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Staff Perspectives of Children with Challenging Behaviors in a Preschool Setting

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Walden University

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Abstract

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by

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MA, Cleveland State University, 2007

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Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Abstract

Preschool children exhibiting challenging behaviors are expelled or suspended instead of identified, evaluated, and linked to appropriate services for their needs. This qualitative case study explored preschool teacher, administrator, and technical assistant perspectives related to identifying, evaluating, and linking to appropriate services children with challenging behaviors which the research questions focused on. The research frameworks were the ecological systems theory and assertive behavioral model. Purposeful sampling was used to select 10 teachers, two administrators, and two technical assistants who worked in a preschool center for at least 1 year and experienced one or more past incidents where they had to address challenging student behavior share their perspectives through semistructured interviews. Data were analyzed using inductive analysis. Concept coding was used to code data and answer the research questions. Five themes emerged from the data analysis: (a) formal and informal assessments, (b)managing challenging behaviors, (c)participants' experiences of difficulties, (d) strategies involving communication and collaboration, and (e) successes in addressing challenging behaviors among preschool children. The implication for positive social change is a better understanding of the difficulties school staff encounter when addressing challenging behaviors in the preschool setting. Findings may help school staff understand the need for greater collaboration between educators and parents which could positively support the development and preparation of students and addressing challenging behaviors.

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Dedication

This study is dedicated to my world, my daughter, Taraya C. Cockfield. I love you more than life itself! This study is also dedicated to Billie Osbourne-Fears, who implemented the Special Needs Child Care program in our community. She fought continuously to ensure funding was available for services to be provided to children with challenging behaviors and medical conditions. Billie, your passion for children when implementing the program has placed me in a career that I never imagined. Special Needs Childcare has become my passion and ensuring that children with challenging behaviors thrive in their preschool classrooms because of you. Billie, thank you for spearheading so many projects in our community, rest in Heaven, and you are missed dearly. This study is dedicated to all the preschool children who display challenging behaviors in the classroom setting. I will forever advocate for you to have the opportunity to thrive in your learning environments and bounce back from your behavioral difficulties. I dedicate this study to those community professionals who work endlessly in linking families with the appropriate services. This study is for preschool staff who give their all in educating young children to the best of their ability by providing them a strong foundation to enter their upcoming years of education. Preschool children, staff, and community professionals will always hold a special place in my heart.

Acknowledgments

I would like to give honor to my Heavenly Father for giving me the strength to endure the trials and tribulations of this academic race. I would have never made it to complete this doctorate degree without you. "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13). I also would like to give a special thanks to my parents, Shirley Schaffer and Falandous Tomlinson (Kim), Loretta Schaffer-Zeigler (aunt), Corliss Tomlinson (cousin), Adeitra Jimmison and Ta-Asia Caver, and all who supported me. Thank you all for your encouraging words and prayers for me on this challenging but impressive educational journey. Thanks to my love, Toure Cockfield, for supporting and pushing me to keep going. A special thanks to my late grandmother, Estelle Schaffer, for continuing to encourage me to stay the course. A heartfelt thanks goes out to my Uncle Wilbert Schaffer, who was the most supportive, intelligent person I knew and a second father to me. Rest well, Uncle, and thanks for your encouragement along the way until you were called home. I love you and miss you all dearly. Thank you to Constance Walker for always keeping me abreast of all the new research, training, pilots, and conferences, even having me speak at your trainings. Constance, you have always been my number one fan since I started this journey as a technical assistant, and you always speak highly of me to others. Thank Dr. Donald Yarosz for correcting countless drafts, being resourceful, and respecting my military commitment. The support from you all means the world to me, and I could not have done it without any of you.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

In addition to educating students in age-appropriate lessons and skills, preschool teachers manage addressing challenging behaviors in their classrooms (Walker & Snell, 2013). Among preschool children, challenging behavior is characterized by throwing tantrums, kicking, biting, and using inappropriate words, as well as having difficulty with sharing, following instructions, transitions, and classroom routines (Bellone et al., 2014). Presently, many preschoolers who exhibit challenging behaviors are suspended or expelled rather than being referred to appropriate social or behavioral services (Allen & Smith, 2015).

Although appropriate solutions to address preschool children's challenging behaviors have been researched and implemented, it is not understood why young children are being suspended or expelled rather than being evaluated and linked to appropriate services for their needs (Allen & Steed, 2016; Hallett et al., 2016; Joseph, Hemmeter et al., 2017; McLeod et al., 2017; Price & Steed, 2016; Singh et al., 2013). Thus, I explored the perspectives of preschool teachers, administrators, and technical assistants (TAs) on addressing challenging behaviors to determine why current solutions do not often result in corrected behaviors (McGoey et al., 2013). I examined the perspectives of preschool teachers, administrators, and TAs regarding why preschool teachers would resort to suspension or expulsion when addressing challenging behaviors, the support needed to address challenging behaviors effectively, and the challenges experienced. The goal was to develop solutions to address the needs of preschool students and their teachers more effectively than before.

This chapter serves as an overview of the study. First, background information is provided on the topic. Then, the problem statement is provided, followed by the purpose of the study. The guiding research questions of the study are listed next. Subsequently, the conceptual framework for the study is explained, then, the nature of this qualitative case study is examined. Definitions pertinent to the study are provided after that. Then, the assumptions of the study are presented, followed by the scope and the limitations. The significance and limitations of the study are explored. Lastly, the conclusion to the chapter is provided.

Background

Many preschool children have difficulty adjusting to their classroom settings; as a result, they may demonstrate challenging behaviors (Yoleri, 2013). Voorhees et al. (2013) noted that 10% to 21% of preschoolers would exhibit challenging behaviors. Many preschoolers' exhibit behavioral challenges, but only a few receive services related to social and behavioral needs (Bellone et al., 2014). Such services can include referral to further evaluations for identifying students with special needs. Other students may require behavioral referrals so that behavioral professionals can seek to address the effects of their misbehaviors on their academic success and the positive classroom learning environment.

Preschoolers with challenging behaviors who do not receive appropriate behavioral referrals are often suspended on a reoccurring basis. In 2012, approximately 5,000 preschoolers were suspended in the United States (Allen & Smith, 2015). Almost half of them for a second time. After challenging behaviors are exhibited repeatedly,

children are usually suspended or expelled; when this action occurs, problematic behaviors can remain uncorrected (Allen & Smith, 2015).

Children with misaddressed challenging behaviors have difficulty processing new information academically, participating in daily activities, and developing positive relationships with their peers and teachers (Yoleri, 2013). Yoleri (2013) reported that "children who are unable to adjust in the preschool period display difficulties in both their social relationships and academic success in later grades" (p. 218). McGoey et al. (2013) suggested that "children enrolled in prekindergarten are expelled 3.2 times as often as students in kindergarten through 12th grade" (p. 186). This high expulsion rate prompts a deeper look at why many preschool teachers resort to suspension or expulsion to address challenging student behaviors. Preschool teachers should rather use evidence-based solutions, such as behavioral referrals, to address the causes of behavior instead of removing children from the educational environment (Allen & Smith, 2015).

Teachers must address challenging behaviors using appropriate interventions, such as behavioral plans or referral to community resources. A child's challenging behavior, if left unaddressed, can continue to manifest and have long-term negative outcomes. For example, Poulou (2015) found that behavioral issues could predict school dropouts, poor academic achievement, and adolescent drug abuse. The researcher also linked behavioral challenges to violence and delinquency (Poulou, 2015). However, consistent implementation of appropriate solutions to challenging behaviors can increase children linked with the appropriate resources and decrease children suspended or expelled from preschool classrooms.

Although nearly 30% of children attending Head Start programs demonstrate behavioral issues, only about 2% receive social or behavioral services (Bellone et al., 2014). In many preschools, particularly those that serve low-income families, children are rarely identified and evaluated when challenging behaviors are observed in the classroom (Allen & Smith, 2015). Further, preschool teachers and assistant teachers may not document a child's behavior or implement social and emotional strategies with them after a behavior is identified. According to Voorhees et al. (2013), school personnel in courses that serve at-risk children, such as Head Start, "report less competence in individualizing interventions for children with significant behavioral challenges while indicating that training to address children's challenging behavior is a priority" (p. 173). Singh et al. (2013) found that one out of every 40 children enrolled in prekindergarten were expelled for challenging behaviors. Expulsion and suspension are often used as solutions to address behaviors rather than as a last resort when behavioral referrals and other solutions are ineffective (Singh et al., 2013). For preschoolers' behavioral challenges to be addressed more effectively, researchers should develop a clearer understanding of why preschoolers are not identified, evaluated, and provided appropriate services for challenging behaviors.

Problem Statement

The problem addressed in this study was that in preschools, children exhibiting challenging behaviors were often expelled or suspended instead of being identified, evaluated, and linked to appropriate services for their needs. Although many preschoolers exhibit behavioral issues, such as throwing tantrums, kicking, biting, using inappropriate

words, having difficulty with sharing, struggling to follow instructions and classroom routines, few are referred to behavioral or social services to address these issues (Bellone et al., 2014). If students exhibiting problematic behavior are not referred to behavioral or social services, they are often suspended one or more times for their behaviors without significant attempts to develop a plan for behavioral correction. However, suspension and expulsion rarely work as strategies to correct problematic behavior and may have unintended consequences for students (Allen & Smith, 2015; Coplan et al., 2015). Students who experience early childhood expulsion or suspension are 10 times more likely to drop out of school before earning their high school diplomas, experience grade retention, and have lower grades than their peers who were not suspended or expelled in early childhood (Gilliam, 2016). Thus, the findings of this study presented the perspectives of preschool teachers, administrators, and TAs regarding identifying, evaluating, and linking preschool children who had exhibited challenging behaviors to the appropriate services for their needs rather than suspending or expelling them.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the perspectives of preschool teachers, administrators, and technical assistants regarding how children with challenging behaviors were identified, evaluated, and linked to appropriate services. I also explored the support that preschool teachers, administrators, and TAs would need to address challenging behaviors effectively and how preschool teachers described their experiences in addressing students' challenging behaviors. Within the context of this study, challenging behaviors were characterized by throwing tantrums, kicking, biting, using

inappropriate words, having difficulty with sharing, and struggling to follow instructions and classroom routines (Voorhees et al., 2013). The research paradigm that guided this study was the constructivist paradigm; this research paradigm assumes reality is "constructed" from each person's subjective experiences rather than there being a single objective reality (Ponterotto, 2005).

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the present study:

RQ1: What are the perspectives of preschool teachers, administrators, and technical assistants about children with challenging behaviors are identified, evaluated, and linked to support services?

RQ2: How do preschool teachers describe their experiences in addressing children's challenging behaviors?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual frameworks that guided this study included Bronfenbrenner's (2000) ecological systems theory and Canter and Canter's (1976) assertive behavioral model. Bronfenbrenner's (2000) ecological systems theory addresses human development and how different environments can influence behavior. The theory centers on how environments can fuel and steer student development. The interactions of the student's immediate and larger environment can affect their development positively or negatively. Suspension and expulsion practices in the early learning environment may impede a child's capacity to thrive in their environment and delay the process of identifying and addressing underlying issues. The U.S. Department of Health and Human

Services and U.S. Department of Education (2014) reported that when young students were suspended or expelled, they would become 10 times more likely to drop out of high school, experience grade retention or academic failure, face incarceration, and hold negative attitudes in comparison to others. Thus, determining why suspension and expulsion are often used as strategies to correct challenging behavior instead of behavioral referrals is pertinent because suspension and expulsion may exacerbate challenging behaviors instead of correcting them (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services & U.S. Department of Education, 2014).

Bronfenbrenner's (2000) theory includes four influential systems outside of the individual: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem. The microsystem includes the associations and exchanges a child has with their immediate environment. Early suspension and expulsion practices in preschool may set many children's educational learning experiences in a negative direction; thus, these strategies must not be relied on in lieu of behavioral referrals and similar corrective tactics. The U.S. Department of Education and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2014) discovered that over 10% of preschool teachers in state-funded prekindergarten programs reported expelling at least one preschooler in the previous year, and 39% expelled a preschooler in the previous year. The application of Bronfenbrenner's (2000) theory within the context of this study facilitated a new understanding of environmental factors critical to a child's development during their preschool years.

Another theory included in the framework of this study was Canter and Canter's (1976) assertive behavioral model. This theory addresses the processes and factors

involved when educators address challenging student behavior. Further, this theory addresses how disciplinary choices can affect students' behaviors in the future. Canter and Canter asserted that certain conditions must be met for disciplinary actions to be used as a strategy to mitigate challenging student behaviors. Behaviors need to be actively addressed, and educators should voice what they disapprove of and indicate how they would like the student to behave instead.

This theory was used to frame the factors that influenced exchanges between children and their educators when challenging behaviors were being addressed. The holistic quality of this theory accounted for the needs of both educators and students. When the needs of either educators or students remained unmet, the situation could have negative reactions that might worsen challenging behaviors. For example, students taught in an authoritarian way may feel a lack of compassion and attention, possibly increasing the likelihood they will feel misunderstood and act out. From an educator's perspective, a lack of institutional support or trust from students' parents can decrease patience for student misbehavior and affect the severity of punishments (Voorhees et al., 2013). In this way, the assertive behavior model may help to explain the factors and challenges that lead many preschool personnel to avoid employing behavioral referrals or intervention tactics, instead resorting to suspension or expulsion (Canter & Canter, 1976).

Nature of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the perspectives of preschool teachers, administrators, and technical assistants regarding how children with challenging behaviors are identified, evaluated, and linked to appropriate services. I also explored the

support that preschool teachers would need to address challenging behaviors effectively and how preschool teachers described their experiences in addressing students' difficult behaviors. I used a case study design (e.g., an in-depth investigation of a single instance of a phenomena based on a collection of data; Creswell, 2012). Therefore, a case study was an appropriate research design to address the research questions of this study because it allowed for an in-depth examination of participants' lived experiences by examining their perspectives in the work environment (Creswell, 2012). I used inductive analysis to analyze data collected from the interviews. I used concept coding to code the data.

I interviewed 10 preschool teachers, two school administrators, and two TAs recruited from two separate preschools. The research occurred in two preschool centers in a small county located in the southern part of the state. I conducted interviews at their workplace on the teachers' lunch breaks or at the library at the scheduled times proposed by the participants. The location of the interview was at the discretion of the participants, but they were all held in a public setting.

Definitions

The following definitions were chosen to provide clarity to the content of this study.

Behavioral intervention: These plans and strategies are developed to address problematic behaviors. Such interventions are developed when behaviors are reoccurring and do not improve after simpler disciplinary measures are taken (Sørlie et al., 2015).

Behavioral referral: This written form is submitted by a teacher to the schools' administration recommending disciplinary actions more serious than those taken in the

classroom. Such referrals may indicate the need for support from a technical assistance program or similar services (Bellone et al., 2014).

Challenging behavior: Within the context of preschool children, challenging behaviors include throwing tantrums, kicking, biting, and using inappropriate words. Children with challenging behaviors also have difficulty with sharing, following instructions, transitions, and classroom routines (Walker & Snell, 2013).

Technical assistance program: These programs provide resources and plan interventions for students whose learning or behavioral needs extend beyond what teachers are trained to address (Bellone et al., 2014).

Assumptions

This study was a qualitative study using interviews to collect data; thus, I maintained a few assumptions. I assumed that all responses given during the interview portion of this research were honest and accurate. I assumed that all participants were knowledgeable about preschoolers' challenging behaviors because of their experiences; therefore, their responses were accurate. I assumed that some certain factors or problems had led to preschool teachers' decisions to expel or suspend students as a solution for addressing problematic behaviors rather than referring them to appropriate behavioral services. I made this assumption based on the high prevalence of suspension and expulsion rates in preschools and the known consequences and ineffectiveness of using these strategies to correct challenging behavior. This assumption was a necessary step in seeking solutions to challenging behaviors that would not contribute to the high

prevalence of preschool suspension and expulsion (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services & U.S. Department of Education, 2014).

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of this study included the perspectives of preschool teachers, administrators, teachers, and TAs regarding how children with challenging behaviors were identified, evaluated, and linked to appropriate services. The scope also showed the support preschool teachers would need to address challenging behaviors effectively and how preschool teachers described their experiences in addressing students' difficult behavior. This focus was chosen due to the prevalence of suspensions or expulsions as a means of addressing behavioral problems in preschoolers, a method that had seen little success in correcting or improving problematic behavior (Allen & Smith, 2015). Other populations, such as students in higher grade levels, were not considered because the research problem was specific to preschool children. Expulsion and suspension were prevalent at the research site, making this focus applicable to participating institutions. Thus, the research had to be conducted to get a better understanding of why these ineffective strategies were used in lieu of behavioral referrals or similar options.

This study was delimited to preschool teachers, TAs, and administrators working in preschools. Other populations and school personnel were excluded from the sample because they were less likely to have relevant or recent perspectives about this phenomenon. Findings from this study might effectively inform understanding of the challenges that teachers of similar grade levels, such as kindergarten, face when addressing problematic behaviors and why expulsions and suspensions occur so often.

Transferability describes the process of conceptually seeking to apply the findings of a study to other research contexts (Yin, 2015). Yin (2015) recommended considering explanations for findings outside of the initial research hypothesis or primary explanation of the results. Thus, the research context and explanation of findings provided later in this research included considerations of what might have affected teachers' responses and how the research setting might have affected results. Findings from this research may be transferable to other populations of preschool teachers who have addressed challenging behavior among their students.

Limitations

Some limitations applied to this study that warranted consideration. First, although the sample size of 10 teachers, two administrators, and two TAs was adequate for achieving data saturation (Fusch & Ness, 2015), the findings might not be transferred to a larger population. Next, because all the participants were recruited from the same geographical area, their challenges and perspectives might have been influenced by regional norms. For instance, school systems in certain regions might support or even encourage using suspension and expulsion for many preschool students who had demonstrated challenging behaviors, and school systems in other areas might discourage this practice. Finally, the research design also presented a limitation because qualitative research could involve smaller sample sizes; thus, there were fewer data to draw conclusions from than when quantitative methods might be used (see Yin, 2015). Further, participating teachers might have altered their interview responses due to concerns that the perspectives would affect their teaching positions; if the participants tried to answer

in a way that reflected well on them, they might not have been honest about the pertinent information provided. This information might not be reliable to address the research questions. To ensure this issue did not limit the credibility or reliability of the study, participants were explicitly informed that their names would not be associated with their interview responses in the published study; instead, a pseudonym was used in place of their name (i.e., "Teacher A," "Teacher B," and so forth).

Significance

This study is significant because its findings will be used to address a gap in research concerning the perspectives of preschool teachers, administrators, and TAs regarding children with challenging behaviors being identified, evaluated, and linked to the appropriate services for their needs and how preschool teachers describe their experiences in addressing children's challenging behaviors. Presently, many preschoolers who present significant behavioral challenges remain unidentified and are not referred for appropriate services to address and correct their behaviors (Gilliam, 2016). This study may contribute to the early childhood setting by increasing the understandings of the perspectives of teachers, administrators, and TAs on this issue.

This study may address the gap in professional practice by encouraging additional institutional support for preschool teachers, administrators, and TAs while determining why expulsion and suspension are commonly used as challenging behavioral solutions instead of being reserved for particularly severe cases. These insights may encourage a shift from ineffective disciplinary tactics used by some preschool teachers (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services & U.S. Department of Education, 2014). This

research may also facilitate positive social change through an increased number of preschoolers' challenging behaviors being addressed appropriately by staff. This process may lead to more efficient correction of problematic student behaviors than before so that more preschoolers can be successful in their learning environments, as opposed to being suspended or expelled.

Summary

In summary, the problem addressed in this study was that in preschools, children exhibiting challenging behaviors were often expelled or suspended instead of being identified, evaluated, and linked to appropriate services for their needs. Thus, the purpose of this study was to explore the perspectives of preschool teachers, administrators, and technical assistants regarding how children with challenging behaviors were identified, evaluated, and linked to appropriate services. I also explored the support preschool teachers would need to address challenging behaviors effectively and how preschool teachers described their experiences in addressing children's challenging behaviors. The research paradigm that guided this study was the constructivist paradigm; this research paradigm assumes reality is "constructed" from each person's subjective experiences rather than there being a single objective reality (Ponterotto, 2005). The conceptual framework that guided this study included Bronfenbrenner's (2000) ecological systems theory and Canter and Canter's (1976) assertive behavioral model.

A qualitative case study design was used to explore the perspectives of preschool teachers, administrators, and TAs regarding the challenges encountered when addressing students' behavioral concerns. Ten preschool teachers, two preschool administrators

recruited from two separate preschools, and two TAs from two separate agencies were interviewed for this research. The findings from this study might inform other early childhood educators of the appropriate ways to address challenging behaviors in the classroom setting.

The following chapter is a systematic review of the literature pertinent to the topic of the present study. First, the theoretical framework of the study, Bronfenbrenner's (2000) ecological systems theory and Canter and Canter's (1976) assertive behavioral model, is reviewed. Next, relevant literature is reviewed categorically. Topics reviewed include challenging childhood behavior in the early childhood classroom, risk factors for challenging childhood behavior, short- and long-term outcomes related to challenging childhood behaviors, teachers' perceptions of challenging student behaviors, and how challenging behaviors are addressed in the classroom. Lastly, a summary is provided.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

I addressed the problem of children exhibiting challenging behaviors being expelled or suspended instead of being identified, evaluated, and linked to appropriate services for their needs. The purpose of this study was to explore the perspectives of preschool teachers, administrators, and technical assistants regarding how children with challenging behaviors are identified, evaluated, and linked to appropriate services. I further explored the support that preschool teachers need to address challenging behaviors effectively and how preschool teachers described their experiences in addressing students' challenging behaviors. Jolstead et al. (2017) estimated that 33% of preschool-aged students in the United States displayed problematic conduct. Failure to address challenging behaviors appropriately and early with evidence-based practices may lead to an increased likelihood of students struggling with academic success, social rejection, and mental health problems (Poulou, 2015). Further, suspension and expulsion are often used as solutions to challenging behaviors rather than the last option if all others fail, which can have lasting and negative impacts on developing children (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services & U.S. Department of Education, 2014).

This chapter includes a systematic literature review relevant to this study's topic. First, the literature search strategy is detailed. Next, the conceptual framework of the study is presented. Then, relevant literature is categorically reviewed. The topics discussed include challenging childhood behavior in the early childhood classroom, risk factors for challenging childhood behavior, short- and long-term outcomes related to challenging childhood behavior, teachers' perceptions of challenging student behaviors,

and how challenging behaviors are addressed in the classroom. Lastly, a summary is provided.

Literature Search Strategy

I located scholarly articles for this review of literature using the following electronic databases: Academic Search Complete, Education Source, Education Research Complete, ProQuest Central, PsychINFO, and Thoreau. The search engines used consisted of EBSCOHost and Google Scholar. The following search terms were used: *challenging behaviors*, *problem behaviors*, *preschool teachers*, *challenging behavior interventions*, *addressing challenging behaviors*, *challenging preschool behaviors*, *preschool classroom management*, *challenging behavior evaluation*, *challenging behavior assessment*, *correcting challenging behavior*, *preschool suspension*, *preschool expulsion*, *preschool children*, and *staff perceptions*. I also used the term *problem behaviors* to populate current research because the search engines produced more results with this term instead of *challenging behaviors*. All the databases were searched using all keywords and phrases identified to maximize the relevant literature produced. I reviewed each result and then filtered out articles irrelevant to the topic of my dissertation. Most reviewed articles were written within the last 5 years regarding relevance to the topic of this doctoral dissertation.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual frameworks that underpinned this study consisted of Bronfenbrenner's (2000) ecological systems theory and Canter and Canter's (1976) assertive behavioral model. Bronfenbrenner's (2000) ecological systems theory addresses

human development and how different environments can influence behaviors. Bronfenbrenner (2000) stated that environments and environmental factors could influence childhood development. Interactions within a child's immediate and larger environment affect their development in positive or negative ways. Suspension and expulsion practices may interfere with a preschooler's ability to succeed in the learning environment, as well as delay the process of addressing underlying issues that cause behavioral problems. The U.S Department of Health and Human Services and the U.S Department of Education (2014) noted that when young children were expelled or suspended, they would face a tenfold increase in terms of dropping out of high school, experiencing grade retention or academic failure, becoming incarcerated, and hold negative attitudes toward class work compared to others.

Bronfenbrenner's (2000) theory includes four influential systems outside of the individual: the microsystem, mesosystem, ecosystem, and macrosystem. The microsystem includes the relationships and interactions a child has within their immediate environment, including when in a school setting. The U.S Department of Health and Human Services and the U.S Department of Education (2014) found that more than 10% of preschool teachers in prekindergarten programs funded by the state reported expelling at least one preschooler in the previous year. Additionally, 39% of preschool teachers in nonstate-funded programs expelled a child within the past year (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services & U.S. Department of Education, 2014). Applying Bronfenbrenner's (2000) theory within the present research context can

lend insight regarding how high-quality environments and environmental factors are critical to a child's optimal development.

Other researchers have applied Bronfenbrenner's (2000) ecological systems theory to examine aspects of problematic behaviors among children, although not from the perspectives of preschool teachers. Atzaba-Poria et al. (2004) examined whether risks related to problematic childhood behavior worked cumulatively or individually, as well as whether the risk for problematic behavior stemmed from the environmental system or different levels of children's behaviors determined by age. In total, 125 children and their parents participated by completing a questionnaire and a videotaped interaction activity. Problematic behavior triggered during children development and their interactions with caregivers and parents had cumulative effects. The bad behavior in children was contributed by individuals (caregivers or parents), exosystem, and microsystem. The children might learn the bad behavior from caregivers, as children learned from adults during their development milestones. These findings offer insights for Bronfenbrenner's (2000) ecological systems theory being an effective lens to guide the understanding of teachers on how facets of a student's environment affect their conduct. Bronfenbrenner's theory can also help to explain how the decisions preschool teachers make when addressing challenging behaviors can influence their preschool students' development.

Canter and Canter's (1976) assertive behavioral model also informed this study. This theory addresses the processes and factors involved when educators acknowledge challenging student behaviors and discipline them accordingly. The scope of this theory goes further to address the effects of disciplinary choices on future student behaviors.

Canter and Canter stated that for disciplinary actions to be effective, the behaviors should be addressed actively, educators must clearly voice what they disapprove of, and they must then concisely indicate how they would like the student to behave. In this study, this theory framed the factors that influenced interactions between students and their teachers when challenging behaviors were addressed and guided developing the research questions. In this way, the assertive behavior model helped to explain the factors and challenges that might lead many preschool teachers to avoid employing effective tactics, such as behavioral referrals or interventions, instead resorting to suspension or expulsion.

Sahin-Sak et al. (2016) found that participating teachers preferred models of classroom management that were more child focused than teacher focused. The participating teachers believed more strongly in holding students accountable for their actions than taking credit for how their missteps could impact students' behaviors. Thus, most participants did not prefer Canter and Canter's (1976) model because it emphasized how teachers' disciplinary choices and interactions with students would influence students' behavior.

Literature Review Related to Key Concepts and Variable

This review of literature includes existing literature that focuses on challenging behaviors in the early childhood classroom setting, teachers' perceptions surrounding these behaviors, and methods that have been suggested for addressing these behaviors. Although many solutions to preschool students' challenging behaviors have been proposed in the literature, these solutions are often overlooked in practice in lieu of the ineffective strategies of expulsion or suspension for undetermined reasons (U.S.

Department of Health and Human Services & U.S. Department of Education, 2014).

After all the relevant research to the topic of the present study is discussed, a summary is

provided to conclude the chapter.

Challenging Childhood Behavior in the Early Childhood Classroom

   Challenging behavior in children is characterized by throwing tantrums, kicking,

biting, using inappropriate words while having difficulty with sharing, following

instructions, transitions, and classroom routines (Walker & Snell, 2013). Over time,

challenging behaviors can become increasingly disruptive and affect the quality of

learning for other students in the classroom (Axelrad et al., 2013). Teachers who must

devote a significant portion of their day to addressing challenging behaviors have less

time to teach, lead activities, and enrich their students' lives. Considering this

information, the consequences of problematic preschool behaviors affect both teachers

and students. Axelrad et al. (2013) examined challenging preschool student behaviors and

the need for intervention when such behavior was displayed. Axelrad et al. found that

disruptive behaviors could cause stress for parents and their children, contributing to a

stressful home environment and causing or worsening the challenging behaviors

displayed. These researchers suggested that parent management education could improve

children's problematic conduct effectively.

   Because preschool children experience changes to their interests and

temperaments frequently, they are likely to exhibit challenging behaviors (Poulou, 2015).

Preschoolers have not reached an age when their personality characteristics, actions, and

other traits are salient; thus, shifts in temperaments and behaviors can happen often.

Poulou (2015) conducted an in-depth examination of the behavioral and emotional challenges experienced by children who were of preschool age and discovered that it was critical to address challenging behaviors during the preschool period in a child's life than in the years before or after. The researcher asserted this aspect was because when emotional or behavioral problems arose during the early years and remained unaddressed, it was likely they would develop into long-term patterns that were harder to correct (Poulou, 2015). Poulou's (2015) findings indicate the importance of understanding the challenges educators face when dealing with problematic behaviors in preschool students, as well as why it is so important for effective techniques to be used when challenging student behavior is addressed. Preschool teachers' access to professional support and resources is also imperative during times when presented with challenging student behavior and must decide what steps are appropriate to address it.

Rescorla et al. (2011) examined the prevalence of challenging behavior among preschool children. The researchers conducted an international study concerning behavioral and emotional issues, drawing on parental reports of preschool children from 24 societies. The results indicated that age and gender did not significantly affect the prevalence of behavioral challenges. Additionally, the authors noted that in most countries included in the study, the number of children who displayed problematic behavior was significantly large, although a negligible number was referred to social or mental health services. Their findings demonstrated that although behavioral challenges were relatively prevalent among preschool-aged children in many societies, these challenges remained unaddressed by trained professionals (Rescorla et al., 2011).

Leaving such behavioral concerns unaddressed can then lead to long- and short-term adverse outcomes for students displaying such behaviors in the home and educational setting (Yoleri, 2013). Findings from this international research reflect a U.S. trend noted in the problem of the present study, where research-based services and resources for problematic student behaviors were under-utilized in comparison to suspension and expulsion in the preschool classroom setting.

Friedman-Krauss et al. (2014) stated that when challenging behavior was prevalent in a preschool classroom, it might affect the teachers' stress levels and the classroom climate. The researchers studied whether teacher stress influenced the association between the classroom's emotional climate and challenging classroom behaviors. The data for the study were sourced from two samples of teachers from low-income preschools. The researchers found that when teacher stress levels were moderate, the classroom climate was more positive; conversely, when teacher stress levels were either low or high, the classroom climate tended to be more negative. The researchers concluded that addressing challenging behaviors was imperative to ensuring the overall classroom climate would not suffer; the stress experienced by teachers when addressing challenging behaviors can impact their interaction with students (Friedman-Krauss et al., 2014). These results demonstrate the significance of preschool teachers using effective coping methods for stress, as well as the importance of having support options available to address challenging student behaviors.

In summary, challenging behaviors among children are demonstrated through throwing tantrums, kicking, biting, and using inappropriate words while having difficulty

with sharing, following instructions, transitions, and classroom routines (Walker & Snell,

2013). Stress for parents, as well as their children, can be caused by disruptive childhood

behavior and may contribute to negative home environments (Axelrad et al., 2013).

Therefore, one should address challenging behaviors during the preschool period in a

child's life rather than in later years. When behavioral problems arise during these years

and remain unaddressed, it is likely they will develop into long-term patterns that are

harder to correct (Poulou, 2015). Despite the prevalence of behavioral challenges among

preschool-aged children in many societies, these challenges remain unaddressed using

effective techniques (Rescorla et al., 2011). Unaddressed behavioral concerns can then

lead to adverse short- and long-term outcomes (Yoleri, 2013).

Risk Factors for Challenging Childhood Behavior

When considering how challenging childhood behaviors are addressed in the

classroom, one should consider the risk factors and outside contexts that may contribute

to those behaviors. Indeed, choosing a solution to address challenging preschool

behaviors can be ineffective if risk factors that impact preschoolers remain unaccounted

(Bornovalova et al., 2014). Bornovalova et al. (2014) explored how childhood disruptive

behavior disorders (DBDs) were related to familial risk factors for challenging behaviors.

DBDs make children more likely to exhibit challenging behavior; thus, challenging

behaviors and DBDs are closely related. In total, 606 families partook in the study, and

Bornovalova et al. found that marital discord and maladaptive parenting were associated

with childhood DBDs. Additionally, biological parents with antisocial personality

characteristics demonstrated a greater tendency to influence their children's DBDs more

negatively than adoptive parents. Overall, the researchers attributed the correlations between familial risk factors and childhood DBDs to a passive gene-environment relationship (Bornovalova et al., 2014).

Bornovalova et al.'s (2014) results indicate that understanding the familial risk factors present in a student's family may explain certain challenging behaviors in the academic environment. Determining the external factors that may influence a student's challenging behavior can aid in addressing the cause if predisposition is unrelated to genetic factors. Besides, most existing research has indicated the strong influence of external and nongenetic factors on challenging behaviors (Buist & Vermande, 2014; Rijlaarsdam et al., 2014; Waller et al., 2014).

Another familial risk factor that can make challenging childhood behavior more likely is maternal maltreatment (Rijlaarsdam et al., 2014). Rijlaarsdam et al. (2014) explored how mothers' histories of childhood maltreatment were related to behavioral and emotional problems exhibited by their children. In total, 4,438 families with children from infancy to age 6 were sampled in the study. The data from the survey consisted of parental questionnaire data, checklist assessments completed by parents regarding their children's behavior, and interviews with the participating children. The researchers found indirect effects linking historical maltreatment of mothers to behavioral problems exhibited by their children; this effect occurred through the mechanism of harsh discipline and hostility exhibited by mothers with a history of maltreatment. Rijlaarsdam et al.'s findings indicate that mothers, potentially all parents who have a history of being mistreated, may have an increased likelihood of making parenting decisions that can

exacerbate challenging childhood behavior in their offspring. Mothers who have experienced childhood maltreatment are more likely to take on hostile and authoritarian parenting styles, exacerbating their children's behavioral issues. In turn, their children's challenging behaviors may be exhibited more in the preschool classroom setting than other environments.

Similarly, Waller et al. (2014) examined how callous-unemotional childhood behaviors, parental warmth, and behavioral problems among preschool-aged children were associated. In total, 731 pairs of mothers and their children partook in this study. The researchers found that callous-unemotional behaviors exhibited by children were predicted by parental warmth, although associations between parental warmth and other childhood behavioral problems were not as significant. Thus, the researchers suggested that behavioral interventions for children demonstrating problematic behaviors between the ages of 2 and 3 years should focus on the influence of parental warmth and how parents interact with their children (Waller et al., 2014). This form of behavioral intervention was suggested to mitigate the challenging behaviors demonstrated in the home, classroom, and other environments related to a lack of parental warmth.

Parent-child relationship qualities are not the only familial dynamics that can increase the risk of challenging childhood behaviors (Buist & Vermande, 2014). Buist and Vermande (2014) explored how sibling relationship patterns had affected childhood behavior. Questionnaires for this study were distributed to 1,670 Dutch preschool-aged children. The researchers grouped the siblings who participated in three clusters based on the degrees of affection and struggle present in their association with their sibling. The

researchers found that siblings with high-conflict relationship patterns demonstrated more externalized and internalized issues, lower social competence, lower academic performance, and less global self-worth. Overall, sibling relationships low in warmth and high in conflict were the most detrimental, involving their associations with problematic behavior and other developmental issues. Buist and Vermande's (2014) findings suggest that perhaps familial interventions intended to improve children's behavior should focus on both parent-child and sibling relationships so that challenging behaviors demonstrated in environments, such as the home and classroom setting, can be reduced.

Holtz et al. (2015) stated that socioeconomic status might also influence challenging behaviors exhibited by children. Holtz et al. explored how prevalent behavioral problems were in preschool children living below the poverty line. The researchers noted that previous literature had found that challenging behaviors were more common in children living in poverty than in children living above the poverty line. Holtz et al. used a sample of 357 children aged 5 years and younger living in poverty in a low-income urban area. A questionnaire was given to the children's parents to assess their behaviors. The researchers found that younger children and boys were more likely to externalize behavior. Out of all the participants, 17.4% scored significantly higher than the mean number of challenging behaviors for their age group. The researchers noted that although programs were available to address challenging behaviors in preschool students from low-socioeconomic families, there was a lack of training programs that would help teachers to identify effectively which students should be placed in behavioral programs (Holtz et al., 2015).

Holtz et al.'s (2015) findings indicate that socioeconomic status can affect the behaviors exhibited by young children in indirect ways. As such, further interventions and institutional strategies aimed at improving challenging student behavior need to exist based on a shared understanding of what behavior is considered problematic and how specific behavioral situations can be addressed. A lack of consistency or other problems that may occur when ineffectively trained teachers seek to address challenging behaviors may lead to those behaviors getting worse instead of better (Poulou, 2017).

Additionally, Sivertsen et al. (2015) opined that if young children demonstrated problems sleeping through the night, they might be more likely to exhibit behavioral and emotional issues during their preschool years. The researchers explored the effects of sleep issues in toddlers and whether they affected emotional and behavioral problems when those children reached preschool age. The researchers conducted a large population-based longitudinal study; data for this research were sourced from the Norwegian Mother and Child Cohort Study. In total, data from 32,662 children were included in this research. Their mothers helped to assess the duration of sleep experienced by the participating children. The researchers found that sleeping for less than 10 hr or frequently waking up in the middle of the night at 1.5 years of age effectively predicted conduct and emotional issues at age 5. Based on this finding, the researchers suggested that future researchers should examine how interventions aimed at improving young children's sleep patterns could mitigate challenging behaviors (Sivertsen et al., 2015). Challenging behaviors that could be related to sleep issues during

the developmental years might influence their conduct in the educational setting once they reached preschool.

Doi et al. (2015) also found that children's sleep patterns could influence their likelihood to exhibit behavioral issues. This researcher surveyed Japanese preschoolers regarding their health and sleep patterns. The researcher surveyed 312 girls and 342 boys. The researcher found that chronotype, which represented preferred times of day to sleep that are unique to everyone, significantly impacted behavioral problems. Evening-types and neither-types were associated with inattentiveness and hyperactivity, and evening-types were associated with conduct and peer issues. Thus, the researcher determined that children with an evening-type preference were more likely to demonstrate behavioral issues and social jetlag. These findings provide further evidence that establishing healthy and natural sleep patterns early in childhood is essential to ensuring that sleep problems do not result in behavioral issues, particularly around preschool age (Doi et al., 2015).

Although currently there is no research linking classroom factors to problematic behaviors, indirect connections have been discovered in relation to teachers' stress levels, challenging behavior, and classroom climate. Such research demonstrates the interconnected nature of classroom factors and challenging behavior (Friedman-Krauss et al., 2014). Another researcher discovered a connection between the emotional intelligence of teachers and certain emotional reactions and behaviors exhibited by young students, although this relationship was heavily mediated by students' social skill set (Poulou, 2017). These findings indicate that although there is little evidence to suggest that classroom factors directly influence a child's likelihood of demonstrating challenging

behaviors, teachers' affect, classroom climate, and similar factors may affect the frequency or severity of students' behavioral challenges that stem from other causes (Friedman-Krauss et al., 2014; Poulou, 2017).

In summary, a myriad of factors can influence the likelihood that children will demonstrate challenging behaviors (Bornovalova et al., 2014). Understanding risk factors present in a student's family or home life may explain certain disruptive behaviors in the classroom (Bornovalova et al., 2014). Maternal maltreatment can make problematic childhood behaviors increasingly likely, and parents mistreated in the past may be more likely to make parenting decisions that exacerbate challenging childhood behaviors than others (Rijlaarsdam et al., 2014). Parental warmth displayed when parents interact with their children can also greatly impact children's behaviors (Waller et al., 2014). Parent-child relationship qualities are not the only familial dynamics that can increase the risk for challenging childhood behaviors; sibling relationships low in warmth and high in conflict are the most detrimental within the context of problematic behaviors and developmental issues. Socioeconomic status may also influence challenging behaviors exhibited by children (Holtz et al., 2015). Children who have problems sleeping through the night may also be more prone to behavioral and emotional issues during their preschool years (Sivertsen et al., 2015). Although challenging student behaviors may stem from causes outside the classroom, teacher- and classroom-related factors may affect the frequency or severity of students' behavioral challenges (Friedman-Krauss et al., 2014; Poulou, 2017).

Short and Long-Term Outcomes Related to Challenging Childhood Behavior

The transition process from home to school is difficult for many preschoolers, and it could result in problem behavior. Yoleri (2013) stated that approximately 48% of students would not successfully transition from home to preschool. Early childhood professionals are concerned with the emotional and behavioral difficulties that preschoolers display in the classroom setting (Poulou, 2015). Affective and behavioral challenges demonstrated by students reflect a growing problem for early childhood professionals. Both the number of preschoolers' behavioral problems and the severity of those problems have increased over time.

Behavioral problems are not only a concern for early childhood professionals but pediatricians as well. Approximately 33% of preschool children demonstrate severe disruptive conduct problems, causing conduct issues to be the largest source of functional impairment among students (Yoleri, 2013). Yoleri (2013) found that pediatric populations who could not adjust to the preschool setting might display problems in their peer relationships and educational success. Challenging behaviors can interfere with a child's learning and daily routines in the classroom setting, which then interferes with how the child learns new concepts and applies concepts in their environment (Park & Lynch, 2014). The life-long impact of challenging behaviors can result in continuous poor decision-making and outcomes as an adult. Ocasio et al. (2015) noted difficult conduct that impedes the preschool classroom is more common now and can result in poor outcomes in adulthood, such as crime, violence, antisocial behavior, and substance abuse. Although the negative implications of challenging childhood behavior are still

being understood, recent research findings have shown that such effects are plentiful and far-reaching (Ocasio et al., 2015; Park & Lynch, 2014).

In summary, the recent increase in the frequency and severity of preschool children experiencing behavioral problems highlights concerns about outcomes related to preschoolers' challenging behaviors (Poulou, 2015). Problematic behavior is also a concern for early childhood professionals, pediatricians, parents, and other adult stakeholders (Yoleri, 2013). Approximately 33% of preschool children exhibit disruptive and severe conduct problems, making behavioral problems the most significant source of functional impairment among pediatric populations (Yoleri, 2013). Fifty percent of young students who reflect behavioral difficulties continue to display behavioral problems throughout their lives. Effects stemming from challenging childhood behavior are still being explored and understood through research (Ocasio et al., 2015; Park & Lynch, 2014). The prevalence and severe implications of challenging childhood behavior highlight the urgency of the current research problem.

Teachers' Perceptions of Challenging Student Behaviors

How teachers perceive challenging behaviors exhibited by their students can influence how they choose to address behavioral issues (Stormont & Young-Walker, 2017). Stormont and Young-Walker (2017) examined the perceptions of teachers regarding the challenging behaviors encountered in the classroom, as well as their stress, support, and commitment to addressing those behaviors. The researchers surveyed 100 professionals involved in early childhood education. The researchers found that the participants perceived that as the number of challenging behaviors encountered by early

childhood education teachers increased, their levels of stress also increased. Additionally, the participating teachers reported that as their stress levels increased, they were more likely to feel burnout and provide less effective support for their students. These findings indicate the importance of teachers in early childhood education being trained to address challenging behaviors effectively in time, so they may not cause teachers continued stress and frustration (Stormont & Young-Walker, 2017).

Similarly, Quesenberry et al. (2014) examined the perspectives of childcare teachers regarding challenging behaviors they encountered. Data for this study consisted of interview responses from nine childcare teachers sourced from five childcare centers. Like research findings from studies conducted in other early childhood education settings, Quesenberry et al. (2014) found the participating teachers perceived that challenging behaviors would cause significant problems within childcare classrooms. Although the teachers identified ways that they had attempted to address challenging behaviors, how these tactics were implemented made them ineffective in most cases. Thus, the researchers suggested a requisite for additional professional development opportunities for childcare educators to help them deal with challenging student behaviors more intentionally and consistently than before (Quesenberry et al., 2014).

Teachers' perspectives regarding their students' challenging behaviors are affected by various contextual elements, one of which is their knowledge of their students' lives outside of the classroom (David, 2016). David (2016) investigated how teachers from an urban elementary school perceived and responded to challenging behaviors exhibited by their students related to traumatic events. In total, 68 teachers

responded to a survey with 71 items. The researchers found that when teachers had a high level of knowledge regarding challenging behaviors and trauma, they noted less difficulty in managing such behaviors, lower stress levels, and a higher degree of confidence in addressing challenging behaviors. Additionally, the researcher noted the vital role of school social workers in helping students cope with trauma so that challenging behaviors and other negative effects related to trauma were lessened (David, 2016).

Teachers' personal traits and inclinations can also influence their perceptions of students' challenging behaviors (Jennings, 2014). Jennings (2014) explored how the self-reported mindfulness, well-being, and self-compassion of 35 preschool teachers were related to the quality of their classrooms and how they perceived problematic student behaviors. Emotional support was negatively related to depersonalization and emotional exhaustion and positively related to self-compassion, mindfulness, positive effect, and personal efficacy. Depression was negatively related to traits of a quality learning environment, including organization and instructional support. Regarding their perceptions of challenging student behaviors, teachers with high efficacy and mindfulness demonstrated an increased likelihood of being sensitive and taking a student's perspective when challenging behavior was demonstrated. In contrast, those with high ratings of depersonalization were less likely to be sensitive when disciplining students. These findings demonstrate that whether a student has presented challenging behavior and how severe that behavior is are subjective and depend on the perspective and personal effect of the teacher (Jennings, 2014).

Gilliam et al. (2016) took a similar line of inquiry a step further and explored whether early childhood education teachers' implicit biases would affect their expectations of students' behaviors and which students they recommended for suspension or expulsion. The researchers examined race and sex biases. This line of inquiry was necessitated by the disproportionately high rates of the expulsion of Black male preschool students. Preschool teachers completed two tasks intended to measure their implicit biases regarding sex and race in the classroom. The researchers found that during a task where participants were asked to spot challenging behaviors in a recorded video of preschool children, the teachers watched the Black children longer, and Black boys were observed for the most extended durations. Additionally, the researchers found evidence that the race of the participating teachers affected their biases. Although biases did not appear to affect expulsion and suspension recommendations, Black teachers were more likely than teachers of other races to recommend longer disciplinary periods. These results support the hypothesis that teachers' perceptions of challenging behavior are subjective and related to their characteristics (Gilliam et al., 2016).

Young and Martinez (2016) asserted that the reasons teachers perceived that challenging behaviors had occurred in their classrooms could influence the steps taken to address those behaviors. These researchers surveyed teachers to determine their perceptions and experiences with methods such as functional behavioral assessment for addressing challenging behaviors, as well as how the participating teachers ascribed meaning to challenging behaviors demonstrated in their classroom. The researchers found that the participating teachers had different views and opinions on why challenging

behaviors occurred; there were no specific identified explanations for the behaviors that many participants shared. Additionally, the survey revealed that many participants had perceptions of general behavioral principles that were inconsistent or invalid, and there was a constant lack of training and experiences conducting applied behavioral analysis among their students. These findings indicate that teachers may need better training and education regarding how and why challenging behaviors arise so that they can effectively choose strategies to address challenging behaviors (Young & Martinez, 2016).

O'Brennan et al. (2014) explored how the school and classroom climate influenced how teachers perceived students' challenging behaviors. An ecological lens was used to examine this issue by accounting factors at the classroom, individual, and school level. The researchers used data from 467 classrooms at 37 elementary schools, which included data from 8,750 students in total. The researchers found that although the greatest measured influence on problematic behavior was characteristics of each individual student, students' behaviors were influenced by the general concentration and prosocial behavioral levels in the classroom, as well as how teachers perceived the school environment in general. These findings demonstrate that both the school and classroom climate significantly affect how teachers view the behavior of their students. The researchers concluded that if problematic student behavior became a school-wide issue, programs intended to help teachers build new classroom management skills and reframe their beliefs about normative school behaviors could help to address the issue (O'Brennan et al., 2014).

The way teachers choose to address behavioral issues is influenced by their perceptions of the behavior in question (Stormont & Young-Walker, 2017). Teachers' perceptions of challenging behaviors occurring in their classroom have a large influence on the steps they do or do not take to address those behaviors (Young & Martinez, 2016). Teachers' perspectives regarding their students' challenging behaviors are affected by various contextual elements: their knowledge of their students' lives outside of the classroom (David, 2016). Teachers' traits and inclinations can also influence their perceptions of students' challenging behaviors (Jennings, 2014). Teachers with high efficacy and mindfulness face an increased likelihood of being sensitive and taking the student's perspective when challenging behavior is demonstrated. In contrast, those with high ratings of depersonalization are less likely to be sensitive when disciplining students (Jennings, 2014). Teachers' perceptions of challenging behavior can be affected by implicit biases based on student demographic traits (Gilliam et al., 2016).

The school and classroom climate significantly affect how teachers view the behavior of their students (O'Brennan et al., 2014). As teachers' stress levels increase, they are more likely to experience burnout; when teachers experience burnout, they provide less effective support for their students (Stormont & Young-Walker, 2017). Therefore, early childhood education teachers must be trained to address challenging behaviors immediately and address them effectively so that those behaviors do not worsen or cause teachers continued stress and frustration (Stormont & Young-Walker, 2017). If problematic student behavior becomes a school-wide issue, programs intended

to help teachers build new classroom management skills and reframe their beliefs about normative school behaviors can help to address the issue (O'Brennan et al., 2014).

Addressing Challenging Behaviors in the Classroom

Although there is minimal consensus regarding the best means for addressing problematic behavior in the classroom, many methods have been suggested and tested (Hallett et al., 2016; Joseph et al., 2017; McLeod et al., 2017; Price & Steed, 2016). Singh et al. (2013) examined how challenging classroom behaviors were affected after preschool teachers took part in an 8-week course focused on mindfulness. The researchers found that when the teachers took part in mindfulness training, there was a significant decrease in the problematic behaviors exhibited by students, and those changes remained consistent after the training course ended. The researchers found that mindfulness training successfully resulted in better interactions between students and teachers, making it an effective tool to provide teachers to improve challenging behavior among preschoolers (Singh et al., 2013).

Additionally, behavioral consultations may serve as an effective first or only step to correcting challenging classroom behaviors, depending on the severity of the infraction (McGoey et al., 2013). McGoey et al. (2013) explored how preschool consultations could be used to treat problematic behaviors demonstrated by preschool children. In a behavioral consultation, experienced consultants provide teachers with the knowledge that they can use to manage specific student behavioral challenges. This form of consultation was tested using a pilot model intended to improve the behavior of 35 preschoolers. After the teachers took part in the consultation and applied what they had

learned when interacting with disruptive students, fewer behavioral issues, and increased positive teacher-student interactions were reported. These findings indicate the preliminary success of behavioral consultations for teachers as an effective means of addressing preschool students' problematic behaviors (McGoey et al., 2013).

Other authors have suggested that teachers use activities and games to encourage good behavior and discourage challenging behaviors (Flower et al., 2014). Flower et al. (2014) examined how the Good Behavior Game (GBG) could be employed in a classroom setting to improve student behavior. The authors found immediate and significant effects regarding improvements to challenging behaviors following the game. Additionally, teachers most often used the game to address off-task behavior, speaking at inappropriate times, disruptive behavior, and hostility. Overall, the authors determined that intervention success depended on whether effective reward protocols were followed. Based on these findings, the GBG may be an effective means to address challenging behaviors in the classroom. However, it may be more effective for improving some problematic behaviors than others (Flower et al., 2014).

Efforts to improve challenging childhood behavior have also been addressed at the policy level (Vinh et al., 2016). Vinh et al. (2016) detailed the efforts undertaken by the Colorado government to decrease the number of children being expelled from childcare programs due to problematic behavior. The policy changes were implemented in two stages. During the primary stage, the pyramid model acted as the guiding framework for developing a state-level planning team, a center to develop model sites, continuing practitioner training, and coach and trainer certification. Following these

initiatives, the number of mental health consultants trained to address early childhood behavioral issues was expanded, and reimbursement was adjusted to match that of professionals providing adult mental health services. Following these initiatives, results from a follow-up survey revealed a decrease in the number of expulsions occurring in early childhood care in the state. These findings indicate that changes made at the state policy level may effectively help early childhood education teachers better address challenging behaviors in their classrooms (Vinh et al., 2016).

In summary, although there is no general agreement regarding the best means for addressing problematic behavior in the classroom, many methods have been suggested and tested (Singh et al., 2013). First, mindfulness training for teachers may result in better interactions between students and teachers, making it a potentially effective tool to provide teachers to improve challenging behavior among preschoolers (Singh et al., 2013). Secondly, behavioral consultations may serve as an effective first or only, step to correcting challenging classroom behaviors, depending on the severity (McGoey et al., 2013). The preliminary success of behavioral consultations for teachers as an effective means of addressing preschool students' problematic behaviors has been demonstrated (McGoey et al., 2013). Thirdly, other authors have suggested that teachers use activities and games to encourage good behavior and discourage challenging behaviors (Flower et al., 2014). Fourthly, the good behavior game may be an effective means to address challenging behaviors in the classroom, although it may be more effective for improving some problematic behaviors than others (Flower et al., 2014). Lastly, efforts to improve challenging childhood behaviors have been addressed at the policy level (Vinh et al.,

2016). Changes made at the state policy level, such as improving children's access to mental health professionals, may effectively help early childhood education teachers better address challenging behaviors in their classrooms (Vinh et al., 2016).

The following subsections will detail specific methods that have been researched extensively to manage the difficult conduct of preschoolers. The two methods explored in-depth are behavioral assessments and interventions.

Behavioral Assessment

The first step frequently used to address challenging classroom behaviors displayed by young students is a formal behavioral assessment (Harris et al., 2016; McIntyre & Golya, 2016; Riggleman & Morgan, 2017). McIntyre and Golya (2016) stressed that conducting a formal behavioral assessment after challenging behavior was displayed centers around the risk for poor learning outcomes and severe behavioral disorders that could develop when these behaviors remain unaddressed. The authors assessed the use of functional behavioral assessments to evaluate children displaying challenging behaviors. In a functional behavioral assessment, information from multiple sources is considered so that teachers can figure out the cause of the behavior. A plan is developed for behavioral support so that the challenging behavior does not persist. Through a systematic literature review, the authors determined that functional behavioral assessments could be an effective first step in addressing challenging behaviors exhibited by young children (McIntyre & Golya, 2016).

Moreno et al. (2017) explored teachers' experiences with a functional behavioral assessment. The authors noted that although the functional behavioral assessment was

mandated for special education teachers, its use in general classrooms to address challenging behaviors was less frequent. Teachers from the Midwestern United States were surveyed regarding their experiences implementing the functional behavioral assessment. The researchers determined that while most of the surveyed teachers confidently completed and implemented the functional behavioral assessment, they were unsure how the cultural factor of the assessment influenced behavior. The researchers concluded that it would be beneficial for teachers of young students to regularly implement the functional behavioral assessment, as it would be used to correct challenging behavior in the special education setting (Moreno et al., 2017).

Moreover, Moreno et al. (2014) explored how the functional behavioral assessment could be tailored to suit different young students' assessments better. The authors noted that there is still a pervasive issue in the United States, where teachers can misinterpret cultural differences as indicators of behavioral or emotional disorders. Unfortunately, because of this lack of understanding, many non-White students are disproportionately and incorrectly identified as having behavioral or emotional disorders. The authors determined that specific changes should be implemented during every step of the functional behavioral analysis to ensure cultural differences were not misunderstood as behavioral issues. These findings indicate the importance of the teacher demonstrating cultural competency when addressing their students' challenging behaviors (Moreno et al., 2014).

Losinski et al. (2015) explored how behavioral assessment could be used to develop interventions for students that exhibited problematic behavior. The structural

behavioral assessment, an approach that had many similarities to the functional behavioral assessment, was used. In the structural behavioral assessments, contextual variables that precede a challenging behavior are assessed. Then, manipulations based on the assessed context are developed and then implemented. From there, interventions are created to address challenging behaviors individually. The authors noted that a strength of the structural behavioral assessment is that interventions developed through this method are often easier to implement than independently developed interventions. The authors noted that their study was an extension of exploring a type of assessment traditionally used with children with autism or other intellectual disabilities. The authors found that many challenging behaviors, including verbal outbursts, passing notes, and inappropriate contact, could be reduced through the structural behavioral assessment. These findings support the implementation of the structural behavioral assessment to mitigate challenging behavior in young students (Losinski et al., 2015).

Similarly, Nelson (2014) explored the functional behavioral assessment for evaluating preschool children exhibiting problematic behavior and different methods used to collect information for such assessments. Two methods discussed for collecting information were functional analysis (FA) and paired-choice (PC) assessment. Functional analysis entails using an experimental analysis to validate the function of behaviors. At the same time, the PC assessment is employed so teachers can better understand children's preferences regarding classroom arrangements and reinforcement. Four preschoolers were assessed using PC and FA methods to test which information gathering method was the most effective. Nelson (2014) found that PC methods made it easier to

hypothesize regarding the source of challenging behaviors and how they could be addressed than FA. This study also revealed that teachers might need additional training in distinguishing between the functions of certain behaviors. This additional training is necessitated by the importance of teachers effectively assessing behavioral functions so that interventions or behavioral plans made to address concerning behavior are effective (Nelson, 2014).

In summary, in functional behavioral assessment, information from multiple sources is considered so that teachers can figure out the source of the behavior. A plan is developed for behavioral support so that the challenging behavior does not persist. Functional behavioral assessments could be an effective first step in addressing challenging behaviors exhibited by young children (McIntyre & Golya, 2016). Although using the functional behavioral assessment is mandated for special education teachers, its use in general classrooms to address challenging behaviors is less frequent. Therefore, it may be beneficial for teachers of young students to implement the functional behavioral assessment as regularly as it would be used to correct challenging behavior in the special education setting (Moreno et al., 2017). There remains a pervasive issue in the United States, where teachers can misinterpret cultural differences among students as indicators of behavioral or emotional disorders. Unfortunately, because of this lack of understanding, many non-white students are disproportionately and incorrectly identified as having behavioral or emotional disorders. Thus, it is of the utmost importance that teacher demonstrates cultural competency when addressing their students' challenging behaviors (Moreno et al., 2014).

In structural behavioral assessments, contextual variables that precede a challenging behavior are assessed. Then, manipulations based on the assessed context are developed and then implemented. From there, interventions are created to address challenging behaviors individually. One strength of the structural behavioral assessment is that interventions developed through this method are often easier to implement than independently developed interventions. Many challenging behaviors, including verbal outbursts, passing notes, and inappropriate contact, can be reduced through the structural behavioral assessment (Losinski et al., 2015). Teachers may need additional training in distinguishing between the functions of certain behaviors; this additional training is necessitated by the importance of teachers being able to assess behavioral functions effectively so that interventions or behavioral plans made to address concerning behavior are effective (Nelson, 2014).

Interventions to Address Challenging Behaviors

Intervention methods have been utilized to address problematic classroom behavior (Axelrad et al., 2013; Feil et al., 2014; Lydon et al., 2017; Stanton-Chapman et al., 2016). Bellone et al. (2014) explored how successful behavioral interventions have helped correct challenging behaviors exhibited by preschool children enrolled in Head Start. While many preschool students exhibit challenging behavior, the authors noted that these behaviors are often not identified and addressed consistently and intentionally. Four Black male preschoolers between the ages of three and four participated in the study. The participants and their teachers took a functional behavioral assessment, followed by a functional analysis component. The researchers tested two interventions to note effects on

disruptive behavior, one tailored to correct these problems and another intervention method not functionally matched. Although both interventions caused positive behavioral effects, the intervention that was matched to the behavioral issues displayed by participants was more effective in mitigating problematic behavior. These results demonstrate the promising potential of behavioral interventions for improving problematic behaviors in preschool children (Bellone et al., 2014).

Interventions for preschool students exhibiting problematic behavior have also been conducted in the homeschool environment (Feil et al., 2014). Feil et al. (2014) explored the effectiveness of early intervention for preschool students who demonstrated problematic conduct. This study was a cross-site randomized controlled trial that included 128 preschool children exhibiting challenging behaviors. Participants took part in either a Preschool First Step to Success (PFS) intervention or a control group. Postintervention teacher and parent-reported measures were used to gauge the success of the intervention. The researchers found that those who took part in the PFS intervention demonstrated significantly fewer behavioral issues and better social skills than those in the control group. Parent-reported effect sizes were small to medium, while teacher-reported effect sizes were medium to large. These findings indicate that PFS interventions may be an effective means to target challenging behaviors early on for children in preschool (Feil et al., 2014).

Another form of intervention that has been tested with preschool students demonstrating problematic behaviors is the social skills intervention (Hutchins et al., 2017). Hutchins et al. (2017) conducted a systematic review of the literature to determine

how successful social skills interventions have addressed challenging behaviors in the classroom setting. In total, 24 studies were included in this review. Unfortunately, half of the studies that were to be included did not meet the standards needed to define a single-case design. Among the behaviors included in the reviewed studies that needed correction, the three most common were negative verbal interaction, noncompliance, and class disruptions. The researchers could not show the efficacy of social skills interventions conclusively and suggested a need for improved methodological rigor in future single-case studies on social skills interventions.

Certain technologies may assist teachers when they seek to address challenging behaviors (Hundert et al., 2016; Johnson, 2017). Johnson (2017) examined how technology can improve the strength of data used to understand and address challenging behavior in children. The author explored how cloud computing technologies could effectively use data to solve behavioral challenges in early childhood education. The author determined that cloud computing technologies give educators a better means of storing behavioral data about their students, sharing that data with other involved staff and parents, and applying cloud-stored data to team-based problem-solving models that require the input of more than one individual. Overall, the author determined that cloud computing might be an effective means to facilitate improved solutions to challenging classroom behaviors by making collaborative behavioral improvement methods more accessible to school staff than before (Johnson, 2017).

In summary, interventions matched to specific behavioral issues displayed by students are the most effective for mitigating problematic behavior (Bellone et al., 2014).

Research shows that students who participate in PFS interventions demonstrate significantly fewer behavioral issues and better social skills than those who do not participate in this kind of intervention. Therefore, PFS interventions may be an effective means to target challenging behaviors early on for children in preschool (Feil et al., 2014). Another form of intervention that has been tested with students demonstrating problematic behaviors is social skills interventions (Hutchins et al., 2017). Researchers have suggested a need for improved methodological rigor when single-case research on social skills interventions is conducted in the future (Hutchins et al., 2017). Cloud computing technologies can give educators a better means of storing behavioral data about their students, sharing that data with other involved staff and parents, and applying cloud-stored data to team-based problem-solving models that require the input of more than one individual. In these ways, cloud computing may effectively facilitate improved solutions to challenging classroom behaviors by making collaborative behavioral improvement methods more accessible to school staff (Johnson, 2017).

The following subsections will detail specific types of interventions researched for how effectively they can improve challenging behaviors in young children. The interventions explored in-depth in these sections involve teachers and other school staff members, parent- and family-based interventions, and individualized interventions.

Teacher and School Staff Interventions

Interventions for teachers or school staff to gain the knowledge necessary to address problematic behavior have been explored through research (Conroy et al., 2014). They explored the impact of a classroom intervention that suggests best practices for

preschool teachers to help them avoid challenging student behaviors before they become an issue. The intervention title was the Behavioral, Emotional, and Social Training Competent Learners Achieving School Success (BEST in CLASS). In total, 19 teachers and 10 students participated in the BEST in CLASS intervention. Over time, the participating teachers increasingly used the best practices suggested through the intervention. Additionally, after teachers began implementing the best practices, their students became more engaged and were less likely to exhibit problematic behavior. The researchers noted that the success of this intervention was preliminary, and further research would be required to determine its overall efficacy (Conroy et al., 2014).

Similarly, Sørlie et al. (2015) examined the effectiveness of an intervention intended to curb students' problematic behaviors through empowering school staff. The name of this intervention was the Preventing Problem Behavior in School (PPBS) intervention. This intervention was created in Norway and consisted of a 4-day training program for all staff working at a primary school. The effects from 20 control schools were compared to the school where the PPBS intervention took place. The researchers found moderate positive effects regarding positive behavior management, perceived staff efficacy, and the number of behavioral issues in the school where the intervention was tested. Intervention results were moderated by school enrolment, the ratio of unqualified staff members, quality of implementation, and program training dosage. Although staff reported positive effects from the intervention, students did not support the improved ratings perceived by staff. These findings indicate preliminary success for the PPBS

intervention, although students may not have felt positively influenced by the changes that occurred (Sørlie et al., 2015).

Reinke et al. (2014) explored how a universal classroom management intervention intended to support and train teachers could help disruptive classroom behavior. The authors noted that although professional programs are presently available that can help support and assist teachers, most are not attuned to the unique challenges and complexities they presently face when teaching. Thus, these authors examined the effectiveness of a global classroom administration program that incorporated teacher coaching. The coaching component was intended to help teachers implement best practices and support the creation of behavioral plans to mitigate challenging behaviors. The coaches gave teachers feedback on their classroom management methods and helped them plan for future disruptions. After the intervention had concluded, teachers reprimanded their students less often, and those targeted during the intervention as needing a behavioral action plan were less disruptive moving forward. The previously disruptive students were also more social and more likely to stay on task following the intervention. These findings indicate that teachers may be the most effective individuals to administer an intervention to students displaying disruptive behavior. Still, they need professional support and effective training (Reinke et al., 2014).

Similarly, Snell et al. (2014) examined the efficacy of a universal classroom program for teachers who indicated that they had significant behavioral problems with many of their students. Six Head Start classrooms were studied in this research. During the intervention, these classrooms received two coaching sessions and two workshops on

universal positive behavioral support. The techniques used in this intervention were focused on a process that included antecedent-behavior-consequence problem-solving. Upon completion of this intervention, challenging behavior in all six classrooms involved in the study decreased to below what is average for Head Start classrooms. These findings demonstrate that if preschool teachers have proper professional support and training, assessment-based interventions that they develop and implement can effectively be used to address challenging behaviors (Snell et al., 2014).

In summary, interventions for teachers or school staff to gain the knowledge necessary to address problematic behavior have been explored through research (Conroy et al., 2014). The BEST in CLASS intervention demonstrated preliminary success. Teachers increasingly used the best practices suggested through the intervention, and students became more engaged and were less likely to exhibit problematic behavior. The PPBS intervention demonstrated moderate positive effects regarding positive behavior management and the prevalence of behavioral issues in the school where the intervention was tested. Although staff reported positive effects of the PPBS intervention, students did not agree (Sørlie et al., 2015). Teachers need professional support and training to effectively address behavioral challenges (Reinke et al., 2014). If preschool teachers have proper professional support and training, assessment-based interventions based on positive behavioral support may be used to address challenging behaviors effectively (Snell et al., 2014).

Parent and Family-Based Interventions

Some interventions aim to change family-child interactions to mitigate

problematic conduct in young students (Axelrad et al., 2013). Axelrad et al. (2013)

examined how a parent management training intervention could influence disruptive

behavior exhibited by their children. The researchers examined child behavior outcomes

just after treatment, six months after -treatment, and one year after treatment. The

participants in the study were 120 children between two and 6.5 years of age who were

significantly and clinically disruptive before the study. Following the parent management

intervention, parent stress and disruptive behavior exhibited by their children decreased

significantly. Additionally, the participants' teachers reported decreased disruptive

behavior following the intervention. These findings indicate initial success in suggesting

parent management training to combat challenging behavior in the classroom (Axelrad et

al., 2013).

Similarly, Gardner et al. (2016) explored the efficacy of globally dissipated

parenting programs intended to serve as interventions to address problematic childhood

behavior. The studied interventions were tested in 10 countries among 15,558 children

who displayed challenging behavior. The success of these interventions was reviewed in

stages. The author found that effects concerning child behavior were significant in

randomized trials but not in non-randomized trials. There was no relationship found

between intervention or participant factors and effect size. The effect sizes found were

smaller in individualistic countries than those with survival-centered family values. These

findings indicate that although parenting programs are effective as child behavior

interventions across the globe, cultural factors can impact the success of this type of intervention (Gardner et al., 2016).

Similarly, Dishion et al. (2014) explored how problematic behaviors in children ages two to five might be prevented through yearly family check-ups. This randomized intervention trial also included a parent management training component. In total, 731 families took part in this research. The researchers found that early-onset behaviors displayed by two 5-year-old antisocial or otherwise problematic children might be prevented through yearly checkups and parent management training. Additionally, the researchers found that effect sizes were increased following yearly completion of the routine outlined in this intervention; if parents completed this intervention with their child for more than one year, they were more likely to see greater improvements in problematic behavior. The researchers underscored the importance of this annual intervention routine, particularly for children at high risk for problematic behavior (Dishion et al., 2014).

Fettig and Barton (2014) explored existing research regarding using interventions implemented by the parents of children with challenging behaviors. The analyzed interventions used functional assessment as a basis. The authors reviewed 13 existing studies. The authors concluded that if parents have adequate support and training, they can administer functional assessment-based interventions to reduce challenging behaviors exhibited by their children. These findings demonstrate that parents may be effective intervention administrators, although the inclusion of knowledge from child behavioral specialists is still key to their success (Fettig & Barton, 2014).

In summary, some interventions aim to change family-child interactions to mitigate challenging behaviors in young children (Axelrad et al., 2013). Parent management programs led to significant decreases in both parent stress and disruptive behavior exhibited by their children and decreased children's disruptive behaviors, as reported by their teachers (Axelrad et al., 2013). Although parenting programs are generally an effective type of child behavior intervention globally, cultural factors can impact the success of this type of intervention (Gardner et al., 2016). Challenging behavior displayed by children ages 2-5 years old that is antisocial or otherwise problematic may potentially be prevented through yearly checkups and parent management training. The effect sizes attributable to these intervention methods increased when checkups and parent management training were both completed annually (Dishion et al., 2014). If parents have adequate support and training, they can often administer functional assessment-based interventions in a way that reduces challenging behaviors exhibited by their children (Fettig & Barton, 2014).

Individualized Interventions

Evidence has been found to suggest that interventions intended to improve challenging behaviors in young children are more successful when they are individualized (Hemmeter et al., 2016; Zimmerman et al., 2017). A tiered behavioral support model has shown promise for correcting challenging behaviors in young children; this holistic framework was created specifically for children who persistently exhibit challenging behaviors (Hemmeter et al., 2016). The authors noted that when challenging behaviors remain unaddressed, a child's learning, social-emotional function,

and other facets of their life can suffer. The researchers found that their tiered framework could effectively be used to address challenging behaviors. The researchers noted the importance of a partnership between those running a behavioral intervention and the children's families; additionally, the researchers asserted that individually tailoring behavioral interventions to fit the participants is key to effectiveness (Hemmeter et al., 2016).

Similarly, Zimmerman et al. (2017) explored how individualized visual activity schedules (VAS) could mitigate challenging behaviors displayed by young children. Previous literature had demonstrated the efficacy of VAS for improving recreation behaviors, transition, and engagement for children with autism or intellectual disabilities. However, VAS was not tested as a solution for children without such conditions. The constant time delay was used to teach three participating children how to use VAS. After learning to use VAS, the participating children demonstrated challenging behavior and engagement levels that matched their peers. Thus, the researchers suggested that VAS might be an effective individualized intervention strategy to mitigate challenging behaviors in young children (Zimmerman et al., 2017).

In summary, researchers have suggested that programs for young students tailored to specific behavioral needs and challenges are the most successful (Hemmeter et al., 2016; Zimmerman et al., 2017). A tiered behavioral support model created specifically for children who persistently exhibit challenging behavior has shown promise (Hemmeter et al., 2016). In any individualized intervention, a partnership between those running the behavioral intervention and the families of the children who participate is key to the

effectiveness of the intervention (Hemmeter et al., 2016). Individualized VAS may also be an effective individualized intervention strategy to mitigate challenging behaviors in young children. However, their efficacy has been tested primarily in special education classrooms (Zimmerman et al., 2017).

Summary and Conclusions

The problem was explored in local preschool centers, children with challenging behaviors were not being identified, evaluated, and linked to the appropriate services for their needs. Children's challenging behavior is characterized by throwing tantrums, kicking, biting, and using inappropriate words while having difficulty with sharing, following instructions, transitions, and classroom routines (Walker & Snell, 2013). When these behaviors are prevalent in the preschool setting, children can disrupt classroom activities, reduce learning outcomes, and have other negative consequences. Disruptive behaviors cause stress for parents and their children and can contribute to a negative home environment, which then impacts behavior in the classroom setting (Axelrad et al., 2013). Although behavioral challenges are relatively prevalent among preschool-age children in many societies, trained professionals often do not address these challenges (Rescorla et al., 2011). Short and long-term adverse outcomes can occur for children displaying challenging behavior if these behaviors are not addressed effectively (Yoleri, 2013).

Many methods for addressing challenging behaviors in the classroom may not be effective without considering influential risk factors (Bornovalova et al., 2014). Understanding the familial risk factors present in a student's family may help explain

certain disruptive behaviors in the classroom (Bornovalova et al., 2014). Socioeconomic status may also influence challenging behaviors exhibited by children (Holtz et al., 2015). If children demonstrate problems sleeping through the night, they may be more likely to exhibit behavioral and emotional issues during their preschool years (Sivertsen et al., 2015).

The transition process from home to school is difficult for many preschool children, resulting in problematic behaviors (Yoleri, 2013). Behavioral problems exhibited by preschool students concern early childhood professionals and pediatricians alike (Yoleri, 2013). An estimated 33% of preschool children exhibit problematic conduct issues, causing behavioral problems to be the most significant source of functional impairment among young children (Yoleri, 2013).

Teachers' perceptions of challenging behaviors exhibited by their students can greatly impact how they choose to address behavioral issues (Stormont & Young-Walker, 2017). Early childhood education teachers must be trained to effectively address challenging behaviors the first time so that they may be resolved and not prolong teachers' frustration and stress (Stormont & Young-Walker, 2017). Researchers have suggested that a need exists for additional professional development opportunities for childcare educators to help them deal with challenging student behaviors more intentionally and consistently (Quesenberry et al., 2014). Additionally, the perceived cause of challenging behaviors in their classroom effects the steps preschool teachers do or do not take to address those behaviors. As such, teachers may need better training and education regarding how and why challenging behaviors arise to choose strategies to

address challenging behaviors effectively (Young & Martinez, 2016). If problematic

student behavior becomes a school-wide issue, programs intended to help teachers build

new classroom management skills and re-frame their beliefs about normative school

behaviors can help to address the issue (O'Brennan et al., 2014).

Although there remains a lack of consensus concerning the best means for

addressing problematic behavior in the classroom, many methods have been suggested

and researched (Singh et al., 2013). Mindfulness training for teachers may result in better

interactions between students and teachers, making it a potentially useful tool to provide

teachers to improve challenging behavior among preschoolers (Singh et al., 2013).

Behavioral consultations may serve as an effective first or only step to correcting

challenging classroom behaviors, depending on the severity (McGoey et al., 2013). Other

authors have suggested that teachers use activities and games to encourage good behavior

and discourage challenging behaviors (Flower et al., 2014). Changes made at the state

policy level, such as improving children's access to mental health professionals, could

effectively help early childhood education teachers better address challenging behaviors

in their classrooms (Vinh et al., 2016).

The first step in adequately addressing challenging classroom behaviors displayed

by young students is usually a formal behavioral assessment (McIntyre & Golya, 2016).

Interventions matched to specific behavioral issues presented by students are the most

effective for mitigating problematic behavior (Bellone et al., 2014). Teachers may be the

most effective individuals to administer an intervention to students displaying disruptive

behavior, but they need professional support and effective training (Reinke et al., 2014).

Some interventions aim to change family-child interactions to mitigate challenging behaviors displayed by young children in various settings (Axelrad et al., 2013). Parent management intervention has resulted in significant decreases in both parent stress and disruptive behavior exhibited by their children and a decrease in children's disruptive behavior as reported by their teachers (Axelrad et al., 2013). If parents have adequate support and training, they can often administer functional assessment-based interventions in a way that reduces challenging behaviors exhibited by their children (Fettig & Barton, 2014). Researchers have suggested that interventions intended to improve challenging behaviors in young children are more successful when individualized over others (Hemmeter et al., 2016; Zimmerman et al., 2017).

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this study was to explore the perspectives of preschool teachers, administrators, and technical assistants regarding how children with challenging behaviors are identified, evaluated, and linked to appropriate services. I explored the support preschool teachers would need to address challenging behaviors effectively and how preschool teachers described their experiences addressing children's challenging behaviors. This chapter details the research methods used in this study. First, the research design and rationale are reviewed, then, the role of the researcher is explained. Next, the methodology is provided. Next, issues of trustworthiness are examined, followed by ethical procedures. Lastly, a summary is provided.

Research Design and Rationale

The following research questions guided the study:

RQ1: What are the perspectives of preschool teachers, administrators, and technical assistants about children with challenging behaviors are identified, evaluated, and linked to support services?

RQ2: How do preschool teachers describe their experiences in addressing children's challenging behaviors?

The concept central to this study was the challenging behaviors exhibited by preschoolers in a classroom setting. Challenging behavior in this age group is characterized by throwing tantrums, kicking, biting, and using inappropriate words, as well as having difficulty with sharing, following instructions, transitions, and classroom routines (Voorhees et al., 2013). The research tradition was a qualitative case study. A

case study is an in-depth exploration of a bounded system based on extensive data collection (Creswell, 2012). A case study was an appropriate research design to address the research questions of this study because it allowed for a detailed examination of the boundaries of the case and the complexity of the behavior patterns of the bounded system (see Creswell, 2012). Ten preschool teachers, two school administrators, and two TAs were recruited for this research. The case unit of analysis for this research was the participants' perspectives. Analyzing the perspectives of preschool teachers, administrators, and TAs may lead to a more thorough understanding of how preschoolers' behavioral challenges in the classroom can be best addressed and improved for the collective benefit of teachers and students.

Role of the Researcher

My role in this study entailed facilitating all portions of the research and participating in the data collection phase. My only interaction with the participants occurred when setting up interviews, interviewing them, and conducting member checking. I had no personal or professional relationships with the participants, ensuring that power differentials did not occur related to the participants' details. Based on my experiences and observations, preschool teachers experience obstacles that hinder them from providing behavioral referrals for students who need them in some circumstances. However, I did not share my perspective regarding the topic with the participants to ensure that those opinions did not skew their interview responses. I also followed the interview protocol closely and ensured that questions were not asked in a leading manner.

The data were reviewed and rereviewed before coding to avoid codes that did not effectively represent the meaning of the data. All data collection and analytic methods were recorded in a journal (see Yin, 2015). I ensured data accuracy by mailing a one-page summary of the findings to the participants, allowing them to correct and clarify where necessary. However, they did not have any clarifications or corrections to the summary. All semistructured interview questions that participants were asked to answer were worded so that the participants were not encouraged to answer a certain way, further preventing the influence of researcher bias.

I am a TA at a health and human services agency. As the researcher, I was not supervising any of the participants. They were not put at risk of losing their current employment.

Methodology

Participant Selection

The population for this study was preschool teachers, administrators, and TAs in each preschool setting in a midwestern state. The sample was drawn from this population. The participants consisted of 10 preschool teachers, two preschool administrators, and two TAs selected through the purposeful sampling method. A TA provides resources and plans interventions for students whose learning or behavioral needs extend beyond what teachers are trained to address (Bellone et al., 2014).

After IRB approval (01-03-20474953), fourteen total participants were expected as a sufficient sample size for a qualitative case study. The questions were first submitted to a local educational expert to ensure that the research questions were aligned with the

interview protocol and that the totality of the interview questions would answer the research questions. The expert served as a TA coordinator for special needs childcare and was an expert in identifying, evaluating, and referring children with challenging behaviors. The expert read them and provided feedback. This expert ensured that the questions were structured to collect the information I intended to collect.

A purposeful sampling technique was used to select participants. This method involves selecting participants based on specific criteria (Palinkas et al., 2015). Purposeful sampling was an effective strategy for this study to elicit data regarding the experiences of preschool teachers, administrators, and TAs when addressing problematic behaviors among preschool students based on experience and knowledge related to that topic. Besides, the participants should be able to express themselves concisely and reflectively while remaining willing to participate (Palinkas et al., 2015).

The participants were selected based on the criteria of working as a teacher, administrator, or TA at the preschool they worked at for at least 1 year and having experienced one or more past incidents where they had to address challenging student behavior. The participants were advised upon recruitment to indicate their interests in participating if they were a preschool teacher, administrator, or TA to ensure they met the selection criteria. By having insight into the perspectives and experiences of preschool teachers, administrators, and TAs, strategies can be developed to address the issue of disciplining preschoolers with challenging behaviors better while refraining from suspending and expelling them, ensuring the collective benefit of teachers and students.

I then contacted eligible participants independently through email, explaining the study, their roles, and the associated risks, as also explained in the informed consent. The participants were then given 1 week to decide if they were interested in participating and had to confirm by email or phone. After participants confirmed their participation, I contacted them by phone or email to determine dates and times for interviews and provide a private setting for the interviews. Participants were informed that they must sign an informed consent at the interview and would be given a copy for their records.

Instrumentation

The data collection instrument for this case study was a semistructured interview protocol. In the semistructured interview, I used open-ended questions, which would allow participants to provide descriptive, thorough responses (see Weller et al., 2018). I used open-ended questions to ask the participants follow-up questions, as seemed fitting (see Weller et al., 2018). The interviews were used to elicit detailed perspectives from teachers, administrators, and TAs concerning how children with challenging behaviors were identified, evaluated, and linked to the appropriate services for their needs. The interviews also helped to elicit information concerning preschool teachers' support for identifying, evaluating, and linking children with challenging behaviors to the appropriate services for their needs. The goal was to show how preschool teachers described their experiences managing children's conduct.

The participants were interviewed at the workplace and library at scheduled times. The interview questions were examined by a local educational expert, a TA coordinator for special needs childcare and an expert in identifying, evaluating, and referring children

with challenging behaviors. This individual examined interview questions for leading

questions, confusing questions, having face validity, and retaining content validity

(Zamanzadeh et al., 2015). The appointed expert provided feedback on the interview

questions before presenting them to participants during the face-to-face, semistructured

interviews. Zamanzadeh et al. (2015) suggested that after review, instruments, such as

interview questions, should be rated on a 1-to-3 scale: 1 signifying, "not necessary;" 2

signifying, "useful, but not essential;" and 3 signifying, "essential" (p. 168). Following

this information, I asked the expert not only to determine whether the interview questions

were appropriate but also to rate them based on the effectiveness of the information

intended to collect. The expert approved all the interview questions and gave them a

rating of 8 out of 10.

The conceptual framework and related literature also informed the development

of the interview protocol. The interview questions were structured to align with this

study's central research questions to ensure content validity further. Throughout the

interview, the structure of open-ended interview questions was explicitly selected so that

I could ask follow-up or probing questions when needed and appropriate.

In other words, the items included in the interview protocol addressed different

facets of the central research phenomenon, addressing children's challenging behaviors in

the school setting. Further, the interview questions allowed the participants to provide

additional details to contextualize responses when required. The wording of the interview

protocol varied for each participant group (teachers, administrators, and TAs) to ensure

questions remained relevant to each group's job description. The goal was to ensure that the most appropriate group of participants addressed each research question.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

When recruiting participants for the present study, the participants were sought from a public childcare agency. I contacted prospective participants who wished to participate in this study and met participant selection criteria via email. The email contained information about the study, participants' roles, and risks involved. The email also included the informed-consent form. Prospective participants were given 1 week to determine whether they wished to participate. They were informed that they must sign a consent form at the interview and would be given a copy for their records. I then followed up with an email about the dates and times that worked best for the participants to meet face-to-face. I requested each participant to send three dates and times that worked for them, in addition to a contact number. A private location was also determined before the meeting date.

I conducted one interview with each person, which lasted 45 to 60 minutes (Creswell, 2012); thus, all interviews were completed within 5 weeks. All interviews were recorded with an audio recorder. As such, within the participant consent form, they were informed that the interviews would be audio recorded and were required to provide their consent to this recording. Due to the open-ended structure of the interview questions, after participants responded, relevant follow-up questions were asked to elicit more detail or contextual information. After the interviews were completed, the participants were thanked for their time and willingness to participate and reminded that

if they wished to ask follow-up questions about the study, they were welcome to do so by contacting me via phone or email. Electronic data, such as the transcribed interview data, were saved on a password-protected computer that only I could access. These data will be deleted after a period of 5 years beyond completion of my study.

Data Analysis Plan

The purpose of inductive analysis is to identify research findings from significant themes in raw data without being limited or influenced by structured methodologies (Thomas, 2006). Inductive analysis is less burdened by expected outcomes than most forms of deductive analysis because a core function of inductive analysis is to first describe the phenomena rather than engaging in hypothesis testing (Thomas, 2006). In addition to the core purpose of identifying findings through significant themes, other benefits of inductive analysis are that it allows a researcher to condense lengthy and varied text into a summary, establishes links between the objectives of the research and the findings, and allows for developing models and theories (Thomas, 2006).

Inductive analysis is like other qualitative analysis forms, such as grounded theory. Like grounded theories, the board steps of inductive analyses include summarizing or reducing the data, displaying the data, and drawing conclusions (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Thomas, 2006). The data reduction process began with coding. I closely read the text and considered multiple meanings, where applicable. Then, I flagged specific portions of text that had specific meanings. Next, I developed a label for the meaning attached to all similar texts. As I continued to label the data, some labels were combined based on the relatedness to others. As the labels combined, I developed initial

descriptions of the category by including multiple labels (Thomas, 2006). Once the text was initially coded, I reviewed the text that was uncoded or coded with multiple categories. It was acceptable for text to be included in multiple categories. Additionally, Thomas (2006) noted that a large portion of the data, sometimes 50% or more, might not be labeled. However, I still reviewed unlabeled text or text with multiple labels for appropriateness.

As the categories were clarified, I developed a memo about the category to define associations, links, and connections to other categories. I continued to refine the categories until they were appropriately narrow without excluding relevant items. I eventually attached a descriptive phrase to the category. The steps of an inductive analysis are summarized as follows: (a) prepare the data files, (b) closely read the text, (c) create the categories, (d) review overlapping coding or uncoded text, and (e) refine the categories. Once this process was complete, I had a small number of categories to summarize the key insights from the data set (see Thomas, 2006).

Trustworthiness

The credibility, transferability, confirmability, and dependability of the study were examined to confirm the trustworthiness of this research. The credibility of qualitative research refers to how confident researchers are that their findings reflect the true nature of the research topic (Anney, 2014). As mentioned previously, member checking was employed in the present study, entailing participants' reviews of findings from the study to confirm the accuracy of the data provided (Anney, 2014). Member checking was conducted after all interview data were transcribed and analyzed. The

participants were instructed to review a one-page summary of the findings and my interpretations to ensure that the analysis results accurately reflected their experiences and perspectives (see Yin, 2015).

Transferability in qualitative studies indicates the applicability of other research populations or contexts to research findings as interpreted by the reader (Anney, 2014). Thick descriptions were used in this study to ensure transferability. When conducting a qualitative study, thick descriptions entailed providing a high degree of detail and context to encourage valid conclusions about how the findings would apply to other populations and settings. Within the context of this research, thick descriptions were used when recording the research methods, protocols used, and findings. Full quotes and excerpts from participants' responses were used in the narrative to ensure detailed research findings. The meaning derived directly reflected the reality of the participants' perspectives and experiences by including direct quotes.

The audit-trail method ensured both reflexivity and dependability (see Anney, 2014). Reflexivity in qualitative research indicates that research findings will be successfully replicated if other researchers conduct a study using the same procedures (Anney, 2014). Conversely, dependability is the likelihood that the research procedure may be effectively repeated, regardless of when the study is replicated (Anney, 2014). By keeping an audit trail (e.g., a clear and detailed record of all procedures taken during a study), I ensured that the findings could be replicated, regardless of when the study was repeated; thus, I kept a written log of all research procedures.

Ethical Procedures

Various steps were taken to ensure this study was done ethically. First, all participants and leaders signed an informed-consent form before data collection. Secondly, all participants were informed that they could withdraw from the study if they were uncomfortable with any part of the participation process. If a participant withdrew before data collection, I used the aforementioned recruitment methods to find another suitable candidate. If a participant withdrew after data collection had concluded, their data were destroyed, and no replacement participant was selected. Thirdly, the Walden University Institutional Review Board approval was secured before collecting data. The Institutional Review Board number for this study was 01-03-20474953. Fourthly, all files associated with the study stored electronically were password protected on my computer. All physical documents will be stored in a locked file cabinet in my office until 5 years after the conclusion of this study. Five years after the study has concluded, all physical documents related to the participants will be shredded based on researchers' suggestions (e.g., Corti et al., 2000). All the audio recordings from the interview will be physically destroyed by shredding the tapes. The primary reason behind this practice will be to ensure that the participants' data remain entirely confidential and do not get into unauthorized hands.

Summary

In summary, I aimed to explore preschool teachers,' administrators,' and TAs' perspectives concerning how preschool teachers describe their experiences in addressing children's challenging behaviors, and the assistance they require to manage difficult

conduct effectively. The concept central to this study was challenging behaviors encountered by preschool teachers, administrators, and TAs. The research tradition that guided this study was a qualitative case study. Participants for this study were 10 preschool teachers, two school administrators, and two TAs recruited from a public childcare agency. Purposeful sampling was used to select participants. The data collection instrument for this case study was a semi-structured interview protocol I created for this study.

Data were obtained from users of a public childcare agency to recruit participants for the present study. The participants chose a date, time, and location for their interviews; interview dates and times needed to be compatible with my schedule. Each interview lasted between 45 to 60 minutes for me to collect enough detail to reach data saturation. I used inductive analysis to analyze data collected from the interviews. I then used concept coding to code the data.

The following chapter details the study results. First, the setting is reviewed. Next, data collection methods are reviewed, as well as data analysis methods. Then, the results of the study are explained. Next, evidence of trustworthiness is explored. Lastly, a summary is provided.

Chapter 4: Results

Children exhibiting challenging behaviors are often expelled or suspended, and few are referred to behavioral or social services to address these issues (Bellone et al., 2014). The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the perspectives of preschool teachers, administrators, and technical assistants regarding how children with challenging behaviors were identified, evaluated, and linked to appropriate services. I developed two research questions (RQs) employed as the blueprint for the study to meet the objective of this study. The research questions are as follows:

RQ1: What are the perspectives of preschool teachers, administrators, and technical assistants about children with challenging behaviors are identified, evaluated, and linked to support services?

RQ2: How do preschool teachers describe their experiences in addressing children's challenging behaviors?

This chapter contains the description of the setting of the study, participants' demographics, data collection, and data analysis procedures. The results and evidence of study trustworthiness are discussed. A summary is provided to conclude the chapter.

Setting

The setting for this study was a public childcare agency in a midwestern state. The agency personnel provided resources and services, such as plans and interventions, for students with learning and behavioral needs. Throughout the course of this study, there were no personal or organizational conditions that governed or affected the

participants or their experiences during the study. As such, the setting did not affect the interpretations of the findings.

Participants' Demographics

The participants consisted of 10 teachers, two administrators, and two TAs. During data collection, all participants were employed in a preschool, where personnel received resources and services, such as plans and interventions, for students with learning and behavioral needs. Participants were selected based on working as a teacher, administrator, or TA at the preschool they worked at for at least 1 year and having experienced one or more past incidents where they had to address challenging student behavior. One of the administrators who participated in the interview had experience of 15 years, while the other had 25-years of experience. The experience levels of the teachers interviewed ranged from 3 years to 30 years of experience. Lastly, the two TAs had 17 and 26 years of experience. Table 1 shows the demographic profile of each participant.

Table 1

Participants' Demographic Information

Participant	Years of experience	Sex	Race
Admin 1	25	Female	African American
Admin 2	15	Female	African American
Teacher 1	8	Female	African American
Teacher 2	3	Female	African American
Teacher 3	4	Female	African American
Teacher 4	25	Female	African American
Teacher 5	5	Female	African American
Teacher 6	9	Female	African American
Teacher 7	20	Female	African American
Teacher 8	10	Female	African American
Teacher 9	30	Female	African American
Teacher 10	3	Female	African American
TA1	17	Female	African American
TA2	26	Female	Caucasian

Data Collection

The data collection method for this study was individual semistructured interviews. I targeted the population of preschool teachers, administrators, and TAs in the selected preschools. I sent the prospective participants a letter of invitation to the study using email. The letter contained an introduction of myself, the nature and purpose of my study, and the sampling criteria for employment as a teacher, administrator, or TA at the selected preschools for at least 1 year with at least one experience of addressing challenging students' behaviors. I used the criteria as part of using the purposeful sampling technique.

A total of 14 participants (10 teachers, two administrators, and two TAs) reached out to express their interest in joining the study. I had a brief conversation with the participants to ask them about their employment and experiences with students with

challenging behaviors to screen whether they met the sampling criteria. I was also transparent about the terms and conditions, which included the estimated duration of a maximum of 60 minutes for each interview, the privacy and confidentiality clause, the member-checking process, and the voluntary nature of their participation. I obtained the participants' consent to participate and asked them for their preferred time and place to conduct the interview. Immediately after the initial conversation, I sent a copy of the informed-consent form to the participants' emails.

I sent an email reminder to the participants a day before their chosen interview schedules. All the teachers chose to be interviewed in the library inside the premises of the selected preschools after their class schedules. All the administrators and TAs chose to be interviewed in their offices during working hours. I ensured that the participants submitted a signed informed-consent form during the interviews. I also assigned a number to replace the participants' names to protect their identities.

I began each interview with a scripted recap of the study and the terms and conditions indicated in the interview protocol (see Appendix A). Once the participants were ready for the interview sessions, I began the audio recording. I used a hand-held portable audio-recording device and the audio recording application on my phone for backup files. I collected some demographic questions to information on the participants' years of employment, sex, and race. I then asked the interview questions and probing questions as needed. All interviews lasted for 30 to 50 minutes. I completed two to three interviews each week. The data collection process was completed within 5 weeks.

No unusual circumstances were encountered during data collection. All participants were interviewed only once. I did not need to ask the participants for follow-up interviews. I produced transcribed transcriptions of the interviews within 12 hours after all 14 interviews were completed. I contacted the participants for member checking. The participants received a copy of their interview transcripts through an email. I requested the participants to review their responses and the accuracy of the transcription. The participants did not make any changes to the transcripts. The reviewed transcripts were prepared for data analysis.

Data Analysis

I used an inductive approach based on the recommendations of Thomas (2006) for the analysis of qualitative data. The data analysis process moved inductively from coded units to larger representations, which were the categories, and then evolved into themes. The five themes were formal and informal assessments, managing challenging behavior, areas of difficulties in addressing challenging behaviors, strategies involving communication and collaboration in addressing challenging behaviors, and successes in implementing consistent and objective strategies to address challenging behaviors.

The process of conducting inductive analysis involved (a) condensing text data collected from participants into a summary format, (b) clearly connecting the summary data to the research questions used in this study, and (c) creating meaning from the experiences or processes that participants described in the raw data (Thomas, 2006).

Figure 1 contains the data analysis process described in the following subsections. The figure shows a cycle beginning with reading many pages of transcripts, as the data analysis process was cyclical rather than linear.

Figure 1

Data Analysis Process
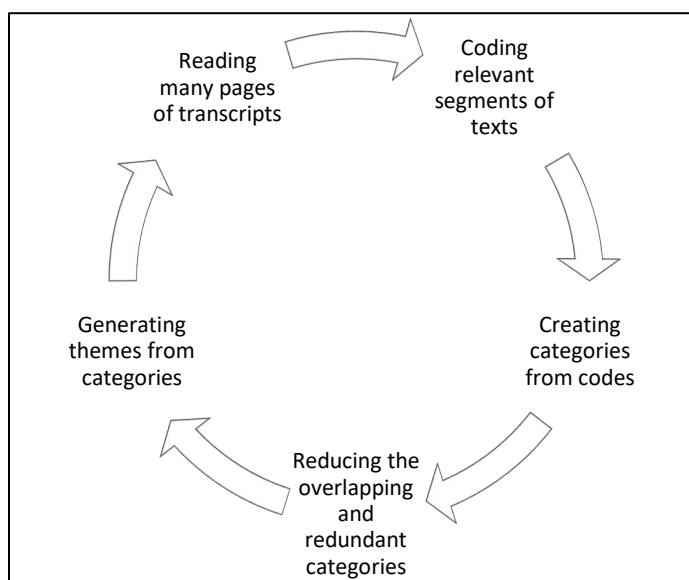
Note. This process was adapted from Thomas's (2006) inductive analysis process.

Condensing Text Into a Brief Summary

Condensing text into a summary involved repeated reading of the transcripts and coding of relevant segments of texts. I read all 14 interview transcripts once to grasp the whole dataset. During the first reading, I identified common patterns across the participants' perceptions and experiences of addressing challenging behaviors. The general patterns were about assessing challenging behaviors in children, aspects of managing challenging behaviors, and successes and difficulties in the strategies applied

to address challenging behaviors in children. I proceeded to reread the transcripts line-by-line to identify relevant segments of texts. I considered segments of texts as relevant if serving as units of meaning depicting the perceptions and experiences of the teachers, administrators, and TAs in addressing challenging behaviors in preschool children. The general common patterns also served as guides for identifying meaningful units. An example of a relevant segment of text is Teacher 4's statement:

> The ASQ is an assessment tool that we use to see what level the child is…we ask them a series of questions and see what level they're at and if they need further assistance, depending on what their score is. The ASQ [measures] language, communication, physical, social, and emotional [development].

The text segment from the transcript of Teacher 4's interview contained the participant's perceptions of ASQ as a method of assessing children's age-appropriate behaviors. Therefore, I considered the text as relevant to the study. I highlighted the text segment and assigned it to a code, which I labeled *socioemotional measures of strengths and needs*. Figure 2 shows the codes and coded texts.

Figure 2

Sample Coding

In immersing in the transcripts, I identified 76 codes. Appendix C provides a complete list of codes. Through labeling segments of texts in the transcripts, I created a summary of the participants' responses to the interview questions. At the analysis point, the whole dataset was broken into units of meaning. The next analysis phase involved rebuilding the data based on connections among the codes related to the research questions.

Connecting the Summary to the Research Questions

This phase involved creating categories from codes. Codes with similar meanings were grouped to form the categories. Categories were more specific than the general common patterns I identified at the beginning of the analysis but broader than the codes I generated in the previous phase. For instance, in categorizing codes that referred to methods of assessing challenging behaviors in children, I clustered the codes according to formal and informal assessment methods (see Figure 3).

Figure 3

Categorizing the Codes
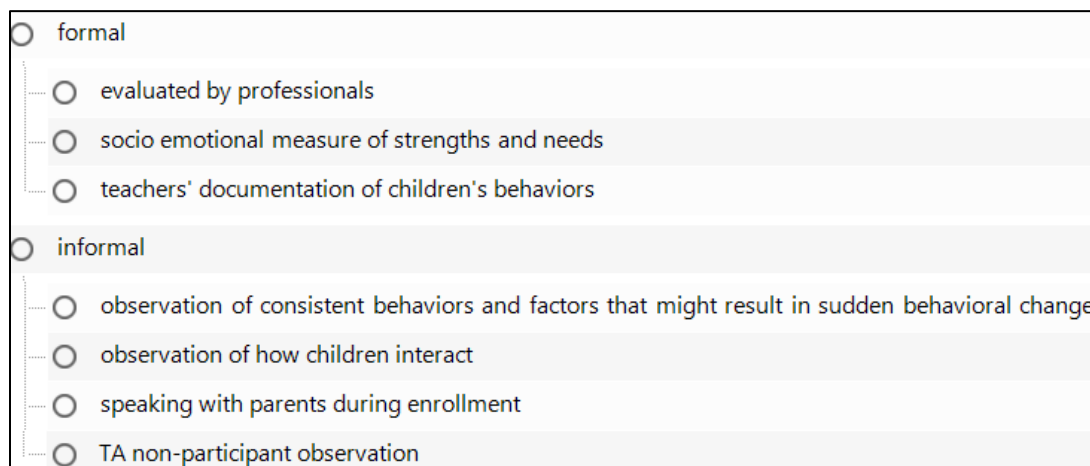
I identified 24 categories from the clustered codes. Appendix B contains a complete list of categories. I further refined the categories in the next phase of the analysis.

Creating Meaning from the Raw Data

This phase involved reducing the overlapping and redundant categories. I generated themes from categories to create meaning in the perceptions and experiences of the participants from raw data. I reduced the 24 categories to 17, as seven categories overlapped with the other categories. I defined each of the 17 categories (see Table 2) to distinguish one category from another.

Table 2

Categories and Definitions of Categories

Categories	Definition
Formal assessments	Methods of assessing children's behaviors based on professional evaluation or guidelines and checklists based on age-appropriate standards
Informal assessments	Any tools teachers used to document challenging behavior at school
Behavior policies	Principles and procedures implemented and reinforced in the preschool to manage challenging behaviors in children
Classroom management	How teachers control and direct the children's behavior inside the classroom
Inhouse service	The in-school referral process teachers follow and any in-school services available
Outside service	The referral process teachers follow for the cooperating agency and the process the agency personnel complete
TA referrals	What teachers and administrators did to secure help with counseling, therapy, and outside services and TA observations and recommendations to manage challenging behavior
Training	Short courses, workshops, lectures, or other educational tools the teachers used to increase their knowledge on managing challenging behavior
Lack of awareness and experience	Teachers and administrators having inadequate knowledge in managing challenging behaviors
Operationalizing challenging behaviors	Standard definition of classifying behaviors as challenging
Parents' denial	Parents refusing to accept that their children were exhibiting challenging behaviors in school
Administrators' roles	Administrators as facilitators of communication and connection to resources
TAs' roles	TA assisting and educating teachers, admins, and parents
Teachers' role	Teachers helping parents access resources to address children's challenging behaviors
Teamwork	Collaboration among administrators, teachers, TAs, and parents to address children's challenging behaviors
Continuity of the interventions at home	Consistency of applying the strategies to address challenging behaviors
Neutrality and objectivity in assessing the child	Consistency in assessing children's challenging behaviors

I reviewed the remaining 17 categories compared with the RQs and the raw data. I found that the categories might be further condensed into themes that represented the essence of the meaning of the participants' perceptions and experiences. Five themes emerged from the process. Figure 4 shows an illustration of refining the categories to themes.

Figure 4

Developing Themes From Categories

Theme 1: Formal and informal assessments	Theme 2: Managing challenging behavior	Theme 3: Areas of difficulties in addressing challenging behaviors	Theme 4: Strategies involving communication and collaboration in addressing challenging behaviors	Theme 5: Successes in implementing consistent and objective strategies to address challenging behaviors
formal	behavior policies	lack of awareness and experience	administrators' roles	continuity of the interventions at home
informal	classroom management	operationalizing challenging behaviors	TAs' roles	neutrality and objectivity in assessing the child
	inhouse service	parents' denial	teachers' roles	
	outside service		team work	
	TA referrals			
	training			

Discrepant Data

Examining discrepancies is crucial in any research work that aims at gathering enough evidence to support its research questions and hypothesis. Surveys or interviews

conducted may contain errors that a researcher aims to identify, communicate, and

minimize (Mbotwa et al., 2017). In this case of this study, some participants reported that

institutionalized policies were in place for all staff as required by the center's licensing

regulations, and other participants reported that they were unaware of any such policies.

Findings

This section contains the presentation of the findings. The results are organized

according to the research questions and presented in themes. Narratives and excerpts

from the data are presented to support the results. Table 3 contains an overview of the

themes with the number of contributing participants and occurrences in the data. The

themes consisted of formal and informal assessments, managing challenging behavior,

areas of difficulties in addressing challenging behaviors, strategies involving

communication and collaboration in addressing challenging behaviors, and successes in

implementing consistent and objective strategies to address challenging behaviors.

Table 3

Overview of the Themes

Themes	No. of participants	No. of occurrences
Formal and informal assessments	14	52
Managing challenging behavior	14	143
Areas of difficulties in addressing challenging behaviors	11	38
Strategies involving communication and collaboration in addressing challenging behaviors	11	35
Successes in implementing consistent and objective strategies to address challenging behaviors	9	17

Research Question 1

RQ1 asked the following: What are the perspectives of preschool teachers, administrators, and technical assistants about children with challenging behaviors are identified, evaluated, and linked to support services? Themes related to RQ1 included formal and informal assessment and challenging managing behaviors. The participants perceived that preschool children needed to be assessed formally and informally for at least 2 weeks from enrollment. The teachers and TAs used formal assessment tools to determine whether the children's challenging behaviors were caused by developmental problems. Teachers and TAs also used informal assessment tools to observe age-appropriate behaviors among the children. Teachers recorded the assessment data for a prolonged period—usually 2 weeks—then produced a write-up report submitted to the administrators. The administrators discussed the report with the children's parents and recommended technical assistance to address the children's behaviors. As stipulated in behavioral policies, once the parents had consented, the report was submitted to the TAs. The TAs conducted their assessments before discussing the interventions with administrators, teachers, and parents. The TAs trained the teachers to implement the interventions in the classroom.

Theme 1: Formal and Informal Assessments

All 14 participants shared their perceptions and experiences of identifying, evaluating, and linking children with challenging behaviors to support services through formal and informal assessments. According to the participants, both formal and informal assessments were essential in how teachers, administrators, and TAs managed

challenging behaviors among the children in their preschool. Formal assessments comprised the Ages and Stages Questionnaires (ASQ) and Devereux Early Childhood Assessment (DECA) program. Ten participants described the tools as measurements of children's socioemotional areas of strengths and needs. Teacher 1 expanded that the ASQ was a checklist used by teachers to evaluate age-appropriate behaviors among preschool children. Teacher 1 measured "motor skills, cognitive [skills], social [skills, and] emotional [skills]" among 36-month-olds and 48-month-olds. Teacher 7 shared similar descriptions of the areas measured in the ASQ but stated that the checklist was designed to evaluate age-appropriate behaviors among 2- to 5-year-old children. Teacher 7 added that the teachers were instructed to use the ASQ checklist within 45 days after the first day of classes. Administrator 1 and Teachers 4, 5, 6, and 10 cited the teachers' use of the ASQ to assess preschool children in their classes formally. Teacher 6 explained how teachers used the ASQ:

> Our formal assessments, [the ASQ], those are ages and stages questionnaires for social emotional behaviors and [the children] have to score at a certain level. If they don't score at a certain level, then we have to refer them out.

In addition to the ASQ, Teachers 4 and 9 and TA1 described using DECA. TA1 described DECA as an assessment like the ASQ, where the children's social and emotional skills were evaluated through a series of questions. TA1 elaborated, "[DECA] measures initiative, challenging behavior attachment and it measures those qualities so it can help me to be able to identify exactly what the child area of needs are." TA2 did not specify any formal assessment tool but stated that TA role involved evaluating potential

developmental delays or neurological problems in children referred by teachers due to challenging behaviors. Teacher 6's response corroborated TA2's statement, as Teacher 6 stated, "[The children] are evaluated by trained individuals [who] basically have been trying to look at specific behaviors that meet specific [criteria] … They're trained in that specific field to make sure that I'm not … picking up on the wrong signs." TAs 1 and 2 further elaborated their professional evaluations of the children through nonparticipant observations. TA2 shared how she observed the child's ability to follow classroom routines, follow simple and complex instructions, and interact with their peers in "a socially acceptable manner." TA1 described her work:

> Also, I go out to the center, and I do two observations where I'm not interacting with the children. I just basically go there, sit, and just take notes on what I'm seeing for those two specific days when I go out there. And then after that then I'm able to analyze and see some of what the child needs, area of needs there are and concern.

In addition to formal checklists and assessments, the 14 participants believed that informal assessments were needed to evaluate preschool children. According to one administrator and six teachers, teachers had long periods of first-hand exposure to children and how they normally behaved. The participants perceived that teachers' consistent documentation of the type of behavior and the time the behavior was exhibited might be considered assessments for challenging behaviors. Administrator 1 specified, "Documentation is the key to all of this. That the teachers are documented, these

behaviors when they come, when they start. What difficulties have you encountered when addressing preschool children's challenging behaviors."

For children to be considered for referral to administrators and TAs, seven participants believed that the teachers needed to observe consistently challenging behaviors and events in children's lives that might trigger challenging behaviors. As part of informally observing challenging behaviors consistently, Teachers 5, 6, and 10 shared using anecdotal notes. Teacher 5 shared the following:

Of course, it's not a one-day project is ongoing simply because we have, so consider everything that the child may have going on. So we do ongoing evaluations by taking the notes needed to determine if it is indeed a challenge in behavior or if it's a change in a child's life that's affecting them…we take anecdotal [notes].

Teacher 7 provided another period apart from the 45-day period she applied when using the ASQ. Teacher 7 shared that upon the first week of class, she would have "suspicions" about potentially challenging behaviors among children. She would begin her "informal teacher's assessments" during the first week up to the first month. Teacher 1's response substantiated Teacher 7's response in informally observing "patterns" of behavior among children during the beginning of classes. Administrator 1 elaborated with the following:

There has to be something that happened for the day, a couple of weeks of monitoring of behaviors before we say it's a challenging behavior going on because it just could be situational. It could be just that day or a day or two. But

long-term at least, I think it takes at least a couple of weeks to kind of look at, see

what is happening at those times.

Theme 2: Managing Challenging Behavior

All 14 participants shared their perspectives of managing challenging behaviors as

part of identifying, evaluating, and linking to support services. The participants believed

that classroom management, behavioral policies, TA referrals, and training were

influential in managing challenging behaviors. The participants had mixed responses

when describing policies regarding student behavior; however, all the participants cited

specific procedures that teachers, administrators, and TAs needed to follow to evaluate

and address challenging behaviors. In addition, TA2 reiterated that the centers their

agency worked with must have a student handbook to obtain a license to operate. The

required handbook should contain a section about managing challenging behaviors.

Administrator 2 shared, "A licensed center is required to have in their handbook a

process for managing challenging behaviors … I'm going to say every center I go to has a

handbook that is in compliance with their licensing rules."

Eight participants shared that the preschool's policy about challenging behaviors

was to use every possible support service and prevent suspension and expulsion of the

child. Teacher 1 disclosed, "No child is supposed to be expelled, so they have to figure

out what's going to work for that child and that family to redirect them to a better

program." Teacher 5 reported that their handbook contained a protocol for following

step-by-step procedures about managing challenging behaviors in children. Teacher 6

similarly expressed, "There is basically the procedure that we've been talking about, the

observation and the order of operations just to make sure every nook and cranny is taken care of." Administrator 1 perceived that children exhibiting challenging behaviors should not be punished through suspension and expulsion but should be supported by adults to eliminate challenging behaviors.

Administrator 1 and both TAs 1 and 2 stated that the policies shifted the accountability on challenging behaviors from the children to the preschool and the parents. TA1 shared, "With the policy, it holds the center accountable to seek help for that child. Give them a chance to get better before they say, okay, we can't do anything to help you at least has given the parents a chance to try." Teacher 10 similarly believed that children with challenging behaviors deserved "a little bit more sympathy" due to possible problems caused by the adults at home.

Apart from the policies made known through the handbook, five participants reported the importance of reinforcing the policies. Three participants shared that parents were informed of the procedures of referrals to TA services from evaluation to intervention as early as the enrollment period. Administrator 2 stated, "I have an orientation with the parent upon enrollment, and I let them know that we do have supportive services for them." Five participants also stated that the administrators talked to parents about consent and involvement upon enrollment. Administrators 1 and 2 disclosed that they obtained parents' consent for their children to be observed. They set the expectations that parents should cooperate in providing the most appropriate support needed to manage the children's behaviors. TA1 and 2 verified the administrators' procedures. TA2 stated the following:

Especially in centers where the director is very seasoned, well-educated, and on

the floor for a long time, they do use their policy as a support for their

communication with parents. This is what we're observing, and this is what we

would like to do next. Yes, I do often see that.

Eight teachers shared managing and addressing challenging behaviors following

the procedures from TA referrals that their preschool mandated. The teachers cited the

same narratives of observing the children for a few weeks while documenting the

behaviors displayed by the children. If children exhibited behaviors that were not age-

appropriate, they would write and submit a report to their administrators requesting for

the support of TAs. The administrators would contact the TA agency and the child's

parents to let them know about the TA referral. A TA would sit-in in the classroom to

observe the child reported. Teachers, administrators, TAs, and parents would have a

conference on the most suitable intervention to address the child's behavior. The

intervention was expected to be applied at school and home. Teacher 7 described the

following:

We'll discuss it with the, um, the daycare director and she get in touch with the

TA, and they'll come in and observe the children and then meet back with us and

tell us what they think rather than the child has, you know, needs to further be

evaluated or whatever.

Seven participants expressed that teachers were trained to implement the

interventions for addressing challenging behaviors among children. However, TA1,

Teacher 1, Teacher 4, and Teacher 5 perceived that the training teachers received was

inadequate. Teachers 6, 7, and 9 elaborated that they received training about developmental disorders and the autism spectrum that increased their abilities to identify children with challenging behaviors because of those issues. Administrator 1 perceived that teachers had received adequate training to seek appropriate resources to address challenging behaviors. In contrast, Administrator 2 shared that teachers were trained to use the available resources properly to address challenging behaviors.

In utilizing the available resources, 13 participants shared their classroom management experiences. Seven participants cited using the strategies that they had learned from the TAs. Teachers 1, 2, 3, 4, 8, and 9 reported redirecting children to help them calm down. Techer 4 and 8 elaborated that redirecting children involved removing them from the setting so that they could defuse their emotions. Teacher 4 remarked with the following:

> Sometimes it's called for the child to be removed from the environment. Maybe you know, another part of the classroom maybe outside on the playground. Maybe their child is not ready to handle what's going on, activities that that particular day, that particular time … It does help to move the child out of their environment into another environment and you tend to get more out of that child. Sometimes that child may need to just release from the environment that he's in.

> Teachers 4, 6, and 10 shared that regardless of the resources used, they attempted to manage their classes and students' behaviors by providing consistent routines and structures. Teacher 10 explained that children had less outbursts when they knew what to expect. Teacher 4 incorporated the TA's recommendations in her lesson plans and that

she made sure to follow her scheduled activities to help the child she referred. Teacher 5

shared that the TA's recommended interventions might target one child, but the teachers

implemented the strategies to the whole class. Teacher 5 noted the following:

> We try to do everything individualized, but we don't necessarily just put it out
>
> there like, oh, this is just for this certain child. But we know who the target child
>
> is. So we'll do like different activities. It can be something like, for instance, yoga.
>
> Not all kids like to sit still through yoga, but we know some people were working
>
> on focus or we were working on how to maintain their behaviors.

Research Question 2

RQ2 asked the following: How do preschool teachers describe their experiences

in addressing children's challenging behaviors? Themes that answered RQ2 were the

participants' experiences of difficulties, strategies, and successes in addressing

challenging behaviors among preschool children. The general difficulties experienced by

the participants were the parents' denial of their children's challenging behaviors.

Additionally, some administrators and teachers lacked awareness and experience in

implementing interventions recommended by TAs to manage challenging behaviors.

Challenging behaviors encompassed a wide variety of issues, contributing to the

difficulties experienced by the participants. The administrators, teachers, and TAs

disclosed their strategies to manage challenging behaviors through effective

communication and collaboration. Apart from the three groups of stakeholders, the

participants shared that they involved the parents in the communication and collaboration

efforts to manage challenging behaviors. Lastly, the participants shared their experiences

of success in managing challenging behaviors. The success of the interventions relied on consistency, neutrality, and objectivity.

Theme 3: Areas of Difficulties in Addressing Challenging Behaviors

Two administrators, two TAs, and seven teachers described their experiences of difficulties in addressing challenging behaviors among preschool children. The participants cited three prominent difficulties: operationalizing challenging behaviors, parents' denial of their children's behaviors, and teachers' and administrators' minimal awareness and experience addressing challenging behaviors. Only Administrator 2 cited difficulties when the parents' insurance did not cover services to address mental health issues for their children and when the teaching staff's turnover rate was high, resulting in children experiencing inconsistencies at school.

Nine participants shared different types of behaviors they categorized as challenging; however, none cited specific definitions of what constituted challenging behavior. Administrator 1 and TA2 perceived that some children tended to misbehave when in large groups, while Teachers 6 and 8 believed that some children tended to act out when in unfamiliar environments. The participants perceived that the children's outbursts in such situations might be considered challenging behaviors and might be addressed by helping them adapt or changing their environments. Administrator 2 and Teacher 6 defined challenging behaviors as uncontrollable behaviors in which they could not redirect the child. Teacher 6 also perceived that nonconforming behaviors were challenging behaviors. Teacher 7 expanded nonconforming behaviors to include inappropriate behaviors for children's ages. Teachers 8 and 10 described challenging

behaviors to include harmful behaviors. Teacher 10 added that harmful behaviors were the only grounds for suspension and expulsion in their preschool. TA1 perceived that challenging behaviors were any misbehaviors tolerated by parents. TA1 specified with the following:

> [Challenging behavior] … it's a behavior that they have gotten away with for so long. [The children] might not be able to wait their turn because they might be a child who was a single child in the home. Just the only child. And the parents give them everything they want when they wanted at school. Now it's a bigger environment. It's more kids, you have to take turns.

Concerning TA1's description of challenging behaviors, eight participants experienced difficulties when addressing challenging behaviors when parents were in denial of how their children behaved. Teacher 4 remarked, "Sometimes the parent is not willing to cooperate when there is a need with the child … Sometimes they don't want to admit that there is a problem with the child." Administrator 2; TA1; and Teachers 7, 8, and 10 perceived that parents did not want to accept the evaluation on their children's behavior due to not wanting their children to be "labelled." Teacher 10 shared, "Parents don't want to accept it. Sometimes they don't even want to accept the help or the resources that you give them because they're scared their child might be labeled or something." Administrator 2 shared a story of one parent who had multiple children "with problems." The parents were in denial due to "fear" of not knowing how to manage challenging behaviors. Administrator 2 added that they were tasked to help the parents

understand that their children were not being labeled but offered technical assistance and support services.

Both TAs interviewed in this study disclosed that parents were not the only ones who lacked knowledge and experience of support services. The TAs shared that some administrators also had an inadequate understanding of their services. TA2 perceived that inexperienced administrators had difficulties explaining the support services for challenging behaviors to the parents. TA1 believed that administrators who lacked experience tended to influence their staff, resulting in inconsistencies in implementing the interventions. TA1 stated, "They don't really know what the services offer, and they don't know what's out there and what they can actually get help for the staff."

Theme 4: Strategies Involving Communication and Collaboration in Addressing Challenging Behaviors

Two administrators, two TAs, and seven teachers described their strategies to address challenging behaviors among preschool children through maintaining communication and collaboration. The participants perceived that administrators, TAs, and teachers had specific roles when communicating and collaborating and parents. Communication was central to collaboration and vital in coordinating the plans for the interventions. Teachers had to communicate their observations of behaviors to their administrators. The administrators communicated the teachers' observations to the TAs and the children's parents. The TAs developed the interventions and communicated the strategies with the administrators and teachers with parental consent. The administrators and teachers relayed the interventions strategies to the parents.

Administrators 1 and 2 perceived that their roles involved keeping the parents informed of their children's behaviors and the processes of evaluating and addressing their children's behaviors. The administrators also collaborated with parents by connecting them with support services to address their children's challenging behaviors. Administrator 2 stated, "My responsibility was to facilitate the resources and refer the parents [to what] the child needed." Administrator 1 perceived, "I think everything with a child is collective. So making sure that everybody, all parties involved are collectively into it. So it's the teacher, the child, the parent, the support services, [I am] making sure all those are connected." Administrator 1 further believed that she was good in "building relationships," particularly providing support for parents and conversing with colleagues and TAs about interventions for addressing challenging behaviors.

Seven participants believed that TAs were central to communicating with administrators, teachers, and parents to educate them about the strategies that would help address children's challenging behaviors. TA1 shared her experience of offering an agency's support services to a daycare owner. The offer was initially turned down, but TA1 communicated the strategies involved in technical assistance and how the interventions would help the children. The daycare owner eventually agreed to the services after hearing the explanation. TA2 shared her experience of educating teachers and parents about implementing the strategies. TA2 emphasized that her role was not to change the child's behavior but to educate the teachers and parents on how to address the child's behavior. TA1 also stated the following:

As a TA, I go into the classroom and I offer strategies to the teachers, to the

parents, to the child to help them cope with this challenging behavior that they

have so that um, sometimes they might not be, they might not know how to say

they want something.

Five participants elaborated that teamwork was vital to the strategies used for

addressing challenging behaviors. Teacher 4 stated that parents, teachers, administrators,

and TAs needed to work together to have "the same understanding" of children's needs

and the interventions implemented to address the children's behaviors. Teacher 7 shared

the following:

With me, the daycare director, the TAs, and the parent, we all get together and do

some brainstorming. And usually, the TA will help us with ideas of what she

thinks we might need to help to work with the child in the classroom.

Theme 5: Successes in Implementing Consistent and Objective Strategies to Address Challenging Behaviors

Two administrators, one TA, and six teachers described their experiences of

success in addressing children's challenging behaviors when consistent and objective

strategies were implemented. The participants believed that the strategies to address

challenging behaviors shared by the TAs needed to be implemented unswervingly in the

classroom and continued at home. TAs' recommended strategies were based on neutral

and objective measures from individual assessments of each child's behaviors. TA1

shared that she complemented teachers' informal observations of the children through

"neutral personal notes" and focused attention when observing one single child after receiving a referral. TA2 also believed in the neutrality of her approach:

> The protocol is nonjudgmental and non-punitive and that that extends to the child and to the parent. The protocol is generally what is causing this behavior and how can we remove the problem to change the behavior and parent, how can we work with you as well to change this behavior. So it's nonjudgmental and it's not punitive.

Teacher 9 applied TAs' plans when dealing with children with challenging behaviors. The participant shared that apart from attempting to redirect the child, she also sometimes redirected herself by taking the time she needed to calm down and re-evaluate her approach to dealing with the child. Teacher 8 took the time to reflect on which strategies were "working." TA1 reiterated the importance of the teachers remaining neutral and consistent when implementing the interventions to address challenging behaviors:

> If I don't see the rules posted, then I'm giving them the rules I have in my bag. I model it with the [teaching] staff, I'm modeling it with the students, and then I say, this is one of the 10 you must do every day. If you don't have rules, then how would you know [how] you're supposed to act?

Five participants described the successes of the interventions when parents would extend the strategies of addressing challenging behaviors at home. Administrator 2 perceived that the parents were the "main source" of addressing children's challenging

behaviors. Educating parents about the interventions was vital to the children's "progress" in the classroom. Administrator 1 shared similar experiences:

> That is our most important role because we bring in, we tell parents up front in enrollment that you know, if things happen, we do have the support services to bring, but to pull them all together because if we do things within the school or within and they don't do them at home, that's not helping the we all, it's a whole the village concept.

> Teachers 6 and 9 perceived that "all interventions" were effective if implemented regularly at home and in school. Teacher 8 also believed, "The parent is also given plans or strategies, and then we work here at the center and the parent works at home."

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Several steps were taken to establish the trustworthiness of the study. These steps fostered greater credibility, transferability, confirmability, and dependability. I employed the member checking technique as planned to increase the credibility of this study. After the interviews, I listened to the audio recordings of the interviews and transcribed those recordings. I then mailed a one-page summary of findings to the participants for them to correct and clarify the findings where necessary. They received the mail, and none of them had a correction or clarification to make. I concluded that the summary of the findings reflected the actual experiences and perspectives of the participants.

Confirmability of the study was increased by providing evidence that the findings were derived from the data. In the presentation of the study findings, the themes were reported along with direct quotes from the interviews to show that the findings were

grounded to the data. The member-check process also increased the confirmability of the study by ensuring all the data collected remained truthful and representative of the participants' true thoughts and feelings.

Lastly, the confirmability and dependability of the study were bolstered through an audit trail. The audit trail entailed documenting and maintaining a log of all the steps and procedures followed in the study and the rationale to pursue the steps. I identified and provided descriptions for the research procedures, such as data collection, analysis, and findings presentations. The procedures outlined in the methodology section under confirmability and dependability were not deviated from and proceeded according to plan.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the perspectives of preschool teachers, administrators, and technical assistants regarding how children with challenging behaviors were identified, evaluated, and linked to appropriate services. The setting for this study was a public childcare agency in a midwestern state. The participants consisted of 10 teachers, two administrators, and two TAs. All participants were employed in a preschool where personnel received resources and services, such as plans and interventions, for students with learning and behavioral needs at the time of data collection. Participants were selected based on working as a teacher, administrator, or TA at the preschool they work at for at least 1 year and having experienced one or more past incidents where they had to address challenging student behavior.

An inductive approach for analyzing qualitative data, outlined by Thomas (2006) was used in the study. RQ1 was: What are the perspectives of preschool teachers, administrators, and technical assistants about children with challenging behaviors are identified, evaluated, and linked to support services? Themes related to RQ1 included formal and informal assessment and managing challenging behaviors. RQ2 was: How do preschool teachers describe their experiences in addressing children's challenging behaviors? Themes related to RQ2 included the participants' experiences of difficulties, strategies, and successes in addressing challenging behaviors among preschool children. I employed the member-checking technique as planned to increase the credibility of this study. Lastly, I increased the confirmability and dependability of the study through an audit trail.

The next chapter, Chapter 5, includes a discussion of the findings to answer the research questions. The discussion is based on the literature provided in Chapter 2 and the conceptual framework. Chapter 5 also includes the implications, recommendations, and conclusions of the study.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

Many preschoolers who present significant behavioral challenges are often not identified and referred for appropriate services to address and correct their behavior (Gilliam, 2016). This study may contribute to the early childhood setting by increasing the understanding of the perspectives of teachers, administrators, and TAs on this issue. Thus, the purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the perspectives of preschool teachers, administrators, and technical assistants regarding how children with challenging behaviors were identified, evaluated, and linked to appropriate services. The goal was to show the support that preschool teachers, administrators, and TAs would need to address challenging behaviors effectively and how preschool teachers had described their experiences in addressing students' challenging behaviors. The research framework that guided this study was Bronfenbrenner's (2000) ecological systems theory and Canter and Canter's (1976) assertive behavioral model.

The present study utilized a case study design to provide an in-depth examination of participants' lived experiences by examining their perspectives in the work environment (Creswell, 2012). Inductive analysis was used to analyze data collected from the interviews with 10 teachers, two administrators, and two TAs. Concept coding was used to code the data and answer the research questions. RQ1 asked about the perspectives of preschool teachers, administrators, and TAs about how children with challenging behaviors were identified, evaluated, and linked to support services. Themes related to RQ1 included formal and informal assessments and challenging managing

behaviors. RQ2 asked how preschool teachers described their experiences addressing children's challenging behaviors. Themes related to RQ2 included the participants' experiences of difficulties, strategies, and successes in addressing challenging behaviors among preschool children.

Interpretation of the Findings

Research Question 1

The first theme was formal and informal assessments. All 14 participants shared about identifying, evaluating, and linking children with challenging behaviors to support services through formal and informal assessments. According to the participants, both formal and informal assessments were essential in how teachers, administrators, and TAs would manage challenging behaviors among preschool children. This finding corroborated past research about formal assessments (Losinski et al., 2015; McGoey et al., 2013; McIntyre & Golya, 2016; Moreno et al., 2017; Nelson, 2014). Ten participants described the formal assessments, ASQ and DECA, as measurements of children's socioemotional areas of strengths and needs that could reduce issues. This finding corroborated Losinski et al. (2015), who found that many challenging behaviors, including verbal outbursts, passing notes, and inappropriate contact, could be reduced through structural assessments. Like Losinski et al., McIntyre and Golya (2016) stressed the importance of conducting a formal behavioral assessment after challenging behavior was displayed to see why poor learning outcomes and severe behavioral disorders occurred. In further corroboration of the usefulness of formal assessments, Moreno et al. (2017) defined behavioral assessments as beneficial for teachers of young students to

correct challenging behavior in a special education setting. Although Losinski et al.

(2015), McIntyre and Golya (2016), and Moreno et al. (2017) corroborated the findings

of the current study that assessments were necessary for mitigating problematic

behaviors, the researchers did not discuss the same formal assessments as the participants

in the current study. The three studies only discussed using behavioral assessments in

general and did not discuss ASQ and DECA specifically. Thus, future research may wish

to explore specifically the use of other formal assessments, like those discussed in this

study, to expand the findings.

In addition to formal checklists and assessments, the 14 participants believed

informal assessments were needed to evaluate the preschool children. The participants

perceived that teachers' consistent documentation of the type of behavior and the time the

behavior was exhibited was considered informal assessments for challenging behaviors.

The participants also believed in using observations as informal assessments; however,

teachers needed familiarity with such students to know what to consider when observing

such students. These findings were corroborated by research (McGoey et al., 2013;

Nelson, 2014; Quesenberry et al., 2014). McGoey et al. (2013) agreed about the need for

informal assessments, such as observations, but stressed the importance of teachers being

knowledgeable. After the teachers took part in the consultation and applied what they had

learned when interacting with disruptive students, fewer behavioral issues and increased

positive teacher-student interactions were reported (McGoey et al., 2013). Nelson (2014)

similarly revealed that teachers might need additional training to distinguish between the

functions of certain behaviors during informal assessments, such as observations. In

agreement, Quesenberry et al. (2014) found that participating teachers perceived challenging behaviors as causing significant problems within childcare classrooms; however, the issue could be mitigated if teachers had the training to observe such students properly. The researchers found that when teachers had a high level of knowledge regarding challenging behaviors and trauma, they noted less difficulty managing such behaviors, lower stress levels, and a higher degree of confidence in addressing challenging behaviors. Although McGoey et al. (2013), Nelson (2014), and Quesenberry et al. (2014) loosely discussed informal assessments, the researchers did not specify such observations as informal assessments as discussed by participants in this current study. The other researchers might not have used the exact verbiage, or the participants of those studies might not have defined observations as informal assessments. Future researchers may want to study the usefulness of informal assessments among teachers with the knowledge to see if such a method is truly effective.

The second theme was managing challenging behavior. All 14 participants believed that classroom management, behavior policies, TA referrals, and training were influential in managing challenging behaviors. These findings were like O'Brennan et al. (2014). The researchers concluded that if problematic student behavior became a school-wide issue, new classroom management skills could help teachers reframe their beliefs about normative school behaviors to address the issue. Also corroborating the current study's findings, Reinke et al. (2014) stressed the importance of having effective classroom management skills to influence problematic behaviors in the classroom positively. After experiencing an intervention that taught new classroom management

skills and training, teachers reprimanded their students less often. Those targeted during the intervention as needing a behavioral action plan were less disruptive moving forward (Reinke et al., 2014).

Regarding policies, however, the current study's participants had mixed responses; however, all the participants cited specific procedures that teachers, administrators, and TAs needed to follow to evaluate and address challenging behaviors. Research corroborated the findings of participants' varied perceptions about the issue, as Young and Martinez (2016) found that the participating teachers had different views about policies addressing challenging behaviors. Efforts to improve challenging childhood behavior have also been addressed at the policy level (Vinh et al., 2016). Vinh et al. (2016) detailed the importance of policy to decrease the number of expelled children. The policy changes influenced the number of mental health consultants trained to address early childhood behavioral issues, and reimbursement was adjusted to match that of professionals providing adult mental health services. Following these initiatives, results from a follow-up survey revealed a decrease in the number of expulsions occurring in early childhood care in the state. These findings indicate that changes made at the state policy level could effectively help early childhood education teachers better address challenging behaviors in their classrooms (Vinh et al., 2016). Corroborating such findings, in the current study, eight participants shared that the preschool's policy about challenging behaviors was to utilize every possible support service and prevent suspension and expulsion of the child, as detailed in the handbook.

Apart from the policies made known through the handbook, five participants reported the importance of reinforcing the policies. Three participants shared that parents were informed of the procedures of referrals to TA services from evaluation to intervention as early as the enrollment period. Nelson (2014) agreed with the current study's findings of the need to reinforce policy; however, the researcher did not specifically discuss TAs. In the current study, seven participants used the strategies that they learned from the TAs. None of the research reviewed in the literature review chapter discussed TAs directly, indicating a need for more research. In the current study, eight teachers shared their experiences of addressing challenging behaviors following the procedures from TA referrals mandated by their preschools. The teachers cited the same narrative of observing the children for a few weeks while simultaneously documenting the behaviors displayed by the children. This finding coincided with the first theme, where participants discussed informal assessments. These findings were corroborated by research (McGoey et al., 2013; Nelson, 2014; Quesenberry et al., 2014), as discussed previously.

Seven participants expressed that teachers were trained to implement the interventions for addressing challenging behaviors among children. However, TA1, Teacher 1, Teacher 4, and Teacher 5 perceived that teachers' training was inadequate. This finding was corroborated by Young and Martinez (2016). The researchers found that teachers needed better training and education regarding how and why challenging behaviors arose to effectively choose strategies to address challenging behaviors (Young & Martinez, 2016). Other research confirmed the need for effective training. Researchers

stated that teachers needed professional support and training, which were usually lacking in current teaching environments, to address behavioral challenges effectively (Reinke et al., 2014).

Teachers 1, 2, 3, 4, 8, and 9 reported their utilization of redirecting children to help them calm down. Teacher 1 disclosed, "No child is supposed to be expelled, so they have to figure out what's gonna work for that child and that family to redirect them to a better program." The finding of teachers actively redirecting children and families to a program was not discussed in the literature review, leaving room for future research. However, researchers did discuss the usefulness of outside programs, suggesting that programs for young students tailored to specific behavioral needs and challenges were the most successful (Hemmeter et al., 2016; Zimmerman et al., 2017). In the current study, Teachers 4, 6, and 10 shared that regardless of the resources utilized, they attempted to manage their classes and their students' behaviors by providing consistent routines and structures. The literature review did not discuss teachers' routines to help manage behaviors. Researchers in the literature review only mentioned how classroom routines were damaged and difficult to follow due to problematic behaviors. It might be interesting to delve more into the routines and structure teachers would use to combat this issue in future research.

Research Question 2

The third theme was difficulties in addressing challenging behaviors. The participants cited three prominent difficulties: operationalizing challenging behaviors, parents' denial of their children's behaviors, and teachers' and administrators' lack of

awareness and experience addressing challenging behaviors. Nine participants shared

different types of behaviors they categorized as challenging; however, none cited specific

definitions of what constituted a challenging behavior. Administrator 2 and Teacher 6

defined challenging behaviors as uncontrollable behaviors in which they could not

redirect the child. Teacher 6 also perceived that non-conforming behaviors were also

challenging behaviors. These findings were corroborated by research that defined

challenging behaviors in children as characterized by throwing tantrums, kicking, biting,

using inappropriate words, having difficulty sharing, and not following instructions

(Walker & Snell, 2013). Despite the prevalence of behavioral challenges among

preschool-age children in many societies, these challenges are often unaddressed using

effective techniques (Rescorla et al., 2011). The current study showed that teachers had

various definitions of problematic behaviors, so the finding may show why effective

techniques are not developed.

Eight participants described that they experienced difficulties in addressing

challenging behaviors when parents were in denial of how their children behaved. Not

much research discussed the psychology behind parents' denial of their children's

behavior. However, some researchers stressed that parents mistreated in the past might be

more likely to make parenting decisions that exacerbate challenging childhood behaviors

(Rijlaarsdam et al., 2014). Researchers indicated the importance of parental involvement,

as parental warmth displayed when parents interact with their children can greatly impact

children's behavior (Waller et al., 2014). Such warmth may come from a place of

empathy, which cannot occur if a parent is in denial of an issue. However, this study

cannot cite why some parents lacked awareness, as that finding was not presented by the participants, leaving room for further research.

Both TA's interviewed in this study disclosed that parents were not the only ones who lacked knowledge and experience of support services, indicating some administrators also had inadequate understandings of the services offered. This finding was corroborated by research, as a survey revealed that many participants perceived a constant lack of training and experience working with such students. These findings indicate that teachers may need better training and education regarding how and why challenging behaviors arise to choose strategies to address challenging behaviors effectively (Young & Martinez, 2016).

The fourth theme was strategies involving communication and collaboration in addressing challenging behaviors. The participants generally perceived that administrators, TAs, and teachers had specific roles when communicating and collaborating with each other and with the parents. Communication was central to collaboration and vital in coordinating the plans for the interventions. As seen from the study, adequate communication processes between parents and teachers ensure that pre-school children's well-being is well monitored both in school and at home. A close relationship between children, their parents, and their teachers makes it easy for possible cases of challenging behaviors to be identified in advance and responded to accordingly. These findings can be informed by Poulou's (2015) findings, which showed that good communication was elemental in early discoveries and solutions to challenging behaviors among preschool children. Axelrad et al. (2013) similarly suggested increased

communication; however, the researcher focused on the issue by suggesting applying

parent management education, which would require increased communication among

teachers and parents. Such education would stress better communication among parents

and children as an effective parent management strategy (Axelrad et al., 2013).

Five participants elaborated that teamwork was vital to the strategies in

addressing challenging behaviors. Teacher 4 stated that parents, teachers, administrators,

and TAs needed to work together to have "the same understanding" of the children's

needs and the interventions implemented to address the children's behaviors. Like the

current study's finding, Johnson (2017) defined team-based problem solving as important

to solving problematic behaviors. No other researchers discussed working in teams

specifically; however, many discussed using interventions, which would usually

encourage teamwork among members (Reinke et al., 2014; Snell et al., 2014; Sørlie et al.,

2015).

The fifth theme was successes in implementing consistent and objective strategies

to address challenging behaviors. The participants generally believed that the strategies to

address challenging behaviors shared by the TAs needed to be implemented

unswervingly in the classroom and continued at home. This finding was corroborated by

research suggesting that dealing with challenging student behaviors required more

intentionally and consistently applied actions in the classroom and beyond (Quesenberry

et al., 2014). In agreement with this finding, Poulou (2015) stated the need for consistent

implementation of appropriate solutions to challenging behavioral procedures. Singh et

al. (2013) also agreed about the importance of consistency in the classroom when

addressing problem behaviors. In further agreement, participants in the current study,

Teachers 6 and 9, perceived that "all interventions" were effective if implemented

regularly at home and in school.

Five participants described the successes of the interventions when parents

extended the strategies of addressing challenging behaviors at home. Administrator 2

perceived that the parents were the "main source" of addressing children's challenging

behaviors. In corroboration of this study's finding, Feil et al. (2014) stressed the

importance of parents applying strategies at home; however, the study was focused on

home schooling, thus differing from the current study. Axelrad et al. (2013) also

discussed parents' effect on their children, suggesting school leadership should offer

parent management education. The researchers applied such an intervention with positive

results: Following the parent management intervention, their children's parent stress and

disruptive behaviors decreased significantly. This finding would imply that parents

extended the training into their home environments; however, future research is still

needed to show the effectiveness of parental support. This study did not focus only on

parents.

Theoretical Framework

The findings can be viewed based on the framework of Bronfenbrenner's (2000)

ecological systems theory and Canter and Canter's (1976) assertive behavioral model.

Bronfenbrenner's (2000) ecological systems theory has previously been applied to

examining aspects of problematic behavior among children, although not from preschool

teachers' perspectives, making this study important. Bronfenbrenner indicated that

children might learn the bad behaviors from caregivers, as children would learn from adults during their developmental milestones. This belief was corroborated by some researchers who stressed that parents mistreated in the past might be more likely to make parenting decisions that exacerbate challenging childhood behaviors (Rijlaarsdam et al., 2014). This issue was also demonstrated in the study, as eight participants experienced difficulties addressing challenging behaviors when parents were in denial of how their children behaved. In further support of Bronfenbrenner's (2000) ecological systems theory, Administrator 2 perceived that the parents were the "main source" of addressing children's challenging behaviors. These parents influenced their children at home due to their environment; moreover, poor socioeconomic conditions were cited as influencing students. Participants recommended using ASQ and DECA to show such conditions to understand such students better. These findings offer insights for Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory being an effective lens to guide the understanding of teachers on how facets of a student's environment affect his or her conduct.

Canter and Canter's (1976) model can also be used to view the current study's findings. For example, Administrator 1 and TAs 1 and 2 stated that the policies shifted the accountability on challenging behaviors from the children to the preschool and the parents, defining the need to sympathize with the students. This finding contradicted Sahin-Sak et al. (2016), who found that participants believed more strongly in holding students accountable for their actions than taking credit for how their missteps might impact students' behaviors. This finding can be understood more clearly by applying part of the theoretical framework of the study, Canter and Canter's (1976) model. Sahin-Sak

et al. (2016) stated that most participants did not prefer such a model because it emphasized how teachers' disciplinary choices and interactions influenced students' behaviors. The participants in this study disagreed with this assessment, admitting that they influenced students' behaviors and taking responsibility for controlling those behaviors by following established policies.

Limitations of the Study

Some methodological limitations applied to this study would warrant consideration. First, although the sample size of 10 teachers, two administrators, and two TAs was adequate for achieving data saturation (Fusch & Ness, 2015), the findings might not be transferred to a larger population. Next, all the participants were recruited from the same geographical area; thus, the challenges and perspectives expressed might have been influenced by regional norms. For instance, school systems in certain regions might support or even encourage the use of suspension and expulsion for many preschool students who demonstrate challenging behaviors. In contrast, school systems in other areas may discourage this practice. Finally, the research design also presented a limitation because qualitative research would generally involve smaller sample sizes; thus, there were fewer data to conclude than when quantitative methods could be used (Yin, 2015). Further, participating teachers might have altered their interview responses due to concerns that the perspectives would affect their teaching positions; if the participants had tried to answer in a way that would reflect well on them, they might not be honest about the pertinent information they are providing. This information might not be reliable to address the research questions. To ensure such possible issues did not limit the

credibility or reliability of the study, participants were explicitly informed that their names would not be associated with their interview responses in the published study; instead, a pseudonym was used.

Other limitations appeared after conducting the study and presenting findings in Chapter 4. The interviews might not have probed deeply enough into the issue. For example, the participants discussed using ASQ and DECA as socioeconomic measures of their students, but these measurements were not discussed in other literature. Thus, not all schools may have the same assessments available, leaving the validity of these tests up to debate. All that was known about the assessments was that the participants in the study used them. It might help for more research to probe the validity of such assessments. The following section discusses more examples of future research.

Recommendations

Some recommendations can be made based on the limitations of the study. One recommendation is from the small sample size used in the study from one geographic location. Future researchers may wish to attempt to increase the sample size or replicate the study in a different region. Different geographical studies may show various findings, which a future researcher can later disseminate through a systematic literature review. Another recommendation based on the limitations is that future researchers may consider applying quantitative methods using a correlative design to study results based on students' assessment tests and test scores.

Regarding the findings of the study, some recommendations can also be made. For example, the participants discussed using ASQ and DECA as socioeconomic

measures of their students, but these measurements were not discussed in other literature. Thus, not all schools may have the same assessments available, leaving the validity of these tests up to debate. All that was known about the assessments was that the participants in the study used them. It might help for more research to probe the validity of such assessments. The following section discusses more examples of future research.

Additionally, five participants described the successes of interventions when parents would extend the strategies of addressing challenging behaviors at home. Administrator 2 perceived that the parents were the "main source" of addressing children's challenging behaviors. Following Axelrad et al.'s (2013) parent management intervention, parent stress and disruptive behaviors exhibited by their children decreased significantly. This finding would imply that parents extended the training into their home environments; however, this study did not focus only on parents. Thus, future research is still needed to show the effectiveness of parental support.

Teachers 4, 6, and 10 shared that regardless of the resources utilized, they attempted to manage their classes and their students' behaviors by providing consistent routines and structures. The literature review did not include teachers' routines to help manage behaviors. Researchers in the literature review only mentioned how classroom routines were damaged and difficult to follow due to problematic behaviors. It might be interesting to delve more into the routines and structure that teachers would use to combat this issue in future research. Moreover, the finding of teachers actively redirecting children and families to a program was not discussed in the literature review, leaving room for future research.

Implications

The results of this study have some implications for positive social change and practice. The results showed that assessments might effectively manage students with behavioral issues. The practical implication is that assessments may be influential for students, teachers, and parents, if involved. Axelrad et al. (2013) suggested parental management interventions to teach parents skills to apply at home. The current study's participants stressed the impact that parents could have on their children at home. Thus, one social change implication is that school leaders may use the results of this study to consider developing parental interventions to increase communication among staff, parents, and students while teaching skills to apply beyond the classroom. If parents learn better skills to take home to their children, then they may positively influence their households, possibly enhancing society when these children grow up with positive outcomes and enter the job force.

Another implication is for practice based on the finding that all the participants cited the need to follow specific procedures to evaluate and address challenging behaviors. This finding acknowledges the need for consistent and specific procedures to address issues appropriately. School leaders may use the findings to understand the need to streamline policies about students with behavioral issues, as this approach was deemed effective in the current study. School staff may also use the findings to understand the need for greater collaboration between educators and parents. The ecological system of educators, social work professionals, and parents should focus on positively supporting the development and preparation of students and addressing challenging behaviors.

Failing to do so may mean that the challenging behaviors will persist; hence, educators, policymakers, school administration, and parents should address the problem as early as possible.

Conclusion

Preschool is the foundation upon which education can play a role in preparing young minds for good citizenship. Therefore, fostering collaboration among parents, teachers, TAs, support services, and the administration, as well as providing continuous professional development to preschool teachers, is essential to achieve positive social change. Preschool is often the first opportunity for society to participate in the preparation and development of young children as they begin their education and learn to become positive-acting and productive citizens. Although parents play a substantial role in early childhood development, the classroom is the opportunity for children to learn to socialize and function in a different environment than in the home.

The purpose of this qualitative research was to explore preschool teacher, administrator, and technical assistant perspectives related to identifying, evaluating, and linking to appropriate services children with challenging behaviors. The findings of this research are consistent with the findings of previous research where administrators, faculty, and TAs noted the existence of challenging behavior. Participants believed in the implementation of several new procedures. When challenging student behavior is identified at the preschool level, this is the opportunity for educators to address the behavior. Based on the findings of this research, educators believe that they require more support in the form of policy and procedure.

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Appendix A: Interview Guide Preschool Teachers

Introduction: The purpose of this study is to explore the perspectives of preschool teachers, administrators, and technical assistants regarding (a) how children with challenging behaviors are identified, evaluated, and linked to appropriate services, (b) support preschool teachers, need to identify, evaluate, and link children with challenging behaviors to support services, and (c) how preschool teachers describe their experiences in addressing children's challenging behaviors. Within the context of this study, challenging behavior is characterized by throwing tantrums, kicking, biting, using inappropriate words, difficulty with sharing, following instructions, transitions, and classroom routines.

Before we begin the interview, I will remind you the interview will be audio-recorded. Before we start with the first questions, do you have questions or clarifications for me? (Wait a few seconds for the participant to respond; if yes, address the question, if no, then commence the study.) Let's begin.

1. In your classroom, how do you identify preschoolers with challenging behaviors?

2. What is your protocol for evaluating preschoolers with challenging behaviors?

3. How do you link your preschoolers who exhibit challenging behaviors to appropriate support services?

4. Does your center have a behavioral policy in place for preschoolers with challenging behaviors? If so, what are your responsibilities in implementing the policy?

5. What kind of formal training have you received at your preschool in relation to addressing preschoolers with challenging behaviors?

6. How are preschool children evaluated for challenging behaviors?

7. What is your role in addressing the behaviors of challenging preschoolers in your classroom?

8. What difficulties have you encountered when addressing preschoolers with challenging behaviors? How does the classroom environment contribute to the difficulties in preschool children's challenging behavior that you have encountered?

9. What individualized interventions have you used? Explain whether the interventions were useful and are recommended.

10. What support do you need from other staff members to refer children who present challenging behaviors?

11. What support do you think you should receive from technical assistants and program staff to address children's challenging behaviors?

12. In your opinion, how could the process of identifying, evaluating, and addressing challenging behaviors in the school environment be improved?

13. When, or why, might a child be suspended or expelled instead of being linked to an appropriate support service?

14. What other relevant experiences or insights would you like to add that we have not yet discussed?

Possible probing questions:

- Please expound on that more.

- What do you mean by that?

- What specific examples can you give?

- How would you characterize that experience?

- Please provide more detail.

Concluding Remark: Thank you for your participation. I will remind you that member-checking will be employed in this study. Please expect an email from me soon with detailed findings from the study. You will be asked to review the research findings once the analysis is conducted for member checking purposes to ensure the data are accurate. Thank you again.

Appendix A (continued): Interview Guide-Administrator

Introduction:

The purpose of this study is to explore the perspectives of preschool teachers, administrators, and technical assistants regarding (a) how children with challenging behaviors are identified, evaluated, and linked to appropriate services, (b) support preschool teachers, need to identify, evaluate, and link children with challenging behaviors to support services, and (c) how preschool teachers describe their experiences in addressing children's challenging behaviors. Within the context of this study, challenging behavior is characterized by throwing tantrums, kicking, biting, using inappropriate words and difficulty with sharing, following instructions, transitions, and classroom routines.

Before we begin the interview, I will remind you the interview will be audio-recorded. Before we start with the first questions, do you have questions or clarifications for me? (Wait a few seconds for the participant to provide a response; if yes, address the question, if no, then commence the study.) Let's begin.

1. In your preschool, how are preschoolers with challenging behaviors identified?

2. What is the protocol for linking preschoolers with challenging behaviors with appropriate support service?

3. Are there any improvements you would make to the challenging behavior policy? If so, what would you change?

4. How are parents informed of the behavioral policy when enrolling their child or children in your school?

5. Describe the role of school faculty should challenging behavior be observed over a prolonged period?

6. What difficulties have you encountered when addressing preschool children's challenging behaviors?

7. Do you feel that elements in the school environment (people, policies, procedures, etc.) affect the difficulties associated with addressing preschool children's challenging behaviors? Why or why not?

8. How do you address challenging behaviors from preschoolers? How is your staff trained to address challenging behaviors?

9. What is the role of parents and family-based interventions in addressing challenging behaviors?

10. Describe your experiences in obtaining parents' permission to refer preschool children for behavioral intervention.

11. What happens if the parent of a child with a challenging behavior refuses your suggestion for community resources?

12. What support do you or your staff need to identify, evaluate, and refer children who present challenging behaviors to support services?

13. What changes have you witnessed in preschoolers who have been referred to community resources?

14. Describe a time when a preschooler was suspended or expelled because of their challenging behavior. What was your responsibility in this action?

15. How could the process for preschool staff addressing challenging behaviors be improved? What are the strengths and weaknesses of the current approach?

16. What other relevant experiences or insights do you want to add that we have not yet discussed?

Possible probing questions:

- Please expound on that more.

- What do you mean by that?

- What specific examples can you give?

- How would you characterize that experience?

- Please provide more detail.

Concluding Remark: Thank you for your participation. I will remind you that member-checking will be employed in this study. Please expect an email from me soon with detailed findings from the study. You will be asked to review the research findings once the analysis is conducted for member checking purposes to ensure the data are accurate. Thank you again.

Appendix A (continued): Interview Guide-Technical Assistant

Introduction:

The purpose of this study is to explore the perspectives of preschool teachers, administrators, and technical assistants regarding (a) how children with challenging behaviors are identified, evaluated, and linked to appropriate services, (b) support preschool teachers, need to identify, evaluate, and link children with challenging behaviors to support services, and (c) how preschool teachers describe their experiences in addressing children's challenging behaviors. Within the context of this study, challenging behavior is characterized by throwing tantrums, kicking, biting, using inappropriate words and difficulty with sharing, following instructions, transitions, and classroom routines.

Before we begin the interview, I will remind you the interview will be audio-recorded. Before we start with the first questions, do you have questions or clarifications for me? (Wait a few seconds for the participant to provide a response; if yes, address the question, if no, then commence the study.) Let's begin.

1. What is the evaluation process for identifying preschoolers with challenging behaviors?

2. What is your opinion regarding the processes of identifying preschoolers' challenging behaviors in the classroom?

3. How many of the centers that you service have challenging behavioral policies? Please describe the usefulness of the policies in terms of effectiveness in addressing preschoolers' challenging behaviors.

4. If any of the centers you service have challenging behavior policies, have you observed the administrators and staff reinforcing the policy? If so, how?

5. What community resources are available to preschoolers with challenging behavior?

6. What is your key role in addressing the challenging behaviors of preschoolers?

7. What difficulties have you encountered or observed when addressing preschoolers' challenging behaviors?

8. What factors influence the difficulties staff encounter when addressing preschoolers' challenging behaviors?

9. When a preschooler is recommended to your services, how do you address their challenging behaviors?

10. What are the strengths and weaknesses of current protocol for addressing problematic behaviors in a preschool classroom?

11. Would you like to share other relevant experiences or insights that we have not yet discussed?

Possible probing questions:

- Please expound on that more.

- What do you mean by that?

- What specific examples can you give?

- How would you characterize that experience?

- Please provide more detail,

Concluding Remark: Thank you for your participation. I will remind you that member-checking will be employed in this study. Please expect an email from me soon with detailed findings from the study. You will be asked to review the research findings once the analysis is conducted for member checking purposes to ensure the data are accurate. Thank you again.

Appendix B: Interview Elements Checklist

i.   The participant shared a considerable experience in handling pre-school children

Yes☐ No   ☐

ii.   The participant worked in a pre-school setting before

Yes☐ No   ☐

iii.   The interviewee met the required educational standard

Yes☐ No   ☐

iv.   The interview met the set standards

Yes☐ No   ☐

v.   The interviewee reacted to all the asked question

Yes☐ No   ☐

vi.   There were no distracters during the interview

Yes☐ No   ☐

vii.   Interview answers were precise and direct to the answer

Yes☐ No   ☐

viii.   Responses were supported by enough evidence based on past experiences

Yes☐ No   ☐

ix.   Weak responses were evaluated

Yes☐ No   ☐

x.   Responses were backed by facial expressions

Yes☐ No   ☐

Appendix C: List of Patterns, Codes, Categories, and Themes

General patterns	Codes	Categories	Themes
methods of assessing challenging behaviors in children			
			Theme 1: Formal and informal assessments
		formal	
	evaluated by professionals		
	socio emotional measure of strengths and needs		
	teachers' documentation of children's behaviors		
		informal	
	observation of consistent behaviors and factors that might result in sudden behavioral change		
	observation of how children interact		
	speaking with parents during enrollment		
	TA non-participant observation		
	not based on assumptions		
	not based on what the teachers say		

General patterns	Codes	Categories	Themes
the aspects of managing challenging behaviors			
			Theme 2 Managing challenging behavior
		behavior policies	
	behavior policy reinforcement		
	following through with the policies when child displays challenging behaviors		
	informed of TA services as early as the enrollment period		
	admin's task		
	parental consent and involvement		
	cannot expel or dismiss children		
	follow a set of procedures to address the behavior		
	did not have policies until TA's recommendation		
	give children a chance to improve their behaviors		
	hold centers and parents accountable to address a child's behavior		

General patterns	Codes	Categories	Themes
	important to set expectations		
	required to have a handbook		
	behavior policy is not in the handbook		
	behavior policy is in the handbook		
		classroom management	
	challenges in classroom management		
	children affecting other children		
	lack of resources in classrooms		
	centers are privately run for profit		
	lack of funding		
	lack of staff in the classroom		
	lack of transition between activities		
	size of the room and the resources inside may affect behavior		
	teachers expect instant results		
	paperwork takes too long		
	teachers might miss certain behaviors when the attention is on other children		

General patterns	Codes	Categories	Themes
	children need attention		
	handling a large class		
	teachers needing a break		
	increasing number of children with clinically diagnosed developmental problems		
	teachers' mood affecting the children		
	teachers not implementing the strategies advised by the TA		
	engaging the whole class		
	helping children behave		
	giving attention to children who need it		
	implementing consistent strategies		
	making children aware of what is expected of them		
	providing adequate support for the children		
	providing consistency to the students		
	providing transitioning activities		

General patterns	Codes	Categories	Themes
	teachers redirect children's behaviors		
	understanding children's individual needs		
	identifying age-appropriate behavior		
	way of communicating with the students		
		inhouse service	
	family-based support services		
	TA offers training for effective communication with children		
		outside service	
	community resources		
	school district		
	specialists for medical and developmental problems		
	specialists to help children communicate		
		TA referrals	
	TA provides individualized intervention		
	TA working with centers to improve children's behaviors		
	early intervention		

General patterns	Codes	Categories	Themes
	not early enough		
	prevent escalation		
	teachers are expected to follow through with TA's recommended strategies		
	teachers submit a write-up referral to their admins		
		training	
	need for extensive training		
	need for updated information		
	TA perceived that some teachers lacked training		
	teachers are trained to address challenging behaviors		
	teachers are trained to communicate with parents		
	teachers are trained to seek resources		
	teachers are trained to utilize the resources to address children's behavior		
the successes and difficulties in the strategies applied to address challenging			

General patterns	Codes	Categories	Themes
behaviors in children			
			Theme 3: Areas of difficulties in addressing challenging behaviors
		lack of awareness and experience	
	center owners are unaware of TA services		
	center owners lack experience as admins		
	teachers might be unaware of TA services		
		operationalizing challenging behaviors	
	behaviors tolerated at home		
	children acting out when in large groups		
	children being disrespectful to their teachers		
	children misbehaving in unfamiliar environments		
	children throwing tantrums		
	disruptive behaviors		
	harmful behaviors		
	non-conforming behaviors		

General patterns	Codes	Categories	Themes
	uncontrollable behaviors		
		parents' denial of their children's behavior	
	parents' honesty in disclosing their children's behavioral problems		
	parents not willing to work on the strategies suggested by TAs		
	parents' health insurance not covering the services		
	staff turnover		
			Theme 4: Strategies involving communication and collaboration in addressing challenging behaviors
		administrators' role in communication and connection	
	building relationships with parents		
	communicate with the parents		
	facilitate the connections among the resources needed to address the children's needs		

General patterns	Codes	Categories	Themes
	support parents with resources		
		TAs' role in assisting teachers, parents, and administrators	
	assessing each child individually		
	assisting the parents		
	educating teachers on how to address children's behaviors		
	speaking directly with teachers		
	TA explaining to center owners about their services		
	TA explaining to the parents that the children were not being diagnosed		
	teachers satisfied with TA		
	understanding the teachers' struggles		
		teachers' role in communicating with parents	
	teachers helping parents access resources to address children's challenging behaviors		
		teamwork	
			Theme 5: Successes in implementing

General patterns	Codes	Categories	Themes
			consistent and objective strategies to address challenging behaviors
		continuity of the interventions at home	
	children will be suspended if parents refuse the services		
	continuity of strategies to address children's behaviors		
		neutrality and objectivity in assessing the child	