaviors, which often results in feelings of loneliness, sadness, and social isolation in the classroom from peers and teachers (Breeman et al., 2015; Brown Hajdukova et al., 2016; Griffin et al., 2017; Martin et al., 2017). These feelings are transferred to the classroom, which creates tension in the TSR (Jia et al., 2018). A primary goal for teachers is to provide psychological support for students with EBD rather than shaming, critiquing, or berating them in class or in a TSR (Gasser et al., 2018).

Meeting the psychological needs of students with EBD is a necessity. Often, the psychological needs of students with EBD are overlooked because of their negative behaviors (Harbour et al., 2015; Sekreter, 2019). In a study on resilience, Archdall and Kilderry (2016) found that general education EC teachers should provide support and positive TSRs that meet the early psychological needs of students with EBD. Several researchers have stated that a supportive relationship with teachers helps build better psychological health and adjustment for students with EBD (Archdall & Kilderry, 2016; Gasser et al., 2018; Liu et al., 2019; Mansoory et al., 2019). Hamre (2014) and McCormick et al. (2015) noted that supportive and positive TSRs decreased aggression

and enhanced the comprehension of emotions for students with EBD. When the students' psychological needs were met, however, these students in EC were able to manage their behaviors, emotions, and their perceptions of their relationships with teachers (Seyhan et al., 2019). In a quantitative study that focused on supports, strengths, and predictors in academics for seventh graders, Caleon et al. (2017) documented that teachers' support improved students with EBD' psychological well-being. This support has also been linked to learning and is a strong predictor of self-regulation among students with EBD (Caleon et al., 2017).

Another way to facilitate the psychological needs of students with EBD is to develop a positive (trusting) relationship that is supportive of these needs (Gasser et al., 2018; Rogers & Tannock, 2018). Creating a trusting relationship that encourages psychological needs helps students with EBD with emotional security and feeling accepted, safe, and calm in the classroom (Collins et al., 2017; Nash et al., 2016; Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development, 2017, 2018; Riley, 2017). General education EC teachers can assist with the psychological needs of students with EBD by providing trust in a TSR. According to Ferreira et al. (2016), teachers are important for helping students develop prosocial behaviors. Learning, emotional well-being, positive behaviors, self-regulation (e.g., the ability to problem-solve and complete tasks), and attitudes towards teachers, peers, and school have improved as teachers actively participate in nurturing students with EBD' psychological well-being (Iruka et al., 2020; McCormick et al., 2015).

In an international study on teachers' and secondary students' well-being, Harding et al. (2019) found that teachers, themselves, need good mental health to meet the psychological needs of students with EBD. According to several studies, the mental health of the teacher has been found to influence that of their students (Harding et al., 2019; Jiang et al., 2019; McLean et al., 2017; Schonert-Reichl, 2017). The wellness of both teachers and students with EBD is linked (Harding et al., 2019; McLean et al., 2017). Teachers with a healthy psychological well-being are able to help students with EBD with social interdependence, social skills, psychological security, belonging, and likeability among their peers and teachers (Collins et al., 2017; Liu et al., 2019; Mansoory et al., 2019; Nash et al., 2016). The connection between the emotional well-being of teachers and their students with EBD is important to the performance of a TSR. What general education EC teachers need for support when teaching students with EBD is a concern for schools, and their needs should be addressed to improve school life, TSRs, and the psychological outcomes of these students.

There is debate about whether or not teachers are accountable for students with EBD' behaviors in the classroom (Kern, 2015). According to Kourkoutas et al. (2018), teachers are not responsible for shaping and influencing behaviors. Many teachers do not view negative student behaviors as their responsibility or an area they are competent to address (Cooper, 2019; Majoko, 2017; Schonert-Reichl, 2017). Teachers should not dismiss their responsibility of explicitly educating students regarding appropriate behaviors related to social skills in the classroom (Schonert-Reichl, 2017).

Teachers are, however, responsible for educating and managing the behaviors of students with EBD, although they need knowledge and skills to do so as well as address the lack of students' social skills and social issues (Flower et al., 2017; Fu et al., 2020; Perle, 2018; Schonert-Reichl, 2017). Woods et al. (2016) reported that in an EC setting, teachers have the responsibility to address students' behaviors and feelings related to prosocial behaviors. Denham and Bassett (2019) added that general education EC teachers are held accountable for instructing students concerning emotions through daily interaction in a positive TSR. Because general education EC teachers have a duty to manage and influence students' behaviors, emotions, and interactions, they need to be aware of their roles in behavioral management and social skills development (Sekreter, 2019). As general education EC teachers understand their roles in forming, shaping, supporting, and teaching behaviors in the classroom, they may be less anxious about building positive TSRs as well as engaging with and managing and developing positive behaviors in students with EBD (Mason et al., 2017; Sekreter, 2019).

Whether or not general education EC teachers are responsible for the education and behaviors of students with EBD, they are still accountable for managing behaviors in the classroom (Flower et al., 2017; Fu et al., 2020; Schonert-Reichl, 2017; Woods et al., 2016). In addition, teachers also have the task of supporting prosocial behaviors (Ferreira et al., 2016). Prosocial behaviors and psychological well-being are connected (Ferreira et al., 2016). As teachers support and encourage prosocial behaviors, students with EBD are able to stay on task and complete assignments. For students with EBD, this creates a better sense of self or confidence in their academic abilities and how they are perceived

by other teachers and students (Ferreira et al., 2016; Gregg, 2017; Jia et al., 2018). Managing behaviors, supporting prosocial behaviors and students' psychological well-being helps students with EBD follow social norms and demonstrate behaviors that are socially accepted (Lei et al., 2016). Following social norms helps students with EBD connect and build positive (trusting) relationships with teachers (Gasser et al., 2018; Iruka et al., 2020). Being socially accepted helps students with EBD relate to their peers in the classroom (Collins et al., 2017; McCormick et al., 2015; Rogers & Tannock, 2018).

The Challenges of Building a Quality Teacher-Student Relationship With Emotional Behavioral Disorder Students

One of the most challenging aspects of being a teacher is building a quality or positive TSR with students with EBD. Due to the negative behaviors that accompany students with EBD, general education EC teachers are constantly struggling to create a positive relationship with these students. Both Minahan (2019) and Gidlund and Boström (2017), in their international study on students with EBD in a mainstream school, reported that students with EBD were considered the most challenging to work with in the classroom because of their disruptive, aggressive, defiant, and destructive behaviors. As a result, these students were more inclined to have negative relationships with their teachers.

From a teachers' perspective, students with aggressive-disruptive, frustrated, and uncontrolled behaviors have a harder time creating and maintaining prosocial relationships with teachers and their peers, which can contribute to negative interactions with teachers that keep them from learning (Breeman et al., 2018; McGrath & Van

Bergen, 2015). In a study on secondary special education teachers, Hopman et al. (2018) found that a negative relationship might also result in fewer learning opportunities for students, and this has often made teachers feel they were unable to influence learning and behaviors (Markelz & Taylor, 2016; Noltemeyer et al., 2015; Sutherland, Conroy, Algina, et al., 2018).

When teachers have not able to fully influence learning and behaviors, they have tended to separate students with EBD from other classmates, thus hindering learning (Breeman et al., 2018; Shin & Ryan, 2017). In a dissertation on middle school students with EBD by Champine (2017), students with EBD were separated from students who did not have a disability. According to Chitiyo and Brinda (2018), this can be detrimental to these students' academic achievement and deny them an equal opportunity for education. As a result, students with EBD were less likely to focus, be attentive, or be engaged during instructional time than students without EBD (Butler & Monda-Amaya, 2016; C. R. Cook, Coco, et al., 2018; Stoutjesdijk et al., 2016; Sutherland, Conroy, Algina, et al., 2018). When students with EBD become uninterested in the learning process, they may become disruptive, uncooperative, and off-task during instructional time, making it almost impossible to build a quality TSR (Butler & Monda-Amaya, 2016; Cook, Grady, et al., 2017).

Conflict in Teacher-Student Relationships in Early Childhood

In negative TSRs, conflict will occur due to the poor behavior of students with EBD. Özgan (2016), in a study of primary school students aged 13 to 14, noted that conflict was a natural and normal event that occurred in relationships and in school.

Breeman et al. (2018) and Ciuladiene and Kairiene (2017) found that poor TSRs were continuously dominated and overpowered by conflict. These struggles were based on the negative behaviors of students (i.e., constant anger and frustrated interaction), which created tense, coercive, or negative relationships (Becker et al., 2017; Hughes & Im, 2016; Poulou, 2017a). This is supported by research that has shown that (a) conflict in a TSR is highly correlated to external behavior, (b) higher levels of conflict provide the path for increased problem behaviors, and (c) teacher-student conflict is a consequence driven by students with EBD' behaviors and their negative attitude about their TSRs (Metsäpelto et al., 2015; Skalická et al., 2015). According to Ng and Chong (2017) and Zee and Koomen (2017), conflict between teachers and students with EBD was a strong indicator of negative student attitudes and reduced self-efficacy regarding their relationships with their teachers. This, in turn, led to poor classroom participation, behavioral problems, and less enthusiasm regarding teaching. Rudasill et al. (2016) added that in EC classrooms, conflict between teachers and students has had a negative influence on behaviors, achievement, and social relationships.

Conflict with teachers creates a negative TSR as well as externalizing behaviors such as aggressiveness, distrust, antagonism, disrespect, defiance, disharmony, disobedience in primary school (Aasheim et al., 2018; Evans et al., 2019; McGrath & Van Bergen, 2015; McKinnon & Blair, 2019). Aggressiveness, combativeness, and disobedient behaviors can limit the effectiveness of a TSR or even the ability of students with EBD to have a positive TSR (Breeman et al., 2015; Crockett et al., 2018; Gregoriadis & Grammatikopoulos, 2014). These negative behaviors have caused teachers

to label their TSR as hostile and full of conflict (Evans et al., 2019). Gagnon et al. (2019) found that preschool teachers often find managing poor behaviors stressful in the classroom. Other researchers added that teachers might find handling and correcting students with EBD behaviors taxing while attending to the rest of class (Gagnon et al., 2019; Kennedy & Haydon, 2020; Özgan, 2016).

Conflict in a TSR is unproductive for teachers and students with EBD. As teachers deal with conflict and aggressive and combative behaviors, their relationship with students begins to deteriorate rapidly. As a result, students with EBD have a harder time adjusting to school. According to Li and Lau (2019), Nemer et al. (2019), and Sutherland, Conroy, Algina, et al. (2018), conflict in a TSR has been a signal of poor school adjustment for these students. Cadima et al. (2015) added that a TSR with substantial conflict or disagreement has been shown to contribute to negative experiences in school for students with EBD. In most cases, conflict adds to a negative TSR, which makes adjusting to school more difficult for these students. As a consequence, students with EBD become more reliant on their teachers, who experience them as overly dependent and challenging because of their disciplinary infractions (Li & Lau, 2019; Mejia & Hoglund, 2016; Schussler et al., 2016).

Conflict and over-dependency among students with EBD are negative characteristics in a TSR (Li & Lau, 2019). According to Mejia and Hoglund (2016), students in kindergarten through third grade who are anxious tend to over-depend in a TSR. Teachers have reported that over-dependency among students with EBD tends to create poor-quality relationships and higher rates of conflict within their TSRs (Li & Lau,

2019; Roorda et al., 2020; Verschueren & Koomen, 2020). Multiple researchers have also noted that in preschool, conflict and dependency has led to fewer instructional practices, limited learning opportunities, and struggles within relationships between students with EBD and their teachers (Bosman et al., 2018; Garner & Mahatmya, 2015; Roorda et al., 2020; Schussler et al., 2016; Verschueren & Koomen, 2020). These same students have poor academic outcomes, externalizing behaviors, and are less compliant, which negatively influence learning and cause teachers to become stressed and frustrated because of the emotional responsibility of teaching students with EBD (Bernard, 2016; Gage et al., 2018; Jeon et al., 2016; Schmidt & Jones-Fosu, 2019; Vancraeyveldt et al., 2015).

Many researchers have also found that the level of anxiety as well as teaching, managing, and disciplining students with EBD not only negatively influenced teachers but students as well (Bettini et al., 2017; Butler & Monda-Amaya, 2016; Gidlund, 2018). Koenen et al. (2019), R. Xu and Jia (2022), and Jeon et al. (2019) found that negative emotions affect the way teachers support students with EBD. They also found that stress contributes to teacher's loss of self-efficacy, which was their primary reason for leaving the profession. Several researchers have stated that addressing negative behaviors adds to teacher stress and burnout, a decrease in learning and academic achievement for students, and more disruptive behaviors (Amstad & Müller, 2020; Corbin et al., 2019; Haydon et al., 2018; Herman et al., 2018). To avoid poor academic outcomes, negative behaviors, teacher stress, limited learning opportunities, fewer instructional practices, and struggles in the TSR, teachers, particularly general education EC teachers, need to be vigilant for

students with EBD who are overly dependent and provide them with the necessary support to build positive TSRs (Garner & Mahatmya, 2015; Li & Lau, 2019; Post et al., 2020; Verschueren & Koomen, 2020).

Building a positive TSR with students with EBD requires closeness, which depends on the breadth and depth of the relationship students with EBD have with their teachers and also determines the level of independence or dependence in a TSR (Garner & Mahatmya, 2015; Li & Lau, 2019; Schussler et al., 2016; Sette et al., 2014). In EC (preschool-first grade), teacher-student closeness could have some influence on students with EBD, their independence, and negative behaviors (Cadima et al., 2019; Vancraeyveldt et al., 2015). Students with EBD who encounter a high-quality TSR in EC tend to have lower levels of conflict with and dependency on their teachers (Rhoad-Drogalis et al., 2018). Students with EBD can better accommodate and maintain positive relationships and manage their behaviors and academic outcomes when they experience a good TSR (Rucinski et al., 2018; Skalická et al., 2015). Behavioral problems and conflict have caused students with EBD to be dismissed as equal participants in building positive relationships with teachers and has left them susceptible to negative TSRs, long-term conflict, and future behavioral problems (Bosman et al., 2018; Skalická et al., 2015). As students with EBD learn to maintain relationships, manage behaviors, and achieve success in academics, they may overcome being judged by their negative behaviors, poor grades, and relationship shortcomings (Dusenbury & Weissberg, 2017). Instead, students with EBD may be seen as important agents when forming a relationship with their teacher (Skalická et al., 2015).

The Quality of Teacher-Student Relationships in Early Childhood

The quality of a TSR is vital to the instructional, emotional, and social support of students with EBD. Harbour et al. (2015), Hernández et al. (2017), and Jones and Kahn (2017) stated that a quality TSR is essential for supporting academic achievement, behaviors, and emotional success in school. In addition, instructional, emotional, and social support are intertwined—three characteristics of a TSR found to be beneficial for students with challenging behaviors (Furrer et al., 2014; Jennings, 2015; Jones & Kahn, 2017).

In the area of instructional support, teachers are responsible for building a high-quality TSR that promotes academic achievement and school engagement for students with EBD. Sointu et al. (2017) and Hosan and Hoglund (2017) reported that teachers found that a quality TSR contributed to academic success and school engagement among students with EBD in the early elementary grades. Several other researchers have noted that a quality TSR could improve students with EBD' grades, learning, and attention in the classroom. Quality TSRs can delay or eliminate school dropout rates, frequency of disciplinary action, suspension rates, and contribute to a reduction of delinquent behaviors while increasing school engagement for these students (Cooper et al., 2015; Furrer et al., 2014; Gage et al., 2018; Gidlund, 2018; Jennings, 2015; Leckey et al., 2016; Roorda et al., 2014; Ştefan et al., 2015; Walker & Graham, 2019).

Research by Marsh (2018) on students' mental health issues and a study by Vandenbroucke et al. (2018) on working memory, TSRs, and academic achievement regarding kindergarten children, confirmed that the quality of the TSR for students with

EBD is associated with higher academic achievement and school engagement. Blair and McKinnon (2016) and Van Loan and Garwood (2020) added that a quality TSR might help close the early achievement gap students with EBD encounter at school entry. Students with EBD struggle with academics, learning, and school engagement due to their poor behaviors. As a result, they have a difficult time with engagement at school and initiating and maintaining quality relationships with teachers (Breeman et al., 2018; Gidlund & Boström, 2017; Kern, 2015; Knowles et al., 2019; Marsh et al., 2019).

General education EC teachers need to focus on building the self-confidence of students with EBD regarding school, self-efficacy, and academic achievement to encourage a positive TSR. The support from a positive TSR can be used as a foundation for students with EBD to learn and become interested in academics and school engagement. Hernández et al. (2017) noted that in the primary grades, a quality TSR could assist teachers with school-related outcomes for students with EBD. In addition, Hernández et al. pointed out the importance of instructional support in a quality TSR and how it relates to students with EBD' academic achievement and school engagement. This applies to what general education EC teachers need for support when teaching students with EBD. Discovering what general education EC teachers need to support students with EBD is critical to their academic achievement and school engagement.

Providing emotional support is another task that teachers have when working with students with EBD. A quality relationship that is emotionally supportive has been shown to improve students with EBD' emotional well-being and behaviors, directly and indirectly, in the classroom (Leckey et al., 2016; Poulou, 2017a; Roorda et al., 2014). An

emotionally supportive or sensitive TSR is important in changing or improving students with EBD' behavioral problems (Walker & Graham, 2019). Emotional support in a quality TSR is also considered essential and may mitigate risk factors related to behavioral problems, such as self-regulation, which may be a contributor to chronic emotional issues and behavior disorders (Metsäpelto et al., 2015; Sutherland, Conroy, Algina, et al., 2018; Yoleri, 2017).

In a quality TSR, teachers' sensitivity is expected and required because (a) when directed towards students with externalizing behaviors, it may decrease these behaviors and improve the TSR due to behavioral support, and (b) it should help teachers acknowledge the emotional state of their students (Vancraeyveldt et al., 2015; Walker & Graham, 2019; Williford et al., 2017). As a result, teachers' sensitivity toward students with EBD may help them maintain and continue appropriate behaviors (Hagenauer et al., 2016; Vancraeyveldt et al., 2015; Walker & Graham, 2019). Emotional support in a TSR is beneficial for students who exhibit negative EBD behaviors' emotional well-being.

Emotional support (i.e., teachers being sensitive), teachers' emotional involvement, and a quality TSR are correlated (Tilbe & Gai, 2020; Uitto et al., 2018). Teachers could use a quality TSR as an intervention strategy to support and influence students with EBD' emotional well-being and emotional and behavioral struggles (Applestein, 2017; Marlow et al., 2017; Poulou, 2017a; Yoleri, 2017). According to Majeika et al. (2020), when teachers implement or use quality TSRs as an intervention strategy, those techniques may help students with EBD' social and academic issues as well as their behavioral problems. A strong TSR with consistent emotional support from

preschool teachers could reduce or prevent problematic behaviors related to emotional well-being and help with social-emotional development and language skills (Tilbe & Gai, 2020). Kajamies et al. (2016) added that EC professionals provide more positive or neutral emotional support than negative emotional support in the classroom. This may help students with EBD adjust their behaviors in the classroom and experience positive relationships with their teachers.

Emotional support is essential in a quality TSR (Uitto et al., 2018). The purpose of a quality TSR is to provide students with EBD emotional support and help them with emotional competence (Kiuru et al., 2016). When students with EBD experience emotional support in a TSR, they learn how to be socially relatable, sensitive, and responsive to social cues from teachers (Kiuru et al., 2016). Emotional competency is important to how students with EBD maintain their TSR in the classroom and feel a sense of connectiveness in school (Kiuru et al., 2016). It is important to understand that emotional support from teachers sets the foundation for positive emotional well-being, better behaviors, and a quality TSR for students with EBD (Kiuru et al., 2016; Uitto et al., 2018).

A teacher's social support of the student is another attribute of a quality TSR, and, according to Zinsser et al. (2016), occurs in preschool classrooms. According to Gasser et al. (2018) and Walker and Graham (2019), a TSR that is warm, secure, caring, respectful, and supportive is beneficial for the development of social skills and prosocial behaviors of students with EBD. Rucinski et al. (2018) added that a quality TSR improves and creates positive behaviors and social outcomes for students with EBD. Leckey et al.

(2016) and Roorda et al. (2014) stated that a quality TSR strengthens social skills, including communication, conversation, social interaction, prosocial behaviors (i.e., caring), helping, and sharing with others. When teachers establish a quality relationship with students with EBD, they develop these essential social skills and prosocial behaviors (Ferreira et al., 2016; Hamre, 2014).

As students with EBD develop their social and prosocial skills through a quality TSR, they also develop self-regulation skills. Montroy et al. (2014) and Zolkoski (2019) found that social skills and self-regulation (e.g., controlling behaviors and emotions) are fundamental skills that preschool children with EBD need to initiate interactions with others (social skills), which enhance prosocial skills (caring, sharing, and helping) among other students with EBD. Multiple researchers have stated that a high-quality TSR nurtures students' self-regulation, which, in turn, supports or contributes to prosocial and social skills both academically and behaviorally in the classroom (Day & Connor, 2016; Li & Lau, 2019; Liew et al., 2018; Zolkoski, 2019). In addition, self-regulation has been linked to academic achievement and is perceived to be a component of academic success (Day & Connor, 2016; Schmitt et al., 2015).

Academic success and self-regulation are intertwined (Birgisdottir et al., 2020; Day & Connor, 2016). In Grades 1 and 4, self-regulation plays an important part in mathematics (Birgisdottir et al., 2020). In a quality TSR, teachers promote higher levels of self-control, which produces positive gains in core academic areas such as mathematics but can be overshadowed by self-regulation problems (Day & Connor, 2016; Hernández et al., 2017). General education EC teachers frequently struggle with

promoting student academic success and decreasing problem behaviors, especially for students with EBD who are challenged in the areas of academic performance and self-regulation. Grappling with these problems creates pressure in the relationship between students with EBD and their teachers. As a result, academic achievement for students with EBD is less likely due to poor behaviors (Poulou, 2015; Van der Worp-van der Kamp et al., 2014).

Positive Teacher-Student (With Emotional Behavioral Disorders) Interaction in Early Childhood

Interaction is an important part of a quality TSR. According to W. Fu et al. (2020), the foundation of teacher-student interactions involves common exchanges or mutual actions that include two individuals with emotions. Head Start preschool educators agree that teacher-student interactions are a top priority in a TSR (Johnson et al., 2017). Teacher-student interactions are important to students' behavioral, emotional, and academic development (Hu et al., 2019; Johnson et al., 2017; Pianta et al., 2016). In Grades 1 through 6, interaction in a TSR requires multiple exchanges between teachers and students with EBD (Breeman et al., 2018). Teacher-student interaction has a specific and positive influence on learning. Close interaction between students with EBD and teachers predicts better short- and long-term academic outcomes (Pianta et al., 2016; Sutherland et al., 2019). Positive teacher-student interaction also has a direct influence on student academic outcomes, particularly in reading and mathematics skills, which correlates with successful teacher-student experiences (Birgisdottir et al., 2020; Hu et al., 2019) and to a quality TSR. For students with EBD, having positive interactions in EC

improves academic trajectory, social-emotional skills, cognition, and self-regulation (Day & Connor, 2016; Leyva et al., 2015; Pianta et al., 2020). When general education EC teachers interact with students with EBD in a positive manner, teachers enhance their social, cognitive, and linguistic skills (Leyva et al., 2015). As a result, students with EBD interact more often in the classroom, perform better academically, become more actively engaged in the classroom, and develop better social-emotional skills (Conroy et al., 2015; Fu et al., 2020).

Teacher-student interaction is an important part of improving the academic and social-emotional skills of students with EBD through a quality TSR. Teacher-student interaction with academic guidance is integrated with socioemotional support and could enhance learning (Fu et al., 2020). According to Hu, Fan, et al. (2017), in preschool, positive interaction may not directly influence the social skills and academic gains of students with EBD and may not be enough to assure specific learning outcomes relevant to the classroom learning objectives. The time teachers spend in instruction does not guarantee positive interaction with students with EBD (Van der Worp-van der Kamp et al., 2017). Higher achievement and positive interaction are not necessarily determined by teachers spending more or less time in academic instruction; however, special needs students, like those with EBD, rely on positive interactions (e.g., one-on-one) to enhance their academic and social-emotional skills (Van der Worp-van der Kamp et al., 2017). Positive interactions can help students with EBD more than students who do not have these difficulties (Van der Worp-van der Kamp et al., 2017; Zolkoski et al., 2016).

In EC, it is important to make sure students with EBD are provided with the opportunities to improve their behaviors, academics, social, and emotional development through a quality TSR. According to Vitiello et al. (2018), training preschool teachers improves teacher-student interactions. As a result, students demonstrated small gains in self-regulation skills and academic achievements. Teachers need to ensure that a quality TSR includes interactions, exchanges, and experiences that are warm, sensitive, and adhere to the needs of students with EBD (Ansari & Pianta, 2018; Burchinal et al., 2016; Hu et al., 2019; Johnson et al., 2017; Pianta et al., 2016; Vernon-Feagans et al., 2019). Exposure to a positive teacher-student interaction improves social-emotional skills and increases academic achievement in early school years, such as pre-K (Cash et al., 2019; Gottfried & Ansari, 2019). Vernon-Feagans et al. (2019) found that positive teacher-student interactions improved academic areas, such as reading comprehension and literacy skills, from kindergarten to third grade. Teachers need to practice positive teacher-student interactions in a quality TSR as these appear to be beneficial for students with EBD in the classroom (Cash et al., 2019; Pianta et al., 2020; Vernon-Feagans et al., 2019).

Social Interaction of Students With Emotional Behavioral Disorders in the Early Childhood Classroom

The classroom is full of daily interactions that help develop students with EBD' social relationships. According to Hu et al. (2019), social development matters in the EC classroom. Sandilos et al. (2018) found that exposure to quality interaction helps prepare students with EBD socially and emotionally in pre-K. In an EC classroom, students with

EBD are engaged in social interactions that occur outside of their families, which makes teacher-student interaction a critical element for social relationships. Jorge et al. (2019) and Spohr et al. (2019) confirmed that interactions are considered tangible and a set of complex networks (i.e., social interaction networks) that capture the emotional connections between teacher-student interaction and the context of the classroom. Rimm-Kaufman et al. (2015) added that teacher-student interaction and the classroom context are considered the foundation for social relationships.

In an exploratory study on social interactions, substance use, and treatment initiation, Spohr et al. (2019) stated that an individual's social support is divided into two constructs: positive and negative interactions. Zolkoski et al. (2016) noted that social relationships and positive interactions are influenced by two factors: the individuals in the relationship and the social environment. In the social environment, the relationships that students with EBD develop are based on the type of interactions between teachers and these students. For students with EBD, this type of interaction and support is essential because positive social communications help with social development (Mwoma & Pillay, 2016). In a TSR, positive social interactions can serve as a powerful tool for interpersonal skills, teaching appropriate behaviors, social cues, knowing right from wrong, and improving social development skills (Leyva et al., 2015; Pennings et al., 2018).

Teachers of students with EBD have reported that proximal connections have led to positive social interactions and social competence, which influenced these students' interpersonal skills and made it easier to interact and build a quality TSR (Gogolin & Szymlik, 2019; Hernández et al., 2017; Hu, Zhou, et al., 2017). Having positive teacher-

student interactions is one-way general education EC teachers can assist students with EBD in developing the necessary social skills to function in a relationship inside or outside the classroom. As a result, teachers need to take the time to focus more on interacting positively with students with EBD because they are considered social referents. Hendrickx et al. (2016) and Hendrickx, Mainhard, Oudman, et al. (2017) noted that teachers are a social referent for the way students with EBD are perceived and accepted by other peers in the classroom. Teachers can help students with EBD interact, behave, and communicate better with authority figures and peers by learning how to begin and end conversations (Hendrickx, Mainhard, Boor-Klip, & Brekelmans, 2017).

In the classroom, teachers and students with EBD interact daily with each other. Teachers' social interactions influence students with EBD' social skills and development (Jorge et al., 2019; Sandilos et al., 2018). Positive social interactions teach students with EBD to build social relationships and to be socially and emotionally involved in those relationships (Sandilos et al., 2018). Close social interaction with teachers shows students with EBD how to discern and understand social cues in a relationship (Gogolin & Szymlik, 2019; Hu, Fan, et al., 2017; Leyva et al., 2015; Pennings et al., 2018). Daily exposure to social interaction helps students with EBD to engage in their TSRs and to communicate with peers and other teachers in an appropriate manner (Gogolin & Szymlik, 2019; Hu, Zhou, et al., 2017; Koenen et al., 2019; Leyva et al., 2015; Pennings et al., 2018). It is important that teachers act as an example of positive interactions for students with EBD so they can develop the positive social skills necessary to function in

any relationship (Hendrickx et al., 2016; Hendrickx, Mainhard, Oudman, et al., 2017; Mwoma & Pillay, 2016).

Interaction Between Teachers and Students With Emotional Behavioral Disorders in the Early Childhood Classroom

General education EC teachers struggle to interact with students with EBD in the classroom. Teachers have found that negative interaction creates destructive patterns of behaviors that pervade the classroom environment (Markelz & Taylor, 2016). As teachers interact with students with EBD, engaging in positive TSRs is difficult because these students are the most challenging to teach and work within the classroom (Bettini et al., 2019; Minahan, 2019). Teachers often encounter adverse, negative, tense, or controversial interactions with students with EBD, which may create a negative classroom environment (Becker et al., 2017; Eller et al., 2015; Hollo & Wehby, 2017). In a study on the developmental links between disobedience and teacher closeness in boys with EBD aged 6 through 13, Breeman et al. (2018) found that negative interactions set the foundation for a poor TSR. This continues the cycle of negative interactions and disruptive behaviors with students with EBD, which may be the reason why there is a breakdown in the TSR and in the classroom environment (Eller et al., 2015; Nemer et al., 2019). As a result, negative behavioral patterns and teacher-student communication in the classroom often hinder learning and academic success. According to Cooper (2019) and Diaz et al. (2017), behaviors, academics, and interactions are connected. Behaviors and interactions can influence learning, or they can take away from instructional time in the classroom.

In an EC classroom, many students with EBD exhibit numerous disruptive behaviors. These disruptive behaviors impede learning and contribute to negative teacher-student interactions, which require teachers to focus more on inappropriate behaviors and negative relationships than on instruction (Cook et al., 2017). As a consequence, teachers spend less time teaching students with EBD. According to Butler and Monda-Amaya (2016), teachers of students with EBD reported that disruptive behaviors and negative teacher-student interactions interfered with instructional time. Amstad and Müller (2020) and Haydon et al. (2018) noted that addressing negative behaviors takes away from instructional time in the classroom. During instruction time, teaching students with EBD can be challenging for general education EC instructors (Breeman et al., 2018; Shin & Ryan, 2017). The negative behaviors and experiences that occur between teachers and students with EBD can cause educators to feel unprepared, overwhelmed, and inadequate to deal with these students in the EC classroom (Flower et al., 2017; Schonert-Reichl, 2017). Poor behaviors and negative interactions also frustrate and increase stress for teachers, which leads to less interaction with students with EBD during instructional time (Amstad & Müller, 2020; Butler & Monda-Amaya, 2016; Gage et al., 2018; Haydon et al., 2018; Martin et al., 2018).

When general education EC teachers feel overwhelmed and lack confidence, they often have negative perceptions and reactions to students with EBD' poor behaviors (Gagnon et al., 2019). According to Leggio and Terras (2019), Koenen et al. (2019), and Mariano and Bolsoni-Silva (2018), teachers' behaviors play a significant part in their interactions with students with EBD. Teachers' responses to students with EBD in EC

have the potential to encourage or hinder positive teacher-student interactions. Negative responses or reactions are often reinforced, which worsens social interchanges in the classroom and makes students with EBD socially incompetent to provide positive social responses when prompted (Arhin & Laryea, 2018; Mariano & Bolsoni-Silva, 2018). As a consequence, these types of responses or reactions from teachers predict how they interact with students with EBD in the classroom (Cooper et al., 2015; Koenen et al., 2019; Mariano & Bolsoni-Silva, 2018).

Teachers need to be aware of their reactions toward students with EBD and how students respond to them (Sabey et al., 2019). Whitney and Ackerman (2020) noted that the way teachers respond to negative or positive behaviors influences students' behavioral outcomes, which can predict positive or negative behaviors in a TSR. Fu et al. (2020) added that teachers' direct or indirect language could influence students with EBD' feelings, interactions, and behaviors. If teachers are not conscious of how they respond or react to students with EBD, then negative teacher-student interactions will continue to lead to fewer classroom responsibilities, positive social interactions, teacher praise or nominations for good behaviors, opportunities for academic advancement, and engagement in classroom activities (Post et al., 2020; Sutherland, Conroy, Algina, et al., 2018).

In negative teacher-student interactions, students with EBD rarely receive positive reinforcement, such as praise for compliant behavior; instead, they receive negative reinforcement for poor behaviors (Caldarella et al., 2019; Downs et al., 2019). Negative reinforcements contribute to less teacher-student attention and fewer opportunities for

academic advancement, leaving students with EBD less engaged in classroom activities (Sutherland, Conroy, Algina, et al., 2018). In the classroom, teachers often increase their reprimands as a response to disruptive behaviors (Hollingshead et al., 2016), and as a result, praise is less frequent from teachers toward students with EBD. Researchers have reported a lack of recognition and positive affirmation (Downs et al., 2019). Higher rates of reprimands are the most common experience in the classroom between teachers and students with EBD (Gage et al., 2018; Sabey et al., 2019). Caldarella et al. (2020) added that teacher reprimands do not change disruptive behaviors or increase school engagement.

Despite the low incidence of praise from teachers, there are several ways to provide affirmation for students with EBD. In a study of fourth and sixth grade Swedish teachers who taught students with EBD, Gidlund and Boström (2017) found that positive affirmation involves making eye contact and addressing the student separately from other students in the classroom. Other forms of positive affirmation include genuine compliments, corrective responses, instructional feedback, contingent praise, expressions of gratitude and appreciation for desired behaviors, statements that assure understanding, and confirmation of understanding to clear up any confusion (Cook, Fiat, et al., 2018; McComas et al., 2017; McLeskey et al., 2017; Oakes et al., 2018; Sabey et al., 2019).

According to Scott et al. (2017), praise (i.e., feedback) is an unpopular instructional strategy used in the classroom despite supportive research. However, praise is not only about rewards and should not be used as a tool to eliminate disruptive behaviors or negative teacher-student interactions; instead, it can be integrated into other

strategies to improve students with EBD' behaviors (Jenkins et al., 2015; Perle, 2018; Whitney & Ackerman, 2020). A structured classroom combined with praise and positive feedback can meet the needs of students with EBD in EC. Accolades produce better social skills, academic success, and positive learning (Zolkoski et al., 2016). These elements are considered best practices for improving behaviors and ultimately creating more positive teacher-student interactions for students with EBD. Positive interactions may be used as a strategy to decrease or possibly eliminate negative disruptive behaviors and negative teacher-student interactions in EC classrooms.

By utilizing positive teacher-student interactions, general education EC teachers reduce challenging behaviors and address students' learning needs (Sutherland, Conroy, McLeod, et al., 2019; Sutherland, McLeod, et al., 2019). Positive teacher-student interactions that include praise may improve learning, behaviors, better academics, and social skills and give teachers a sense of hope when working with students with EBD (Cornell & Sayman, 2020; Mrachko et al., 2017; Pianta et al., 2016). However, a few researchers have mentioned that teachers may not have the ability to interact with disabled students and that these interactions may not equally support or benefit students with EBD. According to Bakadorova and Raufelder (2016) and Hu, Fan, et al. (2017), teacher-student interactions may not improve students' social skills, relationships, academics, and learning or encourage more praise and recognition for positive behaviors. Sutherland, Conroy, Algina, et al. (2018) added that the reason teacher-student interactions do not improve social skills, relationships, academics, or learning is due to teachers' lack of experience, training, inability to handle negative interactions, or manage

poor behaviors in students with EBD. As a result of improper training, teacher-student interaction is made worse by the poor behaviors and negative interactions that teachers and students with EBD encounter (Noltemeyer et al., 2015).

When teachers interact positively with students with EBD in a TSR, those positive interactions have been shown to shape teachers' praise as well as the social and cognitive skills, relationships, academics, and learning for students with EBD inside and outside the classroom (Floress & Jenkins, 2015; Hu, Fan,Wu et al., 2019; Markelz & Taylor, 2016; Rucinski et al., 2018). Positive teacher-student interactions also encourage motivation, engagement, improved self-concept, and self-esteem among students with EBD (Markelz & Taylor, 2016; Spilt et al., 2016). Training teachers to interact with these students may lead to improved social intelligence, behavior patterns, social relationships, and positive TSRs for students with EBD (Caldarella et al., 2019; Rubow et al., 2019).

Teacher-student interactions are an important part of social relationships and positive TSRs. In the classroom, teachers are viewed, socially, as examples for students with EBD (Hendrickx, Mainhard, Oudman, et al., 2017; Koca, 2016), but teachers struggle with interaction (Büttner et al., 2015; Van Loan & Garwood, 2020), which leaves them frustrated due to poor behaviors and negative communication (Kourkoutas & Giovazolias, 2015; Martin et al., 2018). As a consequence, teachers often correct behaviors and address negative interactions that disrupt the classroom during instructional time (Gage et al., 2018; Noltemeyer et al., 2015; Sointu et al., 2017). Negative behaviors by students with EBD lead to poor quality interactions between teachers and peers as well as academic issues and social problems, such as isolation and

rejection (E. L. Anderson et al., 2017; Barghaus et al., 2017; Breeman et al., 2015; Brown Hajdukova et al., 2016; Butler & Monda-Amaya, 2016; de Swart et al., 2019; E. L. Skalická et al., 2015).

One way to manage negative teacher-student interactions with students with EBD is a smaller classroom. A smaller classroom or teacher-student one-on-one interaction could help general education EC teachers facilitate positive interactions, become acquainted with students with EBD, and learn their interests while addressing their other needs (Cook, Coco, et al., 2018; Zolkoski et al., 2016). According to Van der Worp-van der Kamp et al. (2017), one-on-one interaction with students with EBD helps them learn better social and academic skills as well keeps them more alert and responsive during instructional time. According to Leggio and Terras (2019), when teachers actively listen to students with EBD at the beginning of the school day, they address these students' emotional needs. Allowing students with EBD to express their feelings and emotions through one-on-one interactions produces many academic and emotional benefits (Leggio & Terras, 2019; Van der Worp-van der Kamp et al., 2017; Zolkoski et al., 2016).

Synthesis of Research on Teacher-Student Relationships and Students With Emotional Behavioral Disorders

Findings from several researchers show that poor behavior and conflict contribute to negative TSRs. Breeman et al. (2015) and Tsang (2019) found that teachers have been incapable of building quality relationships with students with EBD. Hamre (2014) and de Leeuw et al. (2018) also found that teachers were unable to participate in positive teacher-student interactions because they struggled with students with EBD in the

classroom. Archambault et al. (2017) added that a warm and close relationship might not be enough to enhance students with EBD' behaviors and emotional engagement. The majority of researchers, however, found that the positive characteristics and interactions of a TSR contributed to academic achievement, fewer disruptive behaviors, and a healthier TSR.

Research by Lei et al. (2016) showed that negative TSRs are associated with students' emotional and behavioral problems, such as aggression, depression, loneliness, anxiety, and low self-esteem. In a TSR, poor behaviors and conflicts are the leading cause of teacher stress and the negative experiences of students with EBD in their relationship with their teachers (Archambault et al., 2016). Gagnon et al. (2019) found that conflict in a relationship contributes to preschool teacher stress as a response to students' behaviors. Students with EBD and their disruptive behavior produce anxiety and challenges for teachers (Shields, 2020). Hopman et al. (2018) reported that constant high incidences of disruptive behaviors create emotional exhaustion and stress for teachers, and, as a result, they become less involved in students' learning and education. Mason et al. (2017) noted that approximately from birth to fifth grade, negative TSRs contribute to lower academic achievement in reading and mathematics. Crum et al. (2016) added that lower levels of academic achievement are linked to higher rates of conflict and negative outcomes in the academic school year. Ciuladiene and Kairiene (2017) found that when teachers and students emotionally withdraw from one another, students' poor behaviors result in negative outcomes related to academic achievement with subsequent consequences for the TSR. These findings coincide with those of Collins

et al. (2017), who noted that negative external behaviors changed the relationship quality between teachers and students with EBD. Breeman et al. (2018) added that students (i.e., boys) in Grades 1 through 6 with EBD experienced less closeness with their teachers in a TSR, which contributed to more disobedience and an increase in negative relationships and behaviors.

It is important to note that when teachers feel close to students with fewer disruptive behaviors, they are not as exhausted, stressed, or overwhelmed (Gagnon et al., 2019; Hopman et al. (2018). However, teachers often feel overcome and frustrated when dealing with students with EBD (Gidlund & Boström, 2017; Hopman et al., 2018). In a qualitative study by Gidlund and Boström (2017), teachers reported they wanted to be more involved with students with EBD, but that they also wanted to know how to meet the needs of these students. Ciuladiene and Kairiene's (2017) research supports Gidlund and Boström's in that the teachers in their study were not equipped to handle students with EBD in the classroom because they did not have the skills to do so. Both Gidlund and Boström's and Ciuladiene and Kairiene's research supports the recommendation for future research to collect more information regarding teachers' perspectives of their TSRs with students with EBD and the support they need when working with these students. Poulou (2015, 2017a, 2017b) stated that teachers need help to develop their professional skills or practices to address behavioral problems to build a positive TSR with students with EBD.

Hernández et al. (2017) and Hu et al. (2019) found that teacher-student interaction was critical to students' learning and academic achievement. Zolkoski (2019) also found

that when teachers interacted with students with EBD during instructional time in the classroom, the students were able to learn and understand concepts during this time. Uitto et al. (2018) and Thornberg et al. (2018) found that the elements of a TSR such as love, warmth, care, support, and understanding were related to students' engagement and academic achievement. Mason et al. (2017) and Roorda et al. (2017) found that an effective TSR was associated with student engagement and academic success.

According to Archambault et al. (2017), students with oppositional disorders have demonstrated lower levels of behavioral engagement than other classmates. Simultaneously, Archambault et al. found that for students with oppositional disorders, TSRs were important for promoting classroom engagement in school. Sointu et al. (2017) also found that strong TSRs predicted academic achievement. Findings from a study by Battey et al. (2016) indicated that establishing supportive relationships with students with EBD has increased their mathematical skills in the classroom. Zhou et al. (2020) found that students' improved mathematical abilities, self-efficacy, and reduction in mathematical anxiety in primary school were directly associated with the positive influence of a TSR. They also found that higher academic achievement was linked to positive ratings regarding teacher-student closeness in a TSR.

The majority of research concerning TSRs and students with EBD has focused on teachers and students in upper elementary and middle schools, special secondary education teachers, college students, and university teachers. Three multigrade level studies by Collins et al. (2017), Battey et al. (2016), and Fisher et al. (2016) examined first through sixth grades regarding problem behaviors in low-income boys, relational

content of quality instruction, adaptability, social skills, and TSRs. Collins et al. found that TSRs changed from grade to grade with conflict increasing and closeness decreasing in TSRs among low-income male students. Battey et al. found that relational interaction can help teachers enhance their instruction and establish supportive relationships with students in mathematics. Fisher et al. found that teachers who aim to increase students with EBD' social skills and adaptability (i.e., temperament) may experience a positive TSR.

Gagnon et al. (2019) and Rudasill et al. (2016) focused on preschool children and teachers' ratings of their TSRs with regard to teacher stress and students' temperament. Gagnon et al. found stress predicted the quality of preschool teachers' relationships based on their experiences with students in the classroom. Rudasill et al. examined preschool students' temperament, teacher-student conflict, classroom instruction, and emotional support. They determined that children with high self-control (i.e., the ability to regulate behaviors and emotions) in a low emotionally supportive classroom experienced lower levels of teacher-student conflict. Rudasill et al. also found that in a classroom with high instructional support and children with low effortful control, these children experienced more conflict than those with high self-control.

Hajovsky et al. (2017), in a longitudinal study, examined gender, teacher-student closeness, and conflict regarding mathematics and reading achievement from birth to adolescence. They found students' academic achievement was closely related to TSRs. It also indicated that teacher-student closeness and conflict changed among gender, specifically, more for males than females across grades. In another longitudinal study,

Hu, Fan, et al. (2019) demonstrated that quality teacher-student interactions in Chinese preschools had long-term implications for language development in the EC years. The limited research in the area of EC shows a gap in the literature on practice and supports the need for this study. What remains to be investigated are teachers' perspectives about their TSRs and the support they need when instructing students with EBD (Poulou, 2015). In addition, studies have shown that teachers need help to develop their professional skills or practices to address students' behavioral challenges and build TSRs with students with EBD (Poulou, 2017a, 2017b).

Review and Synthesis of Research Related to the Research Questions

From the instructors' perspectives, students with EBD have a difficult time creating and managing their relationships with teachers (McGrath & Van Bergen, 2015). In EC, students with EBD often experience negative TSRs because of their poor behaviors in the classroom (Eller et al., 2015; Sutherland, Conroy, Algina, et al., 2018). The first RQ in this study addressed teachers' perspectives about their relationships with students with EBD. The second RQ explored teachers' perspectives of what they need for support when instructing students with EBD. Teachers have reported that they are unqualified to cope with students with EBD because of their lack of training and confidence to efficiently support them in the classroom (Chen & Phillips, 2018; Jenkins et al., 2015). Regarding supporting teachers with students with EBD, some researchers have suggested that specific training and effective implementation of instructional practices geared towards students with EBD would help them reduce the number of incidences regarding poor behaviors and negative TSRs in EC (Conroy et al., 2015;

Kennedy & Haydon, 2020; Rucinski et al., 2018; Vancraeyveldt et al., 2015). A basic qualitative design for this study using semistructured interviews was conducive to exploring the perspectives of general education EC teachers who work with students with EBD and their needs when instructing these students. A basic qualitative design was appropriate for this study as it helped me explore the experiences of the participants and capture their perspectives and feelings.

Summary and Conclusions

A teacher's role is not confined to educating students with EBD; teachers assume multiple roles that contribute to the education and development of these students in EC (Archbell et al., 2019; Breeman et al., 2015; Capern & Hammond, 2014; Gottfried et al., 2016; Muñoz-Hurtado, 2018; Phajane (2014); Raufelder et al., 2016). A quality TSR is connected to many areas related to students with EBD. Researchers have found that quality TSRs are linked to academic success, improved behaviors, emotional well-being, and social and prosocial behaviors (Arhin & Laryea, 2018; Ferreira et al., 2016; Gresham, 2015; Harbour et al., 2015; Hu, Zhou, et al., 2017; Leckey et al., 2016; Mrachko et al., 2017; Poulou, 2017a; Roorda et al., 2014; Zee et al., 2020). This suggests that a quality TSR is essential for students with EBD in the classroom.

Positive interaction in a TSR significantly influences students with EBD. Researchers have stated that positive teacher-student interactions in a TSR in early and later grades are connected to improved literacy and mathematics skills, social skills, and social relationships (Ansari & Purtell, 2017; Battey et al., 2016; Hu et al., 2019; D. P. Martin & Rimm-Kaufman, 2015; Mwoma & Pillay, 2016; Schonert-Reichl, 2017).

Kindergarten is where students encounter positive TSRs (Ansari & Purtell, 2017). Those students who experience a positive TSR demonstrate the greatest improvement in literacy, mathematics, and social skills. While the roles of general education EC teachers in a TSR are limitless, a positive TSR is important for students with EBD. Some challenges, such as the conflicts teachers regularly endure in a TSR with students with EBD, keep educators from fully functioning in these capacities. Several researchers have found that conflict is a result of a negative TSR, which paves the way for increased problem behaviors, teacher-student conflict, and negative TSRs (Bosman et al., 2018; Evans et al., 2019; Metsäpelto et al., 2015; Skalická et al., 2015).

EC is a sensitive and critical time when established and positive TSRs may have many benefits for students with EBD. By the time students with EBD enter middle school, positive TSRs play a significant part in school transition, relationship quality, school engagement, and achievement (Hughes & Cao, 2018). Positive TSRs and connections between students with EBD and teachers in EC classrooms are vital components of school transition, socioemotional and behavioral growth, self-regulation, and developmental outcomes (Li & Lau, 2019; Liew et al., 2018). Those teachers who encourage social-emotional skills, positive behaviors, school adjustment, and development help students with EBD through positive TSRs and interactions in EC (Jennings, 2015; Schonert-Reichl et al., 2015).

Researchers have demonstrated that a positive TSR has many benefits for students with EBD regarding their social, emotional, academic, and behavioral skills (Becker et al., 2017). What is not known in the discipline of EC education is the teachers'

perspectives about their TSRs and their needs when teaching students with EBD. General education EC teachers' perspectives are important to the field of EC education because EBD are the most recognized condition among children in the United States (Idris et al., 2019; Ogundele, 2018). In the metropolitan area, this is a concern because the number of students identified with EBD is increasing. Bridging the gap between teachers' needs and support extends the body of knowledge concerning teachers' ability to create and maintain positive TSRs with students with EBD. In this study, I addressed the problem regarding the gap in literature relating to practice concerning general education EC teachers' perspectives of their TSRs and their needs when teaching students with EBD (see Poulou, 2015). In addition, in this study, I sought to identify the support teachers need help to develop their professional skills or practices to deal with behavioral problems to build a positive TSR with students with EBD (see Poulou, 2017a, 2017b).

In Chapter 3, I discuss how I used a basic qualitative design to achieve the purpose of this study, as well as its rationale, and the role of the researcher. I outline the methodology, including participant selection, instrumentation, the recruiting process, participation, and data collection, and provide a data analysis plan. Finally, the trustworthiness of the study and ethical procedures will be discussed.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore the perspectives of general education EC teachers regarding their TSRs and the support the need when teaching students with EBD. Poulou (2015) indicated that there is a gap in the literature relating to practice concerning teachers' perspectives of their TSRs and what they need for support when teaching students with EBD. Further studies by Poulou (2017a, 2017b) have shown that teachers need help to develop their professional skills or practices to address students' behavioral problems to build a positive TSR with students with EBD.

In this chapter, I provide a detailed explanation of the research design and rationale for this study as well as my role as the researcher. I discuss the study's methodology: participant selection and instrumentation; procedures for recruitment, participation, and data collection; and a data analysis plan. Finally, I address the trustworthiness of the study and ethical procedures.

Research Design and Rationale

I selected a basic qualitative design using interviews as the research approach for this study to explore the perspectives of general education EC teachers and the support they need when working with students with EBD. According to Lodico et al. (2010), use of a basic qualitative design helps the researcher to investigate the experiences of participants and capture their perspectives and feelings. The RQs in a basic qualitative study, therefore, help identify specific information and allow for detailed descriptions of the participants' perspectives (see Lodico et al., 2010). In this study, the RQs were as follows:

RQ1: What are general education EC teachers' perspectives regarding their TSRs with students with EBD?

RQ2: What are general education EC teachers' perspectives of the support they need when teaching students with EBD?

Quantitative methodology was not appropriate for this study, as this would not have allowed me to address the participants' perspectives. I conducted this basic qualitative study to focus on the perspectives of general education EC teachers related to their TSRs with students with EBD. Grounded theory was not appropriate for this study because its purpose is to generate a new theory pertaining to the phenomenon under investigation (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, 1994; Tie et al., 2019). Phenomenology was rejected because its focus is to extract the lived experiences of human beings for the purpose of understanding their experience the world (Creswell, 2012; Sutton & Austin, 2015). A case study was also not acceptable as researchers use this design to discover meaning, uncover new insights, and gain a deeper understanding of people, individuals, or situations (see Lodico et al., 2010).

Role of the Researcher

The role of the researcher is to access, collect, and analyze data and to provide a possible explanation of the study phenomenon based on the information obtained during the research process (Korstjens & Moser, 2017; Sutton & Austin, 2015). As the researcher, it was my responsibility to examine and be vigilant regarding potential bias when I conducted this study. Lodico et al. (2010) stated that qualitative researchers should consider their own experiences, biases, subjectivity, and assumptions. A reflective

journal helped me to set aside any prejudgments, ideas, personal opinions, thoughts, or urges to speak during the interviews that could contaminate the study. A reflective journal is used to record and examine subjective impressions (i.e., feelings, thoughts, and values) that could help control biases during the interview process (see Lodico et al., 2010).

I used my reflective journal before, during, and after data collection. I used the journal to document any biases prior to the interviews to help me avoid interjecting or expressing personal opinions during the interviews and data analysis. Each entry was divided into two columns. The left side was used for chronological descriptions of the events during the interview. The right side was for reflective notes about my thoughts; I recorded the notes to identify my opinions and ensure objectivity. An expert reviewer was also used to search for biases in the journal and recommend solutions regarding how to control these before, during, and after the data collection process.

It is also the researcher's responsibility to ensure the integrity of the study's design, protect the participants, and make sure that data collection is done in a fair and just way to keep participants from any harm. Before the study began, I obtained permission from Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). To help ensure ethical procedures were followed for this study, I completed a training course, Protecting Human Research Participants, offered through the National Institutes of Health, Office of Extramural Research regarding the use of human participants in my study.

As the researcher, I have an obligation to reveal any personal and professional relationships that may have involved the participants. For 8 years, I have worked as a

teacher's assistant. During that time, I attended a summer youth program with two of the participants. My professional relationships with the two participants was not supervisory, and I did not have any other position involving authority over the other participants.

Methodology

Participant Selection

I asked general education EC teachers in pre-K through third grade in a public school in the target metropolitan area in the Northeast region of the United States to participate in this study. These teachers met three criteria: they must be a general education EC teacher, (b) be currently employed in the local school district for 3 or more years, and (c) have experience teaching students with EBD for 3 or more years in public schools. The sample consisted of nine teachers. All participants were recruited using snowball sampling. Starting with the two teachers with whom I had a casual relationship from the summer youth program. I verified participant criteria before arranging the interviews, which ensured that those nominated had the characteristics and experiences relevant to the study (see Lodico et al., 2010).

Teachers who participated in this study provided their perspectives regarding their TSRs with students with EBD and identified their need for support when instructing these students based on their expertise and experiences. I was able to recruit two participants from the summer youth program during the initial round of recruitment. Once the two participants agreed to participate in the study, additional names and contact information were requested for other participants. I continued the snowballing process until I reached a sample size of nine participants. The district's institutional review board does not

permit research to be conducted on-site unless the researcher is a district employee. As a nondistrict employee, I did not know any participants, except the first two teachers with whom I had a casual relationship from the summer youth program. All interviews were conducted via telephone.

Instrumentation

To collect data in this research study, I conducted semistructured interviews with open-ended questions based on Bronfenbrenner's (1974) ecological systems theory and related literature. I developed the interview protocol and questions (see Appendix), which addressed general education EC teachers' perspectives and relationships with students with EBD. Open-ended questions allowed the participants to provide descriptions of their experiences and for me to explore their perspectives (see Creswell, 2012).

I used the elements of Bronfenbrenner's (1974) microsystem and mesosystem (i.e., school, teacher, neighborhood, family, and peers) from the conceptual framework to design the interview questions. The questions addressed general education EC teachers' perspectives regarding their TSRs and what they need when working with students with EBD. The interview questions encouraged the participants to describe their relationships, interactions, classroom environments, and needs when teaching these students. Each interview question aligned with the conceptual framework:

- Question 1 pertained to demographic information.
- Questions 2 and 4 addressed the classroom environment (microsystem).
- Questions 3 addressed relationships in the classroom (microsystem).

- Question 5 focused on instructional needs in the classroom (microsystem) and in school (mesosystem).
- Question 6 focused on emotional needs in the classroom (microsystem) and in school (mesosystem).
- Question 7 addressed teachers' needs to support students with EBD.
- Question 8 asked for additional information that participants might share pertaining to the study.

An expert reviewer with research methods experience assessed the interview questions to make sure data collection provided sufficient data to answer the RQs and later reviewed the data analysis to check for bias. E. L. Anderson et al. (2017), Barghaus et al. (2017), and Wallace and Chhuon (2014) have used Bronfenbrenner's (1974) ecological systems theory to examine individual behavior changes over time within the microsystem and mesosystem. The conceptual framework in this study did not go beyond the microsystem and mesosystem.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

Previously, I had contacted the central office of the school district where I proposed to do this research and their office of data systems and strategy. I was informed that nondistrict employees could not conduct a study in a school in this district. Per their policy, however, there is no special request form or permission needed to conduct a study if it is not done at or in the school itself. This information was verified by phone with two district departments. I did not approach teachers on school grounds who could have been potential participants in the study.

After Walden's IRB approved the study (approval no. 03-12-0569151), I used snowball sampling to recruit participants by contacting two teachers I knew from the summer youth program I attended. They gave me the names of persons they believed might be interested in the study, and I made a list of these potential participants. Next, I contacted each with an introductory email in which I introduced myself and explained the purpose of the study and my reason for contacting them. In this email, the consent form was attached for participants to review. If these potential participants were interested, they sent me an email saying, "I consent." I repeated the process for any new participants until I reached the desired sample size.

The consent form informed the potential participants of their rights to privacy and confidentiality. The consent form states that I will not use or share personal information outside of the study and that alphanumeric codes would be used to protect their identities. I emailed interested teachers a consent form that outlined how I would keep their information private and their rights as a participant. I was available to answer any questions that the prospective participants might have had before sending the consent form. Once they reviewed the consent form, the teachers sent me an email saying "I consent" to participate in the study. I kept paper documents and tape recordings in a locked file cabinet in my home; electronic files were password protected on my personal computer. Data, including tape recordings, interview transcripts, and consent forms, will be kept for 5 years beyond the completion of this study. Data will be shredded, recordings will be destroyed, and electronic information will be deleted from my computer at this time.

Data Collection Process

I conducted the interviews by phone based upon the participants' availability. Once I received emails saying "I consent" to participate in the study, I scheduled the interviews. I contacted the participants by phone or email within 24 hours to schedule a time to conduct an interview. I began each interview by reading the interview protocol introduction, which explained my role as the researcher, what the study was about, and the participant's rights to privacy and confidentiality. Interviews included open-ended questions, ranged in length from 23 minutes to 1 hour, 20 minutes, and were recorded using a tape recorder. While I was recording the interviews, I used a reflective journal to write down my opinions, biases, thoughts, and ideas to keep the interview process objective (see Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I kept these notes in a separate folder in a locked file cabinet; I am the only one with access to this information. In each interview, I tried to put the participants at ease and asked them to answer the questions honestly. I originally estimated it would take approximately 10 weeks to obtain and complete data collection; however, I was able to collect all data in 4 weeks.

According to Bogdan and Biklen (2007), leaving or discontinuing a research study may be difficult for a participant. At the end of each interview, I debriefed the participant by asking, "Is there anything else you would like to share with me on this topic?" The participants could contact me if they had anything further to share or any questions, concerns, or misconceptions about the study. No participants contacted me after the completion of interviews to share any further information or questions, concerns, or misconceptions. Participants were informed that they would be contacted by me via

email to verify the accuracy of my findings. I thanked the participants for taking part in the study.

Data Analysis Plan

According to Lodico et al. (2010), the researcher should not wait until all data are collected to begin data analysis. After completing two interviews I began the coding process (see Braun & Clarke, 2006). I transcribed all recorded interviews into Microsoft Word files.

The first step in the data analysis process for this study was open coding. The goal of the researcher in open coding is to identify and compare similarities in the data (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). The researcher also examines differences and create preliminary codes based on the reading of every interview transcript several times to determine categories (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). During open coding, I read and reread the transcripts multiple times, looking for words or phrases related to the topic of my study and RQs. After rereading the transcripts, I reviewed each transcript line-by-line and grouped words and phrases into a category and labeled them with a term that gives meaning to the group of open codes (see Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Next, I created tentative themes by examining patterns which conveyed important information regarding the RQs. Then, I reexamined the data to refine the themes. In the examination process, I reviewed the categories three more times to ensure they represented the appropriate theme. I continued to refine themes in relation to the RQs and verify how the themes answered the questions.

Discrepant cases are relevant to a qualitative study because they can provide new insight into the phenomena under investigation (Erickson, 2012). Discrepant cases are not insignificant information but involve data that does not conform or follow the same patterns of other findings (Erickson, 2012; Patton, 1990). If discrepant cases occur, they must be examined closely and carefully as well as reported (Erickson, 2012). No discrepant cases existed in this study.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness in qualitative research includes the study's credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability (Shenton, 2004). Credibility ensures that the study depicts the experiences of the participants accurately. Transferability refers to how findings from the study can be applied to a wider population and other contexts or situations. Dependability concerns replication of the study and if similar results can be obtained using the same research methods, setting, and participants. Confirmability ensures that the ideas and experiences of the participants are represented accurately without researcher bias or influence. By addressing all elements of trustworthiness, the researcher confirms the study adheres to the proper methods of qualitative research.

Credibility

Member checking is a strategy used to enhance credibility. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), member checking is the most critical technique or provision used to establish credibility. In this study, I sent, via email, a summary of my findings to the participants to check for accuracy. The participants were asked to contact me within a week with comments or corrections they believed should be made. None responded with

edits. Using member checking expands the quality and meaning of the participants' responses by filling in or clarifying any information that may be relevant to the study (Moustakas, 1994).

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), using an expert reviewer is a good technique for establishing credibility. In this study, I had an expert reviewer, who is an associate professor at a college in the eastern region of the United States with qualitative expertise, examine the data collection and analysis process. The reviewer's task was to identify any biases in the data analysis and data collection process (see Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Pandey & Patnaik, 2014). The expert reviewer assessed the interview questions to determine if they were sufficient to answer the RQs to help ensure credibility. Because no identifiable information regarding participants was provided, the reviewer was not required to sign a letter of confidentiality.

Researcher bias, assumptions, background, and position can influence the research method selected for a study and how the subject is investigated (Pandey & Patnaik, 2014). It is critical that researchers are aware of their own biases during the research process. Lodico et al. (2010) noted that while in this phase, the researcher should continuously monitor their biases and assumptions. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), a reflective journal can be used as a diary to make daily entries regarding the researcher's biases, values, interests, and assumptions during the research process. To monitor personal biases, I used a journal before, during, and after each interview and during data analysis. Using the reflective journal during the interviews assisted me in recording my thoughts rather than expressing them during the interviews.

Transferability

According to Trochim (2021), transferability provides a path for the results of a qualitative study to be applied to other settings or contexts. A technique for establishing transferability is providing thick descriptions (Pandey & Patnaik, 2014). Thick descriptions include sufficient details that the reader can use to judge or draw conclusions concerning a study's participants, culture, resources, setting, time, and situations (Lodico et al., 2010; Pandey & Patnaik, 2014). Results may be transferred to similar settings or contexts; however, the reader determines the transferability of results.

Dependability

Dependability in qualitative research is whether the procedures and processes of the study can be duplicated using the same context, methods, and participants to obtain the same results (Lodico et al., 2010; Shenton, 2004). A technique for establishing dependability is an audit trail. Lincoln and Guba (1985) stated that using an audit trail may enhance the dependability of qualitative research. To ensure dependability, I created a log or audit trail detailing how data were collected and analyzed, how categories emerged, and how decisions were made throughout the research process (see Merriam, 1995).

An expert reviewer can confirm that the results of a study are (a) grounded and accurate, (b) there is a clear connection between the findings and data, (c) the themes are appropriate, (d) the interpretations and conclusions are supported by the data, and (e) that any biases are accounted for (Anney, 2014; Lodico et al., 2010; Shenton, 2004). An reviewer checked for any biases in the data collection and analysis and assessed the

interview questions to determine that they were sufficient to answer the RQs. The expert reviewer is an associate professor who has served in this capacity for more than one university and has no connection to the study.

Confirmability

It is important that the study's findings accurately reflect the participants' experiences and ideas and not the researcher's characteristics, preferences, or subjective interpretations (Anney, 2014; Pandey & Patnaik, 2014). I used a reflective journal to establish confirmability by providing descriptions of how the study was conducted, the data were collected and analyzed, and to detail the participants' responses. I took notes in my reflective journal before, during, and after data collection. Examining interview responses and notes from my reflective journal provided me with expanded and integrated descriptions of the themes and categories that emerged from the study (see Lodico et al., 2010).

The data analysis process was examined by an associate professor with research method experience, who did a thorough evaluation of the interviews, themes, notes, and the reflective journal. After data analysis was complete, the expert reviewer was provided with a data summary to check for bias(es) and to confirm the findings. The participants were provided with a summary of the study's results to check for accuracy to ensure confirmability.

Ethical Procedures

Treatment of Participants

To ensure the rights, protection, and safety of the participants, I completed a human research protection training course by the National Institutes of Health, Office of Extramural Research. I sought permission from Walden University's IRB by submitting all supporting documents. I explained the reasons for the study and its benefits, how data were to be collected and analyzed, how the participants would be protected, as well as the consent form. Previously, I contacted the central office and office of data systems and strategy at the school district where I proposed to do this research and was informed that a nondistrict employee could not conduct a study at any of its schools. If an individual is not conducting a study in or at a school in this district, there is no special request form or permission needed to identify potential participants for a study. This information was verified by phone with both district departments.

Ethical concerns related to recruitment materials involved the two teachers who were initially contacted for this study and helped me begin the recruitment process by identifying other potential participants. Each participant was asked to give consent via email. I sent the consent form that explained policies regarding the participant's privacy, confidentiality, and rights. The consent form described the purpose of the study, data collection procedures, the nature of the study, risks and benefits, privacy, and confidentially. The consent form also explained that there was no compensation for participation in the study.

Careful consideration of the participants' rights and privacy took place before, during, and after the interview process. The participants were encouraged to express any discomfort they may have experienced during the interview process; if they had any questions or concerns regarding the study, they could contact me at any time. I reassured the participants that any information they shared would remain confidential and that they had the right to withdraw from the study if they experienced any type of discomfort during the interview process.

Treatment of Data

The safety and security of participants' privacy were addressed by using alphanumeric codes (e.g., Participant 1 was referred to as P1) to ensure that their identities remained confidential. There were minor risks for the participants, such as fatigue or discomfort with the interview questions; therefore, I made sure the participants understood they could stop the interview at any time. The participants were also informed that the information collected would not identify them or the school where they were employed. I used direct quotes when discussing the findings from each participant.

Recordings were labeled as P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, and P9. All paperwork, along with tape recordings, transcripts, and personal notes, were kept in separate folders in a locked file cabinet, and I am the only one with access to this information. All electronic documents are password protected on my personal computer. All data will be destroyed 5 years after the study is completed. Transcripts and notes will be shredded, recordings destroyed, and electronic data deleted from the computer. I did not conduct

research in my work environment; therefore, there was no conflict of interest concerning my influence or any incentive given to the participants to take part in this research study.

Summary

In this study, I conducted an in-depth exploration of the perspectives of general education EC teachers' relationships with students with EBD. In this chapter, I discussed the study's research design and rationale, my role as the researcher, and the methodology used. This included procedures for participant selection, as well as discussed instrumentation, recruitment, participation, data collection and analysis. I also reviewed the trustworthiness of this study and ethical procedures (i.e., treatment of participants and data). In Chapter 4, I will describe the setting, data collection, data analysis, and results of the study, as well as evidence of trustworthiness.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore the perspectives of general education EC teachers regarding their TSRs and identified their needs when teaching students with EBD. The participants were EC teachers from a public school district in a metropolitan area in the Northeast region of the United States. I used snowball sampling to select nine participants who had 3 or more years' experience teaching students with EBD in public schools. The primary data collection method for the study was semistructured interviews. In this chapter, I describe the setting and the data collection and analysis processes. I also present the results of the study and evidence of trustworthiness.

Setting

I conducted this study in a school district in a metropolitan area in the Northeast region of the United States. At the time of the study, all teachers in the district were licensed, and 62% held a certification in the subject they taught, according to data in the district's report card. The demographics of the district's student population were as follows: 52% African American, 46% Latino, and 2% from other ethnicities. In this metropolitan area, 35-40% of students who were at risk received reduced or free lunch under the Title 1 target assistance program, according to the school system's website. Teachers' years of experience in public schools ranged from 2 to 10 or more.

Participant criteria for this study included general education EC classroom teachers who were currently employed in a public school in the metropolitan area with 3 or more years of experience teaching students with EBD in public schools. The

experience requirement ensured the participants had a history of teaching students with EBD. I selected nine general education EC classroom teachers to participate in this study. I used semistructured telephone interviews at a date and time of the participant's choosing and arranged interviews. All participants chose weekdays after work hours. I recorded the interviews with a tape recorder. I completed all interviews without distractions or interruptions. An overview of the participants' demographics, including grade level taught, is provided in Table 1.

Table 1

Demographic Profile of Participants

Participant	Gender	Grade level
P1	Female	Pre-K4
P2	Female	Third
P3	Female	Mixed grades
P4	Male	Third
P5	Female	EC
P6	Female	Kindergarten
P7	Female	Pre-K3–Pre-K4
P8	Female	First
P9	Female	Kindergarten

Note. Mixed grades are classrooms with more than one grade level. Pre-K4 = [free "early action" program for 4-year-old children]; EC = early childhood; Pre-K3 = [free "early action" program for 3-year-old children].

Data Collection

I collected data from nine participants. The only source of data for this study was interviews conducted via phone beginning March 29 and lasting until April 30, 2021. I collected data via telephone to limit direct contact because of the COVID-19 pandemic (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2022). I scheduled an interview with each

participant once they reviewed the consent form and emailed me their response, “I consent,” to participate in the study. I began each interview by reading an introduction that contained specific information pertaining to the study and the interview process (see Appendix). The introduction contained information on my role as the researcher, the purpose of the study, the participants' rights, and confidentiality measures. I asked the participants eight open-ended questions with follow-up questions that focused on their perspectives regarding their TSRs and their needs when teaching students with EBD.

All nine participants answered the interview questions. Three participants rescheduled their interviews due to work schedules, doctor’s appointments, and sickness. During the interview process, four teacher participants were concise with their answers, which made their interviews shorter; however, they thoroughly answered each question. One interview lasted 1 hour and 20 minutes. There was one participant who did not answer the interviews thoroughly and needed redirection. After prompting and redirecting, the interview was still incomplete. I tried reaching out to reschedule another interview and was unsuccessful.

After completing the interviews, I saved them on my password-protected computer. I thanked each participant for their time and contribution and explained that I would email them a summary of my findings to make sure I accurately identified and represented their thoughts and experiences. I kept all recordings in a locked file cabinet. I manually transcribed each, verbatim, into Microsoft Word and saved them on my password-protected computer. While I was recording the interviews, I used a reflective journal to write down my opinions, biases, thoughts, and ideas to bolster objectivity

during the interview process (see Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I kept these notes in a separate folder in a locked file cabinet; I am the only one with access to this information. The only variation in the data collection process proposed in Chapter 3 was that the duration of interviews took 4 weeks instead of 10.

Data Analysis

All nine participants were asked the same open-ended interview questions in the same chronological order. I used Microsoft Word to transcribe all nine interviews. I checked each transcript line by line to ensure that all transcripts were accurate. I completed this process by reading the transcripts while listening to the tape recordings and making necessary corrections if needed. During this process, I became familiar with the data. After checking transcripts for accuracy, I used an inductive analysis approach, based on Braun and Clarke's thematic approach, to analyze data and to determine themes. The steps involved (a) familiarizing myself with data, (b) generating initial codes, (c) developing themes, and (d) producing the report (see Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 87). I did not encounter any unusual circumstances during the data collection or analysis processes.

Step 1: Familiarization With the Data

To ensure that the data collected were accurate, I made sure that each transcript accurately represented the tape recordings. I saved transcripts on my computer and assigned each participant an alphanumeric code to protect their identities (e.g., P1, P2, P3). After ensuring that each transcript corresponded with the tape recordings, I read and reread each transcript several times, correcting errors, and looking for repetition within the data, which helped with the familiarization process. I made notes in the margins of

the transcripts of codes that emerged from the data. As I read, I created a chart in Microsoft Word to help organize the data. The chart included three columns labeled codes, categories, and themes.

Step 2: Generation of Initial Codes

After I familiarized myself with data, first, I used open coding. During open coding, I reread the transcripts and I began looking for repeated words and phrases relevant to the conceptual framework and RQs. I wrote words, phrases, and concepts in the margins of each transcript. I made a list of all the codes then I returned to the data to check for redundancy. Repetitive words or phrases were highlighted and labeled in each transcript using various colors to represent each code. The colors included yellow, orange, blue, pink, green, and red. Words in yellow signified treatment of EBD students, words highlighted in orange were labeled as training, phrases highlighted blue represented teachers needing more help, words highlighted in pink signified parental involvement, phrases highlighted in green were associated with administrative support, and words highlighted in red represented rewards. Table 2 shows examples of the open codes alongside corresponding participant identifiers. Not all codes are represented.

Table 2

Example of Open Codes

Code	Participant	Example
Teacher relationships	P7	"I would it [relationship] as very close because we had to be around him all day."
	P9	"I feel like I have closer relationship with them because I'm constantly talking to them and spending more time explaining myself and asking them where they're coming from."
Need another teacher	P3	"Another teacher or staff member that the child can go to, when they need someone else to talk to and to take a break"
Need another person	P4	"I need another person in the room or a smaller class"
Need extra adult	P7	"…An extra adult to help manage outburst…"
Need one-on-one aide	P6	"A one-on-one educational aide would be helpful because you want them to have the support they need…"
	P2	"A one-on-one like a paraprofessional or someone who can be there to kinda of work with them."
Need administrative support	P4	"I need administrative support."
	P3	"An immediate responsive staff member and an impartial supportive administrator."
No singling out	P6	"There's no way to say you're singling out a child or make that child feel singled out."
Treat all the same	P4 P2	"I treat them all the same…"
No large differences	P3	"I try not to make like very large different between them and the other students as far as expectations."
Rewards	P9	"I have a reward system and that works…they get to go to the treasure chest."
Incentives	P7	"We would have incentive systems…"
Training	P2	"…Continuous training to deal with students in that area…"
	P8	"I would like more training…"
Parental involvement	P4	"Well, it be nice; it would be nice if their parents were involved with them."

After the open coding phase, I revisited the transcripts and codes. I created a chart in Microsoft Word, which helped to identify similarities and connections among codes to create categories. After reviewing the open codes, it was necessary to use axial coding to confirm codes and categories to ensure they accurately represented interview responses. Then, I reviewed and sorted all codes that were similar and related to the RQs. Codes with similar meaning were merged to form broad categories. I performed this technique until all codes merged based on similarity. Each category was color coded using different colors. Using different highlighters helped identify and create categories. Table 3 includes nine open codes and how these fit into five categories with participant identifiers and examples from the data. Please note that this is a sample of codes to categories and not all categories are included.

Table 3

Examples of Codes to Categories

Code	Category	Participant	Example
Treatment of EBD students	Teachers' descriptions of their relationships with EBD students [varied]	P4 P1 .	I treat them all the same…" "They get the same treatment…"
Not singling out		P5	"Yes, you have EBD [in the classroom], but I am not singling you out because you have EBD. You are a part of this class just like the person who doesn't have EBD. So, you treat them the same."
		P6	"There's no way to say you're singling out a child or make that child feel singled out."
Rewards/incentive system		P7	"Sometimes the motivators as far as on you're using like a reward incentive system."
		P9	"They have to move that pin and when they get to the very top; they get a special note home or call, they get to go to the treasure chest."
Positive relationships		P5	The relationship I had with all my children [including EBD] is you're mine and I'm gonna love you regardless."
		P2	"For the most part I think I have a good relationship"
		P9	"I feel like I have a closer relationship with them because I constantly talking to them…"
Negative relationships		P5	"Well, there are days when it's hard especially if they're not telling what wrong it can drain you…"
		P6	To be honest, it's quite tumultuous and other times quite calm depending on which version of the child comes through the door, what's going on before they get to school."
	Need for professionals and paraprofessionals	P2	"It can be challenging depending on the severity the behaviors are it can be challenging because it can take a lot of energy…"
Need social worker		P9	"Like a social worker assigned to the classroom…"

Code	Category	Participant	Example
Need special needs teacher		P5	"Well, you definitely need that special needs teacher to come in and not only work with your kids one-on-one but come and be able to work with kids on those things within the classroom."
		P8	"Okay, I would like the support of the SPED department…"
Need teacher assistant		P1	"There is always room for another adult [teacher] assistant in the classroom just to allow for more one-one-one time with the student."
		P6	"A one-on-one aide would be very helpful…"
Need administrative support		P9	"I think from administration, clear guidelines on overall school procedures."
		P8	"I need that support; I mean real support from the administrators and also [the school district]."

Note. EBD = emotional behavioral disorder; SPED = special education department.

Open and axial coding allowed me to identify categories that supported the RQs. I also examined all codes for discrepant data; none were found.

Step 3: Development of Themes

After coding and merging data, I reviewed categories that emerged during axial coding to help identify and label themes (see Table 4). I evaluated the data using inductive analysis to transition codes into categories. I identified emerging themes, then, I examined the data to refine themes. In the examination process, I reviewed the categories three more times to ensure they represented the appropriate theme. I continued to refine themes in relation to the RQs and verified how the themes answered the RQs: What are general education EC teachers' perspectives regarding their TSRs with students with

EBD? (RQ1) and What are general education EC teachers' perspectives of the support they need when teaching students with EBD? (RQ2).

The three themes that emerged from the data were (a) general education EC teachers believe applying classroom rules and discipline consistently and using incentives improved their TSRs with students with EBD; (b) EC teachers need professionals and paraprofessionals when teaching students with EBD to manage disruptions, provide counseling, address social and emotional needs, maintain safety for all students, and to improve their TSRs with students with EBD; and (c) EC teachers require parental involvement to understand EBD students' individual needs and family dynamics to build good TSRs.

Theme 1

General education EC teachers in the study found that applying rules and discipline consistently and using incentives improved their TSRs with students with EBD. When discussing their relationship with EBD students, teachers believed that to build a relationship with students with EBD, it was necessary to treat students with respect and have the same expectations for students with EBD in the classroom. P5 noted, "Yes, you have EBD [in the classroom], but I am not singling you out because you have EBD. You are a part of the class just like the person who doesn't have EBD. So, you treat them the same." P4 stated, "I treat them all the same because I don't want the kids to think that they're being singled out or they're not as smart as the other kids." P1 added,

> I just treat everybody the same, and I just have expectations for all my students regardless if you have a student with EBD or if you are a student who is not. You [the student] still have to follow the same rules.

P2 shared, "I don't really try to make a big difference between them and other students as far as expectations." Teachers explained the need for using incentives for students with EBD. P9 shared, "I have a reward system and that works for who is fulfilling one of the class rules." P7 noted, "We would have incentive system, you know, incentives. Just a tool that help him manage his learning."

Teachers' descriptions of their relationship with students with EBD varied. Only two teachers felt they had a positive relationship with students with EBD. P2 stated, "For the most part, I think I have a good relationship." However, they did not explain further. P3 noted, "I think we have a good relationship; the relationship would be sometimes hot and cold depending on the day they were having." Other teachers, like P9, claimed, "I feel like I have a closer relationship with them because I constantly talking to them." P3 stated, "It [EBD behavior] makes it difficult you have to accommodate, be more sympathetic, and more tolerant towards, um, with an EBD student." P5 shared, "Well there are days when it's hard, especially if they're not telling what's wrong . . . it can really drain you."

Theme 2

EC teachers need professionals and paraprofessionals when teaching students with EBD to provide counseling, address social and emotional needs, maintain safety of all students, and manage disruptions to improve their TSRs with students with EBD.

Although all teachers wanted support all nine expressed that they wanted support from various staff members, such as school counselors, social workers, special education teacher, and/or teacher assistant as well as more training and support from school administration for different reasons. P2 needed assistance: “In the education field, having good counselors is important . . . we can’t focus on academics and not focus on the emotional health and social emotional learning of a child.” P4 noted, “I have referred a couple of kids to our counselors; to our counseling department because they have shown a lot of anger.” P9 added, “I would like more staff support, like a social worker to be assigned to the classroom to build a rapport and to help with different situations in the classroom.” P5 specifically wanted help from a special education teacher, “to come and work one-on-one with kids within the classroom.”

Two teachers wanted additional support from a teacher assistant. P2 stated, “I think some students need a paraprofessional to work with them.” P1 noted, “There is always room for another adult [teacher] assistant in the classroom just to allow for more one-on-one time with the student.” P5 commented, “Other eyes, you know, you might need that extra person in the classroom to maintain their safety.” Teachers expressed they want more training. According to P3, “I haven’t had training on working with EBD students in over 20 years . . . I think periodical professional development would be helpful.” P5 shared, “We need more training to, you know, to help we us build. … I didn’t have a special ed. [education] background. Somebody who is [from a] special ed. background maybe can come in and tell us what to do.” P2 added, “I think good training always helps, continuous training to deal with students in that area.”

Teachers placed significance on the need for support from school administration. P1 indicated, “I would just need the support from administration to be on same page.” P9, noted, “I think from administration, clear guidelines on overall school procedures and overall social-emotional support.” P8 shared, “I would be good to have your administration to have your back. I’m going to need support from an administrator.” P7, mentioned, “Any dedicated help or an extra adult to manage the outbursts . . . a staff member we could call to give us a break.” There was no consistency among teachers and therefore the information merged into one theme as the codes and categories dealt with support.

Theme 3

EC teachers require parental involvement to understand EBD students’ individual needs and family dynamics to build good TSRs. Teachers mentioned parental involvement. P4 stated, “I need parental support; I need parents to be on board and involved with them.” P6 shared, “I would say support from parents.” P2 stated, “A good parent relationship . . . having that good partnership between school and home.” Teachers specifically mentioned that parental involvement helps with relationship building regarding students with EBD.

It is important to note that during the interviews, teachers used the word “trauma,” and the term “triggers.” Based on the participants’ responses, addressing trauma is important because it influences the way students with EBD interact with their teacher and other peers in the classroom; teachers are aware of their trigger points. P3 stated, “Trauma matter [*sic*]. I have had students abandoned, homeless, sexually abused,

orphans, and abused with extension cords, burns, you know, stuff like that, so understanding their triggers also helps." P8 shared,

> We just had training on this morning on trauma how COVID is affecting us adults. So, think how it's affecting children. We're noticing more and more children with EBD and some kids are having emotional problems because of the pandemic.

P4 explained,

> There is going to be a wave of emotional issues coming into the classroom because of the pandemic. Kids have been cooped up in the house with abusive parents, abusive siblings; not just physical but emotional and sexual abuse from being cooped up in the house over a year.

P7 added,

> My teaching assistant and I would be very aware of where he [a student with EBD] was in the classroom at all times and be very aware of not presenting him with any triggers or try [to] avoid triggers that we knew would set [him] off. You know, destructive behaviors.

This response illustrates that negotiating TSRs requires significant awareness on the part of the teaching team. P5 noted, "We'll first try to take as many triggers away as you can. If you know that this child bothers this child . . . because you know this you move way that child." P3 shared,

> I try to make sure that they are not in the same group of the same team because if there's somebody that really triggers them or if there's an adult that triggers them, I can prevent that person from working with the child.

Table 4 provides a representation of seven categories and three themes identified during inductive analysis.

Table 4

Examples of Categories and Themes

Category	Theme
Same rules for EBD students Treatment of EBD students Using rewards/incentives system for EBD students Knowing your students' triggers Teachers' descriptions of their relationships with EBD students	Theme 1 (RQ1): General education EC teachers believe applying rules and discipline consistently and using incentives improved their TSRs with students with EBD.
Need school counselor Need social worker Need special education teacher Need teacher assistant Need more training Need administrative support	Theme 2 (RQ2): EC teachers need professionals and paraprofessionals when teaching students with EBD to provide counseling, address social and emotional needs, maintain safety of all students, and manage disruptions to improve their TSRs with students with EBD.
Need more parental involvement	Theme 3 (RQ2): EC teachers require parental involvement to understand EBD students' individual needs and family dynamics EBD to build good teacher- student relationships.

Note. EBD = emotional behavioral disorder; RQ = research question; TSR = teacher-student relationship; EC = early childhood.

Step 4: Production of the Report

The last step was to provide a write-up that included the themes and final results. After analyzing the data, I determined there were three themes that answered the RQs. Throughout data analysis, I evaluated any potentially discrepant data. No discrepant data were found. The three themes emerged to help provide answers to the RQs on general education EC teachers' perspectives regarding their TSRs with students with EBD and their needs when teaching these students.

Results

The participant's responses from the interviews are presented in this section. The data were collected and analyzed to answer the following RQs:

RQ1: What are general education EC teachers' perspectives regarding their TSRs with students with EBD?

RQ2: What are general education EC teachers' perspectives of the support they need when teaching students with EBD?

There were nine participants in the study consisting of teachers from pre-K through third grade. Each participant voluntarily took part in the interview. Based on careful data analysis, I created codes, aligned these with categories, and matched themes with categories (see Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Sang & Sitko, 2015).

Research Question 1

Theme 1

Theme 1 was general education EC teachers believe applying classroom rules and discipline consistently and using incentives improved their TSRs with students with

EBD. Teachers believed it is important to treat and have the same expectations and rules for students with EBD as students without EBD. This theme reflected the teachers' thoughts regarding treating students with EBD the same as non-EBD in the classroom. Teachers communicated that treating and having the exact expectations and rules are essential for all students, including students with EBD. P1 stated, "They [EBD] get the same treatment as everybody else because they don't want to be treated differently, so they get the same treatment as everybody else." P5 expressed,

> We're not singling out somebody because they have a problem because the kids don't know this person has a disability and they realize that he cries a lot or he goes off a lot, he hits a lot, but they don't know that he can't help it so, what I have to do for my kids that are EBD…you have to make them feel wanted, make them feel loved, make them feel part of…you do not single them out.

Teachers noted that they treat students with EBD the same as other students by ensuring they are wanted, included, loved, and never excluded from class activities or opportunities due to their disability or behaviors. Teachers mentioned that while treating students with EBD equally, they also have the exact expectations and rules for students with EBD and non-EBD students inside and outside the classroom. Teachers expect students with EBD to follow the same classroom rules as other students, such as reading the same books, playing the same games and toys, and being responsible for their belongings and school supplies. The second expectation from teachers is that students with EBD must follow school rules regarding proper behavior when walking through the hallways, going to specialty classes (i.e., physical education, art, music), going to the

library, the cafeteria, or recess. All students, including students with EBD, are expected to follow classroom and school rules. Six out of nine teachers specifically stated that they do not treat students with EBD any differently than other students in the classroom. Teachers use rewards or incentives to encourage learning and to manage the behaviors of students with EBD. P3 noted,

> Especially in early childhood, they [EBD] like to be rewarded. Whether it be a sticker chart, whether it be a gummy bear, Skittles, extra recess time, or computer time, they really like to be rewarded. And as teachers, we have to come up with creative ways to incentivize to motivate them and to create a balance because you don't want to constantly reward them with tangible things to perform or do something because then they will feel the only way they will perform is because they have an incentive.

P6 explained, "I would use an individual behavior tracker as incentives every 10 minutes or so because . . . that's how long he [the student with EBD] could focus." P7 offered,

> We would have incentives systems . . . you know, incentives. That's just the tool that help [*sic*] him manage his learning and all that stuff, such as being very intentional about not talking about that student in a way to ostracize them and not including him just like any other member of the classroom.

P2 stated, "In some ways, incentives or finding incentives for those interests, so he didn't make the outburst as much as he did when working in small groups or when he has those positive rewards. Sometimes that works." P4 relayed, "I get a lot of incentives, like, the test we just took. I am sending $5 gift cards for those who scored well, including students

with EBD, I just give the cards anyway just because they did their best." Six out of nine teachers reported they use some type of incentive system to promote positive learning and to manage the behaviors of students with EBD in the classroom.

Teachers often used incentives or rewards to encourage, improve, and motivate learning among students with EBD and manage behaviors. Teachers discussed how they use various incentives or rewards for students with EBD. Simultaneously, teachers also expressed that teachers must find a balance when rewarding students with EBD. As teachers implement different incentives in the classroom, over-incentivizing can condition learned behaviors regarding students with EBD. For example, over-incentivizing leads students with EBD to perform or behave in a certain way with the expectation of being rewarded, rather than behaving appropriately in the classroom without being rewarded for positive behaviors. Using incentives or rewards helps teachers teach and manage students with EBD in the classroom.

It is important to note that three teachers believed knowing the strengths of students with EBD is important. P1 noted, "I even highlight the strengths of the child with the EBD to show or take the lead in the situation with other students." P2 offered, "The student with EBD might have a strength that they may be able to share with other students in the class, so I try to use effective pairing—pairing [the] student based on social-emotional characteristics." P4 stated,

> He's very tech-savvy. It's good to know your students with EBD' skills. So, I let this kid, when somebody has a computer, like, . . . the kids get their internet

> access is not working, or they can't get one of the applications. . . I'll say, "Student X go help that student with that problem.

Knowing the strengths of students with EBD is essential to know as a teacher. Teachers discussed the advantages of understanding and knowing the strengths of students with EBD. Teachers use the "strengths" of students with EBD for effective pairing, where students with EBD and non-EBD can share information and learn from each other. Teachers also used students with EBD' strengths to highlight their leadership skills in solving technical issues in the classroom and to build better peer relationships by allowing other students to see students with EBD in a different way. As teachers understand and effectively use the strengths of students with EBD to their advantage, they are enhancing learning opportunities and allowing more classroom engagement among students with EBD.

No two teachers described their relationship the same way. This theme reflected teachers' descriptions about their TSR with students with EBD. Responses varied from positive to negative. P6 stated, "To be honest, it's quite tumultuous and other times quite calm depending on which version of the child comes through the door, what's going on before they get to school." P3 observed,

> I think we have a good relationship; the relationship would be sometimes hot and cold depending on the type of day they are having, um some days they are responsive to learning, listening, communicating, and other days would be just like a bad day.

P5 noted, “Well, there are days when it’s hard, especially if they’re not telling what’s wrong, you just don’t know what wrong or what’s going on with this child and it can drain you; it can really drain you especially when you have other kids that you have to take care of.” P1 stated, “I think we have a good relationship, we get to know each other, rules and things and um so far it’s been kinda positive when he is the center of attention…” P2 commented, “It can be challenging depending on the severity the behaviors are it can be challenging because it can take a lot of energy to find strategies and ways to engage them, sometimes you find yourself spending a little more attention with them than you do with the other students.”

Teachers discussed different reasons why their relationships with students with EBD ranged from positive to negative. Some teachers indicated that their experiences regarding a TSR with students with EBD can be good and calm by establishing classroom rules that help them build a positive TSR. Other teachers mentioned that their experiences regarding TSRs with students with EBD can be tumultuous, hard, hot, or cold due to disruptive behaviors and when students are incapable of using language to express themselves appropriately. Teachers added that, depending on the severity of the disability, the type of day a student with EBD is having or if something happened prior to school [i.e., at home, on the school bus, or on the playground], often influences the relationship teachers have with students with EBD in the classroom.

Research Question 2

Theme 2

Theme 2 was, EC teachers need professionals and paraprofessionals when teaching students with EBD to provide counseling, address social and emotional needs, maintain safety of all students, and manage disruptions to improve their TSRs with students with EBD. Initially, there were four individual themes for RQ2; however, I merged those four themes into two themes because these all dealt with support. The final Theme 2 became the following: EC teachers need professionals and paraprofessionals when teaching students with EBD to provide counseling, address social and emotional needs, maintain safety for all students, and manage disruptions to improve their TSRs with students with EBD. Theme 3 became the following: EC teachers require parental involvement to understand EBD students' individual needs and family dynamics to build good TSRs. I discuss Themes 2 and 3 in this subsection.

Teachers expressed that they need support from the school counselor, social worker, special education teacher, and/or teacher assistant, more training on how to work with students with EBD, and support from school administration. Each teacher's response to Questions 5, 6, and 7 was different regarding the support they need to help students with EBD in the classroom. Questions 5 and 6 pertained to the support required to meet the instructional and emotional needs of these students. Question 7 addressed teachers' needs when supporting students with EBD.

All nine teachers mentioned that they need more help/support in the classroom regarding students with EBD. Most teachers expressed that they need more help or

support concerning students with EBD. Teachers discussed that they need staff support from the school counselor and/or social worker. Social workers and/or school counselors can educate teachers on how to build mutual relationships with students with EBD and train teachers on strategies and techniques to handle potential situations that may occur in the classroom regarding students with EBD. P6 stated, "The counselor would be pulled to do lunch duty or recess duty…to really be able to have counselor in the position of counseling so they can see the students instantly." P9 mentioned, "I would like more staff support. For example, like a social worker assigned to the classroom, assigned to all of my students, and I would like the social worker to have a rapport with them too."

Teachers also need the support from special education teachers and/or teacher assistant. Special education teachers can help general education EC teachers understand EBD as a disability, share teaching responsibilities, help maintain classroom safety and rules, and manage outbursts in the classroom. They can also support teachers by being more hands-on with EBD' academic, social, and emotional issues. Having supportive allies can help teachers meet all the necessary needs to teach students with EBD.

P2 stated,

> I definitely think that [an] extra teacher could be effective, like a co-teacher. Because you, as one person, it's a lot that can go on in the classroom that you are responsible for, and them [EBD] adding students with emotional needs on top of that—it can be overwhelming. So, another adult in the classroom can be very helpful and effective.

Two teachers emphasized that they need additional support from a teacher assistant. Specifically, teachers want a teacher assistant to provide one-on-one support for students with EBD in the classroom. This support in needed due to the teacher-student ratio in the classroom to make sure students with EBD stay focused and get the attention they need, to help with emotional issues, and to provide students with EBD with one-on-one support to complete classroom assignments. Due to the unaddressed help and/or support regarding teachers, teachers indicated that they often feel overwhelmed and stressed when trying to teach, maintain safety and rules, while manage outbursts and redirect students with EBD while also being responsible for their education.

Teachers conveyed that they want more training on how to work with students with EBD. The participants wanted additional resources, strategies, and training to manage students with EBD in the classroom. P7 stated, “Also, just more training—not on what like the disabilities look like but just different strategies for managing it.” P3 suggested,

> I also think it would be helpful for teachers to periodically have professional development because sometimes we are trained or made aware of different issues that are different, um, demographic students, but things change over time. So, if I haven’t had a training on working with EBD students in 20 years or 10 years—I mean, things change by the minute, so I think at least maybe 1 or 2 years [there should be] some sort of professional development on working with students with EBD. And, if you know that there’s a teacher, . . . because there [are] plenty of years where teachers don’t have any students with EBD. So, if you know a

> teacher is working with one or more EBD student, I think they should be, um, prioritize [*sic*] to receive EBD training or updates or something when they [are] working with them.

P2 shared, "I think more effective training is always helpful, techniques, and resources that are current and work with students [EBD] like that." P3 stated, "I just think proper training, but to be most effective…to have the extra resources and to have the training I think is the most effective."

Several teachers expressed that they want more training on how to work with students with EBD. Implementing training and/or professional development can help teachers be more proactive with managing students with EBD behaviors inside the classroom. At the EC level, training and/or professional development can help teachers be more aware of early signs and patterns of EBD among students. In addition to training and/or professional development, teachers want access to additional resources, current and applicable strategies or techniques that are effective for students with EBD. Proper training, professional development, resources, strategies, and techniques can better prepare teachers to teach students with EBD. Seven out of nine teachers mentioned they would benefit from more training, extra resources, and/or strategies to deal with students with EBD.

Teachers felt there was a minimal of support from school administration. The participants expressed their frustration with not receiving support when working with students with EBD in the classroom during instructional time. P8 commented, "It would be good to have your administration behind your back. I'm going to need support from an

administrator." P6 relayed, "A lot of times, the administration doesn't want to pull the child out of the classroom because it [is] not fair to them." P4 stated, "I need administrative support." P5 added, "You have to have the support of the administration to know . . . how to deal with early childhood EBD students because it may not be like it is with the upper grades." P1 stated,

> I would just need the support of the administration—to be on the same page to set the tone for school so that whenever my students [are] traveling within the school, they are receiving the same expectations from every staff member in the building.

Teachers discussed their experiences regarding administrative support and minimal support from administration made teachers feel frustrated with managing behaviors and teaching students with EBD. Based on some responses, teachers believed that administrators are against pulling students with EBD out of the classroom. because it is not fair to the students with EBD. P6 relayed, "A lot of times, the administration doesn't want to pull the child out of the classroom because it [is] not fair to them." P8 shared, "I'm going to need support from administration." Teachers believe that administrators are not considering the time they use to correct behaviors during instructional time or how disruptive behaviors take instructional time away from other students in the classroom, leaving teachers flustered and inundated when dealing with students with EBD in conjunction with dealing with the responsibilities of other students and teaching the curriculum. P2 stated, "Time, we are always in a time crunch, so I definitely think . . . that [it] usually affect [*sic*] [me] a lot when I have to get through

curriculum and materials." Seven out of nine teachers reported that they need more support from administration.

Theme 3

Theme 3 was EC teachers require parental involvement to understand EBD students' individual needs and family dynamics to build good TSRs. Parental involvement is important for teachers. Teachers shared they want more parental involvement for students with EBD. Parental involvement (i.e., support) and TSRs contributes to a good teacher-parent relationship. In a good teacher-parent relationship, teachers, and parents can share information concerning the student with EBD. When information is shared, teachers can understand the family dynamics, which may help them understand students with EBD as an individual and their behaviors in the classroom based on the information teachers receive from parents. P2 stated, "A good parent relationship where you know the history of the child and having the good partnership between school and home." P5 shared, "Another thing is that you have to have that relationship with the parent(s) because if you have one of those relationships with the parents and you talk to the parent(s)…" P3 mentioned, "I also think having a parent support group so that parents can talk to other parent(s) that are having the same, you know, that are dealing with some of the same issues that they are dealing with." P1 stated,

> Family engagement to find out like what their home [is like] . . . to have that home-school connection, because I think that we—home and school—should be

on the same page, so whatever kind of family support, that would lend to more family engagement activity.

Teachers also expressed that having a teacher-parent relationship helps them to acknowledge and understand how traumas, triggers, and behaviors are interrelated. Traumas often lead to negative learning experiences which contribute to the way students with EBD behave in the classroom. P3 shared, “Trauma matters. I have had students abandoned, homeless, sexually abused, orphans, and abused with extension cords, burns, you know, stuff like that so, understanding their triggers also helps.” P4 stated, “He had been molested by 6 years old, and he [EBD] was like 4 and the other child was maybe 6 and this really traumatized him, so he is very fearful of other children because of what happened to him and he is not learning, he doesn’t speak up in the classroom.” Overall, teachers want parents to be involved.

Trauma and triggers influence the way students with EBD interact with teachers. Some teachers mentioned that traumas such as family abuse (i.e., parents and/or siblings), abandonment, sexual abuse, and homelessness are transferred into the classroom. The COVID-19 pandemic is another trauma that students with EBD have endured. Due to the pandemic, students with EBD were isolated from normalcy, which included attending a physical school and classroom, interacting with teachers and peers, and having access to resources. As students reentered the schools and classrooms, the pandemic may have increased the number of EBD among students due to the extended period of isolation from school. These traumas frequently cause students with EBD to behave and interact inappropriately with their teachers and peers in the classroom.

As teachers understand trauma, it also helps to understand triggers. Few teachers shared that awareness of triggers and preventing triggers are essential for managing students with EBD. Teachers stressed the importance of being aware of certain triggers, removing triggers, and understanding that certain adults, peers, sitting, or working in groups may trigger disruptive behaviors in students with EBD. Therefore, acknowledging that trauma and triggers are entities that influence students with EBD is necessary for teachers to appropriately address both situations in the classroom. Acknowledging and knowing about traumas and triggers regarding students with EBD ties back into the importance of a teacher-parent relationship which makes a better TSR. No discrepant cases were found. A more thorough discussion on this is in Chapter 5.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

In qualitative research, trustworthiness includes the study's credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability (Shenton, 2004). In the following sections, I address how this study achieved trustworthiness through accurate representation of the data from interviews, reflective notes, member checking, and peer debriefing. To ensure trustworthiness within the study, I had an expert reviewer, who is an associate professor at a college in the eastern region of the United States with qualitative expertise, examine the data collection and analysis process to establish credibility and review interview questions for content validity. The expert reviewer reviewed the data summary to check for biases and to confirm the findings. Using an expert reviewer established trustworthiness for this study.

Credibility

Establishing credibility is a necessary step in qualitative research. Credibility ensures that the study accurately depicts the experiences of the participants (Shenton, 2004). To establish credibility, I used member checking. Member checking allows participants to review the study's findings and fill in or clarify any information that may be relevant to the study (Moustakas, 1994). I emailed the participants the findings of the study for review and to check the findings for accuracy of their data. Only two teachers contacted me via email and expressed they were satisfied with the results. Additionally, I used an expert reviewer, who is an associate professor with qualitative methodology expertise, to help establish credibility. The purpose of an expert reviewer is to identify any biases in the data collection and analysis process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Pandey & Patnaik, 2014). The expert reviewer checked my codes, categories, and results and determined that my analysis was appropriate, and no bias was discovered.

Transferability

In qualitative research, transferability paves the way for replication of the study and for the results to be applied to other settings or contexts (Trochim, 2021). Thick, rich descriptions allowed readers to make connections to their setting or other environments (see Johnson et al., 2020; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Detailed descriptions provide readers with sufficient information to draw conclusions regarding the study's context, setting, and participants (see Lodico et al., 2010; Pandey & Patnaik, 2014). Using these thick, rich descriptions of the site, situation, and sample allows other researchers to make connections and conclusions when comparing my study to others on this research topic.

Dependability

Dependability refers to whether the results of a study can be repeated using the same methodology, environment, and participants to achieve the same outcome (Lodico et al., 2010; Shenton, 2004). To ensure dependability, I used an audit trail to document the chronological order of events as well as how data were collected and analyzed, categories emerged, and decisions were made throughout the research process (see Merriam, 1995). To enhance dependability, I used an expert reviewer to examine the interview questions to make sure they were designed to achieve responses that would help answer the RQs. The expert reviewer confirmed that the results of the study were grounded and accurate, a clear connection between findings and data was identified, the themes were appropriate, interpretations and conclusions were supported by the data, and that any biases were accounted (see Anney, 2014; Lodico et al., 2010; Shenton, 2004). The expert reviewer found no evidence of bias during the data collection and analysis process.

Confirmability

Confirmability ensures that the study remains objective, reflecting the participants' experiences and ideas and not the researcher's preferences or subjective interpretations (Anney, 2014; Pandey & Patnaik, 2014; Shenton, 2004). I established confirmability by using a reflective journal to document personal biases, assumptions, ideas, and opinions. Using a reflective journal kept me objective, accountable, and aware of my views during the data collection and analysis process. After data analysis was completed, I provided the expert reviewer with a data summary to check for biases and to

confirm the findings. The expert reviewer found no biases in the data collected or in the data analysis. Participants were informed that they would be contacted by email to verify the accuracy of my findings. I provided the participants with a summary of the study's findings to check for accuracy to ensure confirmability. Feedback from the responding participants indicated that they were satisfied with the results.

Summary

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore the perspectives of general education EC teachers regarding their TSRs and the support they need when teaching students with EBD. Three themes emerged from the data. Theme 1 focused on classroom rules and discipline and using incentives to improve TSRs with students with EBD; Theme 2 expressed teachers' need of professionals and paraprofessionals when teaching students with EBD; and Theme 3 emphasized the importance of parental involvement. The three themes answered RQ1 because they captured teachers' perspectives regarding their TSRs with students with EBD. In the data corresponding to Themes 2 and 3, teachers expressed that they need support from the school counselor, social worker, special education teacher, and/or teacher assistant, more training on how to work with students with EBD, support from administration, and more parental involvement. Themes 2 and 3 answered RQ2 because it encompasses teachers' perspectives regarding their needs when teaching students with EBD. Findings based on these themes indicated that the teachers' relationships with EBD were individualized. While the participants' relationships with students with EBD were different, they had equal expectations for these students and treated them the same as non-EBD students in

the classroom. However, the teachers were frustrated with the lack of administrative support and therefore wanted additional help from staff members and parents as well as training and strategies for teaching students with EBD.

Chapter 5 includes the purpose and nature of the study, why it was conducted, and a summary of key findings. I provide an interpretation and analysis of the results for the themes that emerged from the data and connect each to the RQs. I also discuss the limitations of the study, recommendations for future research, and implications for social change.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to address a gap in practice regarding general education EC teachers' TSRs with students with EBD and the support they need when teaching students with EBD. I interviewed nine general education EC teachers from a school district in the target metropolitan area. I collected data using an interview protocol, and the interviews were tape recorded. The interview questions were designed to answer the RQs. Using a basic qualitative approach, I obtained an in-depth understanding of the perspectives of the teachers in this study regarding TSRs and students with EBD. Three themes emerged from the data analysis process: general education EC teachers believe applying classroom rules and discipline consistently and using incentives improved their TSRs with students with EBD; EC teachers need professionals and paraprofessionals when teaching students with EBD to manage disruptions, provide counseling, address social and emotional needs, maintain safety for all students, and to improve their TSRs with students with EBD; and EC teachers require parental involvement to understand EBD students' individual needs and family dynamics to build good TSRs. This study was needed due to the limited research on general education EC teachers' perspectives regarding their TSRs and the support they when teaching students with EBD.

In this chapter, I provide an interpretation of the findings and examine how the results provide a better understanding of the phenomenon. Chapter 5 includes a comparison of the research findings with previous and current literature and the conceptual framework. The study's implications, limitations, and recommendations are

also discussed. Using a basic qualitative approach, I gained a better understanding of the teachers' perspectives regarding their relationship with students with EBD and the support they need when instructing these students.

Interpretation of the Findings

I based the interpretations and findings for this basic qualitative on nine semistructured interviews and the conceptual framework of Bronfenbrenner's (1974) ecological system theory. The study addressed two RQs:

RQ1: What are general education EC teachers' perspectives regarding their TSRs with students with EBD?

RQ2: What are general education EC teachers' perspectives of the support they need when teaching students with EBD?

Three themes were generated, and the findings were informed by the conceptual framework in Chapter 2 and related literature. Findings from this study help to confirm and extend the knowledge in the discipline concerning general education EC teachers' perspectives regarding their TSRs and the support they need when teaching students with EBD. In this section, I offer an analysis and interpretation of the results based on the conceptual framework.

Theme 1, which is associated with RQ1, corresponds directly with the microsystem whereas Themes 2 and 3, which are associated with RQ2, correspond with microsystem and mesosystem. Theme 1 aligns with the microsystem as teachers believe applying classroom rules and discipline consistently and using incentives improved their TSRs with students with EBD. Teachers in the study reflected on the importance of

treating students with EBD the same as non-EBD in the classroom. Teachers' descriptions of their TSRs in the classroom with students with EBD varied among responses. The participants also discussed positive and negative TSRs with students with EBD. This theme highlights the characteristics that contribute to a negative TSR for students with EBD in the microsystem.

In Theme 1, the participants described the microsystem as the classroom environment and how expectations (e.g., rules and procedures) set the tone for all students, including those with EBD. Theme 1 also reflects the microsystem, which concerns behaviors. This was apparent as participating teachers discussed how they used incentives or rewards to encourage learning and manage the behaviors of students with EBD in the classroom. This theme emphasizes various methods and strategies for using incentives/rewards to elicit positive behaviors that produce learning in the classroom. Theme 3 regarding parental involvement also aligns with the microsystem. The microsystem links families (parents, home) and teachers together. The participants emphasized the importance of parent relationships and involvement in the educational process concerning students with EBD.

Interactions between different types of people occur in the mesosystem (e.g., parents, school administrators, and school counselors), which has an influence on student development (Lörinc et al., 2020). Theme 2 also aligns with the mesosystem. The mesosystem is associated with secondary relationships and interactions that involve the teacher and other educators at the school. Theme 2 addresses the teachers' need for support from the school counselor, social worker, special education teacher, and/or

teacher assistant; more training on how to work with students with EBD; and support from school administration. These needs apply to the mesosystem. In this theme, the participating teachers highlighted the benefits of collaborating with colleagues (e.g., school counselor, social worker, special education teacher, and/or teacher assistant) regarding students with EBD and described this as what they need, want, and/or lack regarding additional support. The mesosystem involves teacher support and interactions that may not directly include the developing child but still influences the student (Chan et al., 2019).

The teachers in the study described their desire for more training, how it will support them by building positive relationships, and how it could increase their ability to work with students with EBD while interacting and addressing the complex needs of these students in the classroom. In the mesosystem, there is a connection between school personnel. The teachers in this study emphasized they need more administrative support to teach and work with students with EBD. Theme 3 aligns with the mesosystem regarding secondary relationships and interactions that involve the teacher and parents at school. Theme 3 addresses the teachers' needs for parental involvement; in this theme teachers require more parental involvement to help understand the child with EBD and family dynamics and to help build better TSRs when teaching students with EBD. Findings from this study extend knowledge in the discipline and provide information on the perspectives of general education EC teachers regarding TSRs and the support they need when teaching students with EBD.

The interpretation of the findings of this study for the themes corresponds with the conceptual framework of Bronfenbrenner's (1974) ecological systems theory which describes the process of human development through complex systems. The microsystem involves the individual student, classroom environment, and relatable teachers who address the student's needs and development (Chan et al., 2019). This also includes close and personal relationships between teachers, parents, and students with EBD. In the context of this research, the mesosystem involves connecting school to two or more microsystems (see Bipath et al., 2021; Bouchard & Smith, 2017; Dishion et al., 2019; Pei et al., 2022). The interpretation of themes is discussed in detail in this section.

Research Question 1

Theme 1

Theme 1 was, General education EC teachers believe applying classroom rules and discipline consistently and using incentives improved their TSRs with students with EBD. According to Hutzler et al. (2019), teachers who have positive experiences tend to have a better TSR with students with EBD. In a mixed-method study on TSR quality and student engagement, Thornberg et al. (2020) noted that positive experiences, such as a higher quality TSRs, produced better behaviors and higher engagement in students with EBD. Thornberg et al.'s findings concur with those of Fitzsimmons et al. (2019) and Endedijk et al. (2022). Negative experiences influence teachers' perceptions regarding students with EBD and their abilities to teach these students. Researchers have also noted that negative experiences contribute to motivational deficiency, burnout, emotional

exhaustion, irritation, negative emotions, guilt, and helplessness when supporting students with EBD (Koenen et al., 2019; Xu & Jia, 2022).

The participants' responses aligned with research demonstrating that negative experiences influence the way teachers perceive their TSRs with students with EBD. P3 shared, "At times, it [EBD behavior] makes it difficult." Reeves and Le Mare (2017) noted that dealing with students with EBD causes teachers to become stressed and fatigued. P5 said, "Well, there are days when it's hard…" Several researchers have noted negative experiences (e.g., managing poor behaviors) contribute to frustration, exhaustion, burnout, and stress (Amstad & Müller, 2020; Corbin et al., 2019; Gagnon et al., 2019; Haydon et al., 2018; Herman et al., 2018; Hopman et al., 2018; Schmidt & Jones-Fosu, 2019). P7 noted, "Teaching was exhausting, and I forgot how every day was so draining."

The teachers in this study had the same expectations for all students, including those with EBD. P2 stated, "I try not to make, like, very large differences between them and the other students as far as expectations, you know, overall class expectations." Lambert et al. (2020), in a study on fifth-grade students with autism, noted that teachers who defined their expectations helped students with EBD follow the norms and rules of the classroom. When teachers clearly outline their expectations for all students (including students with EBD), they set the tone by encouraging positive behaviors and holding students with and without EBD to the same standard of classroom etiquette (Owens et al., 2018). P1 remarked,

> I just treat everybody the same and I just have my expectations for all of my students regardless of if you have a student with EBD or if you are [*sic*] [a] student who is not. You [the student] still have to follow classroom rules, read the same books, play the same games and toys, and you have to care for your things and toys and school supplies in the same manner.

Austin and Peña (2017), in a postsecondary study on students with autism, found that when teachers explicitly state their expectations, it helps students with disabilities understand classroom assignments, learning, and expectations for academic achievement.

One approach for influencing behaviors is incentives. Teachers can manage or modify behaviors by using rewards to reinforce or encourage acceptable conduct among students with EBD (Kauffman & Landrum, 2018; Wang et al., 2021). P6 shared, "I would use an individual behavior tracker as an incentive every 10 minutes or so, because one [the student with EBD], that's how long he could focus." Using rewards is a positive way to prevent negative behaviors and poor academics among students with EBD (Tiernan et al., 2020). P7 stated, "…You know, incentives, you know, that's just the tool that help [sic] him manage his learning…" P4 explained, "I get a lot of incentives, like, the test we just took. I am sending $5 gift cards for those who scored well, including students with EBD…" Reinforcers such as incentives are the foundation for effective instruction and desired behaviors regarding students with EBD (Bettini, Cumming, Brunstring et al., 2020;-Bettini et al., 2019). EC teachers can also draw from the student's strengths and capabilities to encourage cooperation and learning using incentives (Bettini, Cumming, Brunsting, et al., 2020; Scott et al., 2019). P3 stated,

> Especially in early childhood, they [EBD] like to be rewarded. Whether it be a sticker chart, whether it be a gummy bear, Skittles, extra recess time, or computer time, they really like to be rewarded. And as teachers, we have come up with creative ways to incentivize

Research Question 2

Theme 2

Theme 2 was, EC teachers need professionals and paraprofessionals when teaching students with EBD to provide counseling, address social and emotional needs, maintain safety of all students, and manage disruptions to improve their TSRs with students with EBD. Teachers need additional help in the classroom when managing students with EBD. This includes mental health supporters, such as social workers and school counselors, to directly assist teachers in the classroom with students with EBD (Hunter et al., 2018). These providers can help teachers meet the complex needs of students with EBD; therefore, it is critical that mental health professionals and teachers collaborate to address the issues concerning these students (Buckley & Mahdavi, 2018; Cornell & Sayman, 2020).

All participants in this study stated that they need more staff support (e.g., school counselor, social worker, special education teachers, and/or teacher assistant). Teachers expect a reasonable amount of shared responsibility and collaboration with mental health colleagues (Cornell & Sayman, 2020). Teachers and other school professionals are integral in identifying and providing support for mental health issues (external behaviors) regarding students with EBD (Kang-Yi et al., 2018; Kauffman & Badar, 2018). Working

with trained professionals could help teachers manage the classroom environment and student conduct while improving practices regarding how to detect early warning signs of disruptive behaviors among students with EBD (Marsh & Mathur, 2020; Olsen et al., 2020).

Teachers in the study also emphasized that they need more one-on-one support from an educational aide and/or paraprofessional to work with students with EBD in the classroom. In a Swedish article on paraprofessionals in a self-contained classroom with intellectual disabilities, Östlund et al. (2021) stated that teaching students with needs often requires a synchronized collaboration and coordination between staff members. Bronstein et al. (2021) noted as teachers and paraprofessionals work with students with disruptive behaviors it is essential that both individuals effectively communicate, collaborate, and plan together on how to support students in the classroom. P6 stated,

> A one-on-one aid would be helpful…you also want them to have the support they need, if I can't give one-on-one all day then having that one-on-one educational aide would be helpful because they [EBD] will get all the attention they need.

Although the roles and responsibilities of paraprofessionals vary and are multifaced depending on students' needs and/or the classroom context, paraprofessionals help with managing behaviors, and they are viewed as supporters for students' learning (Hirsch et al., 2021; Reddy et al., 2021). One of their primary responsibilities is one-on-one support. Paraprofessionals often provide one-on-one support in small groups to address the specific needs of students. P2 stated, "a one-on-one like a paraprofessional or

someone who can be there to kinda work with them." In an article on adolescents' mental health, Amai (2021) stated that one-on-one support can help students with disabilities control their behaviors and teach students how to recover from their frame of thoughts, while helping them adjust their perception towards future behaviors. Amai's research supports that of Ogundele (2018), who noted that a collaborative process involves various professional observers to provide support not only for teachers but for students with EBD as well. With additional help from mental health professionals and paraprofessional, teachers can deescalate problem behaviors among students with EBD in the classroom.

Theme 3

Theme 3 was EC teachers require parental involvement to understand EBD students' individual needs and family dynamics when teaching students with EBD to build good TSRs. Teachers in the study desired more parental involvement regarding students with EBD. Parental involvement is important for students with disabilities and includes parents as well as the home environment and home activities, but also the teacher, which involves the school environment (Avnet et al., 2019; Ihmeideh et al., 2020; Kalayci & Öz, 2018). P1 stated, "family engagement to find out their home [is like] … to have that homeschool connection … home and school should be on the same page." In EC, parental involvement is needed for the educational process and to support students with disabilities' educational endeavors (Bang, 2018; Guo & Kilderry, 2018; Ilik & Er, 2019). For students with EBD, it is important that parent(s) are involved in their child's education (Avnet et al., 2019).

In a Saudi Arabian study on special needs teachers by Almalki et al. (2021), it was demonstrated that teachers should encourage parents to get involved regarding their child's education. When parent(s) and teachers collaborate, they maximize students with EBD learning and the parents' understanding and confidence in their child's education (Aouad & Bento, 2020; Ihmeideh et al., 2020). Teacher-parent collaboration also allows both parties to build strong and positive relationships. Teachers and parents can exchange knowledge and practices that effectively help and support students with EBD behaviorally and academically. Collaboration helps teachers understand students with EBD' history, culture, and learning process, and provides a better school experience (Adams et al., 2018; Bang, 2018; Chow et al., 2020; Ihmeideh et al., 2020). P1, P2, and P5 mentioned parent relationships and parental involvement. Positive collaboration between home (parents) and school (teachers) forms the foundation of parental involvement (Hakyemez-Paul et al., 2018). Teacher-parent collaboration helps both teachers and parents exchange information regarding education, behaviors, and academics, which also ties back into parental involvement concerning traumas and triggers, which helps build better TSRs and provide a better school outcome for students with EBD.

Despite the benefits of parental involvement, parent-teacher collaboration is not easy (Bang, 2018). Teachers continue to struggle with getting parents engaged in the education process. Parents are not as involved or participate in their child's education when prompted to do so by teachers (Willemse et al., 2018). When asked what would improve student engagement, P6 said, "I would say support from parents." In a study on

parental involvement in secondary schools in Zambia by Mwase et al. (2020), findings showed that parents often do not support the school and the child or attend meetings when approached to address conflicts or issues relating to their child's education. Parents believed it was the teachers' responsibility to discipline and educate students (Mwase et al., 2020). P4 explained, "I need parental support; I need parents to be on board."

Minimal parental involvement and the added responsibility teachers face as a result contribute to the stressors they encounter when teaching students with EBD. This link is noted by researchers who found teachers experienced stress when working with students with EBD (Amstad & Müller, 2020; C. M. Corbin et al., 2019; Haydon et al., 2018; Herman et al., 2018). Teachers and parents are collectively and individually responsible for the education of students with EBD (Äärelä et al., 2018).

Teachers conveyed that they want more training on how to work with students with EBD. Teaching and managing students with EBD are difficult for teachers. In mainstream schools, teachers reported that their daily support for students with EBD is a difficult task (Scott & Burt, 2018; Sutherland, Conroy, McLeod, et al., 2019; Tiernan et al., 2020). Researchers have confirmed that teaching these students is both complex and challenging (French, 2019; Gidlund, 2018; Gidlund & Boström, 2017). In the field of education, specifically EC through early elementary, minimal training makes it difficult for teachers to meet the complex and diverse needs of students with EBD (Brock & Beaman-Diglia, 2018; Sutherland, McLeod, et al., 2019). P5 noted,

> We need more training to, you know, to help us build . . . I didn't have a special ed. [education] background. Somebody who is [from a] special ed. background maybe can come in and tell us what to do.

According to Hirsch et al. (2019), regular education teachers, specifically novice teachers in general education, tend to receive less training in classroom management than special needs teachers. P8 shared,

> I would like more training. Sometimes during the summer, I will sit, and I will take courses for SPED [special education]. . . . I'm not a special education teacher, but I need to take [classes in], like, Autism because you have different degrees of autism: full-blown and the ones that is [*sic*], like, borderline, but I would like more training.

Teachers must be competent to work with students with EBD to meet their various needs. It is important that students with EBD have an effective teacher who is competent, knowledgeable, and skilled to instruct and implement strategies to improve their outcomes (State et al., 2019). However, preschool teachers do not have the necessary training to implement behavior interventions, which makes it challenging to teach students with EBD (Brock & Beaman-Diglia, 2018). Teachers have stated they have limited expertise in classroom management techniques for students with EBD, which makes them feel inadequately prepared to manage them (Beahm et al., 2019; Hirsch et al., 2019).

In an article on secondary students with EBD, Sanders et al. (2018) noted teachers had minimal specialized knowledge, access to resources, or inadequate time for training due to other teaching responsibilities P2 shared,

> I think good training always helps, continuous training to deal with students in this area. . . . Time, we are always in a time crunch, so I definitely think . . . that [it] usually affect [*sic*] [me] a lot when I have to get through curriculum and materials. I also have to think about the well-being of my students, so sometimes one don't [*sic*] balance.

Educators feel unprepared, overwhelmed, and inadequate to deal with students with EBD (Flower et al., 2017; Schonert-Reichl, 2017). Training teachers to implement effective and appropriate behavior management strategies and practices can help them improve the behaviors of students with EBD (Brock & Beaman-Diglia, 2018; Zaheer et al., 2019). The way to continue to close the education gap for teachers is to provide them with supportive communities and opportunities to extend their knowledge through training or professional development that improves practices and creates a better and supportive learning environment that addresses the complex needs of students with EBD (Cornell & Sayman, 2020; McKeown et al., 2019; State et al., 2019).

Teachers felt there was minimal support from school administration. Instructors need this support to successfully teach students with EBD. Although administrative support is essential, it is not always consistently available for teachers (Tran & Dou, 2019). P4 and P8 mentioned the need for administrative support. Teachers often complain about the high demands of teaching and that they feel unsupported by administrators,

which leads to burnout and negative experiences teaching students with EBD (Bettini, Cummung, O'Brien, et al., 2020; Cancio et al., 2018; Hester et al., 2020; Tran & Dou, 2019). This confirms research findings that indicate teacher stress is a factor leading to a negative TSR with students with EBD (Amstad & Müller, 2020; Gagnon et al., 2019; Haydon et al., 2018; Jeon et al., 2019; Sandilos et al., 2018; Schmidt & Jones-Fosu., 2019). Negative experiences that create burnout add to teacher stress. In research on college students with EBD by Tran and Smith (2019), findings indicated that teaching students with EBD continues to be significantly influenced by minimal administrative (i.e., principals) support from leaders. P6 mentioned administrative (i.e., principals) do not want to remove students with EBD from the classroom when they are disrupting learning.

Limitations of the Study

This study has several limitations. Limitations represent weaknesses that could affect the study's results (Pyrczak, 2016; Ross & Zaidi, 2019). The first limitation was geographical location. I conducted the study in a metropolitan area with general education EC teachers from pre-K through third grade. Because the participants were from an urban public school district, the results may only be transferred to a similar setting or context; however, the reader determines transferability of results. The second limitation was sample size. Originally, I proposed 10 to 15 general education EC teachers to obtain sufficient information to answer the RQs. I was only able to recruit nine participants for this study, but despite the small sample size, I collected sufficient data.

The third limitation was my biases. Based on previous experience as a teacher's assistant, I held opinions regarding teachers who work with students with EBD. These included (a) general education EC teachers are reluctant to teach and build relationships with students with EBD because of their poor behaviors, and (b) students are mislabeled as EBD. To make sure I did not allow these or my past experiences to interfere in this study, I kept a reflective journal throughout the data collection and analysis process. I also used an expert reviewer to examine my reflective journal for thoughts and attitudes that might have affected the study's findings or identify any issues that occurred during data collection and analysis. After careful examination, no evidence of bias was found by the expert reviewer. I used an audit trail to document the chronological order of events, provide an examination of my reflective notes, and detail how categories emerged and decisions were made throughout the research process. Using the audit trail allowed me to analyze and interpret the findings without bias.

Through the data collection and analysis process, I made a connection with my research findings and the elements of the conceptual framework and relevant literature concerning general education EC teachers' perspectives of their relationships with students with EBD. A summary of my findings was emailed to each participant to check for accuracy. The participants were satisfied with the summary and no further information was shared or changed.

Recommendations

In this basic qualitative study, I explored the perspectives of general education EC teachers regarding their TSRs and the support they need when teaching students with

EBD. The participants in this study described their TSRs and emphasized the importance of knowing their students. The teachers believed it is important to have the same expectations and rules regarding students with EBD as those without. The participants identified different types of support needed: school counselor, social worker, special education teacher and/or teacher assistant, more training on how to work with students with EBD, support from school administrators, and more parental involvement, The study's findings support the gap in the literature on practice concerning teachers' perspectives of their TSRs and what they need for support when teaching students with EBD. The study findings were the basis for recommendations for future research.

I recommend that this study be duplicated in a public school district with a larger population of teachers in upper elementary grades in a different geographic location. The study may provide similar results or more information to better understand teachers' perspectives of their TSR with students with EBD and what teachers need for support when working with these students. Data collected during this study revealed that the teachers found there was a minimal of administrative support and identified a need for assistance from the school counselor, social worker, and more one-on-one help from paraprofessionals when teaching students with EBD.

Another recommendation is that this study be conducted with upper elementary special education teachers. Gathering the perspectives of upper elementary special education teachers may provide a deeper understanding of their TSRs with students with EBD and the professional development needed to instruct these students effectively. Input from upper elementary special education teachers with 3 or more years' experience

may be important in identifying their specific needs when teaching students with EBD while trying to find ways to build and maintain TSRs with these students.

Implications

Findings from this study indicate that general education EC teachers may benefit from more specific training on how to work with students with EBD. This study may promote positive social change by providing information to administrators and educational leaders regarding best practices for motivating and encouraging general education EC teachers who work with students with EBD. This may lead administrators and school leaders to develop an in-service program that focuses on strategies for building and maintaining TSRs, incorporating interventions at the classroom level, and using techniques for managing negative behaviors or other difficult situations concerning students with EBD.

This study was significant because it allowed teachers to share their perspectives of their TSRs and what they need when instructing students with EBD. General education EC teachers' perspectives provided new insight into the challenges they face when instructing these students. Informing administrators of the challenges teachers encounter when working with students with EBD may prompt the creation of programs and training to help teachers manage the many facets of working with these students. The findings of this study can inform school counselors and social workers so they can develop and implement specific classroom strategies or techniques that help minimize negative behaviors and build stronger and healthier TSRs in the classroom. Sharing this information with parents could help teachers shape a better TSR so both can have clear

educational expectations for students with EBD. Also, teachers can initiate family engagement activities and support groups where parents can talk to other parents who interact with students with EBD.

Conclusion

Much of the research has focused on the negative aspects of TSRs with students with EBD. According to teachers, some TSRs were negative, and some were positive, making a TSR a unique and individualized experience for teachers and students with EBD. Based on the knowledge and experiences of EC teachers, they need support from the school counselor or social worker to build good relationships and help them implement strategies or techniques to handle potential situations regarding students with EBD. EC teachers also want more support from special education teachers and/or teacher assistants to share teaching responsibilities, enhance understanding of EBD as a disability, manage outbursts, and be more hands-on with supporting students with EBD' academic, social, and emotional issues, and maintain safety inside and outside the classroom.

Most EC teachers want more support from school administration because they find themselves frustrated when working with students with EBD, because administrators (i.e., school principals) refuse to remove these students from the classroom even when they exhibit disruptive behaviors. Teachers find themselves frustrated with unclear guidelines or procedures from the administration regarding students with EBD. Meeting and understanding teachers' needs will help administrators support teachers in all classrooms and grades with the goal of working harmoniously with students with EBD.

EC teachers want to establish a teacher-parent relationship to understand family dynamics, the child with EBD, and to establish a good TSR. Understanding the family dynamic gives teachers background information on the family regarding students with EBD' strengths, triggers, and behaviors, which helps inform the teacher before the student enters the classroom and can establish a good teacher-parent relationship that results in a good TSR.

My study contributed new information on general education EC teachers' perspectives of their TSRs and the support they need when instructing students with EBD. What was clear, was that teachers need more support. The findings of this study indicated that most teachers want support from a second person in the classroom. In my study, teachers experienced minimal support from administrators. The majority of administrators do not support teachers and are less involved with dealing with students with EBD. The findings indicated that teachers want administrators to be more hands-on and involved with students with EBD. This study also provides school administrators with information on what they need to be successful in dealing with students with EBD.

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Appendix: Interview Protocol

Interview #_____

Date____/_____/_____

Script

Welcome and thank you for your participation today. My name is Tyesha Greene, and I am doctoral students at Walden University conducting research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a degree in early childhood education. Thank you for agreeing to participate in this in-depth interview process, which will take approximately 45-60 minutes and will include eight questions regarding your perspectives about teacher-student relationships and your needs when teaching students with emotional behavioral disorders (EBD). During the interview, I want your truthful and honest answers about your perspectives regarding students with EBD.

I would like your permission to tape record this interview for accuracy so that the information you provide is conveyed appropriately. If at any time during the interview you wish to discontinue the use of the recorder or the interview itself, please feel free to let me know. Your name will not be shared. All your responses are confidential and only used to develop a better understanding of the support teachers need when educating students with EBD.

At this time, I would like to remind you of your consent form to participate in this study. I am the responsible investigator, acknowledging your participation in the research: a basic qualitative study regarding teachers' perspectives of relationships with students with EBD. You and I have both signed a dated each copy certifying that we

mutually agree to begin this interview. You will receive one copy, and I will keep the other under lock and key, separate from your reported responses. Thank you.

Your participation in this interview is completely voluntary. If at any time you need to stop, take a break, please let me know. You may also withdraw your participation at any time without consequence.

Do you have any questions or concerns before we begin? Then with your permission we will begin the interview.

Interview Questions

1. What is your current position? How long have you served in this position?
2. Tell me about the students with EBD in your classroom (microsystem). How many are currently in your classroom? Tell me about a positive experience with your students with EBD. Tell me about a negative experience with your students with EBD. How did you change this negative experience to a positive one so your students with EBD could have a positive experience?
3. Describe your relationship with students with EBD in your classroom (microsystem). Tell me about an interaction with students with EBD in your classroom. Please give me an example (prompt when necessary): How did this make you feel? How did this experience help further interactions?
4. How do students with EBD affect your classroom environment (microsystem) How do children without EBD affect your classroom environment? Tell me more about this. What steps do you take to minimize any disruptive behavior to maintain a

positive learning environment? What steps do you take to ensure positive relationships between students with EBD and students without EBD?

5. What support do you need to meet the instructional needs of EBD students in your classroom (microsystem) and in school (mesosystem)? What do you need to help students with EBD to solve problems and complete assignments? What do you need to ensure student engagement for students with EBD? What do you need to develop and maintain positive student motivation for students with EBD?
6. What support you need to meet the emotional needs of EBD students in your classroom (microsystem) and in school (mesosystem)? What do you need to foster cooperation between students with EBD and students without EBD? What support do you need to develop and maintain emotional development for students with EBD? For example, what do you need to help students with EBD feel accepted, safe, and calm in the classroom? What do you need to facilitate positive interactions between students with EBD and students without EBD?
7. What do you need to help you as the teacher when supporting EBD students? What support do you need to maintain safety at school?
8. What other information would you like to share with me on this topic?