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Administrators' Challenges with Inclusionary Practices in General Education Classrooms

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This is to certify that the doctoral study by

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Abstract

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EdS, Capella University, 2013

MA, Capella University, 2008

BS, University of West Georgia, 2003

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

The research problem explored elementary administrators in a southern school district in Georgia who experienced challenges supporting teachers' implementation of inclusion strategies to support the academic needs of students with disabilities (SWDs) in general education classrooms. The purpose of this basic qualitative study examined administrators' challenges and teachers' support with the implementation of inclusion strategies for SWDs. The conceptual framework that grounds the research included Fullan's six secrets of change and Burns' transformational leadership theory. The basic research qualitative research design used semi-structured interviews with five elementary administrators through purposeful sampling. Data analysis involved notes, NVivo 12 software, audio, and codes that aligned with a theme that was assigned to each participant. Member checking was completed, the NVivo 12 software was reviewed and began the thematic analysis. Research findings revealed the need for more administrative support and appropriate professional development opportunities to promote a culture change and strengthen inclusionary practices. The challenges for administrators include time to monitor inclusionary programming, preparedness for SWDs, and finding the time to implement effective strategies for SWDs, while the primary challenge is in implementing and monitoring resources and professional development for inclusion more appropriately. This study contributed to positive social change by exploring the challenges administrators face who support SWDs and has the potential to increase academic classroom performance and the scores and percentages of SWDs by implementing effective inclusionary practices in general education classrooms.

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Dedication

First and foremost, this study is dedicated to God. *"Though she may stumble, she will not fall, for the LORD upholds her with his hand"* (Psalm 37:2).

I dedicate this study to my parents, who have sacrificed for me to live my life to the fullest and made a way when there was seemingly none. Now that I am an adult with children of my own, I realize so many of their dreams were put on hold so I could pursue mine. For that, I am eternally grateful and will spend the rest of my life making sure they are taken care of and comfortable. I love and appreciate them both!

I dedicate this study to my husband, who cheers for me without making much noise because actions speak louder than words. He minimized frustration by washing clothes, going grocery shopping, and entertaining the kids when he knew I would pull an "all-nighter." He ensured I was up for work when he knew I only had 2 hours of sleep. This is just as much his milestone as it is mine because there is no way I could have done this without him. I fall deeper in love with him every day!

I dedicate this study to my children, who may never know how much they inspired me to be the best version of myself. Every one of them has such a special place nestled in my heart. I would not be who I am if I was not their mother. For my sons, JaJuan, Tyler, and Jackson, our love runs deep. No matter how much they grow or how far they go, my heart will always be their home. For my daughters, Ty'Mia, Erriel, Savannah, and Brooke Haven, we have a bond that can never be broken. I want them to know they never have to choose between having a family and a career; they can have both. Always strive for greatness, and if there is no room at the table, I hope they build their own. I adore them all!

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

The challenges administrators face appropriately dealing with special education issues is a reoccurring topic in education today. As a result, the Collaboration for Effective Educator Development, Accountability, and Reform (CEEDAR) Center recommends that administrators become familiar with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (Billingsley et al., 2018). Understanding IDEA is essential for administrators to develop skills to understand how students with disabilities (SWDs) should be supported, as well as to monitor instructional progress effectively and help structure programs that further develop mission and vision statements involving services for this population of students (DeMatthews et al., 2020). Despite the evident need, there is limited information regarding how administrators support teachers as they become inclusive and effective (Schiariti, 2020; Waldron & McLeskey, 2011).

Regardless of a child's disability, the implementation of IDEA by educators affords SWDs the opportunity to be educated in the least restrictive environment (LRE) with their non-disabled peers (NCES, 2020). In 2018, seven million students ages 3 to 21 received special education services under IDEA, which was approximately 14% of all public school students. The integration has been in place for 46 years. Although inclusion is not relatively new, it still challenges administrators with supporting general education teachers' implementation of inclusion strategies to support the academic needs of SWDs (NCES, 2020).

A practice that can further support the inclusion of SWDs in inclusion classrooms is to increase leaders' roles and responsibilities in influencing instructional practices to

close the achievement gaps between SWDs and students without disabilities (SWODs).

According to Mavrogordato and White (2020), administrators play an essential role in

ensuring that educators make appropriate decisions to meet the academic needs of all

students. The decision-making processes regarding general education curriculum are not

clearly defined and vary among educators implementing instructional strategies for

SWDs (Ruppar et al., 2017). Administrators require various skills and specific expertise

to provide effective leadership for SWDs and must be knowledgeable and prepared to

address the complex and unique challenges in a manner that aligns with IDEA

(DeMatthews & Edwards, 2014). The development of an Individual Education Program

(IEP) does not explicitly outline IDEA or what it should look like for every student; as a

result, educational stakeholders and administrators face challenges making consistent

decisions and developing procedures that support teachers in inclusive classrooms

(DeMatthews & Edwards, 2014). By developing these procedures effectively, closing the

achievement gaps between SWDs and SWODs seems more plausible and attainable for

school leaders.

   Administrators have challenges to meet state standards and close the achievement

gaps between SWDs and SWODs because there is little consistency in formal preparation

for leadership roles related to special education (Kamens et al., 2013). In addition to

preparedness, providing high-quality instruction for all students is a key way

administrators support teachers as they move to a more inclusive approach (Waldron &

McLeskey, 2011). It is critical to examine these challenges continuously, so

administrators can make informed decisions to address any barriers and support teachers

effectively. Approximately 17% of general education teachers felt prepared to teach children with learning disabilities, while 30% felt inadequately prepared to teach them (National Center for Learning Disabilities, 2019). Administrators should become familiar with teachers' specific needs, and effective practices for supporting teachers can increase social change (Keierleber, 2019; Morris, 2017). Social change occurs when people work toward a common good for society. Social change can be described as any adjustment in the established patterns of inter-human relationships and standards of conduct (Morris, 2017), or any practice that enhances and improves the world in which we live. Another definition is people coming together to improve the current practices in society to enrich the culture and strengthen knowledge, thus transforming a group's customs, beliefs, laws, and institutions (Babbie, 2017).

This research study has the potential to contribute to the current literature on effective practices for administrators supporting both teachers and SWDs in inclusive classrooms. One of the primary purposes of integrating special education students into general education classrooms is to provide the same quality of education for SWDs and their nondisabled peers in inclusive classrooms. Researchers have revealed a need to conduct further studies to provide insight into how administrators can address challenges with implementing instructional strategies and offer more comprehensive views on how to best support teachers' collaborative practices in inclusionary classrooms (Shepley et al., 2018). Positive social change propels ideas and actions with real-world implications (Morris, 2017). The findings from this research can promote social change by exploring working relationships and effective practices that ultimately allow SWDs to benefit from

instruction in general education settings with their nondisabled peers. The social implications of the research has the potential to influence employment and judicial encounters because when SWDs reach adulthood, only 46% become employed, and 50% interact with the justice system (Zajac et al., 2015). The interpretation and explanation of social change reveal that change can occur on so many levels, thus providing educational stakeholders with informed decisions to strengthen support processes so that SWDs can maximize their potential in inclusion classrooms and society.

Administrators have reported challenges with supporting teachers in implementing inclusion models related to professional development, instructional resources, and time for collaborative planning with the general and special educators regarding SWDs' individual academic needs (DeMatthews & Edwards, 2014; Shepley et al., 2018). As a result, it is crucial to ensure the practices needed to serve the student population. In inclusive schools, strengthening administrators' practices can promote positive social change with purposeful, explicit research that yields immediate solutions (Ricci et al., 2020). In this chapter, I introduce the study by examining the background of the problem and describing the problem more in-depth. I then present the purpose of the study, followed by the research questions (RQs) that I will seek to answer. Chapter 1 also includes overviews of the conceptual framework and nature of the study; definitions of key terms, and a discussion of the assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations, and significance of the study.

Background

The task of leading a school has become more complex for school administrators. Current federal regulations hold schools accountable for effectively implementing inclusionary practices for students with disabilities (SWDs) in general education classrooms as outlined in their IEPs. In a recent study examining the leadership practices of school principals, it was revealed that there are emerging challenges and a need to align district practices and goals in order to support teachers with effective, inclusive practices and conceptualizing equitable education for all (Shields & Hesbol, 2020). Although evolving evidence provides some insight into an administrator's role in emerging inclusive education, the study addresses the gap in practice identifying the instructional needs administrators have when supporting teachers in becoming inclusive and effective (Schiariti, 2020; Waldron et al., 2011).

Effective instructional strategies to support SWDs in general education classrooms with methods for differentiating instruction to improve teachers' knowledge and skills are vital for the performance of SWDs in inclusion settings (Kauffman & Badar, 2016). Since schools are being held accountable for special education students in general education classrooms, schools thrive when principals are able to effectively shift toward inclusionary practices (Adams et al., 2017). Thompson (2017) noted the need for emerging literature research regarding the areas perceived as crucial to organizational success and relevant competencies for administrators of special education programs. The more administrators understand SWDs, the more prepared they become to make

decisions about the special education programs that provide meaningful instruction for students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms (Crockett, 2019).

Administrators experience challenges implementing differentiated instruction and addressing the evolving demographics of the classroom and its relative impact on the teaching process based on instructional practices aligned with diverse learning needs (Lang, 2019). There are effective instructional models to support services for SWDs in inclusive settings (Cobb, 2015; Stahl et al., 2019). School leaders vary significantly in the support and successful implementation of these practices, making it very difficult to identify the effective practices their teachers employ to close the achievement gap.

Researchers have established positive benefits for SWDs who learn from SWODs in successful classroom models that support inclusionary practices (Hurd & Weilbacher, 2018). Administrators perform a vital role in creating a culture that embraces inclusion designs a school that meets all students' needs (Espinoza & Cardichon, 2017). The significance of this research study considered the implications of inclusion practices and addressed leadership skills needed to create a culture of change. In order to create a culture of change that transforms the collaboration and distributed system of leadership, the study is needed to address the challenges administrators face as they collaboratively identify and implement proven practices to achieve school-wide improvement for students with disabilities and their nondisabled peers (Boscardin et al., 2018). This culture encompasses high-quality education and academic achievement for SWDs in general education settings (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015). Administrators can use data collection to make informed decisions to understand change

theory, support teachers, and face challenges that involve trustworthiness, transparency, and accountability for managerial practices (Denhardt et al., 2018; Finlay, 2002).

In 1970, only 1 in 5 children with disabilities had access to the general curriculum (NCES, 2016). In 1975, legislation was passed for the Education for All Handicapped Children Act 94-142 (EAHCA), which later became Public Law 94-142 (PL-94-142) to protect against discrimination against SWDs in public schools (Hossain, 2012). In 1990, PL-94-142 was later revised and named the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and was reauthorized in 1997 and 2004 (McCulloch & Woodin, 2020). Between 1990 and 2007, there was a 93% increase in the number of SWDs supported in general education classrooms (DeMatthews et al., 2020). The latest version of IDEA, established in 2006, held administrators more accountable for providing teachers with the necessary training and support to provide students with disabilities inclusive environments (Zirkel, 2014). Bateman et al. (2017) found that there remains a need for a more explicit version of what skills and knowledge are required to address students with disabilities in inclusive settings. Administrators must know the regulations for SWDs to receive FAPE and be supported in the LRE with a fully executed IEP (Zirkel, 2014).

The level of support provided by school leaders for teachers who implement inclusive practices varies significantly, making it very difficult to identify effective practices to close the achievement gap. Researchers have established positive benefits for SWDs who learn from their nondisabled peers in successful classroom models that support inclusion in general education settings (Hurd & Weilbacher, 2018). As a result of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), an increased number of educational

stakeholders refine, develop, and propose consolidated state plans that establish goals and outline inclusionary practices for SWDs and SWODs in general education classrooms (Espinoza & Cardichon, 2017). The qualitative research study addressed the gap in practice by understanding how administrators can successfully manage their schools and address the challenges to implement instructional models that effectively support general education teachers in inclusion classrooms.

Problem Statement

The problem this study explored is that elementary administrators in a southern school district in Georgia are experiencing challenges supporting teachers' implementation of inclusion strategies to support the academic needs of students with disabilities (SWDs) in general education classrooms. I selected this population because elementary administrators have expressed the need for support in dealing with these specific challenges (Elementary principal, personal communication, January 14, 2021). Becoming proficient in IDEA strategies allows administrators to support the implementation of effective practices inclusive settings. The Collaboration for Effective Educator Development, Accountability, and Reform (CEEDAR) Center recommends that administrators become familiar with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (Billingsley et al., 2018). Becoming proficient in IDEA strategies allows administrators to remain relevant while supporting the implementation of effective practices inclusive settings. School leaders monitor instructional progress through informal conversations and formal observations before disaggregating standardized testing data to examine practices (Kouali, 2017). The monitoring of inclusionary

practices can help develop an effective leadership style that addresses the challenges of ensuring all students meet academic standards (Kouali, 2017). Administrators become knowledgeable of deficit areas to strengthen their skills based on a Comprehensive Needs Assessment (CNA) (Georgia Department of Education, 2017).

The state of Georgia assessment revealed 63.4% of elementary teachers felt unsupported by administrators when it came to inclusion strategies and professional development opportunities (Georgia Department of Education, 2017). The issue mentioned above, which summarized that 63.4% of elementary teachers felt unsupported by administrators with inclusion strategies and professional development opportunities, resulted in a low performance index rating for the local school district in 2019. Additionally, administrators expressed the need for professional development opportunities that enhance general education teachers' instructional practices in inclusive classrooms (Elementary principal's meeting minutes, October 19, 2021). An administrative meeting reviewed survey results and revealed teachers do not deem current instructional practices effective in addressing students' academic needs in inclusion classrooms (Elementary school preplanning meeting minutes, July 22, 2021).

According to the Georgia Governor's Office of Student Achievement (2019), the local school district's academic performance index rating was 63.4%, scoring an overall "D." To serve as an example of the educational needs, the English Language Arts (ELA) academic performance of local 5th graders identified that only 4% of SWDs scored at the proficiency level in ELA. The performance gap between the districts' 5th grade SWDs and students without disabilities (SWODs) was 23.9%, underscoring the academic

performance gap. By examining performance management and accountability systems in public-school sectors, researchers determined school leaders faced collaboration challenges. Some teachers believe that they are not receiving the necessary tools and support involving professional development opportunities provided by local school districts (Denhardt et al., 2018).

The Georgia Department of Education requires school districts to conduct a Comprehensive Needs Assessment (CNA). The CNA's purpose is to assess each campus's teaching, learning, and leadership in the district (Georgia Department of Education, 2017). The CNA identifies the administration areas to improve student learning and special education programming related to inclusion practices. (Georgia Department of Education, 2017). The Georgia Department of Education (2017) reported that this southern school district's CNA ranked as "Emerging" in teaching, learning, and leadership. The CNA's results revealed that staff engaged in planning processes to improve student learning, yet challenges exist amongst administrators, thereby contributing to the local problem.

While much research has been conducted on how administrators significantly influence the school culture, limited research has addressed the challenges of maintaining the effective sustainability and implementation of inclusion practices (Shepley et al., 2018). The challenges persist when principals lack the experience necessary to work with SWDs, and they are unfamiliar with how to lead an inclusive school and successfully meet the goals of inclusion (Billingsley, 2012). Ngwokabuenui (2013) concluded the following:

The burden of managing special education policies and practices has increasingly been made the responsibility of the principal. The success or failure of these inclusive policies is greatly dependent on the principal of the school. As the popularity of inclusion programs continues to rise, so do the challenges for principals. As the instructional leaders of the school, administrators must have a working understanding of both special education law and educational programming (p. 9).

Despite the widespread use of inclusion to support SWDs, improvements in high stakes accountability policies requiring SWDs to meet district level standards have contributed to increased access; however, achievement gaps have not narrowed in decades, and school leaders continue to face challenges in providing teachers with effective classroom practices (Gilmour et al., 2019). School leaders can address the challenges with academic performance by supporting SWDs and working closely with educators to understand the structural support that can impede the facilitation of high-quality learning practices (Billingsley et al., 2018; Waldron & McLeskey, 2011). Principals revise caseloads, change teacher schedules, complete targeted audits of IEPs, and conduct ongoing classroom observations of teams struggling with inclusionary practices (Billingsley et al., 2018; Waldron & McLeskey, 2011). Table 1 below displays state and districtwide ELA scores for 3rd through 5th grade for SWDs. The schools were chosen because they implement inclusionary practices and support SWDs in general education classrooms. This study is significant in examining the current challenges administrators' face in addressing the large gaps in achievement between SWDs and

SWODs and is supported by preceding research that suggests several SWDs are not accessing the curriculum (Gilmour et al., 2019). The performance gap between the districts' SWDs is significantly lower than SWODs, which underscores the academic performance gap and identifies the need for administrators to address challenges in supporting teachers with effective practices in inclusive classrooms. Tables 2-4 reflect SWDs' and SWODs' academic performance in ELA during the same school years and illustrate the consistent academic performance gap.

Table 1

2017-2019 Statewide/Districtwide scores for SWDs Demonstrating at or Above Proficient Level on Georgia Standardized Tests in English Language Arts (ELA) of Students in $3^{rd} – 5^{th}$ Grades

Year	ELA Grade 3		ELA Grade 4		ELA Grade 5	
	Statewide	**Districtwide**	**Statewide**	**Districtwide**	**Statewide**	**Districtwide**
2017	10.1%	3.8%	11.1%	3.9%	12.1%	2.3%
2018	10.5%	4.5%	11.2%	4.8%	10.3%	4.1%
2019	9.2%	6.1%	10.0%	3.8%	11.4%	4.0%

Note: Retrieved from Georgia Department of Education, 2019.

Table 2

Comparison of Six Elementary Campuses of Percentage SWDs and SWODs Demonstrating Meets Standard Scores for ELA of Students in 3ʳᵈ grade in the Georgia District for 2016-2019

School Years	Study Site	SWDs Overall ELA Proficiency	SWODs Overall ELA Proficiency	Gap in Performance
2016-2017	Campus A	0.0%	17.8%	-17.8%
	Campus B	10.5%	26.3%	-15.8%
	Campus C	0.0%	7.5%	-7.5%
	Campus D	0.0%	16.8%	-16.8%
	Campus E	N/A	19.3%	N/A
	Campus F	5.6%	22.5%	-16.9%
2017-2018	Campus A	0.0%	17.8%	-17.8%
	Campus B	5.6%	19.1%	-13.5%
	Campus C	0.0%	9.5%	-9.5%
	Campus D	0.0%	12.9%	-12.9%
	Campus E	0.0%	20.7%	-20.7%
	Campus F	0.0%	25.8%	-25.8%
2018-2019	Campus A	16.7%	24.1%	-7.4%
	Campus B	11.1%	26.9%	-15.8%
	Campus C	N/A	6.8%	N/A
	Campus D	0.0%	15.6%	-15.6%
	Campus E	N/A	23.0%	N/A
	Campus F	6.3%	19.3%	-13.0%

Note: Data adapted from Georgia Department of Education (2019) **N/A-Does not report fewer than 10 students**

Table 3

Comparison of Six Elementary Campuses by Percentage of SWDs and Percent of SWODs Demonstrating Meets Standard Scores for ELA of Students in 4th grade in the Georgia District for 2016-2019

School Years	Study Site	SWDs Overall ELA Proficiency	SWODs Overall ELA Proficiency	Gap in Performance
2016-2017	Campus A	0.0%	24.4%	-24.4%
	Campus B	0.0%	26.9%	-26.9%
	Campus C	0.0%	9.5%	-9.5%
	Campus D	0.0%	16.8%	-16.8%
	Campus E	N/A	19.3%	N/A
	Campus F	0.0%	25.4%	-25.4%
2017-2018	Campus A	N/A	17.8%	N/A
	Campus B	5.9%	31.5%	-25.6%
	Campus C	N/A	22.0%	N/A
	Campus D	4.5%	21.6%	-17.1%
	Campus E	0.0%	22.5%	-22.5%
	Campus F	11.1%	28.5%	-17.4%
2018-2019	Campus A	16.7%	24.1%	-7.4%
	Campus B	11.1%	24.3%	-19.3%
	Campus C	N/A	14.7%	-14.7%
	Campus D	0.0%	12.7%	-12.7%
	Campus E	N/A	26.4%	-26.4%
	Campus F	6.3%	21.2%	-15.3%

Note: Data adapted from Georgia Department of Education (2019) *N/A-Does not report fewer than 10 students*

Table 4

Comparison of Six Elementary Campuses by Percentage of SWDs and Percent of SWODs Demonstrating Meets Standard Scores for ELA of Students in 5th grade in the Georgia District for 2016-2019

School Years	Study Site	SWDs Overall ELA Proficiency	SWODs Overall ELA Proficiency	Gap in Performance
	Campus A	N/A	42.0%	N/A
	Campus B	0.0%	18.7%	-18.7%
	Campus C	0.0%	26.2%	-26.2%
2016-2017	Campus D	0.0%	16.7%	-16.7%
	Campus E	0.0%	20.7%	-20.7%
	Campus F	7.4%	25.4%	-18.0%
	Campus A	0.0%	28.7%	-28.7%
	Campus B	0.0%	20.1%	-20.1%
	Campus C	0.0%	21.0%	-21.0%
2017-2018	Campus D	0.0%	16.1%	-16.1%
	Campus E	7.7%	26.5%	-18.8%
	Campus F	0.0%	27.1%	-27.1%
	Campus A	N/A	39.3%	N/A
	Campus B	4.5%	28.3%	-23.8%
	Campus C	0.0%	18.7%	-18.7%
2018-2019	Campus D	4.0%	20.0%	-16.0%
	Campus E	N/A	32.6%	N/A
	Campus F	9.1%	28.0%	-18.9%

Note: Data adapted from Georgia Department of Education (2019) *N/A-Does not report fewer than 10 students*

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this basic qualitative study is to examine the challenges administrators face in supporting teachers' implementation of inclusion strategies to support the academic needs of SWDs in general education classrooms. Although the phenomenon of inclusive education is increasing throughout the nation, substantial challenges related to academic achievement persist because there remains a significant gap between literature and practice, which has the potential to adversely impact the implementation of inclusionary practices in classrooms (Schiariti, 2020). In a recent study exploring principals' attitudes towards inclusion, it was determined that an opportunity to increase effective practices and the academic success of SWDs is needed to address the challenges principals face with the lack of experience and training in the areas of inclusion and special education (White et al., 2021). Instructional leaders should mentor, monitor, and influence teachers' instructional practices (Lang, 2019). Therefore, it is necessary to explore the gap in practice to further examine the challenges that elementary administrators face implementing effective and sustainable inclusionary practices to support the academic needs of SWDs in general education classrooms.

Administrators are successful when they build learning capacity and create a school climate that develops relationships and closes the achievement gap of special education students in inclusion classrooms (Osiname, 2018). Inclusion education creates learning environments to ensure all students develop and grow academically; therefore, administrators must have the capability to make an explicit plan of action to close the achievement gap (Katz et al., 2019; Osiname, 2018). Creating a collaborative culture is

essential to developing effective, inclusionary practices, as well as developing inclusion

teachers' expertise to cultivate a positive learning environment for all students. The

research questions that will guide this basic qualitative study are given below.

Research Questions

RQ1: How do elementary administrators describe the challenges with supporting

inclusionary practices for SWDs in general education classrooms?

RQ2: How do elementary administrators support teachers with addressing the

academic needs of SWDs in general education classrooms?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of a study is the underlying structure or frame

(Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The conceptual framework that was established for this study

was Fullan's (2011) six secrets of change coherence framework, which was referenced as

a priori scheme that addresses the challenges of leadership abilities in inclusive

environments. Burns' (1978) transformational leadership theory, which focuses on the

use of emotional motivation to encourage others to advance to a higher level of

transformation within the social system, will also be used in this study. Bass (1998)

examined the work of Burns (1978) by extending the processes that support transforming

leadership practices. Research reveals groups guided by transformational leaders have

higher levels of satisfaction and performance than groups led by other types of leaders

(Bass & Riggio, 2005). In Fullan's (2011) comprehensive framework leadership model,

the reason change occurs as it does is addressed; in Burns' (1978) transformational

leadership model, leaders identify the need for change. The critical components of

leadership theory focus explicitly on inclusion, equity, excellence, and social justice (Shields & Hesbol, 2020). The critical components of the six secrets of change include understanding change, moral purpose, knowledge building, cultivating relationships, and coherence making. Change theory is crucial to inform practice and policy on implementing instructional strategies for schools seeking to expand their knowledge in education and undergo change for organizational effectiveness (Mestry, 2017).

    Since qualitative research uses a conceptual framework, a conceptual model of exploration is appropriate to inform research, practice, and policy for transformative leaders to disrupt inequitable school cultures and work for change that provides equality for all (Shields & Hesbol, 2020). This basic qualitative study conceptualized change through the lens of transformational leadership theory in a critical approach. This approach focuses explicitly on equity, social justice, excellence, and inclusion (Brooks et al., 2017). The challenges administrators face can be influenced by both Burns' (1978) transformational leadership theory and Fullan's change theory by identifying specific leadership qualities desired to promote a culture of change needed to embrace the concept of integrating SWDs in general education classrooms (Ginja & Chen, 2021). The principal's responsibility is to continuously transform inclusion classrooms through reflective, restorative practices that sustain a strong school culture (Osiname, 2018).

    The conceptual framework of change theory related to the study approach and key research questions, as well as to instrument development through explicitly developed interview questions, reviewing artifacts, and data analysis regarding administrators' challenges with the inclusion of elementary students. Fullan's (2011) change theory

model outlines four phases in the change process: initiation, implementation,

continuation, and outcomes. The change theory can be influential in helping

administrators support teachers' implementation of instructional practices and their

collaborative practices by showing that change is inevitable. Knowledge building and

cultivating relationships are change agents that support the academic needs of students

with disabilities (Juvonen et al., 2019). Administrators should cultivate a school

environment where teachers understand change is essential in knowledge building for

inclusion strategies and collaborative practices. The six secrets of change must be

implemented successfully by administrators (Fullan, 2011). It is also necessary to

research the challenges administrators face to ensure their approach to inclusion involves

loving employees, connecting peers with purpose, capacity building, learning the work,

transparency rules, and systems learning (Fullan, 2011).

     According to Seidman (2013), interviewing research is interested in other

individuals' experiences because they are worthy and capable of promoting social

change. The framework relates to the basic qualitative study by providing interviews with

administrators to understand their experiences, how they describe those experiences, and

their interpretation of those experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). A conversation takes

place when a researcher gently guides a conversational partner in an extended discussion.

This approach elicits depth and detail about the research topic by following up on the

interviewee's answers during the discussion (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). In descriptive

coding, a categorized data inventory provides an overview of what is discovered

(Saldaña, 2016). The codes developed from one or more categories can represent a

phenomenon's directly observable or underlying aspect and memos through data analysis (Saldaña, 2016). This research identified challenges through interviews, enrich effective practices for inclusion through a transformational leadership lens, and align with the study's design, data collection, and analysis. Burns' (1978) transformational leadership model and Fullan's (2011) comprehensive change model are presented in the literature review to look for ideas that move an organization to reach a school's vision and connect the current research regarding inclusion models and the challenges administrators face to support teachers and SWDs.

Nature of the Study

The nature of this study used a basic qualitative approach to examine and collect administrative responses. Merriam (2009) describes a basic qualitative research study as being derived from symbolic interaction to uncover highly effective teachers and administrators' strategies, techniques, and practices. Posing a question that addressed the support from administrators regarding the inclusionary practices for SWDs in general education classrooms uncovers these strategies and techniques and aligns with basic qualitative research. Since phenomenological research is not used to examine processes and instead focuses on interpreting and uncovering the inner essence of the participants' cognitive processing regarding a common experience, it is not most appropriate for exploring the challenges administrators face with the implementation of inclusionary practices in general education classrooms. (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002). Such insight is impossible with quantitative approaches because the key concepts being investigated are not replicable and ubiquitously verifiable in educational research.

The purpose of this basic qualitative study examined administrators' challenges in supporting inclusive education with the following key concepts: effective practices, teacher satisfaction, and professional development opportunities. Merriam (2009) believes researchers who conduct a basic qualitative research design are interested in "(1) how people interpret their experiences, (2) how they construct their worlds, and (3) what meaning they attribute to their experiences. The overall purpose is to understand how people make sense of their lives and their experiences" (p. 23). The findings of this study could be used to help strengthen instructional practices by examining the key concepts of administrators' experiences with SWDs in inclusive settings.

Researchers found that principals fail to link theory with practice despite having a vital role in improving special education and supporting students with disabilities (Coviello & DeMatthews, 2021). Data is collected through observations, interviews, or document analysis to link theory to practice (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam, 2009). These are the primary methods I used to address the research questions. This decision was made based on the accessibility to elementary administrators and the school district's proximity to the researcher. The gap in literature and practice gap regarding inclusion practices in a southern school district and the low-performing elementary schools for the Georgia's College Career Readiness and Performance Index (CCRPI) was researched with fidelity through observations, interviews, or document analysis. The participants made sense of their daily experiences and contributed to the body of knowledge by identifying effective practices and addressing the challenges in supporting SWDs in inclusion classrooms. I explain the research and methodology further in Chapter 3.

Definitions

Special education: A form of instruction that is specially designed to meet the unique needs of a student with a disability (Zirkel, 2014).

Student with disabilities: A child or youth from 3 through 21 years of age is considered to have a disability under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA, 2004) if the child or youth meets the eligibility criteria in any of the following areas and needs special education and related services: (a) autism spectrum disorder, (b) deafblind, (c) deaf/hard of hearing, (d) emotional and behavioral disorder, (e) intellectual disability (mild, moderate, severe, profound), (f) orthopedic impairment, (g) other health impairment, (h) significant developmental delay, (i) specific learning disability, (j) speech-language impairment, (k) traumatic brain injury, and (l) visual impairment (U.S. Department of Education, 2010).

General education classroom: A general education class is an educational setting that is comprised of students who have not been identified as having a disability (Zirkel, 2014).

Inclusion: When students with disabilities are receiving all or some of their instruction in a general education classroom with a general education teacher teaching in collaboration with a special education teacher (State Department of Education, 2019).

Inclusion classrooms: A general education classroom that includes students with disabilities (State Department of Education, 2019).

Inclusionary practices: Specially designed instruction that allows SWDs to learn in the general education classroom, interact with nondisabled peers, and access the core curriculum (Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act, 2004).

Assumptions

The assumption of a study is that bias exists and shapes all research; therefore, intentional and purposeful choices need to acknowledge, account for, and approach researcher bias and the assumptions that drive and shape research (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). This basic qualitative study assumed that the identified participants would be forthcoming regarding their interpretations of the challenges involving inclusive education. Another assumption was that identified participants would be willing and able and want to participate in the study. These assumptions included that there are underlying phenomenological experiences of administrators that would be useful to investigate to influence future research, understand challenges related to supporting teachers with inclusionary practices, and possibly pilot successful programming districtwide.

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of this study was limited to participants identified as elementary administrators that support teachers with inclusionary practices for SWDs in general education classrooms in a local, Georgia school district. The following delimitations identified the boundaries for this study. Although the local, Georgia school district has inclusion classrooms in every school, this study included elementary schools that do not meet standards on state assessments, and five administrators in roles responsible for supporting elementary teachers with inclusionary practices for SWDs in general

education settings. This study was limited to elementary administrators in a Georgia school district with low performing scores on state assessments. There is potential for transferability because the percentage of special education students in surrounding Georgia districts was comparable to the population at the current study district; although, district policies, experience, gender, and age may vary.

Limitations

By using the basic qualitative study and having interviews that offer the opportunity for descriptions from the participants, it was assumed the participants understand inclusion and how it was used for the context of this study. The methodological weakness involved limited time with participants for interviews. The participants were African American elementary administrators. There was a distribution of genders as the participants were predominantly female. My biases could influence the research because I was a former Special Education Compliance Specialist in elementary schools in the study district, and my experience may cause favor with one response or practice over another. They were addressed by coding exactly what is recorded. The issues relating to transferability included no criteria for race, gender, age, or administrative experience for the interviewees. The decision made for the southern school district in Georgia was based on (a) my proximity to the school district, (b) the gap in the literature and practice regarding inclusion practices in a Georgia school district, and (c) because this school district had low performing schools for the state's College Career Readiness and Performance Index (CCRPI) (State Department of Education, 2019).

Significance

This study addressed a problem in education by exploring administrators'

challenges supporting the implementation of instructional strategies and inclusion

practices for students with disabilities. Since there is little information on how

administrators support inclusive programs effectively, this study has the potential to

contribute to emerging evidence and provide some insight into an administrator's role in

the process based on the findings of the study (Waldron & McLeskey, 2011). Although

the problem examined challenges amongst administrators, the study can potentially

impact both students and teachers with effective inclusionary practices. Furthermore,

because school leaders' instructional support is a predicator in motivating teachers to

advance teaching approaches into everyday practices in their classroom (Lang, 2019).

This study was significant for any educational stakeholder seeking to address the

challenges administrators face while supporting teachers and strengthening instructional

practices for SWDs in inclusive classrooms.

In this chapter, I introduced the study by examining the background of the

problem and describing the problem more in-depth. I then presented the purpose of the

study, followed by the research questions (RQs) that I will seek to answer. Chapter 1 also

includes overviews of the conceptual framework and nature of the study; definitions of

key terms; and discussion of the assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations, and

significance of the study. Strengthening administrators' practices in inclusive

environments can promote positive social change with purposeful, explicit research that

produces immediate solutions for administrators and teachers (Ricci et al., 2020).

Summary

While the challenges administrators face in effectively dealing with special education issues is a topic in education today, understanding IDEA is essential for administrators to develop the skills to support teachers, monitor instructional progress effectively, shifts from compliance to results, and possess the self-awareness to acknowledge their biases with inclusion education (DeMatthews et al., 2020). Addressing the needs of SWDs makes meeting state standards and closing the achievement gap challenging for general education teachers within inclusive classrooms. It is critical to continuously examine challenges so administrators can make informed decisions to address any barriers and support teachers effectively. This research has the potential to strengthen the current practices that address these challenges stemming from supporting both teachers and SWDs in inclusive classrooms. With this background in mind, this study addressed a Georgia school district problem by exploring the challenges administrators are experiencing supporting teachers' implementation of inclusion strategies to support the academic needs of students with disabilities (SWDs) in general education classrooms.

The literature review is an essential section of the research and will be discussed further in Chapter 2. I included a review of the literature on administrator challenges, instructional support, and inclusive education. I also included the consideration of two vital theories, Burns' (1978), transformational leadership and Fullan's (2011) six secrets of change coherence framework. In Chapter 2, I reviewed key literary articles regarding

the challenges elementary administrators face in supporting teachers with inclusionary

practices for SWDs in inclusive classrooms.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The problem this study explored is that elementary administrators in a southern school district in Georgia are experiencing challenges supporting teacher implementation of inclusion strategies to support the academic needs of students with disabilities (SWDs) in general education classrooms. This study examined the specific challenges faced supporting teachers who instruct SWDs in inclusion classrooms from the administrators' perspective. There is a plethora of research aimed at the concept of inclusive education for SWDs. Much less attention has been paid in the scholarly literature to the experiences of school principals supporting students with special needs (Sider et al., 2021).

In response to the gap, a study of 285 school principals was conducted that identified key themes to include relationships, modeling behaviors, principal isolation and communication, and a lack of preparation (Sider et al., 2021). Therefore, it is crucial to develop educational practices and create a culture that embraces students' needs in inclusion classrooms (Menon, 2014). The study was significant because it explored the challenges with leadership practice for fostering inclusive classrooms. The significance enhances the persistent lack of scholarly literature that addresses how school principals are involved in this process (Sider et al., 2021). These challenges are related to a lack of leadership, knowledge capacity, skills, and a failure to support needs and restrictive practices in inclusive settings (Shevlin et al., 2008). Understanding the instructional practices required for general education teachers to meet the various needs of SWDs is a continued challenge with increasing demands for support and a limited number of highly qualified special education teachers (Mastropieri et al., 2017).

Administrators must create a positive culture of change to best support teachers in inclusion classrooms by offering a straightforward leadership approach that closes the gap between practice and connects more than it controls, inspires more than it empowers, and demonstrates more than it decides (Fullan, 2011). Vaz et al. (2015) conducted a study to close the gap between policy and practice by exploring viewpoints toward implementing inclusive education, as well as why it presents challenges in elementary schools. Researchers' findings have indicated administrators' instructional leadership can influence change in teachers' instructional practices. A study conducted by Sider et al. (2017) revealed school administrators are charged with supporting teachers in inclusive classrooms; however, less attention has been given to leaders to hone their leadership skills to support them. The study identifies 15 principals who communicated themes regarding professional learning experiences, personal values, being accessible for staff and students, and the importance of leadership in fostering inclusive school culture (Sider et al., 2017). These themes should be further examined, with the emerging literature asserting that school leaders are pivotal in shaping school cultures in inclusive education. A gap in practice is evident regarding administrators as special education leaders and supporting teachers in inclusion classrooms (DeMatthews & Edwards, 2014). Further, the literature lacks sufficient information on how administrators create a positive climate culture of change that embraces the challenges of inclusionary practices and supports general education teachers.

The conceptual framework that grounded the research discussed in detail includes integrated literature aligning the components of Burns' (1978) transformational

leadership theory and Fullan's (2011) six secrets of change coherence framework as a change agent for school-wide reform. Leadership transformational theory and six secrets of change empower administrators to create a culture of change that implements and sustains effective practices for inclusion classrooms (Burns, 1978; Fullan, 2011). Chapter 2 consists of three main sections with subsections. The main sections include background information on inclusion, identification of the gap in practice, coherence framework, and literature review. Within the literature review section, there are three subsections: (a) background information on inclusion, (b) inclusionary practices, and (c) school leaders' influence on inclusionary practices. The chapter concludes with a summation to transition to the study's methodology discussed in chapter 3.

Literature Search Strategy

School leaders must be knowledgeable and ready to respond to challenges in a manner that aligns with special education policies and procedures. There is increased scrutiny on ways school leaders create effective inclusion classrooms for SWDs and address the challenges they encounter while supporting general education teachers (DeMatthews et al., 2020). Research on inclusive leadership is relatively limited, and school leaders struggle with accountability for SWDs (Schiariti, 2020). The information gleaned from this study may help school administrators address the challenges faced while supporting teachers with implementing inclusionary practices for SWDs in elementary school settings.

I conducted a systematic search for current, peer-reviewed journals through the Walden University Library using the following databases: ERIC, ProQuest, Sage

Journals, and Google Scholar. I used weekly alerts from Google Scholar to receive peer-reviewed literature with specific search terms and combinations. The search terms and combinations include the following: *special education, inclusion, special education student achievement, teacher support with inclusion, administrator perceptions of inclusion, administrator preparedness for special education, administrator challenges with inclusion, school leadership, professional development, and inclusion, change theory, elementary schools, inclusion challenges, inclusionary practices, inclusive schools, transformational leadership, change leaders, school culture, school-wide reform,* and *coherence framework for change.*

Conceptual Framework

Transformational leadership theory by Burns (1978) and Fullan's (2011) six secrets of change (2008) provide the conceptual framework for this study. I developed the conceptual lens that framed the qualitative study based on Fullan's (2011) six secrets of change coherence framework, which addresses the challenges of leadership abilities in inclusive environments. School leaders play an intricate role in evaluating, supporting, and influencing teachers who facilitate inclusionary practices for SWDs in general education classrooms (Murphy, 2018). Change models have been previously established through both Fullan (2011) and Burns (1978) that will help undergird the purpose, research questions, and methodology. Once the data analysis is completed, it should help explain the findings as it did with previous studies.

The current study benefits from the six secrets of change framework because it aligns with the purpose, problem, and research questions, and it can possibly create a

culture of change. Transformational theory can help with the development of a comprehensive leadership model that identifies why effective inclusionary practices are necessary for SWDs. The conceptual framework for identifying the challenges and supporting effective practices within inclusion classrooms is provided by Cobb's (2015) article as a guide to help school principals serve as special education leaders within their inclusion programs. Education perspectives have changed over the last twenty years and have gained much research interest related to inclusive programs (Lautenbach & Heyder, 2019).

Fullan's (2010) conceptual framework of change is presented in the literature review to connect effective practices for SWDs in inclusion classrooms and administrators with school leaders that face challenges by involving moral purpose, understanding change, building relationships, sharing knowledge, and creating coherence. Additionally, Burns' (1978) transformational leadership theory outlines the foundational qualities needed for administrators to inspire teachers to commit to organizational changes by intellectual stimulation, individualized stimulation, inspirational motivation, and idealized influence (Bass & Riggio, 2005). Burns' (1978) transformational theory and Fullan's (2011) six secrets of change coherence framework speak to the notion that administrators, as structural leaders, set the tone for inclusion within their schools by inspiring and motivating teachers who support SWDs in inclusive classrooms.

Fullan's Coherence Framework

Fullan (2011) is an expert in fundamental system change in education who developed a coherence framework outlining six change secrets. The key term prompts

change leadership and involves moral purpose, understanding change, building

relationships, creating, and sharing knowledge, and creating coherence (Fullan, 2010).

The six secrets of change are not complex and are relatively simple to follow; yet, the

need to explain these in detail to administrators shows the lack of ability to support and

build a culture based on fundamental values that promote change in schools. The six

secrets consist of loving your employees, connecting peers with purpose, building

capacity, learning cultures, being transparent, and developing learning systems that

demonstrate a growth mindset (Fullan, 2011). School leaders must realize that continuous

learning depends on being receptive to the complexity and creating a culture that is open

to new ideas as outlined in six secrets to change (Fullan, 2011).

Fullan's first secret to love your employees. This is the foundational secret;

however, the six secrets are interrelated and sometimes overlap. The quality of education

should not exceed the love for teachers. School leaders should support all teachers

finding satisfaction in honing their craft and finding meaning in their work that links skill

to strategy. The second secret is being able to connect peers with purpose. School leaders

should provide direction that rallies around a higher purpose, has meaning for individuals

and the group, and develops both individual and collaborative efficacy (Fullan, 2004).

The third secret is to build capacity. School leaders should create a culture that embraces

a growth mindset and supports developing the instructional and managerial aspects of

change necessary for school improvement. The fourth secret is learning the work. School

leaders must engage in the daily practices of teachers and offer professional development

opportunities that promote continuous learning and precision in teaching (Fullan, 2011).

The fifth secret is transparency rules. School leaders must consistently collect, review, discuss, and publish schoolwide data. This act of transparency creates a culture for teachers that embraces observations from school specialists. The last secret involves systems and learning. School leaders should promote continuous learning and develop teacher leaders to enhance continuity. This practice allows both administrators and teachers to embrace new initiatives, such as the six secrets of change, and become more confident in the face of adversity (Fullan, 2010).

The six secrets of change describe systematic knowledge that promote instructional improvement, which requires a shift in the preexisting culture of leadership and teaching in educational settings. According to Fullan (2010), teachers have little to no opportunity to engage in sustained and continuous learning about their practice in their work settings. Cultures do not change by mandate; instead, they vary by stakeholders' strategic reorganization of existing structures, norms, and processes, and cultural change depends fundamentally on modeling the new behavior (Fullan, 2010).

With this influence, Fullan's (2011) coherence framework and six secrets of change develop leaders that promote education systems that enhance continuous learning in schools. It also depends on schools being confident in the face of complexity and open to new ideas. Fullan's (2010) continuous learning framework aligns with Burns' (1978) concept of transforming leadership in that it calls for leadership to revolutionize education with a transformation of an entire social system. In this way, the conceptual framework can develop professional learning communities where school administrators promote organizational growth and allow teachers and students to learn from each other

and share ideas further developed in the literature review related to inclusive educations'

key concepts and variables.

Burns' Transformational Leadership Theory

Burns' (1978) transformational leadership theory encompasses the level of

understanding required for administrators to guide inclusionary strategies, as reflected in

teachers' collaborative practices to support SWDs. Implementing inclusionary practices

through a motivating leadership style could be challenging throughout the change process

and pose difficulties when creating a culture that embraces organizational growth (Fløvik

et al., 2019; Holten & Brenner, 2015). Becoming aware of these challenges and

addressing proven practices to address them will help school leaders strengthen

inclusionary practices and better support teachers who instruct SWDs in inclusion

classrooms. Evidence shows that transformational leadership has been demonstrated to be

useful as an approach to change, and a review of the emerging literature supports the

claim.

Bass and Avolio (1994) extended the work of Burns (1978) by adding to the

initial concepts and further explaining how transformational leadership is measured and

how it impacts performance and motivation. Transformational leaders have higher levels

of satisfaction and performance than groups led by other types of leaders by responding

to the needs of their team and empowering them (Bass, 1998; Bass & Riggio, 2005).

Transformational leadership comprises four key components that influence and

inspire followers to explore new ideas and become passionate about reaching common

goals (Bass & Avolio, 1994). These components include intellectual stimulation,

individualized consideration, inspirational motivation, and idealized influence.

Intellectual stimulation encourages creativity among followers. This approach will afford

teachers the opportunity to become creative in lesson planning for SWDs. The next

component is individualized consideration which involves offering encouragement and

support. This creates an environment that allows teachers to share ideas and so that

administrators can provide direct recognition of the unique contributions of each teacher

(Choi et al., 2016). The next component of effective transformational leadership practice

is inspirational motivation, where leaders have a clear vision that they are able to

articulate to followers (Choi et al., 2016). Empowering educators allows administrators to

solicit support from teachers to understand and buy into the practices for the school and

motivation to reach common goals. A transformational leader serves as a role model for

educational stakeholders within the school and affords them the opportunity to respect

and trust leadership and internalize their ideals (Bass & Avolio, 1994).

Effective and purposeful collaboration should solicit support from school

administration, who can foster a cooperative commitment to provide opportunities to

design instructional programming to meet the learning outcomes for SWDs (McLeskey,

2017). Shields and Hesbol (2020) conducted a study examining the leadership practices

of school leaders in a large school district to determine whether there are consistencies

with transformative leadership. This study revealed emerging challenges and a need for

the alignment of district practices and goals to address the challenges school leaders face

in conceptualizing an equitable education for all and identifying inclusive practices

(Shields & Hesbol, 2020). Fullan's (2011) coherence framework, much like Burns'

(1978) transformational leadership theory, inspires leaders to create opportunities for positive social interactions that outline six secrets of change vital in supporting teachers in inclusive environments.

Literature Review Related to Key Concepts and Variable

Background Information on Inclusion

The Elementary and Secondary Act (1965) was designed to improve the academic success of SWDs. Since then, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EHA) of 1975 was created as a reform policy and has been updated several times, guaranteeing that SWDs are legally provided quality public education (Brown-Oyola, 2016). In efforts to further support SWDs, the reauthorized act by Congress introduced the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) in 1990, which mandates SWDs be allowed access to the general curriculum in inclusion classrooms (Brown-Oyola, 2016). In 2001, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) redefined the Elementary and Secondary Act of 1965 and further included SWDs in general education initiatives. SWDs were at risk of making adequate yearly progress and implementing assessments that involved federal funding (Browder & Cooper-Duffy, 2003). To further minimize the risk of not meeting standards, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) was developed to allow school district stakeholders more autonomy in the decision-making process (Darrow, 2016).

In 2015, during President Obama's administration, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) replaced NCLB and was the most comprehensive federal bill focused on accountability, flexibility, options for parents and students, and evidence-based solutions (Darrow, 2016). The ESSA relinquished control back to state and schools, giving them

more ownership in implementing their policies and procedures. This also afforded

schools more accountability, relinquishing the majority from the federal government

(Darrow, 2016). The shift of the ESSA initiative gave school districts the autonomy to

redefine what inclusion looks like and how instructional practices are delivered,

monitored, and evaluated. The ESSA moved the decision-making authority for

accountability to local school districts, allowing local stakeholders to determine how to

measure student and school success (Darrow, 2016). The ESSA emphasizes the

alignment and integration of continuous improvement resources that encourage evidence-

based interventions, strategies, and programs and promote increasing SWDs in general

education classrooms (Darrow, 2016).

As a result of recent LRE mandates, inclusive schools across the nation have

increased, placing more SWDs in general education classrooms with non-disabled peers.

(NCES, 2020). In 1970, public schools only served 20% of SWDs in segregated settings

with minimal services (USDOE, 2010). By 2017, several changes in the laws and policies

allowed 95% of SWDs to receive an education in general education schools.

Approximately 65% of those students spent 80% or more time in general education

classrooms, which prompted legislative acts favoring inclusive education (NCES, 2020).

A series of legislative acts commenced a reform for SWDs that favored inclusive

education. This legislation mandated schools provide free and appropriate education

(FAPE) in the least restrictive environment (LRE) to the maximum extent possible,

usually referred to as inclusion (USDOE, 2010). There is a continuum of services

considered when referencing the LRE. These services include from most restrictive to

least restrictive; homebound instruction, treatment center or residential school, full-time

special education classroom, part-time placement in special education, general education

classroom with collaborative or co-teaching models with special education personnel, or

general education classroom with minimal support from special education personnel

(Kart & Kart, 2021). Inclusion is vital in assisting SWDs to build self-confidence,

increase social acceptance, and establish positive interactions among their peers, despite

the challenges involving inclusion (Yasin et al., 2014).

Challenges with Inclusion

There are several challenges with inclusion and diverse student populations

amongst administrators and teachers (Juvonen et al., 2019). While educational

stakeholders cannot negate the importance of inclusivity, it remains unanswered why the

implementation of inclusion classrooms in general education settings is presenting

problems (Vaz et al., 2015). Frick et al. (2013) conducts a study amongst elementary

principals and examines how elementary principals interpret their experience of

leadership decision making as it relates to SWDs and concludes these problems are the

result of a lack of professional and preservice development opportunities has a negative

impact on administrators' understanding of the skills needed to lead programs for SWDs.

The nature of inclusion varies, leading to inconsistent student learning and unclear

teacher expectations. A study examining the leadership practices of school administrators

revealed the emerging challenge in these inconsistencies and the need for an alignment of

district practices and goals (Shields & Hesbol, 2020). Often, general education teachers

do not have the required skill set, knowledge base, or professional preparation to sustain

the increased responsibilities necessary when teaching in inclusive classrooms. Yet, they are considered the primary teacher in these environments (Alvarez-McHatton & Parker, 2013). Teachers are charged with implementing inclusionary practices for SWDs in education settings with the support and guidance of school administrators and require the skill set, knowledge base, or professional preparation to sustain these increased responsibilities and close the achievement gaps associated with these settings (Alvarez-McHatton & Parker, 2013; Gilmour et al., 2019).

The guidance of school administrators and the role of general education teachers in inclusive education is one of the most challenging obstacles in public education, and a study between 285 school principals identified a clear gap in the literature between school leadership and inclusive education (Sider et al., 2021). Inclusive education is necessary and lawful in supporting SWDs, yet schools still face challenges with the implementation (Adams et al., 2017). Teachers must assume varying roles, and it is difficult for school leaders to define these roles clearly. Carrying out the legalities of policies without proper training is a challenge for teachers because the framework is not clearly defined, and administrators struggle with accommodating SWDs with fidelity (Lilly, 2001). Initiating effective practices for SWDs in inclusive environments is loosely defined, and research remains largely unexplored (Sider et al., 2021).

Inclusion has varying interpretations when implemented in schools because the LRE can have a fairly broad meaning. Research indicates delivery methods and the optimal environment for SWDs are unclear (Ruppar et al., 2017). From a sociological perspective, there are challenges with inclusion in education and cultural equity (Higgins

et al., 2017). Inclusive education requires an evolving and ongoing process to identify

quality methods for addressing diversity in the classroom. Despite the mandates, there are

still many challenges with emerging policies that support inclusive classrooms (Adams et

al., 2017). According to Cobb (2015), after reviewing 19 articles, current research

indicates that special education continues to face challenges, and it is necessary to further

examine the practices of principals as special education leaders. A review of the research

investigates how principals perceive their values, learning, and skills related to

supporting engagement, inclusion, and collaboration with the entire school community

(Cobb, 2015). Additionally, inclusion is not formulaic and presents many challenges for

school administrators because decisions vary from the year, so effective practices for

inclusion involve personalization that requires constant review (Hamre, 2007).

Inclusionary Practices

School administrators may not be cognizant of teachers' preparedness to support

inclusionary practices for SWDs in general education classrooms. This disconnect and

misalignment of beliefs can inadvertently create challenges for implementing inclusive

instructional strategies (Lang, 2019). Administrators have the responsibility to consider

teachers' preparedness. Collaborative efforts towards inclusionary practices align with

the sociocultural theory of cognitive change. The aspect of the conceptual framework as a

change agent is a contemporaneous method for implementing inclusionary practices

(Fullan, 2011). Researchers and policymakers agree that future research can impact

leadership development and better prepare school administrators to hone their skills

regarding the formative processes of inclusionary practices that allow teachers to improve

instruction and learning outcomes (Lang, 2019). In an effort to cultivate a climate of change school-wide reform, it is necessary to further research administrators' perceptions of their understanding of specific practices required to promote sustainability for inclusionary practices to support teachers (Cobb, 2015; Gilmour et al., 2019; Sider et al., 2021; Stahl et al., 2019).

Supporting Teachers

Teachers have a very integral role to play in inclusion classrooms. The culmination of several years of proposals, often federally mandated, to support the academic, social, and behavioral needs of SWDs with a one size fits all approach is a situation many teachers face with inclusive programs (McLeskey & Waldron, 2002). Overall, studies focusing on the explicit perspectives of teachers towards inclusion have revealed undecided yet predominantly negative feelings and beliefs towards inclusive education (Monsen et al., 2014). Due to significant laws such as PL 94-192 regarding the LRE, SWDs are in general education classrooms with teachers who lack formal training in working with SWDs (Zirkel, 2014). The educational stakeholders partially understand the concept of inclusion. The teacher's responsibility is to act as a bridge to fill the gaps of understanding with little to no special education training. Some educators do not have adequate training because educational institutions disregard the growing research on the academic potential of SWDs and the importance of equipping teachers with the most effective instructional practices that fulfill that potential (McLeskey & Waldron, 2002).

Researchers have continued the notion that teachers do not have adequate training to support SWDs in general education classrooms (Hoge & Rubinstein-Avila, 2014).

Teachers believe their school leaders do not possess the skill or training to help SWDs in inclusion classrooms (Cobb, 2015). A study of 11 educators revealed, teachers are not prepared and struggle with the implementation of instructional practices for SWDs to access the general curriculum (Olson & Roberts, 2018).

A qualitative study that surveyed teachers working in elementary schools regarding their perceived preparedness and barriers involving inclusion education explored the challenges in collaborative models in inclusion classrooms. The results indicated that teachers perceived they lacked the necessary skills to implement effective collaborative instruction for special education students (Chitivo, 2017). Within this study, teachers believed administrators provided limited support and did not understand the complexities of inclusion classrooms, helping administrators assess the instructional needs for inclusion. Teachers believe inclusion classrooms are the most appropriate setting for SWDs. However, they could not articulate a specific instructional model as the best practice for providing an equal opportunity for all learners (Franck & Joshi, 2017). Teachers believe inclusive classrooms are necessary, and their attitudes towards inclusion can affect effective implementation (Franck & Joshi, 2017; Vaz et al., 2015).

Teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education can positively influence reform practices (Vaz et al., 2015). A study conducted by Adams et al., 2017 outlined the development of inclusion practices in elementary schools. The shift towards inclusion practices made schools more accountable for special education students in general education classrooms. The study provides evidence related to social interactions between inclusion teachers to determine the educational needs of students (Adams et al., 2017).

The enhanced development and learning experiences for SWDs and their non-disabled peers is a practice that forces schools to identify appropriate reform practices to support school-wide success (Adams et al., 2017). The challenges of implementing effective educational procedures, interactions, and collaboration are barriers teachers face daily in inclusion classrooms. As a result, teachers' concerns must be addressed appropriately in order to identify areas of need to support the academic growth of SWDs in general education classrooms.

Ginja and Chen (2021) explore teachers' concerns with their lack of support from administrators and the necessary skill set to support students with disabilities in inclusion education. Ginja and Chen's (2021) qualitative study surveyed 125 teachers from three schools and their feelings towards students with disabilities and attitudes towards inclusion. The results showed two common factors expressed amongst teachers: the inability to provide appropriate support for students with disabilities and the concept of placing students with disabilities in general education classrooms. The study reported 62% teacher readiness for inclusion classrooms, 38% inadequate teacher preparedness, 20% felt supported by school administrators, and 25% expressed the need for materials and resources to support inclusion (Ginja & Chen, 2021). As a result of 38% of teachers feeling ill-prepared for instructing SWDs, it is evident that the preparedness of teachers implementing inclusionary practices can be further explored.

There is a growing need to explore the barriers towards inclusion and the effectiveness of inclusionary practices as the research base of the implementation is still emerging (Chitivo, 2017). Teachers revealed negative experiences implementing

collaborative pedagogy and instructing students with disabilities in inclusion classrooms. Teachers believed administrators provided limited support and did not understand the complexities of inclusion classrooms. Chitivo and Brinda (2018) explored essential implications for educational stakeholders. They discovered that more than half of the teacher participants surveyed indicated only 44% had some inclusion practices in their college degree program. Furthermore, this study relates to the challenges administrators face with inclusion and teachers' limited knowledge of college degree programs, which poses a problem for school administrators.

Administrators' Challenges

Administrators play an essential role in shaping teaching and learning, and although their impact is indirect and facilitated through teachers' instructional practices in inclusion classrooms. Since the attitudes of administrators influence teachers' attitudes towards inclusion, school leaders must establish equitable structures and routines for SWDs in general education classrooms (Ricci et al., 2020). Hermínia and Jorge (2021) explored how administrators' instructional leadership can improve student achievement by surveying educators. In this study, the researchers analyzed the data and reported that most administrators' leadership practices focused on school management and did not focus on student learning. The results indicated that most participants regarded the impact of most principals' instructional leadership practices on student achievement as weak (Hermínia & Jorge, 2021). Yamamoto et al. (2014) conducted a study examining the experiences of school principals in supporting inclusion for SWDs. The study revealed

the nuances of inclusive school leadership is a reiterative process that functions as an opportunity to allow experiences to inform practice.

Through interviews, informal conversations, and observations, Kouali (2017) explored school principals' practices and their influence on instructional practices and teacher satisfaction. The researcher determined that administrators must develop a pervasive leadership style to effectively influence teacher use of instructional methods and barriers to ensure all students meet academic standards. Pervasive leadership is more likely to occur if administrators consider five core capacities: understanding the change process, moral purpose, coherence making, building relationships, and knowledge building (Fullan, 2004). The researcher acknowledged more research is required to address inclusionary practices effectively. More specifically, administrators must exhibit effective leadership and have the necessary skills to empower teachers.

Effective leadership and effective schools can no longer stand apart from special education. Administrators may be incongruous to teachers' perceptions of their support for differentiated instructional practices for SWDs and SWODs in general education classrooms (Lang, 2019). In a study of the perceptions of 34 school administrators and 171 teachers, there was disagreement in four of the six subsets surveyed amongst teachers and administrators regarding the protection of instructional time, professional development, and the evaluation and supervision of instruction. Another study of 116 principals unpacked the ways administrators created processes and learned from failure which spurred the research on the role administrators play in the implementation of inclusive education and the need to improve their knowledge on special education (Bray

& Russell, 2016). Additionally, a significant number of administrators perceive themselves as ill-equipped, unprepared, and inexperienced in providing leadership in special education (Coviello & DeMatthews, 2021), and principals lack the necessary leadership skills needed to support teachers with successful instructional procedures (Mestry, 2017).

The emerging literature repeatedly found that school leaders have very little exposure to special education issues and limited knowledge in inclusion education (Dash, 2018). Mestry (2017) identified that it is essential for principals to understand leadership to ensure school effectiveness and improvement. There is a recognized challenge with a balance between instructional leadership and management. The study suggested principals lack the essential leadership and management skills required for their principalship. School leaders implement successful instructional procedures that inform practices that increase organizational effectiveness and empower teachers (Mestry, 2017). Existing research on administrators exposes inconsistencies in their special education knowledge and ability to support teachers' inclusion classrooms (Lang, 2019). This inconsistency can affect SWDs, and various leadership styles can appropriately address schools' specific inclusion needs.

Osiname's (2018) study attempts to appropriately address a school's specific needs by examining five school principals using different leadership styles to build a positive school culture relating to all students in inclusion classrooms. The researchers described school administrators committed to high performance for all students, accepted ownership of inclusion classrooms, and support practices that developed all students.

These administrators employed specialists committed to developing effective, collaborative, and inter-disciplinary support systems for teachers that sustain professional interactions and helped implement a collective vision (Osiname, 2018). Research on school leaders further conveys the significance of instructional leadership for developing a positive school climate that enhances opportunities for student achievement (Tremont & Templeton, 2019). Further exploring the barriers administrators can help identify the gap in practice related to current teaching practices and readiness in inclusion classrooms (Shepley et al., 2018).

In taking a closer look and exploring administrators' challenges and preparedness for supporting teachers in inclusion classrooms, qualitative information is collected for understanding participants' experiences, how they describe those experiences, and the meaning they make of those experiences (Watson, 2015). In a study that examined principal preparedness, the primary cause of ineffective program implementation was a lack of readiness and training despite a plethora of research on the effectiveness and utility of strategies (Shepley et al., 2018). The researchers examined the effects of administrators' training package to increase teachers' fidelity of inclusion instructional procedures. Researchers examined the instructional practices used to prepare teachers to implement effective instruction in inclusion, collaborative classrooms, and training focused on project-based learning (Shepley et al., 2018). Therefore, the gap in practice may be related to current teaching practices and readiness in inclusion classrooms, which could have implications for how administrators address the challenges and influence on inclusionary practices.

School Leaders' Influence on Inclusionary Practices

School leaders are a significant factor in a school's effectiveness and overall success (Davis et al., 2017). An administrator's leadership style influences teachers, impacting a student's ability to succeed in the classroom. Research emphasizes that inclusion leadership aligns with administrators' work's existing conceptualizations (Zajac et al., 2015). Across the nation, positive school climate and quality leadership are critical to the success of every school administrator, and as a result, a study was conducted that examined the practices of 399 school leaders and their effectiveness amongst teachers, and the study indicated that there was a correlation between transformational leadership and a productive school climate that cultivated a supportive environment (McCarley et al., 2016). Identifying connections for practitioners and policymakers is centered on leadership practice, organizational and social conditions. Although there are challenges within the change theory for school administrators, research has shown school principals are key players in promoting change.

School principals play a significant role in shaping the learning environment and potentially affect how other management and teaching staff develop a professional identity (García-Martínez et al., 2018). According to Mastrangelo et al. (2014), campus leaders influence school staff and are responsible for achieving organizational goals that promote a positive school climate that encourages academic success. Principals are essential in structuring schools in a way that sets the foundation to achieve optimal outcomes. Educational leaders recognize the meaningful role that culturally responsive

principals play in schools and their impact on inclusive programming and identify the need for continuous learning.

According to Qadach et al. (2017), school leaders encourage continuous learning that builds on school improvement initiatives despite barriers that include political mandates and social issues. Studies by Sider et al. (2021) and Cobb (2015) assert that school leaders' behaviors affect school culture, the behaviors of school staff, and the delivery of instructional models and practices in the school. As perceived by school staff, the support for inclusive education can affect the effectiveness of the implementation. School leaders' influence on inclusionary practices is a circumstance of education because of principals-led schools where unsuccessful instruction for SWDs occurred (Stahl et al., 2019). There is little to no knowledge of special education policies and minimal collaboration for professional learning opportunities for teachers (Stahl et al., 2019). School leaders set the foundation for a culture of school-wide reform, although they are not facilitating direct instruction.

A Culture of School-wide Reform

School-wide reform efforts recognize educational practices that shift towards inclusionary classrooms due to changes in IDEA laws and particular education policies (NCES, 2020). The National Center for Education Statistics (2020) reported that approximately 65% of SWD spent 80% or more time in general education classrooms. As a result, school administrators are responsible for implementing effective leadership practices and educational reforms from the district, state, and national level that promotes exemplary instructional practices (Mehmet & Yan, 2018). Schools advance when leaders

can create a culture that embraces school-wide reform, although improving inclusion programming in schools is a difficult task to complete (Stahl et al., 2019).

With an improved understanding of inclusion programming challenges, administrators can be more aware of the specific needs of instructional strategies and provide appropriate support for general education teachers to facilitate a culture of school-wide reform for inclusive education. According to Fullan (2010), school culture can guide beliefs and values evident in how a school operates and embrace the expected behavior, attitudes, and values that impact school-wide practices. Shifting the school culture is contingent on the educational change that merges the relationship between practice and policy (Fullan, 2004). School leaders must embrace change theory that supports the requirements needed to create a culture of school-wide reform, which involves teacher collaboration, strategic planning, and systemic programming to build capacity and advance inclusionary practices for SWDs in general education classrooms. DeMatthews et al. (2020) identified that creating a school culture that promotes inclusion strategies to support the academic needs of students with disabilities classrooms for SWDs is a necessary leadership skill for school administrators to impact school-wide reform.

The impact of school-wide reform, the inconsistency of inclusionary practices, and the expectations for teachers all contribute to the challenges and complexities of change (Ng & Szeto, 2015). There is an evolving context of inclusive education and special education leadership in inclusion schools. Reform efforts include identifying the factors influencing student engagement in creating a school culture where leadership

promotes inclusive instructional practices. The need for administrator qualities that promote a culture of change is needed to embrace the concept of placing students with disabilities in general education classrooms (DeMatthews et al., 2020). A change in the collaboration between teachers and principals impacts teacher work satisfaction, affecting a student's learning ability. Positive changes in school cultures are related to increased student engagement and improved academic achievement and can be supported through appropriate professional development (Read et al., 2015).

Professional Development

The quality of college preparation programs has been scrutinized for years. Educational stakeholders realize that school-based special education professional development opportunities should be collaborative and merge restorative practices with scholarly research (DeMatthews & Edwards, 2014; Shepley et al., 2018). Teachers and administrators receiving adequate training ensures they remain abreast of current effective practices and possess the background knowledge needed to support SWDs in inclusive environments. Unfortunately, studies report both teachers and leaders do not feel adequately prepared to support SWDs in schools (Keierleber, 2019). Avramidis and Norwich (2002) surveyed school staff and reported that while teachers support the idea of inclusive education, literature has continued to reveal that in practice, they are not prepared. School districts have the autonomy to create instructional academies that build capacity by developing professional learning communities for novice teachers and leaders to learn on the job (Burton & Weiner, 2016).

School staff can learn on the job when school districts and site schools provide high-quality field experience opportunities. Professional development is imperative for school-wide reform sustainability. Professional development that is collaborative and supported by school leaders increases knowledge and motivates teachers to hone their skills (Stahl et al., 2019). Shared learning between administrators and teachers promotes a culture of positive school-wide reform that encompasses collective responsibility instead of authoritative leadership (Fullan, 2010; Stahl et al., 2019). Developing professional learning opportunities that collaborate with all stakeholders and use data to inform decisions is a successful approach to promoting successful performance management systems.

Denhardt et al. (2018) examined performance management systems in the public-school sector and school leaders' ability to provide accountability and collaboration challenges. One management practice focused the emerging research on staff development and explored how administrators influenced instructional practice and affected teacher quality (Solheim et al., 2018). Through various studies, teachers had negative perceptions that led to the belief that they were not receiving the necessary tools and support involving professional development opportunities provided by school administrators. Teachers are expected to cover the curriculum and ensure all students acquire content aligned with core content standards. Karabatak and Polat (2020) found training programs focus on instructional support yet prioritize project-based learnings. The research explores the implications for developing the necessary skills to determine

appropriate professional development opportunities, such as project-based strategies that provide teachers with more training for inclusive classrooms.

Teachers express the need for more support and training from school leaders to support SWDs in general education settings. The study surveyed 1,350 available education teachers, and 30% revealed they felt prepared to teach SWDs in general education classrooms (Keierleber, 2019). The study prompted educators to use focus groups to identify effective practices for SWDs to access a broad education curriculum in inclusion classrooms. Teachers reported the need for ongoing professional development, increased classroom support, and more intensive monitoring from the school administrators to provide research-based models for SWDs in inclusive, collaborative classrooms (DeMatthews et al., 2020). Since leadership programs are scrutinized for their lack of development in special education, principals must lead with research-based inclusionary practices that support high-quality schools and provide teachers with professional development opportunities that address their specific needs (DeMatthews et al., 2020).

Teachers implement instructional processes such as differentiated teaching methods, classroom management, curriculum evaluation, and teacher monitoring. Katz et al. (2019) studied 51 teachers and 684 of their students, including students with disabilities, in inclusion classrooms and the implementation of specially designed instruction and the impact on student achievement. The results indicated that the combination of social and emotional learning with specially designed instruction significantly improves academic achievement amongst various inclusion settings. Such

research can assist school administrators with the implementation and professional development needs and recommendations for inclusion teachers. School districts continue to have several pressing issues in inclusion classrooms that prohibit a more equitable educational milieu, which is why professional development is pivotal for school-wide reform (Katz et al., 2019). Addressing pressing issues in inclusion classrooms involves further exploration of responsible inclusion.

Kauffman and Badar (2016) explored the idea of responsible inclusion. They emphasized exposure to a curriculum that grants access to special education students and not in reality or logic. The researchers showed how complete inclusion is problematic for teachers and cannot be done well for all students in a single environment through other articles. Research provides evidence-based practices that determine which academic interventions focus on techniques that effectively improve students' academic performance in inclusion settings. Hayes and Bulat (2017) examined ways to meet the needs of students with disabilities regarding effective practices for culturally responsive interventions in inclusion classrooms. The research is helping to identify a gap in practice that could have implications for how administrators support teachers in implementing academic interventions focused on practices that are beneficial to improve students' academic performance.

The research is beneficial in helping administrators recognize and face the challenges of implementing inclusive education by evaluating effective practices and identifying areas of need for professional development. A study that included 232 school administrators emphasized the importance of ongoing training for inclusive education and

credits professional development as one of the greatest factors for administrators overcoming their lack of confidence while supporting SWDs (Nguluma et al., 2017). Additionally, school leaders express the need to collaborate with resistant staff in the decision-making process to create professional learning communities built on the foundation of buy-in and address a specific need (Osiname, 2018). This critical practice provides administrators with best practice models for engaging lessons and teaching models that focus on research-based instructional strategies that embrace inclusion through various sources and types of qualitative studies.

Summary and Conclusions

There are numerous types and sources of information outlining qualitative studies that include theory, emerging literature reviews, meta-analyses, and research. The background literature provides knowledge relevant to the phenomenon under investigation in the basic qualitative study, Fullan's six secrets of change, and studies involving administrators' perceptions about inclusionary practices used to support SWDs in general education environments. Understanding IDEA is essential for administrators to develop the skills to support teachers, monitor instructional progress effectively, and possess the self-awareness to acknowledge their biases with inclusion education (DeMatthews et al., 2020). This study is relevant because it further develops the theoretical framework exploring the major reoccurring themes of inclusion education and administrators' challenges for creating a culture that promotes school-wide reform that includes professional development, transformative leadership, preparedness, school-wide

reform, and a culture of change (Berkovich & Eyal, 2020; Boscardin et al., 2018; Chitivo & Brinda, 2018; Shepley et al., 2018).

The conceptual framework, the six secrets of change, and transformational leadership theory describes this study. It is not known to what extent this study can add to the current literature regarding the gap in practice evident regarding administrators as special education leaders and supporting teachers in inclusion classrooms (DeMatthews & Edwards, 2014; Sider et al., 2021). The importance of this research addresses the gap in practice and the challenges in supporting teachers with the successful implementation of inclusion classroom models. The present study fills at least one of the gaps in the literature and will extend knowledge related to the discipline and acknowledging a practice that can further support the inclusion of SWDs in inclusion classrooms is to increase leaders' roles and responsibilities to influence and support instructional practices to close the achievement gaps between SWDs and SWODs (Mavrogordato & White, 2020). The key concepts and the challenges of inclusion from a school leaders' perspective will be examined.

It has been determined there is a need to conduct further studies to provide insight into how administrators can address challenges with implementing instructional strategies and offer more comprehensive views on how to best support teachers' collaborative practices in inclusionary classrooms (Shepley et al., 2018). The research can help create a culture that advances, supports, and carries out a shared mission, vision, and the core values of high-quality education and academic achievement for SWDs in general education settings (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015). In

Chapter 3, I will describe the research methodology for this study regarding the continued

gap in the literature regarding inclusion practices, support from school leaders for

inclusion teachers, school-wide reform, and professional development. Chapter 3 will

also include the research design, sampling procedures for recruitment and data collection,

rationale, the role of the researcher, trustworthiness, ethical procedures, and a summary.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to examine the challenges administrators face while supporting teachers' implementation of inclusion strategies to support the academic needs of SWDs in general education classrooms. In Chapter 3, I address the research method for the study, which includes the research design, rationale, and role of the researcher. The basic qualitative research design allowed me to examine a phenomenon from the participants' perceptions, particularly of the challenges involving inclusion and the change needed to improve inclusionary practices for SWDs in general education classrooms. The ethical implications, trustworthiness, interview procedures, and a summary are also discussed in this chapter.

Research Design and Rationale

This study used the basic qualitative research design to examine administrators' challenges with inclusive education. Qualitative researchers collect various forms of data, such as interviews, observations, and records, to cultivate categories and themes until saturation is reached (Creswell & Poth, 2018), allowing the researcher to understand the current problem and gather detailed data from the participants to respond to research questions (Merriam, 2009). A qualitative approach is more appropriate for social inquiry in inclusive classrooms because every administrator is different and embodies the distinctions of being human. A quantitative approach is not most suitable because it can be challenging to quantify complex societal phenomena of human elements, rather than the numerical data of trends and practices.

As I reviewed qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-method approaches to determine the most appropriate method, I selected a qualitative methodology based on the data needed to appropriately address the research questions (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Qualitative research focuses on narrative responses, quantitative research focuses on numerical data and variables, and a mixed-method approach typically combines the two (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

I decided on a basic qualitative study to understand how educational stakeholders express and understand inclusion after considering ethnography, grounded theory, and phenomenology (Creswell & Poth, 2018). None of these methods are most suitable because I wish to further explore social inquiry. An ethnographic study is typically chosen when the goal is to understand a culture and to explain or present its unspoken and spoken nature to individuals who may not be part of the culture (Grossoehme, 2014). This study focused on the culture of inclusive education, and the results may be beneficial to all educational stakeholders. The culture of inclusive education may be important to educators, while ethnographic study designs typically involve a combination of data collection methods (Grossoehme, 2014).

After further review of grounded theory research, it was excluded because this inductive approach collects data while simultaneously analyzing it and using the emerging theory to guide data collection (Grossoehme, 2014; Rafuls & Moon, 1995). I did not develop theoretical models from empirical data that are derived from nuances in the data that drive new questions for future participants. Grounded theory research revises an emerging theory and is capable of being used to alter clinical practice or guide

future research (Grossoehme, 2014). The coding was named by the researcher and not the

participants' exact words that are synthesized into a theory that is ready to be tested

(Grossoehme, 2014).

After further review of phenomenology research, it was excluded because it may

not be the best choice when a researcher wants to be able to generalize their findings and

gather descriptions of participants' lived experiences (Grossoehme, 2014). A basic

qualitative design study is not rich in detail. The interview was conducted once and will

lasted no more than an hour. Although interviews may be the most common method of

gathering data, in phenomenology research, written texts, drawings, photographs, and

videos may be used in order to provide rich data that allow researchers to infer the

meaning of a participants' words and articulate it (Grossoehme, 2014). As a result of the

considerations of ethnography, grounded theory, and phenomenology, a basic qualitative

study design was chosen (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Grossoehme, 2014).

According to Lazarsfeld (1972), Herodotus, a Greek scholar writing in the 5th

century B.C.E, had interests that triggered the foundational "footings" of qualitative

social inquiry development by considering relationships that have evolved over the past

1,600 years. The five foundational "footings" for qualitative research include (a)

disciplinary perspective in anthropology and sociology; social science, (b) the

participant-observational fieldworker as an author/observer, (c) the individuals observed

during fieldwork, (d) the substantive and rhetorical content of the qualitative research as a

text, and (e) the audiences are addressed (Lazarsfeld, 1972). Basic qualitative research

seeks to uncover and understand a phenomenon, a process, or participants' perceptions

(Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I examined the challenges of administrators regarding

inclusion, and basic qualitative research is well-matched to collect data and address the

research questions due to the interpretive need to examine how the participants interpret

their environment, experience, and what meaning is placed on those experiences

(Merriam, 2009).

Research indicates that a basic qualitative research design mainly deals with a

small purposeful group of participants who will add to the current literature by describing

the phenomenon (Creswell, 2003). I chose a basic qualitative design to examine a small,

purposeful group of elementary administrators and the challenges with supporting

teachers of SWDs in a general education classroom. Additionally, I determined the

challenges they encountered in inclusive education and their support to improve the

implementation by posing the research questions below.

RQ1: How do elementary administrators describe the challenges with supporting

inclusionary practices for SWDs in general education classrooms?

RQ2: How do elementary administrators support teachers with addressing the

academic needs of SWDs in general education classrooms?

Role of the Researcher

In qualitative research, the researcher's role is positionality (Ravitch & Carl,

2016). Qualitative researchers question their interpretive role and positionality to

acknowledge the subjectivity of all research. Since scholar-practitioners pay close

attention to the relational approach to research, their identity may merge with the context

and setting. The researcher has several roles throughout the research process. The

relationships between the scholar and the participants include location, topic, and broader

contexts that shape it (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). There is a myriad of intersecting researcher

roles such as student, professional, interviewer, and coder. With the concept of the

researcher as an instrument as a broad frame for qualitative research, it becomes a

principled imperative to consider the role of a researcher throughout all phases and parts

of the research process through qualitative methods such as interviews (Ravitch & Carl,

2016).

As a basic qualitative researcher, my role is to interview participants and interpret

their perceptions on challenges regarding inclusionary practices in elementary education

(Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). For the past five years, a southern school district in Georgia

has employed me as a special education compliance specialist and special education

coordinator. I have an additional fifteen years of prior experience as both a special

education teacher and assistant principal in a surrounding school district. I remained

mindful of my interactions with general and special education teachers, assistant

principals, and principals regarding implementing inclusion classrooms within schools.

While conducting this study, I did not interview any participants with a direct supervisory

role or responsible for conducting pre, mid-year, or summative conferences aligned with

the state's Leadership Evaluation Instrument (LEI). I do not have any direct supervisory

responsibilities to any of the participants, as I understand the importance of qualitative

research credibility.

Richards and Morse (2013) stated, "if it moves, code it" (p. 162). Creswell (2003)

defined qualitative credibility and dependability as the steps a researcher takes to check

for accuracy by employing specific processes. Further, transferability addresses qualitative research results that can be generalized or transferred to other contexts or settings (Leung, 2015). I addressed the transferability by explicitly describing the school district so the results might transfer to other districts. This study was confined to one, southern Georgia school district; as such, the outcomes may not be transferable to another district but are appropriate to understand further the problem related to inclusive education.

Qualitative research is an appropriate method to go deeper into interest issues and explore nuances related to the problem at hand (Merriam, 2009). Qualitative researchers collect various forms of data, such as interviews, observations, and records, to cultivate categories and themes until saturation (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam, 2009). I interviewed the elementary administrators in one interview, spending between 45-60 minutes, over the course of four weeks. Qualitative interviewing is more than a culmination of technologies, techniques, inquiry, and responses. Rubin & Rubin (2012) noted that it grooms the interviewer into a more enduring, open-minded, and attentive human being as they move themes into categories. Qualitative interviewing makes you aware of what you have not seen before, and it enables you to pull meaningful information out of buzzing confusion and identify biases that may occur (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

As the researcher, I recruited participants, conducted interviews, transcribed the recordings, and analyzed the data. It is impossible to completely palliate biases with 19 years of special education experience as a paraprofessional, teacher, department

chairperson, compliance specialist, and coordinator. Therefore, I asked each participant to review the transcription carefully to ensure the interpretation relayed their intention. I maintained awareness and did not allow any preconceptions to interfere with the raw data captured in the study by only inputting data collected. The basic qualitative analysis process used with fidelity consists of organizing and preparing the data, obtaining a general sense of the information, coding the data, developing the coded data into categories and themes, and interpreting the data (Watson, 2015). Gaining the participants' trust was paramount to a study. In addition, I did not allow background knowledge or experience to skew the transcription of the data involving the methodology of social inquiry regarding the inclusion of SWDs in elementary schools.

Methodology

As mentioned above, Lazarsfeld (1972) referred to the "footing" as qualitative research that has progressed through social inquiry over the past 1,600 years by considering the nature of evolving relationships. I examined administrators' challenges with the inclusion of SWD in an elementary school. I collected data through one-to-one, semi-structured, Zoom interviews with elementary school administrators. I investigated administrators' challenges involving implementing inclusion for SWDs in elementary schools with the discussions. As a qualitative researcher, I collected and interpreted data through purposeful sampling to understand further the challenges administrators face involving SWDs in general education settings.

Participant Selection

Purposeful sampling in qualitative research results from a complicated, careful, and collaborative process involving data collection and addressing a particular problem in research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I used criterion sampling to address a problem and give a voice to those impacted by the problem by gathering participants for the study (Creswell, 2003). Criterion sampling involves reviewing and studying the cases that meet a predetermined criterion of importance (Patton, 2002). According to a study of 116 principals where factors and attitudes towards the implementation of inclusive education was examined, it was determined that years of service, gender, and public or private sectors did not produce a significant difference in the findings (Joy & Onukwufor, 2018). As a result, this predetermined criterion includes collecting detailed data regarding inclusive education from elementary administrators who support schools with inclusion classrooms, and will not specify an age or range in years in the profession but instead meet the 5-8 participant criteria.

The rationale for the 5 participants was based on their connection to inclusive education and will meet the criteria being employed by a local district in a southern state. This connection entailed (a) supervising schools with inclusion classrooms, (b) employed in the role of principal or assistant principal, (c) evaluating teachers who instruct SWDs in general education classrooms in a southern school district in Georgia, and (d) leading schools that have not met the standard based on the composite scores in reading for Grades 3, 4, and 5 on the Georgia Milestones Assessment System from school years 2016–2019. The participants were contacted through the district email that was approved

by Department of Research, Evaluation Assessment, and Accountability (REAA), asking

the identified individuals to participate in the study with a consent form attached to the

body of the email. The form contained specific instructions for respondents who wish to

join with details and personal contact information. During the initial contact, the

participants were provided general information about administrators involved with

implementing inclusion for SWDs in elementary schools through properly prepared semi-

structured interviews.

Instrumentation

Semi-structured interviews allow the researcher to obtain detailed data to further

research and explicitly answer the research question. To properly prepare semi-structured

interviews, the conditions for quality, gaining access to and selecting participants, and

establishing a rapport are essential factors. In a basic qualitative research design,

instrumentation outlines the tools used to collect data (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). As noted

earlier, the tools consisted of semi-structured interviews following the process using an

interview question guide that is located in Appendix A. The interview question guide is

researcher produced, including prompts to ensure questions to capture analogous

information during each interview (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Two preselected professional

acquaintances who hold doctoral degrees were asked to review the questions to ensure I

have developed clear and concise questions to ensure content validity of the

instrumentation, I asked two professional acquaintances to review the interview questions

for clarity and content. Interviews are common in qualitative research to gather the lived

experiences of participants. The interview followed the protocol outlined in Appendix A.

Interviews can yield discoveries not evident with the naked eye through observational data alone. I used a recording device to transcribe the responses from the interviews. Patton (2002) believes the technological progress has evolved with the potential to yield more efficient, accurate, and trustworthy representations of qualitative data, whether the researcher uses advancing technology to capture fieldwork or simply writes down what is occurring throughout the data collection process.

Grounded by the conceptual framework for the study, I composed interview questions that align with the research questions. The conceptual framework for the study combines the transformational leadership model developed by Burns (1978) and Fullan (2011) with implications for inclusion, equity, excellence, and social justice paradigms of change theory and a coherence framework with hopes to develop leaders that promote education system influences that enhance continuous learning in schools.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

The data collection process requires a specific protocol for procedures, recruitment, and participation. At the forefront of the study is approval from the local school district and the location of the study. Shortly after that, permission is requested from the Institutional Review Board (IRB). The location of the study occurred in the 5th largest school district in Georgia, with 66 schools and centers with nearly 6,800 employees and 3,092 teachers, with interviews taking place virtually through the Zoom platform. The local school district is a Title I district. The majority of residents are at the low-income poverty level and serve more than 55,000 students, with approximately 10% receiving special education services. All of the schools within the school district in

Georgia implement inclusive practices for SWDs. Therefore, the use of purposeful

sampling will gain insight and involve elementary schools that meet the selected criteria.

I proposed 5-8 administrators who met the specified criteria. The requirements for

administrators consisted of (a) supervising schools with inclusion classrooms, (b)

employed in the role of principal or assistant principal, (c) evaluating teachers who

instruct SWDs in general education classrooms, and (d) leading schools that have not met

the standard based on the composite scores in reading for Grades 3, 4, and 5 on the

Georgia Milestones Assessment System from school years 2016–2019.

Researchers recommend studying small samples of participants, including

between five and thirty people (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Marshall et al. (2013) believed

there is no definite number for sample size in qualitative inquiry, and it is dependent upon

the purpose of the inquiry. The inquiry includes what you want to know, what will be

helpful, what is at stake, what will have credibility, and what can be done with available

time and resources. Additionally, Creswell and Poth (2018) recommend including

between five and twenty-five individuals in qualitative studies. The sample size in the

research study was within the range recommended to ensure it remains relatively small to

support the analysis's depth and reach saturation that is fundamental to a basic qualitative

research design. Additionally, the qualitative sample participants are purposive and

relevant to the phenomenon of inclusion education, opposed to probability sampling

employed in quantitative research (Vasileiou et al., 2018).

Recent research reveals the greater efficiency of purposeful sampling than random

sampling in qualitative studies and that saturation is met when increasing the number of

participants does not change the outcome (Merriam, 2009; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Vasileiou et al., 2018). Based on the research, if I set more defined prerequisite criteria and increased the number of elementary school administrators interviewed, the data may not yield different results. The rationale for the 5 participants was based on their connection to inclusive education and meet the criteria being employed by a local district in a southern state. This connection involved (a) supervising schools with inclusion classrooms, (b) employed in the role of principal or assistant principal, (c) evaluating teachers who instruct SWDs in general education classrooms in a southern school district in Georgia, and (d) leading schools that have not met the standard based on the composite scores in reading for Grades 3, 4, and 5 on the Georgia Milestones Assessment System from school years 2016–2019. To gather detailed information regarding inclusion education, I sent an email asking the identified individuals to participate in the study with a consent form attached outlining the frequency/duration of one 45-60 minute interview consisting of semi-structured questions with open-ended responses. The email was drafted from a Walden University template to ensure full disclosure. The form contained specific instructions for respondents who wish to participate with details regarding the interview protocol and personal contact information. The form contained specific instructions for respondents who wish to join with details and personal contact information. During the initial contact, the participants were provided general information about administrators involved with implementing inclusion for SWDs in elementary schools through properly prepared semi-structured interviews. The interview followed the protocol outlined in Appendix A. The school leaders were informed that

their participation was voluntary, and they could opt out at any time. Obtaining informed consent for a qualitative research study requires honest and open communication between the researcher and the study participants. This consent protects the participants throughout the study and data analysis process.

Data Analysis Plan

The data analysis process looks for recurring ideas and common themes that involve critical participant responses (Yob & Brewer, n.d.). Congruency means the researchers' interviews are anchored in the purpose of the study and offer a systematic framework for developing a well-vetted interview protocol. This process allows the researcher to obtain robust and detailed interview data to address research questions, record, and code fidelity (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). Obtaining detailed interview data often involves a technological process that aligns with the digital age in which we live.

The technological progress of recording devices and coding must align with the researcher's role, the purpose of the study, and how gathering data will affect the practices and participants (Patton, 2002). If done correctly, descriptive coding leads to a categorized data inventory providing an overview (Saldaña, 2016). A code is a word or short phrase that assigns an attribute, idea, or quality to a portion of text or visual data (Walden University Center for Social Change, 2020). A category is a collection of these codes that share attributes, meaning, and intent. A category labels a word or short phrase (Walden University Center for Social Change, 2020). A theme is developed from one or more categories and can represent a "manifest" (directly observable) or "latent"

(underlying) aspect of the phenomenon (Walden University Center for Social Change, 2020) and can be identified through purposeful interview questions.

The data gathered from the formulated interview questions were semi-structured, through the Zoom platform and structured as open-ended questions, lasted for 15-28 minutes compiled on a Google Drive spreadsheet. I recorded the participants' interview responses through the Zoom audio record feature. An audio recorder was also used as a backup to ensure the interview was captured. I also took handwritten notes as the participants were responding. The NVivo software was used to transcribe the recordings and transfer to them to a Microsoft Word document. Each administrator was thanked for their time and willingness to participate in the research study. The transcription and recording were provided within a week of the interview. The participants were provided the transcription as well as the Zoom recording link to review and to provide revisions if necessary. None of the participants expressed the need to clarify any responses and agreed with interview. Determining the location and length of time of the interview and the order, quality, and clarity of questions, and the overall process of conducting an interview are equally important (Patton, 2002). This structure allowed the researcher to remain acquiescent during the research process with an increased understanding of the problem through meticulously developed interview questions that support the researcher's trustworthiness (Creswell, 2003).

Remaining compliant is a must when approaching the possibility of discrepant cases. The researcher's analysis can be categorized in four distinct main stages which include, decontextualization, recontextualization, categorization, and compilation; in

these stages, it is important to reduce the volume of text collected in identifying groups

and categories to make sense of the data in discrepant cases (Bengtsson-Palme, J., &

Larsson, D. J., 2016). In the case of a discrepant event, follow-up questions may be

needed in order to code further. I followed thematic analysis outlined by Braun et al.

(2016), which includes reading and rereading responses, generating initial codes,

searching for themes, reviewing potential themes, defining themes, and analyzing themes

using the NVivo software. Reading responses will allow me to make notations of the

participant's experiences. The next phase allowed me to label and classify concepts that

allow for code mapping to identify the key theme. The next phase used NVivo software

and a Google Drive spreadsheet to compare datasets, and the final phase consisted of

grouping and analyzing the commonalities to create a theme to compile a report.

Table 5

Interview Questions to Address Research Questions

Research Questions	Interview Questions
RQ1: How do elementary administrators describe the challenges with supporting inclusionary practices for SWDs in general education classes?	1. What are the challenges in providing support for inclusion strategies to teachers who support SWDs in general education classrooms? Please explain.
	2. What actions through a culture of school-wide reform do you believe are necessary to support teachers with SWDs in general education classrooms? Please explain
	3. Describe how your leadership program influenced your leadership style and prepared you to identify, implement and evaluate inclusionary practices in your current school setting.
	4. Describe the type of professional development you find to align with the needs of teachers who support SWDs in general education classrooms and why?

	5. What effective practices are outlined for supporting teachers with the implementation of inclusionary practices for SWDs in general education classrooms?
RQ2: How do elementary administrators support teachers with addressing the academic needs of SWDs in general education classrooms?	1. What is your role in supporting teachers who provide inclusionary practices for SWDs in general education classrooms? Please explain.
	2. What planning accommodations are made for teachers who develop lessons for SWDs based on data from IEPs?
	3. Describe your role in implementing professional development opportunities essential to support teachers with SWDs in general education classrooms.
	4. What instructional resources are provided for inclusionary practices to teachers who support SWDs in general education classrooms? Please explain.
	5. Describe your role in creating and/or maintaining a schoolwide culture that embraces effective practices for SWDs in general education classrooms and how you accomplish that.

Trustworthiness

There are essential factors to consider in a qualitative research design when addressing the trustworthiness of a researcher. In this section, I explained how I will use member checking peer debriefer, researcher reflexivity, and audit trail. The percentage of special education students in surrounding area districts in Georgia was comparable to the population at the current study district. I did not have a direct supervisory role, nor was I responsible for conducting evaluations to any of the participants, as I understand the importance of qualitative research credibility and trustworthiness. These results include credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). A

researcher's credibility ensures and appeals to a reader with supporting evidence that the results accurately reflect the current study (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). I addressed credibility by having a process and procedure in place by following the interview guide. I addressed credibility in this study through purposeful sampling that required the participants to (a) supervise schools with inclusion classrooms, (b) be employed in the role of principal or assistant principal, (c) evaluate teachers who instruct SWDs in general education classrooms, and (d) lead schools that have not met the standard based on the composite scores in reading for Grades 3, 4, and 5 on the Georgia Milestones Assessment System from school years 2016–2019. The selection process minimizes bias by allowing the participants to remain anonymous, and as a result, they may be more transparent and forthcoming in their responses. Transferability is when the researcher provides specific contextual information such that readers can determine whether the results are transferable to their situations or the situations of others (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). I addressed transferability by providing descriptions and a detailed account of the participant experiences during data collection to reveal that the research study's findings could transfer to various settings, situations, and circumstances. Dependability is when the researcher describes the research process in ample detail to be replicated (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). I addressed dependability by emailing the participants' transcripts to review to corroborate the accuracy. Dependability was addressed by emailing the administrators' transcripts to review to corroborate the accuracy. Confirmability is when the researcher ascertains and communicates to the reader that the results reflect the participants' data and not the researcher's bias or interpretations (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

I addressed confirmability during the interview process by allowing participants to

confirm their responses and use their own words to describe their experiences, and the

credibility of a study is equally important.

Credibility

As the researcher, I ensured credibility in the qualitative study by member

checking, which includes memo writing, peer reviews, consistent reflexive journals,

bracketing to establish personal biases, and recognition of personal biases, behaviors

(Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Post-study, the results will be archived for five years in a safe

and secured location. Creswell (2003) defined qualitative credibility as the steps a

researcher takes to check for the accuracy of the findings by employing specific

processes. I addressed credibility in this study through purposeful sampling that required

the participants to (a) supervise schools with inclusion classrooms, (b) be employed in the

role of principal or assistant principal, (c) evaluate teachers who instruct SWDs in general

education classrooms, and (d) lead schools that have not met the standard based on the

composite scores in reading for Grades 3, 4, and 5 on the Georgia Milestones Assessment

System from school years 2016–2019. The selection process minimizes bias by allowing

the participants to remain anonymous, and as a result, they may be more transparent and

forthcoming in their responses. Bias is also minimized in the coding process by allowing

participants to review the coding of their responses and an opportunity to change any

answers they feel were not properly coded. Bias considerations minimize credibility

concerns in this basic qualitative study, and the transferability of this study is just as

meaningful.

Transferability

Transferability refers to the ability of the study to be duplicated in similar environments. A credible and transferable researcher is open to the participants' responses and reports the participant's actual content by using exact quotes and notes to develop themes (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Qualitative research is an appropriate method to go deeper into creating themes and explore nuances related to the problem at hand (Merriam, 2009). Creating themes provides an opportunity for transferability in inclusive education to address the challenges school leaders face with implementing and providing appropriate professional development. Being able to describe the procedures in detail through reflexive journals further establishes transferability. The researcher's responsibility is to provide the database that allows transferability judgments possible on potential appliers (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). I provided evidence that the study is applicable in other situations and contexts. I meet the terms of transferability by providing detailed descriptions of the data collected through interview transcriptions of participants and allowing them to clarify or modify the findings. The dependability of this study is equivalently significant.

Dependability

When the procedures of a study explicitly explain the methods and align with the research questions, dependability heightens (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). This process supports complete transparency to any changes with the participants and setting. Qualitative researchers exhibit dependability by collecting various forms of data, such as interviews, observations, and records, to cultivate categories and themes until saturation

occurs (Creswell, 2003; Merriam, 2009). Collecting various forms of data through audit trails and reflexive notes addresses dependability. I adhered to the quality and integrity of the study by acknowledging that dependability establishes the research study's findings as repeatable and consistent. These findings are checked for accuracy through member checking and recordings. Dependability strengthens the data and involves participants evaluating the results, interpretation, and recommendations with precision and fidelity (Korstjens & Moser, 2017). Dependability and confirmability are meaningful to a study, one supports complete transparency, and the other allows the researcher to remain neutral.

Confirmability

Confirmability is the ability of the researcher to remove any biases and record and code experiences and responses as they occur (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Rettke et al. (2018) noted reflexivity measures to include a log to record the participant's comments accurately and repeat the interview to ensure the researcher's own experiences do not with the interpretation of responses. Being able to remain neutral and approach the study as a researcher instead of a supervisor is a trait of confirmability essential in quality research. The extent to which other researchers could confirm the research study's findings is confirmability (Korstjens & Moser, 2017). The researcher should establish the interpretations of the data are not figments of the researcher's imagination but derived from the study results (Korstjens & Moser, 2017). I exercised reflexivity for self-awareness by recording how my frame of reference is influenced in the study and making a conscious effort not to skew the interpretation of responses. My strategy to establish

confirmability through reflexive journals, audit trails, memo writing, recording impressions following the interview does not include personal biases by recording and transcribing the participants' responses with fidelity and accuracy. I provided a copy of the transcript to the participants to clarify or modify the findings to further the practice of transparency. While removing all possible biases from a study is essential, it is equally important and necessary to gain IRB approval.

Ethical Procedures

Ethical issues were considered for the study and require Walden University IRB approval. The ethical procedures in place are an undertaking that ensures trustworthiness and implements safeguards (Burkholder et al., 2016). A doctoral degree in Educational Administration and Leadership from Walden University requires specific steps and forms for approval. Since I had to obtain site permission before collecting any data, I made verbal consent from administrators. Walden University requires specific forms to stay within ethical standards. I will promptly submitted all required forms located in the dissertation manual. Since research cannot begin until the IRB approves the study, the participants were contacted via email once this task is complete. The research was conducted in my current school district via Zoom but not on a personal campus (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I was cognizant of a personal bias during this time because I have 13 years of special education teaching experience, two years of experience as a school administrator, and four years of special education leadership experience. I was mindful of any biased opinions while interpreting data from administrators and teachers, which align with the requirements of IRB approval.

After IRB approval, the participants were emailed consent forms. I scheduled interviews after receiving the forms and reviewing further details of the study that explicitly outline the ethical procedures. Through the explanation and transparency of ethical procedures, participants are aware they can choose to withdraw from the study at any time. The willing and identified participants were assigned pseudonyms. I conducted quality interviews with fidelity with member checking through memo writing, peer reviews, consistent reflexive journals, bracketing to establish personal biases, and recognizing personal biases and behaviors (Babbie, 2017; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). As requested, I shared data with individual participants and an executive summary to the district site's research department. All data collected will be kept confidential on digital files and stored safely for five years and then destroyed, alongside notes gathered throughout the study. The compilation of steps needed to complete this study is outlined in the summary of Chapter 3.

Summary

Chapter 3 consisted of an overview of qualitative research design and a rationale. Qualitative research should be valid and possess the specific criteria for determining the overall trustworthiness of data results. These results of this research include credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability (Creswell, 2003; Merriam, 2009; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). In this chapter, I addressed the basic qualitative study, discussing the role of the researcher, methodology, procedures recruitment, participation, and data collection. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to examine the challenges administrators face in supporting teachers' implementation of inclusion strategies to

support the academic needs of SWDs in general education classrooms. This study was

limited to elementary administrators in a Georgia school district. School administrators

lead their schools to proficiency ratings outlined by state and federal assessments. The

phenomenon examined requires active participants to study the effectiveness of current

policies and procedures. Examining the current practices in inclusive education can

potentially influence local school district policies, state requirements, and federal

mandates. The research and formulated interview questions guide the study in alignment

with the problem statement and purpose of the study. Chapter 4 includes a thorough

analysis of the results from the collected data during the semi-structured interviews.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to examine the challenges administrators face in supporting teachers' implementation of inclusion strategies to support the academic needs of SWDs in general education classrooms. The problem this study explored was that elementary administrators in a southern school district in Georgia were experiencing challenges supporting teachers' implementation of inclusion strategies to support the academic needs of students with disabilities (SWDs) in general education classrooms. The performance gap between the districts' SWDs is significantly lower than SWODs, which underscores the academic performance gap and identifies the need for administrators to address challenges in supporting teachers with effective practices in inclusive classrooms.

I sought to discover the inclusionary practices, professional development, and processes that elementary school administrators implemented to support general education teachers and close the large gaps in achievement between SWDs and SWODs in inclusion classrooms. Research in this area is needed to understand how elementary school administrators could provide support to general education teachers to help increase proficiency levels on state and districtwide ELA scores for 3rd through 5th grade for SWDs in inclusive classrooms. I chose purposeful sampling and collected data from two principals and three assistant principals to examine their roles as elementary school administrators in closing the SWD achievement gaps. From the data that I gathered, I identified codes, categories, and themes to understand elementary school administrators' roles in supporting general education teachers with inclusionary practices and appropriate

professional development opportunities in closing the large gaps in achievement between SWDs and SWODs in inclusion classrooms.

I used the conceptual framework from Fullan's (2011) six secrets of change coherence framework, which was referenced as a priori scheme, and examined the challenges administrators face with teachers' implementation of the gap in practice with inclusion strategies to support the academic needs of SWDs in general education classrooms. The research questions were as follows:

RQ1: How do elementary administrators describe the challenges with supporting inclusionary practices for SWDs in general education classrooms?

RQ2: How do elementary administrators support teachers with addressing the academic needs of SWDs in general education classrooms?

In Chapter 4, I describe setting, data collection, and data analysis. I explain the results in relation to each research question and describe the strategies I used to determine trustworthiness.

Setting

The research study took place in a Georgia school district in the southeastern region of the United States. I conducted the semi-structured interviews via Zoom due to the COVID-19 pandemic. I emailed the interview protocol and semi-structured research questions form (Appendices A and B) to gain consent from the Department of Research, Evaluation Assessment, and Accountability within the southern school district. The setting for this study was in the 5th largest school district in the state, with 66 schools and centers, nearly 6,800 employees, and 3,092 teachers. A majority of residents are at the

low-income poverty level and serve more than 55,000 students, with approximately
14.2% of students being English language learners and 10% receiving special education
services. The local school district is a Title I district. All of the schools within the district
implement inclusive practices for SWDs. In 2021, the state reported the district
demographics as 1.9% White, 69.4% Black, 3.4% Asian or Asian/Pacific Islander, 22.5%
Hispanic/Latino, 0.2% American Indian or Alaska Native, and 0.1% Native Hawaiian or
other Pacific Islander. Additionally, 50% of students are male, and 50% of students are
female. Demographic information of each student is represented in Table 6.

Table 6

Enrollment by Diversity

Race/Ethnicity	Percentage of Participants
Black or African American	69.4%
Hispanic/Latino	22.5%
Asian or Asian Pacific Islander	3.4%
Two or more races	2.5%
White	1.9%
American Indian or Alaska Native	0.2%
Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander	0.1%

Note: Retrieved from US News & World Report, 2021

Participants

The collection of administrator participants for selection was limited due to a
defined delimitation of the study that specified that elementary school leaders must be
principals or assistant principals. Of the twenty-five principals and assistant principals
contacted with an invitation to participate in the study, five participated in the study.

Participants were required to have been (a) supervising schools with inclusion classrooms, (b) employed in the role of principal or assistant principal, (c) evaluating teachers who instruct SWDs in general education classrooms, and (d) leading schools that have not met the standard based on the composite scores in reading for Grades 3, 4, and 5 on the Georgia Milestones Assessment System from school years 2016–2019. Two prospective volunteers who initially agreed to be a part of the study later declined to participate as their schedule conflicted, allowing five total participants.

The elementary school administrators who agreed to participate in the study replied via email with the response, "I consent." I sent a follow-up email thanking the administrators for their willingness to participate in the study. Once the participants agreed, I developed a Microsoft Word codebook document that outlined the information provided from each participant to ensure they (a) supervised schools with inclusion classrooms, (b) were employed in the role of principal or assistant principal, (c) evaluated teachers who instruct SWDs in general education classrooms, and (d) led schools that had not met the standard based on the composite scores in reading for Grades 3, 4, and 5 on the Georgia Milestones Assessment System from school years 2016–2019. This information was determined through the district's Department of Research, Evaluation Assessment, and Accountability. The principals and assistant principals met criteria to be approved to conduct research at the district site. I arranged the interviews within 45-60 minute time allotments for each participant to accommodate their preferred schedule and allow them to plan accordingly. The elementary school administrators had varied backgrounds, experience, and knowledge. The range of years serving as school

administrators ranged from novice to veteran leaders. All administrators worked within
five elementary schools, and two were male and three were female. To prevent including
data that could potentially identify the participants, no other demographic information
was requested. Demographic information of each participant is represented in Table 7.

Table 7

Demographic Information of Participants

Participant	Sex	Campus Type	Administrative Title
P01	Female	Elementary	Principal
AP01	Male	Elementary	Assistant Principal
P02	Female	Elementary	Principal
AP02	Male	Elementary	Assistant Principal
AP03	Female	Elementary	Assistant Principal

According to the Walden University IRB guidelines, I notified the southern state
school district's Department of Research, Evaluation Assessment, and Accountability
(REAA), gathered administrators' emails from the district website, and contacted them
after gaining approval from the school district. The district permitted me to recruit
administrators through email after gaining approval from the area superintendents, who
had to approve the study being conducted within their respective regions. Potential
participants were provided with the general information for the study, including the
possible benefits and risks. I scheduled the meeting dates, based on the participants'
availability to be conducted on Zoom, due to the pandemic and possible spread of the
COVID-19 virus. The day of the scheduled interview, I contacted the administrators via
email with the meeting link and a follow-up reminder to reconfirm the time. Creswell and

Poth (2018) recommend including between five and twenty-five individuals in qualitative studies. The sample size in the proposed research study was in the range recommended to ensure it remained relatively small to support the analysis's depth and reach saturation, which is fundamental to a basic qualitative research design. Although twenty-five potential participants were emailed, seven expressed interest in participating, and five participated in the study. The Walden University IRB approved this study before data collection began (IRB Approval No. 03-18-22-0750777).

Data Collection

I used purposeful sampling to identify the five elementary school administrators and started each interview with a confidential overview of the interview process and reminded them that the interview would be recorded (see Appendix C). Each participant was assigned a code name prior to interview (e.g., P01 = Principal 1, AP02 = Assistant Principal 2). Five participants (three assistant principals and two principals) were interviewed using the interview protocol I composed (see Appendix A). The interviews were anchored in the purpose of the study and offered a systematic framework for developing a well-vetted interview protocol. This process allowed me to obtain robust and detailed interview data to address research questions, record, and code fidelity (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). I designed the ten interview questions (see Appendix B) to collect data and document the analysis that links theory to practice (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam, 2009). The Walden University IRB approved this study before data collection began (IRB Approval No. 03-18-22-0750777).

I collected data for this study through one-on-one interviews conducted through a Zoom platform, due to safety concerns regarding the spread of COVID-19. In order to keep risk to a minimum, virtual interviews provided a safe environment to complete interviews with fidelity and caution. I conducted the interview through the Zoom feature and used an audio recorder as a backup plan, just in case the Zoom audio recording did not save. Although the interview was recorded, I took handwritten notes so I could refer to them as needed. The interviews were completed over a 2-week span at the time requested by the administrators. Each meeting was conducted over Zoom, and the length varied from 15 minutes to 29 minutes.

The NVivo software was used to transcribe the recordings and transfer them to a Microsoft Word document. Each administrator was thanked for their time and willingness to participate in the research study. The transcription and recording were provided within a week of the interview. The participants were provided the transcription, as well as the Zoom recording link to review and to provide revisions if necessary. None of the participants expressed the need to clarify any responses. Once it was determined that no corrections or clarifying statements needed to be made, I began the audio thematic analysis outlined by Braun et al. (2016), which included reading and rereading responses, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing potential themes, defining themes, and analyzing themes using the NVivo software. Reading the written responses allowed me to make notations of the participant's experiences. The next phase allowed me to label and classify concepts that revealed code mapping to identify the key theme. The NVivo software and a Google Drive spreadsheet was used to compare datasets, and

the final phase consisted of grouping and analyzing the commonalities to create a theme to compile a report.

The first action step included reading over my notes, and then listening to the recording and cross-referencing to make sure that the notes captured what was actually said. Since the interviews were transcribed by the NVivo 12 software into a Microsoft Word document, I also reviewed that document to ensure the consistency between the recording and what was actually transcribed. After careful review, my notes, the transcripts from the NVivo 12 software, and the audio from the interviews all aligned and relayed the same information. This process was completed for all five interviews. The participants were given the opportunity to provide clarity and make changes, and none were needed. As a result, the notes, transcribed software, and audio interviews all reported the responses with efficacy.

Data Analysis

A priori scheme was used based on the conceptual framework of Fullan's (2011) Six Secrets of Change, categories in the themes were formed that were not discrepant, data analysis confirmed each category in the scheme, and categories were reduced to five themes. After the interview transcription process that involved the notes, NVivo 12 software, and the audio was completed, a code that aligned with a theme was assigned to each participant. The codes developed from one or more categories can represent a phenomenon's directly observable or underlying aspect and memos through data analysis (Saldaña, 2016).The codes allowed for confidentiality for each participant. The member checking process was implemented when the participants were asked to respond with

changes, and none were needed. All participants were satisfied with the transcription and found them to be a true reflection of what was said during the interview process.

After member checking was completed, the next step included reviewing the NVivo 12 software to begin the thematic analysis of the codes that were created. The thematic analysis included grouping the common codes from the transcripts which allowed the discovery of themes and patterns throughout the data process. I analyzed and coded transcripts of the interview to discover theme statements and themes that are correlated to the conceptual framework of Fullan's (2011) Six Secrets of Change. Examining the challenges administrators face with teachers' implementation of inclusion strategies was needed to support the academic needs of SWDs in general education classrooms. Table 9 reflects the five, common themes and patterns between the questions and the transcribed evidence from assistant principals and principals.

After reviewing the common themes and patterns between the questions and the transcribed evidence, I recorded the data between the codes that emerged from each participant's response. Table 10 reflects the codes and the percentages from assistant principals and principals. The thematic analysis that included grouping common codes was analyzed until there was no divergence of the common codes and the similarities exasperated. The data analysis process looks for recurring ideas and common themes that involve critical participant responses (Yob & Brewer, n.d.).There were several theme statements that occurred throughout the interviews. This reoccurrence allowed theme statements to be created from the questions that were posed. Triangulation continued

throughout the coding process and theme statements were developed. Table 9 reflects the themes and theme statements from assistant principals and principals.

The theme statements that surfaced from the data include (a) professional development for teachers, (b) differentiated instructional strategies and resources, (c) preparedness, (d) planning and scheduling, and (e) culture of collaboration. The overarching themes that emerged can be closely related to the Fullan's (2011) fundamental system change in education outlining six change secrets. The six secrets consist of loving your employees, connecting peers with purpose, building capacity, learning cultures, being transparent, and developing learning systems that demonstrate a growth mindset (Fullan, 2011). Since there was no discrepant data and all themes that emerged were noted until exasperation, the substantiation for the findings were compiled from interviews and theme statements that revealed the participants' perspective of the questions posed and outlined in Table 12.

In Fullan's (2011) comprehensive framework leadership model, the reason change occurs as it does is addressed, and in Burns' (1978) transformational leadership model, leaders identify the need for change. The relationship between this framework and the common themes amongst school leaders is outlined in Table 9 and reveals how each theme aligns to each component. Analogous ideas were evident between the literature summary and the challenges administrators face with supporting teachers with students with disabilities in inclusion classrooms. The emerging theme from the interviews address the challenges of implementing effective, inclusionary strategies for students with disabilities, which allowed the development of theme statements.

Table 8

Themes and Theme Statements

Theme	Theme Statement
Professional development	School administrators should find appropriate professional development opportunities for general and special education teachers to attend together to better understand how to meet the instructional needs of SWDs in general education classrooms.
Instructional strategies and resources	School administrators should become knowledgeable and provide more resources specifically for SWDs and consider additional support outside of what is mandated by the district.
Preparedness	General education teachers and school administrators have not been provided the background knowledge on inclusionary practices to specifically support SWDs in general education classrooms.
Planning and Scheduling	School administrators realize scheduling must be strategic and are cognizant that general education teachers and special education teachers must have additional, uninterrupted time to collaboratively plan for SWDs in general education classrooms.
Culture of collaboration	Creating a culture of collaboration is important for both general education and special education teachers to be inclusive. School leaders attempt to cultivate a culture of change that supports SWDs, but the support varies at different schools.

This section investigates the similarities throughout the data analysis process. The codes and percentages that emerge from the themes encapsulate the participants' responses. The percentages of responses captured from the assistant principals and principals is outlined below in Table 9.

Table 9

Codes and Percentage Responses

Code Responses	Percentage of P Responses	Percentage of AP Responses
Professional development		

Best practices	100	66
Collaboration	100	100
Co-teaching	50	66
Understanding IEPs	50	66
Data Collection	50	33
Instructional strategies and resources		
Differentiated instruction	100	100
District resources	50	66
Type of learner	100	66
Lack of preparedness to provide leadership programs for SWDs		
Prepared	0	66
Not prepared	100	33
Planning and scheduling		
Has time and implements	50	66
No time and attempts	50	33
Culture of collaboration		
Proficient	50	66
Emerging	50	33

Finally, after themes and theme statements as well as codes and percentages were determined, I looked that the relationship between the themes and Fullan's (2011) Six Secrets of Change that is outlined in Table 10. The first secret to love your employees and school administrators should support all teachers find satisfaction in honing their craft, finding meaning in their work that links skill to strategy. The second secret is being able to connect peers with purpose and provides direction that rallies around a higher purpose that develops both individual and collaborative efficacy. The third secret is to build capacity that embraces a growth mindset and supports developing the instructional and managerial aspects of change necessary for school improvement. The fourth secret is learning the work and engage in the daily practices of teachers and offer professional development opportunities that promote continuous learning and precision in teaching (Fullan, 2011). The fifth secret is transparency rules, which consistently collects, reviews,

discusses, and publishes schoolwide data. The last secret involves systems and learning

that promotes continuous learning and develops teacher leaders to enhance continuity.

The six secrets of change describe systematic knowledge that promotes instructional

improvement that requires a shift in the preexisting culture of leadership and teaching in

educational settings.

Table 10

Theme and the Six Secrets of Change

Theme	Love	Connection	Build Capacity	Learning the Work	Transparency	Systems and Learning
Professional development	X	X	X	X		
Instructional strategies/resources	X	X	X	X	X	X
Preparedness		X	X	X	X	X
Planning and scheduling		X	X	X		X
Culture of collaboration	X	X	X	X	X	X

Results

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to examine the challenges

administrators face in supporting teachers' implementation of inclusion strategies to

support the academic needs of SWDs in general education classrooms. The themes

emerged from the findings and the results of the study. The themes are answered in the

research questions and the conceptual framework. Burns' (1978) transformational theory

and Fullan's (2011) six secrets of change coherence framework for this study is the

notion that administrators, as structural leaders, set the tone for inclusion within their

schools by inspiring and motivating teachers who support SWDs in inclusive classrooms, which guided this study and aligned to the participants' responses.

This study proved relevancy because it further develops the theoretical framework exploring the major reoccurring themes of inclusion education and administrators' challenges for creating a culture that promotes school-wide reform that includes professional development, transformative leadership, preparedness, school-wide reform, and a culture of change (Berkovich & Eyal, 2020; Boscardin et al., 2018; Chitivo & Brinda, 2018; Shepley et al., 2018). Shepley et al., (2018) determined the need to conduct further studies to provide insight into how administrators can address challenges with implementing instructional strategies and offer more comprehensive views on how to best support teachers' collaborative practices in inclusionary classrooms. The five key concepts outlined the challenges with inclusionary practices, supporting teachers, administrators' challenges, culture of schoolwide reform and professional development aligned with the five reoccurring themes of professional development, instructional strategies and resources, preparedness, culture of collaboration, and planning and scheduling. Statements were developed from reoccurring themes throughout the interviews and the details are explicitly stated below.

Theme 1: Professional Development – Best Practices, Collaboration, Co-teaching, Understanding IEPs, and Data Collection

Best Practices

The key finding was the majority of administrators found instructional practices a challenge in supporting inclusion. One hundred percent of principals and sixty-six

percent of assistant principals believed that understanding best practices was essential to SWDs being successful. One principal stated, "The challenges in providing support for inclusion strategies to general education teachers involves all the additional tasks they have to do and the lack of knowledge for best practices". Another principal expressed, "there is more focus on instruction from the district, but more focus on compliance from special education and there is not a cohesive balance". Both administrators believed there was a disconnect with the implementation of best practices and little focus specifically for SWDs. AP03 highlighted, "Effective practices are constantly changing, and support needs to be individualized, but a deeper understanding on best practices is needed in order to make that happen."

Collaboration

The key finding was all of the administrators found collaboration a big contributor to effectively support inclusion. One hundred percent principals and assistant principals believed professional development was needed on collaboration. An assistant principal stated, "Special education teachers should work collaboratively with general education teachers". AP02 revealed, "Professional development is segregated and there are not many professional development opportunities for teachers who instruct SWDs, and general education teachers could benefit from understanding functioning levels alongside special education teachers." A principal explained, "Collaboration is essential when teachers are supporting students on multiple grade levels in the same class and there is a lack of human resources and it's difficult to provide meaningful support". Another

principal similarly stated, "The district has collaboration models in place, but the support varies and differs from school to school because of checks and balances".

Co-teaching

The key finding was the half of administrators found professional development a contributor to effectively support inclusion. Fifty percent of principals expressed the need for professional development opportunities and sixty-six percent of assistant principals discussed co-teaching as well. One principal stated, "It is important for teachers to have knowledge on all content areas and understand best practices that support co-teaching models and attending trainings together would be more effective". An assistant principal expressed, "There is a need for professional development on co-teaching models and teachers need to know what that looks like. But most importantly administrators need to know how to support it." Another assistant principal disclosed, "There needs to be role models for effective practices for special education and general education teachers because DES teachers are limited."

Understanding IEPs

The key finding was the majority of administrators found understanding IEPs a challenge in supporting inclusion. Fifty percent of the principals expressed the importance of understanding IEPs and over half of assistant principals referred to the need for professional development opportunities for teachers to understanding accommodations and modifications for SWDs. An assistant principal expressed, "Teachers and administrators do not know how to transfer what is written in IEPs to effective instructional programming. There are lower and higher functioning levels, but

no one can articulate what that means for instruction." Another assistant principal revealed, "There are major challenges with understanding accommodations outlined in a student's IEP and all students seems to receive similar accommodations and it is not clear how the plan is individualized." An assistant principal furthered the thought in stating, "Because these students go from teacher to teacher and the interpretation of accommodations vary between staff and content areas." One principal expressed, "The IEP will lend itself to employ strategies, but there is a disconnection on what that actually looks like in a classroom."

Data Collection

The key finding was the majority of administrators found disaggregating data with fidelity a challenge in supporting inclusion. Fifty percent of the principals discussed the relevance of being able to disaggregate data and identify the subgroup of SWDs and less than half of assistant principals referred to data and the need for teachers' ability to interpret data to drive instructional decisions in inclusive classrooms. A principal referenced pulling reports and acknowledged, "As far as the district is concerned, data drives instructional decisions and fosters programming. Teachers should be equipped with the skills to interpret data and know the difference in tailoring lessons for both SWDs and SWODs." An assistant principal stated, "Data is usually pulled and distributed from the district, and we have to conduct purposeful data digs to identify the needs of SWDs. Academic coaches have a better understanding of the needs, but teachers are the ones in the classrooms."

Theme 2: Instructional Strategies and Resources

Differentiated Instruction

The key finding was the majority of administrators found instructional strategies a challenge in supporting inclusion. One hundred percent of principals and assistant principals discussed differentiated instruction and the importance for SWDs in general education classrooms. Katz et al. (2019) studied SWDs in inclusion classrooms and results indicated that the combination of social and emotional learning with specially designed instruction significantly improves academic achievement amongst various inclusion settings. A principal discussed, "I generated a survey to gain a better understanding of what the teachers needed in order to best support SWD with differentiated instruction and I was provided with books and workbooks the teachers would like to utilize in the classroom." Another principal stated, "It is hard to provide meaningful instruction to support the special education teachers with content knowledge." She added, "Teachers do not know how to differentiate instruction because I am not able to tell what is specifically being done for SWDs." An assistant principal stated, "Effective practices and instruction is constantly changing. There is a lack of resources to support this change." One principal believed, " Differentiated instruction looks different in small group classrooms and those same strategies can be used in general education classrooms although the class size and resources may be different."

District Resources

The key finding was half of the principals expressed that the current instructional strategies and resources were provided districtwide and over half of assistant principals

found the same to be true within their schools. Very few administrators provided teachers with inclusionary practices and ordered resources that were not recommended by the district. A principal stated, "The district provides school leaders with the tools to disaggregate data and understand performance levels, but strategies for specific needs as well as grouping and tracking data specifically for SWDs is not discussed in detail in district meetings." Another principal relayed, "Instructional resources are available for all subgroups, but not specifically designed for SWDs." An assistant principal admits, "All resources are mandated by the district and there is little time or effort to find additional resources. For example, the math manipulatives, workbooks, and electronic software is research based and vetted through the district and we use it." Another assistant principal revealed, "The same resources that are provided for all classrooms are being used by SWDs. My Title I funds have to be for general education students and some teachers may request specific resources, but most teachers have not expressed interest and use what the district provides for all students."

The key finding was the majority of administrators found instructional practices a challenge in supporting inclusion. One hundred percent of principals believed instructional strategies and resources used addressed the various needs of SWDs. They acknowledged SWDs have different learning styles and they believe the strategies and resources implemented addressed those specific needs. Sixty-six percent of assistant principals believed the resources used in the classrooms support SWDs and their various needs. A principal believes, "The strategies implemented address the various needs of students, even sensory and create more of a cohesive balance." An assistant principal

revealed, "We use visuals, manipulatives and understand pacing because we are a school that primarily addresses the bilingual needs of students. We accommodate as a school and SWDs benefit from this approach. We make sure modify, which still allows teachers to teach to the standard." An assistant principal further expressed, "We mandate math manipulatives for students." One principal revealed, "Some students are auditory and need headphones to cancel out the noise and kinesthetic students can use blocks, cubes, sliding counters and cutters, while our visual students benefit from visual models which include large print, and technology-based laptops and iPads."

Theme 3: Lack of Preparedness to Provide Leadership Programs for SWDs

Prepared

The key finding was all of the principals found preparedness a challenge in supporting inclusion. Zero percent of principals felt they were adequately prepared to support SWDs in their schools, while sixty-six percent of assistant principals felt they were prepared to support teachers with inclusionary practices that address the needs of SWDs in general education classrooms. An assistant principal explained, "My leadership program was included in my master's program and there was a work cohort within the district and that afforded exposure to various schools and programs. The cohort was streamlined, and we could discuss the specific needs of our school. If it were not for the cohort, I would not have been exposed to the specific needs of SWDs in the program." Additionally, an assistant principal stated, "My Educational Leadership program addressed special populations such as special education, English language learners and students with 504 plans."

Not Prepared

One hundred percent of principals felt they were not adequately prepared to support SWDs in their schools, while thirty-three percent of assistant principals felt they were not prepared to support teachers with inclusionary practices that address the needs of SWDs in general education classrooms. A principal explained, "There was very little preparation for supporting SWDs in the building. My leadership style is one of a maverick and I had to come up with specific strategies on my own." An assistant principal blatantly stated, "There was no preparation." A principal candidly relayed, "The training was on the job and actually in the role as school leader. My leadership program was different from what I expected, and I was not knowledgeable about inclusionary practices and the needs of special education students. The program did not prepare me for SWDs in classrooms."

Theme 4: Collaboration in Schools

Proficient

The key finding was half of administrators believed their school embraced a culture of collaboration and supported inclusion. Fifty percent of principals believed to be proficient with the culture of collaboration within their school, while sixty-six percent of assistant principals believed to be proficient as well. One principal believes, "I have created an environment that embraces a positive culture and have an open-door policy, so teachers feel comfortable. My role is that there is a culture of learning and expectation for the staff that they will meets the needs of every student. I create a culture in which teachers know there is an expectation for all, and I make sure special education staff

knows they are important and general education teachers know that SWDs cannot be left behind." An assistant principal stated, "I work on school culture and foster relationships with students. I drive it home that all things are inclusive. For example, fire drills, loud noises and we have an all hands-on deck culture that includes nurses, custodians, etc." An assistant principal explained, "I do not separate SWDs, and I help create a culture that does not isolate. We are very inclusionary with small groups and expose all children to the curriculum and foster relationships that allow teachers to reach the end goal without isolation."

Emerging

Fifty percent of principals believed to be emerging with the culture of collaboration within their school, while thirty-three percent of assistant principals believed to be emerging as well. A principal revealed, "It is difficult to start the fire and keep it ignited. How do we obtain resources, maximize time, and reflect? As a school we plan, do and check." An assistant principal stated, "Role models for SWDs and effective practices are needed, and we try not to limit DES teachers, but sometimes it is hard on planning days because they choose to go with the Department of Exceptional Students opposed to content."

Theme 5: Planning and Scheduling

Time

The key finding was half of administrators found time to support inclusion. Fifty percent of principals believe to have time and implement proper planning and scheduling, while sixty-six percent of assistant principals believe to have time and implement proper

planning and scheduling for general and special education teachers. A principal stated, "I extend an extra hour a week for planning and my teachers use a template that restructures lesson plans to include high impact strategies." An assistant principal revealed," I make sure the schedule allows for collaboration. I have one interrupted planning period and lesson plans are provided timely." An assistant principal explained, "I supervise collaborative planning. I go into specific grade levels and assist with lesson planning and interventions for SWDs. Although it is challenging, I schedule the SWDs and SWODs and make sure the classes are aligned."

No time, but attempts

Fifty percent of principals believe to have little time, but attempt to implement proper planning and scheduling, while thirty-three percent of assistant principals believe to have little time but attempt to implement proper planning and scheduling for general and special education teachers. A principal relayed, "It is challenging to collaborate planning time and be a part of collaborative planning sessions. Time, staffing, and the level of content knowledge is a challenge. There have been a lot of vacancies, and although substitutes come in and help with coverage, providing planning time is difficult. I need to be flexible with planning and where it becomes a priority and provide isolated planning time for teachers who work with SWDs." An assistant principal admitted, "There are challenges to implement strategies in the IEP and allow special education teachers to plan collaboratively with general education teachers."

Table 11

Alignment of Interview Questions and Evidence

Research Questions	Interview Questions	Evidence
RQ1- How do elementary administrators describe the challenges with supporting inclusionary practices for SWDs in general education classrooms?	What are the challenges in providing support for inclusion strategies to teachers who support SWDs in general education classrooms? Please explain.	• Collaborative planning time • Additional tasks • Time • Staffing • Level of content knowledge • Buy in • Large margin for SWDs and SWODs • Challenges with professional development • Implementing strategies for IEP • Scheduling of SWDs • Needs of SWDs • Understanding accommodations
RQ1- How do elementary administrators describe the challenges with supporting inclusionary practices for SWDs in general education classrooms?	What actions through a culture of school-wide reform do you believe are necessary to support teachers with SWDs in general education classrooms? Please explain.	• Focus on instruction, not compliance • Grouping and tracking data • Strategies for specific needs • Professional development and training • Believing all students can learn • Allow teachers to teach • Knowledge and understanding SWDs • Understanding inclusion

(table continues)

Research Questions	Interview Questions	Evidence
RQ1- How do elementary administrators describe the challenges with supporting inclusionary practices for SWDs in general education classrooms?	Describe how your leadership program influenced your leadership style and prepared you to identify, implement and evaluate inclusionary practices in your current school setting.	• On the job training • Not knowledgeable • Did not prepare for inclusionary practices • Very little preparation • Leadership style is a maverick • No preparation • Program was streamlined with job cohort • Program was for special programs • Capitalized on support

Research Questions	Interview Questions	Evidence
RQ1- How do elementary administrators describe the challenges with supporting inclusionary practices for SWDs in general education classrooms?	Describe the type of professional development you find to align with the needs of teachers who support SWDs in general education classrooms and why?	• All content knowledge • Best practices for SWDs • Co-Teaching models • Learning styles of SWDs • Instructional styles of teachers • Differentiated instruction • Behavior and academic coding • Phonemic skills • Small group classrooms • Collaboration with gen/sped teachers • SWDs functioning levels • Supporting Co-Teaching
RQ1- How do elementary administrators describe the challenges with supporting inclusionary practices for SWDs in general education classrooms?	What effective practices are outlined for supporting teachers with the implementation of inclusionary practices for SWDs in general education classrooms?	• Does not know • Questions the support in place for SWDs • Lacks checks and balances • Assessments are important • Academic coaches support SWDs • Interpreting SWD and SWODs data collaboratively • Discuss the challenges of SWDs • Academic coaches know what SWDs need • Small group instruction
RQ2 – How do elementary administrators support teachers with addressing the academic needs of SWDs in general education classrooms?	What is your role in supporting teachers who provide inclusionary practices for SWDs in general education classrooms? Please explain	• Time for planning and scheduling • Meeting compliance • Open door policy • Equipping teachers with knowledge • Employ and change practices • Checks and balances • Plan, do, and check • Observations and feedback • Supervise collaborative planning • Assist with lesson planning and interventions • Making sure teachers know accommodations

(table continues)

Research Questions	Interview Questions	Evidence
RQ2 – How do elementary administrators support teachers with addressing the academic needs of SWDs in general education classrooms?	What planning accommodations are made for teachers who develop lessons for SWDs based on data from IEPs?	• Providing planning time • Extending time for planning • Restructuring lesson plan templates • Refer to IEP for high impact strategies • Plan collaboratively • Data digs • Reviewing challenges and successes • Evaluating the gap • Scheduling for collaboration • Have one noninterrupted planning period • Timely lesson plans

Research Questions	Interview Questions	Evidence
RQ2 – How do elementary administrators support teachers with addressing the academic needs of SWDs in general education classrooms?	Describe your role in implementing professional development opportunities essential to support teachers with SWDs in general education classrooms.	• Flexibility with planning • Provide isolated planning time • Survey teachers • Review funding • Purchase research-based resources • Observations and feedback • District offerings • New teacher trainings • Not content but culture • Academic coaches for SWODs and lead teachers for SWDs • Difficulty with follow up and monitoring
RQ2 – How do elementary administrators support teachers with addressing the academic needs of SWDs in general education classrooms?	What instructional resources are provided for inclusionary practices to teachers who support SWDs in general education classrooms? Please explain.	• Equitable for school • District provided • Not specifically for SWDs but all subgroups • Various needs • 1:1 computer-based instruction • Type of learner • Visual • District resources • Same resources for SWDs and SWODs • Teacher recommended • Modified resources that teach to standard • Pacing for SWDs

(table continues)

| RQ2 – How do elementary administrators support teachers with addressing the academic needs of SWDs in general education classrooms? | Describe your role in creating and/or maintaining a schoolwide culture that embraces effective practices for SWDs in general education classrooms and how you accomplish that. | Expectation to meets the needs of all students General education teachers have buy-in Special educations teachers feel important Provide resources, time, and reflection Role model for SWDs Provide effective practices Professional development for all teachers SWDs are not excluded Special education teachers are not isolated Inclusionary practices Support small group classes Expose all students to the curriculum Provide clear goals Foster relationships Inclusivity Culture of collaboration |

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Evidence of trustworthiness allows the researcher to remain agreeable during the process with an increased understanding of the problem through carefully developed interview questions (Creswell, 2003). Qualitative research was valid and possessed the specific criteria for determining the overall trustworthiness of data results. The results of the research included credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability (Creswell, 2003; Merriam, 2009; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). School administrators' perceptions were captured through one-on-one interviews on Zoom platform to adhere to social distancing guidelines. Each participant was provided a transcript as well as the recording of their interview. The participants were given the opportunity to review both the transcript and listen to recording to ensure what was said was captured and recorded with fidelity. Trustworthiness was obtained when member checking took place, reflexivity through logs and notes, an opportunity to review and make changes, and an audit trail of the process.

Credibility ensures and appeals to a reader with supporting evidence that the results accurately reflect the current study (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Credibility was addressed by having a process and procedure in place for the administrators by following the interview guide. Transferability provides specific contextual information such that readers can determine whether the results are transferable to their situations or the situations of others (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Transferability was addressed by providing descriptions and a detailed account of the administrators' experiences during data collection to reveal that the study's findings could transfer to various schools, situations, and circumstances. Dependability is when the researcher describes the research process in ample detail to be replicated (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Dependability was addressed by emailing the administrators' transcripts to review to corroborate the accuracy. Confirmability is when the researcher ascertains and communicates to the reader that the results reflect the participants' data and not the researcher's bias or interpretations (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Conformability was addressed during the interview process by allowing administrators to confirm their responses, and the credibility of this study is equally important.

<div align="center">**Summary**</div>

The purpose of this study examined the challenges administrators face with teachers' implementation of inclusion strategies to support the academic needs of SWDs in general education classrooms. Although the phenomenon of inclusive education is increasing throughout the nation, substantial challenges related to academic achievement persist because there remains a significant gap between the inability to bridge the gap

between the literature and practice which has the potential to have an adverse effect on the implementation of inclusionary practices in classrooms (Schiariti, 2020). The study revealed there are several challenges administrators face in supporting general education and special education teachers with differentiated instruction in elementary classrooms.

The study uncovered administrators felt additional support and training was needed in order to help teachers be successful with inclusionary practices. The additional support yielded five, reoccurring themes that included specific professional development opportunities for teachers, research-based instructional strategies and resources, preparedness for administrators and teachers to proficiently support SWDs. Additionally, the challenges persisted in allowing time and a structure for effective planning and scheduling for general education and special education teachers as well as cultivating and sustaining a culture that embraces provides inclusivity for SWDs and special education. The five themes emerged after thoroughly analyzing the data that revealed the challenges administrators face to support teachers' implementation of inclusion strategies to support the academic needs of SWDs in general education classrooms.

All principals and assistant principals answered questions in entirety regarding the challenges they face but remained optimistic that they would be able to support teachers more effectively by becoming more aware and knowledgeable of their needs. The administrators believed that their culture of collaboration was proficient and emerging inclusionary practices would increase academic achievement and close the gaps for SWDs in general education classrooms. Administrators are successful when they build learning capacity and create a school climate that develops relationships and supports

closing the achievement gap of special education students in inclusion classrooms

(Osiname, 2018). The themes that emerged allowed me to answer the two research

questions:

RQ1 - How do elementary administrators describe the challenges with supporting

inclusionary practices for SWDs in general education classrooms?

RQ2 - How do elementary administrators support teachers with addressing the

academic needs of SWDs in general education classrooms?

The goal was to examine the challenges administrators face so it could streamline

the needs and make school leaders more cognizant of inclusion practices of both general

education and special education teachers to support SWDs in general education

classrooms. Research in this area was needed to understand how elementary school

administrators could provide support to general education teachers to help increase

proficiency levels for SWDs in inclusive classrooms. In Chapter 4, I presented the results

of the study. In chapter 5, I will discuss the interpretation of the research findings,

limitations, recommendations, implications, and conclusions.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to examine the challenges administrators face with teachers' implementation of inclusion strategies to support the academic needs of SWDs in general education classrooms. I investigated the challenges and developed key findings that the five elementary school administrators are faced with regarding the current instructional practices and inclusion needs of SWDs in general education classrooms. The qualitative design allowed me to gain an understanding of the administrators through the development of semi-structured interview questions and interviews conducted on Zoom that included prompts to ensure the research questions captured analogous information during each interview (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

This study is relevant because there is limited research that addresses the challenges of implementing inclusion practices in a sustainable way. The challenges persist when principals lack the experience necessary to work with SWDs and are unfamiliar with how to lead an inclusive school while successfully meeting the goals of inclusion (Billingsley, 2012; Shepley et al., 2018). The more administrators understand SWDs, the more prepared they are to make decisions about the special education programs that provide meaningful instruction for students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms (Crockett, 2019). Chapter 5 provides a summary, interpretation, and a result of the findings. I developed questions that guided the study from Fullan's (2011) six secrets of change coherence framework, which was referenced as a priori scheme and addressed the challenges of leadership abilities in inclusive environments and Burns'

(1978) transformational leadership theory, which focused on emotional motivation to encourage others to advance to a higher level of transformation within a social system.

RQ1: How do elementary administrators describe the challenges with supporting inclusionary practices for SWDs in general education classrooms?

RQ2: How do elementary administrators support teachers with addressing the academic needs of SWDs in general education classrooms?

I asked the participants questions aligning with their role as school leaders implementing effective, inclusionary practices for SWDs in general education classrooms. The basis of the research was to understand how school administrators support teachers with the implementation of inclusionary for SWDs in their respective schools. One of the key findings was the awareness of principals providing teachers with time for proper scheduling and planning for general and special education classes, as well as implementing lesson plans to include high impact strategies. Other key findings about administrators' roles were that they believed understanding best practices was essential to SWDs being successful. The administrators acknowledged practices are constantly changing; therefore, support needs to be individualized. As such, a deeper understanding on best practices is needed in order for SWDs to be successful. Additional findings included that the principals believed professional development was a priority for collaboration. The findings revealed the need for teachers to work collaboratively because general education teachers can benefit from understanding functioning levels, IEP interpretation, accommodation/modifications, as well as effective inclusionary practices for SWDs in general education classrooms, alongside special education

teachers. The primary challenges administrators faced was time to monitor inclusionary programming, preparedness for SWDs, finding appropriate resources and professional development opportunities, and finding the time to implement effective strategies for SWDs. Chapter 5 includes the interpretation of the finding, study limitations, recommendations, implications, and conclusions.

Interpretation of the Findings

I based my interpretation of the findings for this basic qualitative study by the conceptual framework in Fullan's (2011) six secrets of change coherence framework, and Burns' (1978) transformational leadership theory, which focused on emotional motivation to encourage others to advance to a higher level of transformation within the social system. The findings extended the knowledge of Fullan's (2011) six secrets of change coherence framework of leadership consist of loving your employees, connecting peers with purpose, building capacity, learning cultures, being transparent, and developing learning systems that demonstrate a growth mindset inclusive of critical components that encompass understanding change, moral purpose, knowledge building, cultivating relationships, and coherence making. An understanding of change theory is crucial to inform practice and policy on implementing instructional strategies for schools seeking to expand their knowledge in education and undergo change for organizational effectiveness (Mestry, 2017). There was plenty of research involving SWDs in inclusive education. However, little research was available in the scholarly literature to the practices of school principals in supporting students with special needs (Sider et al., 2021). As a result, a study of 285 school principals was conducted that identified key

themes which included: modeling behaviors, relationships, lack of preparation, principal

isolation and communication (Sider et al., 2021). Through my research study of five

principals and assistant principals, I identified key themes included (a) professional

development for teachers, (b) differentiated instructional strategies and resources, (c)

preparedness, (d) planning and scheduling, and (e) culture of collaboration. A priori

scheme emerged in at least one thematic area or another. I developed the research

questions in the current study to examine the administrators' role and the challenges they

faced in supporting teachers with inclusionary practices for SWDs in inclusionary

classrooms, which confirmed and extended the knowledge of previous research studies.

Professional Development

The theme of professional development reoccurred throughout the analysis

process. School leaders must engage in the daily practices of teachers and offer

professional development opportunities that promote continuous learning and precision in

teaching (Fullan, 2011). Professional development was a leading finding in the current

study and will be discussed in detail because administrators expressed the need for

identifying appropriate professional development opportunities within their

schools. Professional development that is collaborative and supported by school leaders

increases knowledge and motivates teachers to hone their skills (Stahl et al., 2019). The

administrators made it clear that finding relative and equitable professional development

opportunities for inclusionary practices was a challenging task. Administrators relied

heavily on support from the district office to suggest research based professional

development that would, in turn, support effective programming for SWDs in general

education classrooms. Although the research explores the implications for developing the necessary skills to determine appropriate professional development opportunities, such as project-based strategies that provide teachers with more training for inclusive classrooms, administrators expressed the need for more specialized opportunities that would address the needs of their individual school involving best practices, collaboration, co-teaching, understanding IEPs, and data collection.

Best Practices

The administrators acknowledged that instructional support for teachers needs to be individualized, noting that a deeper understanding on best practices is needed in order for SWDs to be successful. Although administrators face challenges as they support the development and implementation of effective practices to achieve school-wide improvement for SWDs and their nondisabled peers, there are challenges. They noted one challenge was the need for alignment of district practices and goals in order to support teachers with identifying effective, inclusive practices and conceptualizing equitable education for all (Boscardin et al., 2018; Shields & Hesbol, 2020). In the current study, all the principals found challenges in providing support for inclusionary practices, whereas the majority of assistant principals revealed there was a disconnect with the implementation of best practices and little focus on SWDs. According to administrators, a deeper understanding of inclusionary practices is needed to support both teachers and SWDs in general education classrooms.

Collaboration

The administrators highlighted the importance of collaboration in their schools. By examining performance management and accountability systems in public school sectors, researchers determined school leaders faced collaboration challenges. Effective and purposeful collaboration should solicit support from school administration, who can foster a cooperative commitment to provide opportunities to design instructional programming that meet the learning outcomes for SWDs (McLeskey, 2017). The administrators stated that collaboration was essential when supporting SWDs, and that providing meaningful supports posed some challenges. Although professional development on collaboration appeared to be provided in the elementary schools, there were not many opportunities for all teachers to attend professional development together. The administrators stressed the need for general education teachers and special education teachers to attend trainings at the same time.

Co-teaching

The administrators reported that co-teaching is very important, and professional development is conducted to support this model. Being able to support co-teaching models posed challenges with half of the principals and over half of the assistant principals. The administrators admitted that most general education teachers do not have the professional preparation, required skill sets, and knowledge base to implement specialized instruction when teaching in inclusive classrooms. Although this was relayed for most schools, administrators acknowledged general education teachers are considered the primary teacher in these environments (Alvarez-McHatton & Parker, 2013). Teachers

are charged with implementing inclusionary practices for SWDs in education settings with the support and guidance of school administrators to implement the most appropriate professional development opportunities to sustain these increased responsibilities and close the achievement gaps associated with these settings (Alvarez-McHatton & Parker, 2013; Gilmour et al., 2019).

Understanding IEPs

Half of the principals and over half of the assistant principals noted the importance of understanding IEPs for SWDs in their schools. While the administrators were familiar with IEPs, they did not understand in detail what portion of the IEP addressed instructional support needs in the classroom. They found that teachers also struggled with understanding the functioning levels and articulating how that aligns with inclusionary practices. Administrators expressed continued challenges with understanding accommodations outlined in IEPs. School leaders revise caseloads, change teacher schedules, complete targeted audits of IEPs and conduct ongoing classroom observations of teams struggling with inclusionary practices (Billingsley *et al.,* 2018; Waldron & McLeskey, 2011). Although these tasks are completed, administrators admitted a deeper understanding of current federal regulations that hold schools accountable for effectively implementing inclusionary practices for students with disabilities (SWDs) in general education classrooms as outlined in their IEPs is needed.

Data Collection

Administrators' responsibilities use data collection to make informed decisions to understand change theory and use their knowledge to support teachers and face

challenges that involve trustworthiness, transparency, and accountability for managerial

practices (Denhardt et al., 2018; Finlay, 2002). Administrators in the current study noted

the significance of data collection and how it drives instructional decisions and fosters

programming. They explained teachers should be equipped with the skills to interpret

data and know the difference in tailoring lessons for both SWDs and SWODs. It was

noted that in the current district, data is usually pulled and distributed by the district, and

the schools have to conduct purposeful data digs to identify the needs of SWDs, which

poses additional challenges. Administrators believed the instructional coaches support

general education teachers in a proficient manner and they have an understanding of how

to interpret data but have difficulty with subgroups such as SWDs.

Administrators expressed the significance of differentiated instruction to support

SWDs in general education classrooms. Specially Designed Instruction (SDI) is

considered the adaptation to address the unique needs of SWDs and ensured access to the

general curriculum (DeMatthews & Edwards, 2014). Differentiated instruction should be

happening for all students and is not exclusive to SWDs; none of the administrators used

the term SDI, which is specifically designed for SWDs. The decision-making process of

access to the general education curriculum is not clearly defined and varies among

educators regarding implementing instructional strategies for SWDs (Ruppar et al.,

2017). Administrators realized instruction needed to be implemented differently for

students with various needs but did not elaborate on any specific strategies and

interventions that teachers were providing. School leaders relayed that the resources were

district mandated and instructional strategies were suggested primarily by academic

coaches and instructional support teachers who support all students and not specifically SWDs.

Preparedness for SWDs

The principals openly relayed they were not prepared to support SWDs in inclusive classrooms. Over half of the assistant principals believed they were somewhat prepared to support SWDs in their schools. In a previous study that examined principal preparedness, the primary cause of ineffective program implementation was a lack of readiness and training despite a plethora of research on the effectiveness and utility of strategies (Shepley et al., 2018). Additionally, a significant number of administrators perceive themselves as ill-equipped, unprepared, and inexperienced in providing leadership in special education (Coviello & DeMatthews, 2021), and principals lack the necessary leadership skills needed to support teachers with successful instructional procedures (Mestry, 2017). In the current study, administrators acknowledged the more they understand SWDs, the more equipped they become to make decisions about the special education programs that provide appropriate instruction for SWDs in inclusive classrooms.

Culture of Collaboration

The administrators believed they created a culture of collaboration in their schools. The school leaders relayed they could improve collaborative efforts pertaining to professional development but found the culture of their schools embraced inclusivity and SWDs in general education environments. The principal's responsibility is to continuously transform inclusion classrooms through reflective, restorative practices that

sustain a strong school culture (Osiname, 2018). The school leaders found a positive school culture was essential to schoolwide success of both teachers and students. Administrators did not isolate and exposed all students to the curriculum and fostered relationships in order to meet goals. Administrators perform a vital role in creating a culture that embraces supporting inclusion teachers and designing a school that meets all students' needs (Espinoza & Cardichon, 2017). The current study revealed the majority of administrators believed that their school culture was proficient and important in the growth and development of SWDs in inclusive classrooms.

Planning and Scheduling

Over half of the administrators deemed planning a priority and a practice that they made time for general and special education teachers. Some school leaders extended an hour for collaborative planning while other enforced uninterrupted planning for teachers who support SWDs in inclusive classrooms. Administrators appeared to be very hands on with planning efforts and assisted with lesson planning and made sure classes are aligned to meet the needs of SWDs. In a previous study, administrators reported challenges with supporting teachers in implementing inclusion models related to time for collaborative planning with the general and special educators regarding SWDs' individual academic needs (DeMatthews & Edwards, 2014; Shepley et al., 2018). In the current study school leaders discussed the challenges with time, staffing, and content knowledge. Administrators acknowledged the challenges but reiterated the importance of intentional planning and the positive results it can yield.

Limitations of the Study

The brevity of the interviews was a limitation of this study due to the number of participants that contributed to the study. I proposed 10-12 administrators would participate in the study, while only 7 responded and 5 agreed to be a part of the study. Researchers recommend studying small samples of participants, including between five and twenty-five people (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The participants remained small to support the analysis's depth and reach saturation that is fundamental to a basic qualitative research design. I met the recommendations of a small study with the responses from the school administrators and recorded the responses with handwritten and transcribed notes and a recording. The limited size did not pose challenges for transferability with two principals and three assistant principals on the elementary level. The percentage of special education students in surrounding area districts in Georgia was comparable to the population at the current study district. I did not have a direct supervisory role, nor was I responsible for conducting evaluations to any of the participants, as I understand the importance of qualitative research credibility and trustworthiness.

Recommendations

At start of the research study, I found little research on the challenges administrators faced in supporting SWDs in inclusive classrooms. The majority of the studies focused on the challenges general education teachers faced and their perceptions regarding SWDs and their access to the general curriculum. The standardized testing scores revealed there was an academic gap between SWDs and SWODs, and according to recent studies, inclusionary practices were not being implemented with fidelity.

Although, I was able to find studies that addressed the role school leaders played in increasing academic achievement for SWDs, the challenges in supporting the specific instruction were not as evident. There is limited information regarding how administrators support teachers as they become inclusive and effective and administrators play an essential role in ensuring that educators make appropriate decisions to meet the academic needs of all students (Mavrogordato & White, 2020; Schiariti, 2020; Waldron & McLeskey, 2011). As a result, I focused on examining the challenges administrators face with teachers' implementation of inclusion strategies to support the academic needs of SWDs in general education classrooms in the 5th largest district in the state of Georgia in the southeastern region of the country.

At the completion of the research study, I realized that further research is needed on successful strategies implemented inclusion classrooms that have increased student achievement. This study would be beneficial in outlining SDI and how it is used for SWDs, and their individual needs and deficits as outlined in their IEPs. In the current study, I found that most of the administrators acknowledged that instructional support for teachers needs to be individualized and a deeper understanding on best practices is needed in order for SWDs to be successful. According to the elementary school leaders, a deeper understanding of inclusionary practices is needed to support both teachers and SWDs in general education classrooms. Additionally, all of the principals found challenges in providing support for inclusionary practices, while the majority of assistant principals revealed there was a disconnect with the implementation of best practices and little focus on SWDs. The principals shared a commonality and need to become more

knowledgeable on SDI to better support both general education and special education teachers. The administrators agreed that planning time was very important to create a culture of collaboration that addresses the individual needs of SWDs but admitted that they did not have a deep understanding of what to specifically look for in lesson plans and instruction. Therefore, I recommend more studies be conducted on what administrators should specifically look for when supervising collaborative planning, reviewing lesson plans, and evaluating co-teaching practices that will increase academic achievement for SWDs in inclusive classrooms. I also recommend that district leaders provide continuous professional development opportunities for school administrators to hone their skills in effective, inclusive programming in their schools. As the popularity of inclusion programs continues to rise, so do the challenges for principals. As the instructional leaders of the school, administrators must have a working understanding of both special education law and educational programming (Ngwokabuenui, 2013). I would also recommend that any administrators entering the district be required to attend a yearlong inclusive cohort that addresses the needs of teachers and students in regarding to inclusionary practices. Administrators have challenges to meet state standards and close the achievement gaps between SWDs and SWODs because there is little consistency in formal preparation for leadership roles related to special education (Kamens et al., 2013). Due to this inconsistency, districts should focus on supporting administrators with the foundational skills needed to influence inclusionary practices in their schools.

Implications

The implications of social change reveal that change can occur on many levels and provide educational stakeholders with informed decisions to strengthen support processes so that SWDs can maximize their potential in inclusion classrooms and society. The researchers' results of the current study, in relation to social change, are pertinent in examining the challenges with implementing effective instruction in inclusion, professional development, and preparatory training focused on special education programming. As schools strive to propel social change, a gap in practice can be considered in current teaching practices and readiness in inclusion classrooms, which could have implications for how administrators address the challenges and influence on inclusionary practices (Shepley et al., 2018). Becoming aware of the challenges contributes to positive social change by informing administrators of the needs of elementary teachers who support SWDs in inclusion classrooms that could increase academic classroom performance and the scores and percentages of SWDs who meet standards on statewide and districtwide assessments. Increasing academic classroom performance affords SWDs better opportunities to advance professionally in a global society and goes beyond the scope of this study.

As a result, inclusive schools, strengthening administrators' practices is a further recommendation for further research with purposeful, explicit research that yields immediate solutions (Ricci et al., 2020). It behooves educational stakeholders to focus on social change and work toward a common good for society and can be described as any adjustment in the established patterns of inter-human relationships and standards of

conduct (Morris, 2017). The findings of the current research study support the need for more studies that address specially designed instruction for SWDs in general education classrooms and ways administrators can identify, monitor, and evaluate the practices and make data informed decisions to purchase resources and provide appropriate professional development opportunities to both general education and special education teachers. The findings also reveal the needs for district leaders to provide more learning opportunities and support for administrators with the foundational skills needed to influence inclusionary practices in their schools. My research results revealed five common themes in examining the challenges administrators face with supporting teachers with inclusionary practices in general education classrooms from the data include (a) professional development for teachers, (b) differentiated instructional strategies and resources, (c) preparedness, (d) planning and scheduling, and (e) culture of collaboration. The overarching themes that emerged from the research study can be considered to support closing the achievement gap and increasing academic classroom performance and the scores and percentages of SWDs who meet standards on statewide and districtwide assessments.

Conclusion

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to examine the challenges administrators face with teachers' implementation of inclusion strategies to support the academic needs of SWDs in general education classrooms. After conducting interviews from elementary principals and assistant principals, I was able to understand the challenges administrators faced in providing teachers with time for proper scheduling and

planning for general and special education teachers as well as critiquing lesson plans to include high impact strategies. I was also able to understand how crucial the successful implementation of best practices was essential to closing the academic gap for SWDs and SWODs. The administrators agreed that an individualized and a deeper understanding on best practices is needed in order for SWDs to be successful. Administrators also revealed the need for teachers to work collaboratively because general education teachers can benefit from understanding functioning levels, IEP interpretation, accommodations, and modifications, as well as effective inclusionary practices for SWDs in general education classrooms, alongside special education teachers. Since schools are being held accountable for special education students in general education classrooms, school thrive when principals are able to effectively shift toward inclusionary practices (Adams et al., 2017). It was a consensus that the administrators in this study believed a focus on inclusion practices makes schools more accountable for special education students in general education classrooms, and the challenges they face must be addressed in order to support appropriate, inclusionary practices in their schools.

The themes that reoccurred throughout the study consisted of professional development for teachers, differentiated instructional strategies and resources, preparedness, planning and scheduling, and a culture of collaboration that close the academic gap for SWDs in general education classrooms. The intentness of the theme of professional development that was consistent amongst the school administrators was the reoccurring and addressed key areas which included best practices, collaboration, co-teaching, and understanding IEPs. It was also evident that the majority of administrators

relied heavily on the district to mandate practices and resources for SWDs. Administrators also expected academic coaches and special educations teachers to support general education teachers with inclusionary practices for SWDs in general education classrooms but admitted they did not know how to monitor the effectiveness of this practice. Understanding IDEA is essential for administrators to develop the skills to understand how students with disabilities (SWDs) should be supported and monitor instructional progress effectively to help structure programs that further develop mission and vision statements involving services for this population of students (DeMatthews et al., 2020). The latest version of IDEA, established in 2006, held administrators more accountable supporting fully executed IEPs and providing teachers with the necessary training to provide students with disabilities in inclusion environments, requiring a need for a more explicit version of what skills and knowledge are required (Zirkel, 2014; Bateman et al. (2017). The research study on the reoccurring challenges administrators face, and addressing the monitoring of inclusionary programming, preparedness for SWDs, finding appropriate resources and professional development opportunities, as well as finding the time to implement effective strategies could increase awareness and close the academic gap between SWDs and SWODs.

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to examine the challenges administrators face with teachers' implementation of inclusion strategies to support the academic needs of SWDs in general education classrooms. I investigated the administrators' role in monitoring inclusionary practices and the challenges with closing the academic gap for SWDs and SWODs. The qualitative research design allowed me to

gain an in-depth understanding of the administrators by developing semi-structured interview questions, conducted on Zoom that included prompts to ensure the research questions captured analogous information during each interview (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

The relevance of this study further develops the theoretical framework exploring the major reoccurring themes of inclusion education and administrators' challenges for creating a culture that promotes school-wide reform that includes professional development, transformative leadership, preparedness, school-wide reform, and a culture of change (Berkovich & Eyal, 2020; Boscardin et al., 2018; Chitivo & Brinda, 2018; Shepley et al., 2018). The current study revealed there is still limited information regarding how administrators support teachers as they become inclusive and effective (Schiariti, 2020; Waldron & McLeskey, 2011). The purpose of this study was to fill a gap in practice with the challenges administrators face with teachers' implementation of inclusion strategies to support the academic needs of SWDs in general education classrooms. The administrators shared their experience and the role they play in monitoring inclusionary practices and closing the academic gap with SWD and SWODs in their schools. I asked the participants of the study questions regarding their roles as school leaders and their responsibility for addressing and supporting the academic needs of SWDs in general education classrooms. The rationale for the research was to identify the challenges and understand how administrators supported inclusionary practices in their schools. One of the key findings was the awareness of principals in providing teachers with time for proper scheduling and planning for general and special education teachers as well as implementing lesson plans to include high impact strategies. Other

key findings about administrators' roles were that they believed understanding best practices was essential to SWDs being successful.

According to the administrators, instructional practices are constantly changing, and therefore support needs to be individualized and a deeper understanding on best practices is needed in order for SWDs to be successful. The social implications of the research has the potential to influence employment and judicial encounters because when SWDs reach adulthood, only 46% become employed, and 50% interact with the justice system (Zajac et al., 2015). The interpretation and explanation of social change reveal that change can occur on so many levels and provide educational stakeholders with informed decisions to strengthen support processes so that SWDs can maximize their potential in inclusion classrooms and society. In reference to SWDs, the importance of understanding IEPs was identified and while the administrators were familiar with IEPs they did not understand in detail what portion of the IEP addressed the needs of instructional support in the classroom and reported that teachers also struggled with understanding the functioning levels and articulating how that aligns with inclusionary practices. Administrators expressed continued challenges with understanding accommodations outlined in IEPs and relied heavily on the district for guidance with resources and on academic coaches and lead teachers to support the needs of SWDs to help increase standardized testing scores which reveals an academic gap between SWDs and SWODs. With the constant demands being placed on school administrators regrading SWDs and the pressure to increase academic data, the challenges administrators face regarding time to monitor inclusionary programming, preparedness for SWDs, having the

skillset to implement effective strategies for SWDs is pertinent to address the primary

challenge of implementing and monitoring inclusionary practices and providing

professional development for inclusion more appropriately for teachers who support

SWDs in general education classrooms.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

1. Thank the participants for volunteering their time for the interview to participate in the study and provide a brief synopsis of the study.

2. Explain to the interview participant that participation in the study is completely voluntary and at any time they can choose to no longer participate by contacting me via email or during the interview.

3. Explain to the interview participant that their identity is anonymous and no personal information will be noted in the study.

4. Remind the participant that the interview will be recorded with an audio recorder and recorded through the Zoom feature with their permission.

5. Remind the participant that the researcher will be taking notes.

6. Advise the participant that the interview will take approximately 45-60 minutes.

7. Ask the participant if he or she would like to use an unidentifiable name before proceeding with the interview.

7. Begin the interview.

8. Ask follow-up questions if needed.

9. Thank the interview participant for their participation and time.

10. Approximately two days following the interview, the participants will be provided with the transcripts of the interview via email to review they have been captured as they intended.

11. If participants would like to make any updates to the transcripts, they will have a fifteen-minute time frame to make changes.

Appendix B: Semi Structured Interview Questions

Research Questions

1. How do elementary administrators describe the challenges with supporting inclusionary practices for SWDs in general education classrooms?

2. How do elementary administrators support teachers with addressing the academic needs of SWDs in general education classrooms?

Semi-Structured Interview Questions

1. What are the challenges in providing support for inclusion strategies to teachers who support SWDs in general education classrooms? Please explain.

2. What actions through a culture of school-wide reform do you believe are necessary to support teachers with SWDs in general education classrooms? Please explain.

3. Describe how your leadership program influenced your leadership style and prepared you to identify, implement and evaluate inclusionary practices in your current school setting.

4. Describe the type of professional development you find to align with the needs of teachers who support SWDs in general education classrooms and why?

5. What effective practices are outlined for supporting teachers with the implementation of inclusionary practices for SWDs in general education classrooms?

6. What is your role in supporting teachers who provide inclusionary practices for SWDs in general education classrooms? Please explain.

7. What planning accommodations are made for teachers who develop lessons for SWDs based on data from IEPs?

8. Describe your role in implementing professional development opportunities essential to support teachers with SWDs in general education classrooms.

9. What instructional resources are provided for inclusionary practices to teachers who support SWDs in general education classrooms? Please explain.

10. Describe your role in creating and/or maintaining a schoolwide culture that embraces effective practices for SWDs in general education classrooms and how you accomplish that.

The interview has now concluded. Your willingness to participate has been valuable for this study, and I appreciate the information you have provided. Thank you very much for your time. Have a great day.

Appendix C: Consent Form

You are invited to take part in a research study about administrators' challenges with the inclusion of elementary students with disabilities (SWD) in general education classrooms. The researcher is inviting elementary school administrators to be in the study. This form is part of a process called "informed consent" to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part. This study is being conducted by a researcher named Tyra M. Simon, who is a doctoral student at Walden University.

Background Information:

The purpose of this basic qualitative study is to examine the challenges administrators face with teachers' implementation of inclusion strategies to support the academic needs of SWDs in general education classrooms.

Procedures:

This study involves the following steps:

- 45-60 minute recorded semi-structured interviews with campus administrators conducted via electronic platform.

- Transcription of interviews using electronic software.

- Coding of transcripts using highlighting method to determine codes and themes

- Review of themes for accuracy and usefulness.

- Themes will be named and defined to determine their meanings and to figure out how they help add understanding of the data.

- Data will be analyzed, and the key findings will be summarized.

Here are some sample questions for elementary administrators:

- What are the challenges in providing support for inclusion strategies to teachers who support SWDs in general education classrooms?

- What is your role in influencing the perceptions of teachers who support SWDs in inclusive classrooms?

- What actions through a culture of school-wide reform do you believe are necessary to support teachers with SWDs?

- Describe how your leadership program influenced your leadership style and prepared you to identify, implement and evaluate inclusionary practices in your current school setting.

- Describe the type of professional development you find most effective to align with the needs of teachers who support SWDs in general education classrooms and why?

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Research should only be done with those who freely volunteer. So, everyone involved will respect your decision to join or not. You will be treated the same at your respective ███████████████████████████ elementary school whether or not you join the study. If you decide to join the study now, you can still change your mind later. You may stop at any time. The researcher seeks 10-12 volunteers for this study. The researcher will send a follow-up email to all volunteers who have been chosen to participate in this study.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

Being in this study could involve some risk of the minor discomforts that can be encountered in daily life, such as stress or revealing things that are personal. With the protections in place, this study would pose minimal risk to your wellbeing.

This study offers no direct benefits to individual volunteers. The aim of this study is to benefit society by providing insight to the challenges elementary school administrators face and how they perceive inclusion education for SWDs in general education classrooms, and possible instructional practices and professional development opportunities that may need to be implemented to develop effective inclusive programming for SWDs elementary schools within ███.

Payment:

Participation will be voluntary with no physical or monetary benefit.

Privacy:

The researcher is required to protect your privacy. Your identity will be kept anonymous, within the limits of the law. Be aware that the researcher's professional role as a special education coordinator requires him/her to report any possible instances of unethical behavior to the authorities. The researcher will not use your personal information for any purposes outside of this research project. Also, the researcher will not include your name or anything else that could identify you in the study reports. If the researcher were to share this dataset with another researcher in the future, the researcher is required to remove all names and identifying details before sharing; this would not involve another round of obtaining informed consent. Data will be kept secure by

replacing names with codes in a location accessible to only the researcher. Data will be kept for a period of at least 5 years, as required by the university.

Contacts and Questions:

You can ask questions of the researcher by email at ███████████████████. If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant or any negative parts of the study, you can call Walden University's Research Participant Advocate at ███████████. Walden University's approval number for this study is **IRB will enter approval number here** and it expires on **IRB will enter expiration date.**

You might wish to retain this consent form for your records. You may ask the researcher or Walden University for a copy at any time using the contact info above.

Obtaining Your Consent

If you feel you understand the study and wish to volunteer, please indicate your consent by replying to the email with the word, "I consent".

Printed Name of Participant

Date of consent

_____

Participant's Signature

_____

Researcher's Signature

_____

_____