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High School Special Educators' Perceptions of the Transition Planning Process to Prepare Students with Disabilities for Postsecondary Life

Anne M. Bell
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Walden University

College of Education and Human Sciences

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Anne Michelle Bell

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

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Walden University
2023

Abstract

High School Special Educators' Perceptions of the Transition Planning Process to
Prepare Students with Disabilities for Postsecondary Life

by

Anne Michelle Bell

EdS, Walden University, 2018

MS, Walden University, 2016

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

Walden University

August 2023

Abstract

Students with disabilities in the United States continue to encounter less than favorable success in employment and education after high school. Only 35% of students with disabilities graduating from high school have workforce skills. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to investigate high school special educators' perceptions of the transition planning process for students with disabilities in preparation for postsecondary life. The conceptual framework was Schlossberg's transition theory and Kohler's taxonomy for transition programming 2.0 model. The research questions focused on the types of transition planning practices that are currently being used by high school special education teachers and how these teachers evaluate the sufficiency of the transition process. Purposeful sampling was used in this study. Through semistructured interviews, qualitative data were collected from 10 high school special education teachers with at least one year of experience working with transition plans and the planning process to support students with disabilities. Open coding and thematic analysis revealed five themes: assessment, barriers, training, programs, and support. Findings revealed that connections between transition predictors for postschool success and secondary transition evidence-based practices were missing in the transition process. Also, special educators needed training in program creation, and evaluation, through professional development, in the field. The implication for positive social change is that special education teachers who use effective transition planning consistently can enrich educational decision-making practices that support students with disabilities so they can achieve long-term success, improving their post school outcomes.

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Dedication

My dissertation is dedicated to my family. A special thanks to my loving mother, Irene M. McDuffie, whose words of wisdom and push for tenacity I carry with me every day. My devoted husband, love of my life, James, and wonderful, amazing art teacher daughter Aundrea, who have been by my side throughout all my graduate degrees and the doctoral program journey. You enhance every breath I take in life and are very special to me.

I also dedicate this dissertation to my late brother, Richard, who never gave up on me; may he rest in peace. I dedicate this work to my nephew, Eric; my nieces, Nevico and Pamela; and my sister, Sheila, who have been my cheerleaders. I am grateful to all.

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I want to acknowledge my colleagues in the field. A special thank you for allowing me to conduct my research. Your knowledge and time were much appreciated. Your eagerness to assist me during the interviews made conducting my research pleasurable. I could not have completed this part of the journey without you!

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Students without disabilities transitioning from high school to postsecondary life find this process overwhelming. For students with disabilities, there is added concern and intimidation. Research indicated there may be inconsistencies in how special educators implement the transition planning process for students with disabilities as they prepare for postsecondary life (Alalet, 2022; Fisk, 2018). Transition planning is a method of assisting students with an individualized education program (IEP) in moving from high school to adult life by determining their postsecondary goals. Transition planning also helps them in understanding how to get there. The objective of the planning is to guide these individuals in becoming independent adults through transition goals and services. The plan is a key element of the transition process.

When students with disabilities are no more than 16 years of age and as early as 14 years of age, the IEP team works with the students to identify skill strengths such as self-determination, preferences, and interest to develop the plan. Transition planning is an integral part of an IEP for students with disabilities. In 1990, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) reauthorized the law requiring postsecondary transition planning to be implemented for all students receiving special education services to improve student with disabilities' rates of success after high school. According to Smith (2019), current procedures may not be sufficient in preparing these students to succeed in postsecondary life. After researchers began to develop best practices, they found that transition planning may help bridge the gap between students with disabilities and their nondisabled peers and noted that effective transition planning

might play a factor in contributing to transition successes for students with disabilities leaving high school (Fisk, 2018).

The potential implication for positive social change in the current study is that all high school special education teachers need to use effective transition planning consistently. Findings may enrich educational decision-making practices. Effective practices may support students with disabilities to achieve long-term success after high school. Chapter 1 sets forth concerns of inconsistencies regarding transition planning practices of high school special educators in preparing students with disabilities for postsecondary life. The background section presents numerous qualitative studies relating to the processes. The problem statement identifies a gap in practice and support for how it may exist. The purpose of the was to investigate high school special education teachers' perceptions regarding the transition planning process that supports students with disabilities leaving high school in preparation for postsecondary life. Research questions address the problem and the gap. The conceptual framework includes a description of the concepts that grounded the study.

The nature of the study presents the phenomenon being investigated. The definitions provide clarification of important terms that were used in this study. In the assumptions section, I describe the assumptions that were necessary in the study. Scope and delimitations identify the populations that were included and excluded and the potential for transferability of findings. Limitations describe design, biases, methodological weaknesses, and measures to address limitations. The significance section presents potential contributions of the study for positive social change.

Background

Many discussions related to the transition planning process have revealed that offering effective transition planning education creates a pathway to positive postsecondary outcomes for students with disabilities. Researchers have conducted qualitative studies on the implementation of effective transition planning practices. Brendle et al. (2018), Ju et al. (2018), and Ookeditse (2018) explored the implementation of effective transition planning practices and found that special education teachers' competencies to create and implement effective transition plans are critical to improving secondary transition programs and postsecondary outcomes for students with disabilities. Borland (2018) suggested that effective transition plans for students with disabilities occur when individuals on a team perceive the role they play, decide when to begin the process, indicate supports needed, and manage the transition process from beginning to end. Building on Borland's work, Wilkinson (2020) presented a meta-analysis of special education high school teachers' perceptions of in-school predictors for improving postschool outcomes (employment, education, and independent living) for youths with disabilities. Wilkinson concluded that due to the six counties in the study having their own local education agency, boards of education, administrative control, and state guidelines to maintain, special education experiences may differ in each county. Wilkinson's confidence in predictors that may improve transitions might be linked to training opportunities or lack thereof in the counties of the study. More training on transition, time, and the use of specialists and/or coordinators in this area may help improve postsecondary outcomes for students with disabilities.

Such predictors could provide a missing link associated with postschool success. Meade (2017) noted that the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA, 2007) amendment provisions related to compliance and practices in transition planning were based on the method of transition strategies and best practices. Collier et al. (2017) asserted that one of the primary functions of secondary education is to facilitate a successful transition into adulthood by preparing students for postsecondary education, employment, and independent living. Brezenski (2018) noted that transition service providers' skills and knowledge were limited to effectively implement evidence-based practices that would ensure students with disabilities success in school and postschool.

Other qualitative studies indicated similar findings that transition plans addressing students' needs are within the control of high school special educators. There are key components federally required to ensure that the students receive the appropriate educational instruction to move through high school and postsecondary settings (Brendle et al., 2018). Hume et al. (2018) noted there is limited participation in the transition planning process for students. Special education teachers' involvement in transition planning is associated with optimal transition outcomes. Special educators seek the best or most favorable ways to help students with disabilities prepare for positive postsecondary outcomes (Bruno et al., 2018). Additional studies indicated that in transition planning, there are numerous problems linked to the transition plan, such as a lack of completeness, the absence of student involvement, and IEPs that are focused more on academic skills than soft skills such as following directions, effective communication, teamwork, patience, interaction ability, and listening skills (Grillo et al., 2017; Trainor et

al., 2018). The current study was needed because inconsistencies exist in transition planning practices, which may have an influence on positive outcomes for students with disabilities preparing for postsecondary life.

In a Title I high school district, officials indicated there are inconsistencies in preparation regarding the transition planning process that supports students with disabilities. Within the study site, approximately 13.3% are students with disabilities, and approximately 22 teachers support these students. According to staff and parents, some students do not receive resource information and coordinated activities centered around their interests, preferences, and strengths. This inconsistency may be attributed to the lack of knowledge of resources available and follow-up on the students' goals established by high school special education teachers (Reeves, 2019).

Limited funding and resources and lack of understanding of transition predictors (e.g., teaching transition-related skill development, focusing on students' specific skill levels) in the planning process may impede teachers' abilities to implement effective planning of the transition process for students with disabilities. At the research site, high school special education teachers are knowledgeable in the field and are well-informed of the transition process. Nonetheless, some teachers are inconsistent in making transition decisions based on meaningful indicators of students with disabilities in relation to their learning, skills, and implications of choices (Smith, 2019).

Information on the availability of resources may have a considerable influence on supporting student choices. Special education teachers are sometimes overwhelmed because they are required to complete additional duties assigned by appropriate

administrators while developing and providing an appropriate special education program to eligible exceptional learners. Challenges include limited time to perform required tasks according to guidelines of the program and through established delivery models for service, high caseload numbers of students they support, and follow-up procedures for student management. Special education teachers are held to high standards regarding transition services.

Problem Statement

Students with disabilities in the United States continue to encounter less than favorable success in employment and education after high school. Special educators lack the skills and knowledge to ensure postschool transition success for students with disabilities (Reeves, 2019). Kerns (2021) suggested that the transition information in the IEP written for students with disabilities is insufficient. The plans often are developed without principle of organization. In another study, these students showed a transition rate of only 27% from high school compared to their peers without disabilities' rate of 78% (S. Glover, 2019). The U.S. Department of Education (DOE) sponsored a series of National Longitudinal Transition Studies (NLTS, NLTS2, NLTS 2012) that followed a few groups of these students during and after high school from 1987 until the present. The data collected were used to assist transitions in the secondary discipline to discern that what happens in school impacts students' postschool outcomes. The trend has remained the same (Mazzotti et al., 2015).

Additionally, in 2018, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (as cited in Trainor et al., 2020) reported that students with disabilities who earned a bachelor's degree were

less likely to obtain employment compared to peers without a disability. Mazzotti et al. (2015) concluded that for students with disabilities to achieve a smooth transition to adulthood, special education teachers, service providers, elected officials making policies should remain in collaboration with each other. Special education teachers in secondary schools supporting transition need to continue identifying and fostering research-based methods to help students with disabilities prepare for adulthood, and coordinate activities centered around their interests, preferences, and strengths.

A gap in the literature was identified in current transition planning practices of special education teachers and literature regarding research-based practices that are mandated to make certain students with disabilities' postsecondary outcomes are achieved. With this gap, students' achievement after high school may be unsuccessful (Kerns, 2021; Mazzotti et al., 2015). Some students do not receive resource information. This inconsistency may be attributed to the lack of knowledge of resources available to follow up on their goals established by special education high school teachers. Limited funding and resources and not understanding transition predictors (e.g., teaching transition-related skill development, focusing on students' specific skill levels) of the transition planning process at this site may impede teachers' abilities to implement effective support of the transition process for students with disabilities. Special education high school teachers are knowledgeable in the field and are well-informed of the transition process. Nonetheless, some of the teachers are inconsistent with making high school transition decisions based on meaningful indicators of students with disabilities concerning their learning, skills, and implications of different choices. Information on the

availability of resources may have a considerable influence on supporting student choices. Staff indicated that with extra duties and tasks facing special education high school teachers, including time and high caseload numbers, special education teachers encounter high expectations from their administrators, general educators, parents, and other service providers who stakeholders on the students' team regarding transition services.

The 2004 reauthorization of IDEIA secondary transition provisions have required special education teachers to coordinate, plan, and deliver transition services for students with disabilities (U.S. DOE, 2017). IDEIA is a federally mandated law and has a required critical component in the transition process called transition planning. During transition planning, special education high school teachers must ensure students with disabilities receive appropriate educational supports that provide them with academic and functional goals for postsecondary transition, including preparation, integrated supported employment, and vocational education (IDEA, 1990, 1997, 2004, 2007). Research has shown that only 35% of students with disabilities graduating from high school have workforce skills (Brezenski, 2018).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to investigate high school special education teachers' perceptions regarding the transition planning process that supports students with disabilities leaving high school in preparation for postsecondary life. With an understanding of these teachers' interpretations, there is potential for improving the transition process and outcomes for students with disabilities. Special education high

school teachers who use effective transition planning practices have been shown to achieve long-term success for students with disabilities and improve student outcomes after high school (Chang & Rusher, 2018).

Research Questions

The perceptions of special education high school teachers are important for understanding and improving processes and outcomes for students with disabilities' transition to postsecondary environments. The research questions (RQs) were addressed to provide a deeper understanding of the perceptions of high school special education teachers regarding the transition process. The RQs were as follows:

RQ1: What is being done by high school special educators regarding the types of transition planning practices currently being used at the high school and how do the high school educators feel about these practices?

RQ2: How do high school special education teachers evaluate the sufficiency of the transition process? What else can be done?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework that guided this basic qualitative case study was Schlossberg's (1984) transition theory. Schlossberg characterized progress with any occasion or nonoccasion that outcomes in changed connections, schedules, suppositions, and jobs. Schlossberg's adult development theory facilitates an understanding of individuals in transition. The theory also directs them to cope with the ordinary and extraordinary process of living through the four S's: (a) self, (b) situation, (c) support, and (d) strategy. The theory shows how individuals can reconceptualize their reality with

context and impact as they are informed with new information and knowledge, which opens an opportunity for the students to achieve goals written in their transition plan. Context refers to an individual's relationship with the transition and to the setting in which the transition takes place. The impact is determined by the way the transition affects an individual's daily life after gaining the new information.

Like Schlossberg's theory regarding individuals in transition, another noteworthy framework supporting the special education specialization that guides the development of transition planning programs was Kohler et al.'s (2016) taxonomy for transition programming 2.0 model. The model describes five primary practice categories: student-focused planning, student development, interagency collaboration, family engagement, and program structure. These categories are important connections before and during school and postschool transitions, lending invaluable research that may increase students with disabilities' postsecondary life outcomes (Kohler et al., 2016). Transition practice research has demonstrated that postschool outcomes of students with disabilities improve when educators, families, students, and community members and organizations collaborate to implement a broad perspective of transition planning, also referred to as transition-focused education (Kohler et al., 2016). Students with disabilities who may not receive effective transition planning are at risk of meeting significant barriers in their postsecondary life. Schlossberg's transition theory of the four S's informed the RQs and the investigation of high school special education teachers' perceptions regarding the transition planning process that supports students with disabilities leaving high school in preparation for postsecondary life.

Nature of the Study

A basic qualitative approach was chosen to understand the perceptions of special education high school teachers regarding their transition planning practices used to improve postsecondary skills and outcomes for students with disabilities. Using qualitative methodology, according to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), will enable a researcher to base their research on the perspective that intellect is constructed by individuals continuously while involved in an activity, experience, or event. Data were collected from one-on-one virtual interviews with 10 high school special education teachers using the transition process. Open coding and thematic analysis were used to analyze the data. The results might elicit positive social change for high school special education teachers by empowering them to produce consistency in their practice and support of the transition process.

Definitions

The following terms serve to inform my study:

Annual goals: A written component of the IEP that encompasses appropriate measurable goals and skills students are expected to achieve in disability-related areas within one year (U.S. DOE, 2020). The performance is evaluated and measured based on given criteria, as well as reviewed annually by the IEP team.

Individualized education program (IEP): A written document developed for students with disabilities that is created and implemented to meet unique educational needs (U.S. DOE, 2020). Transition services requirements should be addressed no later than age 16 under IDEA (2004). An IEP includes appropriate measurable postsecondary

goals based on transition assessments relating to employment, independent living, education, and training, as well as transition services to facilitate the student in reaching their desired goal.

Individualized education program team: A committee composed of special education teacher, evaluator, local education agency representative, general education teacher, student, parents, and other school personnel who provide services to the student. The team makes all decisions. (U.S. DOE, 2020).

Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA): A federal law enacted to ensure all students with disabilities have a free appropriate public education emphasizing services designed to meet unique needs that will prepare them for employment and independent living and ensure the rights of students and their parents are protected (IDEIA, 2004).

Objectives: An objective is a skill within the student with disabilities area of weakness (deficit), which should reasonably be achieved within 1 year. The objective is reviewed and evaluated by the IEP team (U.S. DOE, 2020).

Postsecondary transition: An authoritative order that all public-school districts in the United States must provide an individualized free appropriate public education that emphasizes special education and related services designed to meet the unique needs of students with disabilities and prepare them for furthering their education or employment after high school (U.S. DOE, 2020).

Secondary student with disabilities: An individual in high school with a disability enrolled in an educational program and eligible to receive special education as well as related services under part B of IDEA (2004).

Transition planning: A result of comprehensive team planning driven by desires, dreams, and abilities of students with disabilities. Transition planning includes a written document created for a student who will turn 16 within the life of their IEP and must consist of transition goals and outline how the student can transition to life beyond high school (U.S. DOE, 2020).

Transition services: A set of coordinated activities of a result-oriented process that improves the academic and functional skills of the student to facilitate movement from high school to postschool activities such as postsecondary education, vocational education, independent living, supported employment, and community participation (U.S. DOE, 2020). The action is based on the student's individual needs, taking into consideration their strengths, preferences, and interests, including related services, development of employment, and daily living skills.

Assumptions

For this study, I assumed that all potential participants would answer the interview questions truthfully and in a straightforward manner. Also, I assumed that special education high school teachers would understand that the transition planning process is a critical component for students with disabilities' postsecondary success. The assumptions were necessary for developing the study because they enabled me to conduct the study through an interpretive lens to understand perceptions of special education high

school teachers regarding their support of the transition process (see Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Scope and Delimitations

This basic qualitative study included 10 high school special education teachers as participants. The research problem was chosen because there were inconsistencies in how secondary special education teachers implement practices related to the transition planning process for students with disabilities as they prepare for postsecondary life. Another delimitation of this study was that it was conducted in a single high school setting.

Limitations

The study included open-ended interview questions, which may have limited the data. Also, the availability of participants for virtual interviews might have been a limitation. The study included only interviews with special education high school teachers and excluded documents such as students' IEPs and transition plans, which limited the findings. I was the only coder for the data, and my bias may have limited the study's credibility. However, member checking was used to allow participants to confirm that what I wrote was consistent with statements they gave during the interview.

Significance

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to investigate high school special education teachers' perceptions regarding the transition planning process that supports students with disabilities leaving high school in preparation for postsecondary life. The findings of this study may be significant to all high school special education teachers,

transition specialists, and other stakeholders working with students with disabilities to create transition planning for postsecondary goals and meet those goals to become productive individuals in their community and society. Also, empirically based findings may address gaps in practice and provide students with disabilities with the support required from special educators. Another potential benefit for positive social change is that with consistent transition practices, educational decision making may improve and enhance students' skill development for a successful postsecondary transition.

The problem has an influence not only on the special education teachers but also on students with disabilities and their families, which may hinder success in the postsecondary environment and society. IDEIA (2004) stated that transition plans for students with disabilities can start at the age of 14 if the team deems it appropriate but must be implemented by age 16. An active transition plan includes appropriate, measurable postsecondary goals. Successful transition planning to develop these goals is a priority and has been shown to achieve long-term success for students with disabilities (Lucas, 2018). The use of research-based transition planning practices has also shown positive effects for students with disabilities, providing a framework that guides the development of postsecondary goals that can lead to improved outcomes (Kohler et al., 2016; Schlossberg et al., 1995). Ineffective transition planning practices may have negative long-term results for students with disabilities (Flowers et al., 2018; Meade, 2017). Information from the literature investigating transition practices indicated gaps in transition planning practices.

Summary

Over the past decades, a myriad of discussions has been presented relating to transition planning for students with disabilities, which generalize, verify, and provide different interpretations (Cavendish & Connor, 2018; Collier et al., 2017). However, there have been limited inquires on perceptions of high school special education teachers' support of the transition process. Schlossberg's (1984) transition theory on the four S's (self, situation, support, and strategy) may help establish whether an individual has the resources to manage the transition and increase support structures for success in postsecondary life. Kohler et al.'s (2016) taxonomy for transition programming 2.0 model's five primary practice categories (student-focused planning, student development, interagency collaboration, family engagement, and program structure), which are essential connections before, during, and postschool transitions, lend invaluable research that may increase students with disabilities' postsecondary life outcomes. Although Schlossberg's theory had not been used with students with disabilities, a connection may exist regarding postsecondary transition and the practice of special educators.

Schlossberg's (1984) theory begins with a focus on transitions to the workforce. Emphasis was placed on individuals transitioning to new responsibilities or situations. Schlossberg had direct experience of transitioning from one workplace to another. This led to understanding the transition process including its effects on individuals and how to make certain there was an influential transition. The goal of the theory is to help individuals link strategies, understand what is occurring, and be able to cope with the changes. Schlossberg's theory was applicable to the postsecondary transition students

with disabilities encounter. Special educators need to understand the transition process to prepare students with disabilities for postsecondary life. Students transitioning to postsecondary life use their own experiences with transition, which vary from one individual to another.

Ineffective transition practices and postschool outcomes of students with disabilities improve when educators, families, students, and organizations collaborate to implement a broad perspective of transition planning, more appropriately referred to as transition-focused education (Kohler et al., 2016). The impact of transition-focused education is enhanced when service systems and programs connect and support the implementation and application of such learning. The current study focused on special education high school teachers' perceptions of supporting the transition process. The research method for the study was a basic qualitative design, and purposeful sampling was used when selecting the participants. In Chapter 2, the recent literature is reviewed regarding transition planning and implementation.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The problem that has been identified is students with disabilities in the United States continue to encounter less than favorable success in employment and education after high school. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to investigate high school special education teachers' perceptions regarding the transition planning process that supports students with disabilities leaving high school in preparation for postsecondary life. In this chapter, I provide a review of the literature that explains the relevance of the problem.

Chapter 2 provides details of the problem, purpose, and literature search strategy used to access library databases for this study. The conceptual framework is reviewed in which I synthesize key theorists and philosophers related to the phenomenon. Additionally, an exhaustive review of current literature is presented. Ending this chapter is a summary of central themes.

Literature Search Strategy

Walden University's library databases were the location targeted for most of the literature searches for this study. The databases used were: Academic Search Complete, Dissertation and Theses at Walden University, Education Research Complete, ERIC, ERIC and Education Source Combined Search, ProQuest Central, SAGE Journals, and Education Source. Articles searched for this study were published within the last 5 years. The following keywords were used: *students with disabilities, special education, secondary special education high school teachers, transition planning, teacher perceptions, postsecondary transition programs, transition services, transition process,*

vocational rehabilitation, transition predictors, postschool outcomes, parental involvement, transition plan, transition education, evidence-based practices, and adult life. The keyword searches were conducted in an individual format and grouped combinations for a more precise search resulting in literature from the following journals: Exceptional Children, Transition for Exceptional Individuals, Journal of Special Education Leadership, SAGE Learning Disability Quarterly, and Remedial and Special Education.

Theoretical Foundation

The lens of Schlossberg's (1984) transition theory was used as the conceptual framework for this study. The model, originally intended to address developmental processes for adults in transition, had applicability for students with disabilities. Schlossberg's theory is an adult development theory that facilitates an understanding of adults in transition and directs them to cope with the ordinary and extraordinary process of living. The theory outlines how individuals can reconceptualize their reality with two facets (context and impact) as they are informed with new information and knowledge, which creates an opportunity for the students to achieve goals written in their transition plan. Context refers to an individual's relationship with the transition and to the setting in which it takes place. Impact refers to how a transition will vary from one individual to another. In some circumstances, the impact has a greater significance than the transition (Schlossberg, 1984; Schlossberg et al., 1995).

Students with disabilities who may not receive effective transition planning education are at risk of meeting significant barriers in their postsecondary life (Sharp et

al., 2020). Schlossberg's (1984) theory provides a framework for improving the efficacy of transition planning in high school settings. Schlossberg proposed consideration of four key tenets referred to as the four S's.

Situation

The tenet situation refers to the first stage of transition in which an individual's understanding or perception of what is happening in the transition changes their role in the current circumstance to be advantageous or become complex in nature to cope with (Schlossberg, 1984). The new circumstance's timing may bring less or more responsibilities over time into a new situation or task that special education high school teachers and students with disabilities are not accustomed to completing on their own (e.g., finding employment, obtaining transportation; (Glover, 2019). For high school students with disabilities, moving into new situations can be complex and stressful. When routines and roles change for special education high school teachers and students with disabilities, the routines and roles must be planned in a detailed manner regarding how the transition can be approached, including choices and available resources to manage the new experience. The context of a situation can determine outcomes and influence the duration, whether negative or positive, for both special education high school teachers and students with disabilities (Glover, 2019; Schlossberg et al., 1995).

Self

Regarding the tenet of self, special education high school teachers' perception of the transition process may indicate whether they have knowledge about resources to determine transition services, which include a course of study needed to help students

with disability for a transition. As the teachers and students move in and out of the situation, both teachers' and students' self-esteem about the future might contribute to how they perceive outcomes, which is commensurate with the resilience to continue and overcome a complex process (Glover, 2019; Schlossberg et al., 1995). For some special education high school teachers and students with disabilities, demographics play a role in the ability to cope. The demographics that a person has, including values, age, and gender, can influence that individual's ability to sustain a change. These characteristics might enable the special education high school teacher to decide how to support the transition process, which may provide students with disabilities with individualized strategies to handle the move (Chickering & Schlossberg, 1995; Glover, 2019).

Support

Support refers to resources made available to special education high school teachers and students with disabilities. Special education high school teachers have a responsibility to collaborate and develop a plan of activities that will support students with disabilities through and beyond high school that matches their interests and postsecondary goals (U.S. DOE, 2020). Special education high school teachers are provided with professional development to enhance their learned individualized instructional skills. Both students with disabilities and special education high school teachers work together in the aspects of what the transition process serves. In terms of this aspect, the type of support is especially important.

For students with disabilities, a high level of support is needed (e.g., individualized instruction, personal strategies, setting postsecondary goals). Support

comes from various areas including school, teachers, family, community, interagency, and other stakeholders (Schlossberg et al., 1995). Three facets should be taken into consideration when assessing the support needed: type, functions, and measurements (Schlossberg, 1984; Schlossberg et al., 1995). As special education teachers begin the preparation for students with disabilities to move through and exit high school, the specific roles are to provide effective transition planning support, include instructional transition education, coordinate activities for student employment, and develop IEPs that contain a section for the transition plan used for postsecondary life. The support is not limited to the following: family, peer relationships, community, emotional and social assistance, and instruction. The appropriate level of support for the situation should be applied (e.g., effective plans), the function should serve its purpose (e.g., ensuring all needs of students with disabilities are met for successful transition), and measurement should be included (e.g., to assess progress on measurable goals).

Strategy

The last tenet is strategy, which refers to an approach that can be implemented by special education high school teachers and used by students with disabilities to cope with a situation of change. Strategy begins with those who seek to modify the situation. One might ask the following question: What can I do to change the situation? In this aspect, as the student goes through the transition, they make an evaluation. In this initial evaluation, the student perceives whether the change was favorable, unsatisfactory, or insignificant. Following the evaluation of a strategy, an assessment might be given to analyze the

components of the strategy and consider some resources available to cope with that situation (Schlossberg, 1984; Schlossberg et al., 1995).

Next are strategies that control the meaning of the circumstance. This issue might not be able to be modified or changed for the better. Lastly, a review of coping responses is considered that may assist in managing what happens after the transition. For instance, the special education high school teachers may have an unanticipated situation in which they do not know there will be no training to complete the task. Most likely, this transition causes them uneasiness. Also, the students with disabilities' grades for the semester may be lower than expected. When the situations may not be modified, strategies need to be implemented. The teacher is given training, and the student is given strategies to improve their study skills. Whether the special education teacher or student with disabilities is moving in, through, or out of the situation, using strategies may help them both reframe how to make sense of a life situation (Schlossberg, 1984; Schlossberg et al., 1995).

Schlossberg's Transition Theory in Relation to Education

Schlossberg et al.'s (1995) transition theory and education are linked by looking at the outcomes of individuals. Using the four S's might help high school special education teachers develop small individual goals in the sequence in which Schlossberg et al. observed transition happens. This action might allow students with disabilities to understand their perception of what they are experiencing during high school transition and how it might prepare them for postsecondary life. When high school special education teachers are knowledgeable of different methods to develop effective transition

plans, they can use these methods as coping strategies in transition planning for themselves and their students with an understanding of the process (Butler, 2021; Jacobs, 2017; Schlossberg, 1984).

Special education high school teachers are deemed to be experts in helping with the development of students through their academic years. Choosing to embrace a life span perspective in this area of development might enable the teachers to create more diverse planning to prepare students with disabilities for postsecondary life (Lipscomb et al., 2017). For example, a student without disabilities receives help in a general way with the high school course of study. Students with disabilities require a more structured transition plan to attain their postsecondary goals. A more direct plan for the students with disabilities will assist them in targeting their postsecondary outcomes for their future (e.g., employment, independent living, education).

Literature Review

The transition process of students with disabilities continues to be a broadly researched topic in the field of special education. For special education, high school teachers support the process of transition; planning for these students should occur in an organized, consistent way. Postsecondary outcomes for students with disabilities transitioning to adult life continue to lack positive results (Mazzotti et al., 2015).

Overview: History of Laws Relating to Transition

During the 1900s, overarching laws were enacted to support disadvantaged individuals. One of the laws began with the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, which allotted federal funds for primary and secondary school education and the

establishment of a national curriculum (U.S. DOE, 2020). The act also supplied a mechanism to hold special teachers and students accountable. In 1973, the Rehabilitation Act was one of two statutes enacted by Congress to aid students with disabilities in attaining goals set for career and postsecondary life. Additionally, to assist students with disabilities, Congress in 1975 enacted the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (PL. 94-142) mandating that these children receive a free and appropriate education. After the law was reauthorized in 1983 and then in 1990, a what, when, who, and where series of developments ensued. The developments included a framework for a transition plan with specifics on when to establish it, whom the team needed to consist of, and where related services would come from to meet the unique needs and prepare students with disabilities for employment and independent living.

Additionally, the name was changed to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), which was the second statute constituted to address provisions of transition services by the U.S. DOE (2020). The reauthorization was intended to improve equal rights for students with disabilities. As students progressed, an amendment was added to IDEA, requiring transition services to start no later than by age 16. However, if appropriate in some states, it could begin at age 14 for any student receiving services through special education (Learning Disabilities Association of America, 2013). During 1992, the Rehabilitation Act was expanded by adding IDEA's definition of transition. With improvements made in transition, amendments also emerged regarding transition planning. IDEA was updated again with additional amendments in 1997, which gave significant strength to educational expectations for 5.8 million students with disabilities

nationwide to connect what was learned and what was needed to be learned throughout the general curriculum (U.S. DOE, 2020).

Although these laws effected a significant turning point in the lives of students with disabilities, the laws did not lay out high expectations or research-based educational methods for special education teachers (e.g., transition education accountability, as well as activities to prepare students for life after graduation). However, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, included requirements for more strategic responsibility of school districts. This responsibility included states on the number of achievements made by students with disabilities regarding assessment as well as their outcomes for postschool. After, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, which contained Title I provisions emerged (e.g., accountability from teachers, students, hiring of highly qualified teachers if federal funds were used). The aim was to improve students' educational performances through accountability, with the assertion that is putting in place high standards, including measurable goals educational outcomes for students, could improve. A basic skills assessment was created to support students with disabilities. To further help students with disabilities, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA) 2004 would assist students learning by performance results, being accountable, strengthening parents' involvement, using evidence-based practices, flexibility, and a reduction in the undertaking of paperwork for all stakeholders (US DOE, 2020). Also, it encompassed language that required general education teachers to extend to students, research-based interventions. When it comes to disability identification, a response to intervention (RTI) is a prime model. RTI is a

multiple-tier early intervention guide requiring students to receive research-based intervention before being identified for special education services (Allam & Martin, 2021). Even with added support from legislative laws to assist special education teachers in preparing transition activities for students with disabilities, the students seemed unprepared for post-secondary life, and some teachers' preparation skills were deficient, not being able to help students reach their required goals set for life endeavors after high school graduation. (Gothberg et al., 2019; Lipscomb, 2017).

Central Elements of the Transition Process

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 commenced the special education legislation. Special education began with The Education of All Handicapped Children Act (1975), which precluded The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 1990). Within the IDEA structure for the Individualized Education Program (IEP), the law was limited to aspects for outcomes after graduation from high school. Through the reauthorization of the law, mandates were made that caused the emergence of transition services. With the identification of some best practices made by researchers regarding those services, this influential transition component might enhance postsecondary transition planning used by secondary special education teachers to develop the individualized transition plan that ensures planning begins in middle school with continuation through high school years (IDEA, 1990).

The primary purpose of transition planning involves decision-making and allocating accountability for students with disabilities' preferred postsecondary goals. To implement such a plan of requires a knowledgeable understanding of correlated activities

and available resources (U.S. DOE, 2020; OSERS, 2020). When assisting students with disabilities as they prepare for adult life after high school, efficient services, as well as effective plans, are critical (IDEA, 1990; 2004). Transition plans supply a fundamental framework in support of preplanning students' livelihood in their community as independently as one can.

Transition Team Roles

Transitioning students from high school to postsecondary environments can be an intricate undertaking, one that consists of various supports that may influence a student with disabilities' capability to control the transition in progress. Numerous steps are taken by a transition team who collaborate to develop a written plan of activities to be included in the transition section of the IEP (Brezenski, 2018; Dunsmuir, 2020; Yeager & Deardorff, 2021). When all team members generate a commitment and their technical expertise can produce effective plans (Brezenski, 2018; Jacobs, 2017).

Students With Disabilities

Students with disabilities are essential in transition planning and as a participant on the team. The student can communicate their strengths, interests, and preferences specifically, what they want to do after graduating from high school (Brezenski, 2018; IDEA, 2004). Also, the students give details on what type of modification, accommodation, as well as support are also needed for attaining success in class and the community (Newman et al., 2021). All aspects of the transition planning are student focused planning thus, allowing the student to be empowered as an active participant sharing their perspective on developing activities for in school and postsecondary

endeavors (Cavendish & Connor, 2018; Kohler, 2016). Success in the postsecondary environment may depend on the student's understanding of their disability, including its effect on their knowledge and skills. When students with disabilities participate in the development of their IEP and transition planning, parents express that their understanding of the transition planning process is profound (Cavendish & Connor, 2018; Morningstar et al., 2018).

Parents

As contributors to their child's life and educational experiences (e.g., attend postsecondary education, be gainfully employed, participate in the community), parents are one of the critical components to the transition planning team and process (Almalki et al., 2021; Butler, 2021; Kohler, 2016). Parents are the students' first teachers. Encouraging a parent to participate in the process can strengthen the value of individualized, appropriate instructional programs designed for their child (Accardo et al., 2020; Bouck et al., 2021; Muller, 2018). They supply information to the team about skills and needs for independent living and any help they feel the student requires when seeking to achieve preferred postsecondary goals (Robinson & Muller, 2020). A fundamental part of educational policies in the U.S. is regarding education and is explicitly addressed in both the Every Student Succeed Act (ESSA) and IDEA, which is parent engagement. Being actively involved allows the parent to be an equal partner in the decision-making of activities presented for discussion (ESSA, 2015; IDEA, 2004).

Special Education High School Teachers

Secondary special education high school teachers have diverse and specific roles in the transition process. They have a responsibility to provide instructional transition education for students with disabilities, coordinate various activities for student employment, developing IEPs, which contain a section for the transition plan (Butler, 2021; Deardorff et al., 2021). The roles also include the written transition plan and sustaining interactions with community partners for future decision-making as it relates to postsecondary endeavors. These teachers have a deep sense of compassion for working with students and families. They commit to collaboration with other organizations and a student-focused point of view for developing effective transition plans (Karal & Wolfe, 2020).

Their roles are diverse and the key to guiding their students' transition process successfully (Ahmad & Thressiakutty, 2020; Brezenski, 2018; Jacobs, 2017). The high expectations set by special education high school teachers play a vital role in postsecondary settings. The teachers ensure transition planning, as well as active participation regarding decision making, transpire for students with disabilities. As key contributors, they need to be knowledgeable of their students' abilities, interests, and services available to them (McKenna et al., 2019; U.S. DOE, 2020). As secondary special education high school teachers are leaders regarding the transition planning team, they know that their success is tied to the work of the collective, not be the work of one individual (Wilt et al., 2020).

General Education High School Teacher

While there is limited research relating to the general education high school teacher's role in the transition planning process, Kohler (1996) framework suggest that the general education high school teacher has essential knowledge of the broad curriculum, also established in her taxonomy related to transition (e.g., life skills, academics, etc.), to assist in planning the course of study for students with disabilities. This information is decisive for students with disabilities to utilize in acquiring skills necessary for postsecondary goals (Brezenski, 2018). General education high school teachers also assist in the identification of positive behavioral expectations/strategies needed for those students with disabilities in the general instructional setting (Brezenski, 2018; Snell-Rood et al., 2020). Lastly, these teachers attend IEP meetings annually.

Evidenced-Based Predictors in Transition

In a meta-analysis of in-school predictors of postsecondary employment, education, and independent living of students with disabilities, researchers suggested that an examination of predictors could provide a missing link associated with post-school success (Fink et al., 2019). Secondary special education teachers need additional assistance with effective educational decision-making and helping students with disabilities set goals, which are specific to transition; research discovered 16 predictors (Fink et al., 2019; Karal & Wolfe, 2020). Using evidenced-based predictors, according to research, has been shown to improve secondary transition rates for students with disabilities in education, employment, and independent living. Despite mandated laws, and legislation to support and assist with services for students with disabilities in

improving their chances of opportunities to be successful after high school, students with disabilities continue to have profound moments transitioning to postsecondary life.

Currently, there is research on predictors that help improve postsecondary outcomes. The research revealed 16 predictors that improve outcomes for students with disabilities (Mazzotti et al., 2021; Sprunger et al., 2018; Wilkinson, 2020). The 16 predictors are as follows: Career awareness, program study, exit exam/high school diploma, interagency collaboration, active parent involvement, inclusion practice, occupational courses, paid employment/work experiences, self-advocacy/self-determination skills, self-care/independent living skills, strong student support, strong transition program, vocational education, work-study programs, community awareness/experience, and social skills. Of the 16 predictors, 11 were significantly linked to post-school education, five were related to post-school independent living, and all 16 predictors were linked to post-school employment (Sprunger et al., 2018).

Additionally, four predictors were found to improve post-school employment and independent living. The four predictors found in the research are: inclusion in general education, paid employment/work experience, self-care/independent living skills, and student support (Mazzotti et al., 2021). These results supply the field of special education a steppingstone for creating system change by providing practitioners data about secondary transition programs characteristics that have been empirically linked to improved post success for students with disabilities (Sprunger et al., 2018; Wong et al., 2021).

Even though some high school graduation rates are increasing, and evidence-based transition predictors are available to help strengthen students with disabilities' opportunity to reach postsecondary goals, the students continue to fall behind their nondisabled peers in the 21st century. Also, low employment rates, and problems with independent living continue to be reported in post-school outcome studies for these students (Sprunger, 2018). The findings point to the need for tried-and-true transition approaches. Sprunger (2018) concluded that high school special educators need information on new evidence-based transition approaches. These educators can benefit through targeted professional development and learning effective techniques for applying evidence-based transition approaches.

Currently, there are 20 secondary transition predictors that can inform special educators on ways to refine post-school outcomes for students with disabilities. Wilkinson (2020) suggested that after reviewing previous studies linked to favorable postschool outcomes, secondary special educators can now take their instruction and align it to the research results. The previously mentioned outline best practices these teachers can use to enhance their implementation of the transition process. It is essential to understand the extent of special educators' usage and knowledge regarding transition practices that are evidenced-based for their students with disabilities instructional activities used to assist in attaining their postsecondary goals.

Transition Evidence-Based Best Practices

Concerning transition, best practices are a reference to several explicit suggestions from empirical resources to promote success for students with disabilities as

they maneuver from high school to post-school endeavors. Best practices are broken down into several groups. These groups include student and family involvement, functional and comprehensive instruction, inclusion placement, interpersonal, and interagency collaboration.

Mazzotti et al.'s (2021) study noted that students with disabilities have historically had lower rates of postsecondary achievement than their classmates without impairments, with gaps in employment, postsecondary education, and independent living. These patterns are still present today. National figures demonstrate a discrepancy between youth with and without impairments enrolling in higher education and earning a bachelor's degree (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). Furthermore, according to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics (2018), people with disabilities who earned a bachelor's degree were three times less likely to be employed than people without impairments. These findings, when paired with other factors (such as poverty, culture, and marginalization), show that many disabled youths are not receiving the appropriate transition-related services in the school setting for a productive life after high school (Trainor et al., 2020). Career technical education, inclusion in general education, life skills instruction, paid employment/work experience, and self-determination skill training are some of the predictors of post-school success in education, employment, and independent living that have emerged from this study. Predictors can be used to help in program development, improvement, and evaluation. Understanding postschool success determinants, according to the research, can help schools and districts determine whether

special educators are using empirically validated methods to affect change in critical areas (Mazzotti et al., 2021).

Likewise, another researcher updated the research base relating to secondary transition, on evidence-based and research-based practices. Rowe et al. (2021) study suggests that not every practice will work for all students with disabilities. Nonetheless, supplying special educators with quality information on evidence-based practices may strengthen the possibility for the teachers to implement with fidelity these practices (Rowe et al., 2021).

In a study by the U. S. National Longitudinal Transition Study (NLTS,) effective practices were identified for postsecondary outcomes. Although special education high school teachers reported they understood the value of evidence-based practices in a study by Liu et al., (2018); The teachers also stated they lack the knowledge to utilize these practices in the classroom (Reeves, 2019; Thressiakutty, 2020). In a similar study of secondary special education teachers, they reported that they did not have the necessary training needed to use evidence-based practices even though such practices were essential for successful outcomes in transitioning students with disabilities to postsecondary life (Aldossai, 2017).

In keeping with the intentions of IDEA (1990–2004), which designed an outline of criteria for transition services, grouping this criterion as follows: student needs, preferences, and interest, be results-oriented to students with disabilities desired goals, coordinated activities supported by family, school, community, adult services, measurable postsecondary goals, and using age-appropriate transition assessments. A

significant gap in practice between the intent of the policy and implementation might lead to poor outcomes after high school for students with disabilities transitioning to postsecondary life.

Mazzotti et al.'s (2021) study noted that students with disabilities have historically had lower rates of postsecondary achievement than their classmates without impairments, with gaps in employment, postsecondary education, and independent living. These patterns are still present today. National figures demonstrate a discrepancy between youth with and without impairments enrolling in higher education and earning a bachelor's degree (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). Furthermore, according to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics (2018), people with disabilities who earned a bachelor's degree were three times less likely to be employed than people without impairments. These findings, when paired with other factors (such as poverty, culture, and marginalization), show that many disabled youth are not receiving the appropriate transition-related services in the school setting for a productive life after high school (Trainor et al., 2020). Career technical education, inclusion in general education, life skills instruction, paid employment/work experience, and self-determination skill training are some of the predictors of post-school success in education, employment, and independent living that have emerged from this study. Predictors can be used to help in program development, improvement, and evaluation. Understanding postschool success determinants, according to the research, can help schools and districts determine whether special educators are using empirically validated methods to affect change in critical areas (Mazzotti et al., 2021).

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Postsecondary Outcomes

Numerous researchers note that when transition plans are executed effectively, they can offer positive outcomes for students with disabilities relating to transition and their postsecondary goals (Gothberg et al., 2019; Jenkins & Walker, 2021; Morgan et al., 2017; Sharp et al., 2020; Quigney, 2017). A qualitative investigation may lead to identifying themes which in turn might facilitate a significant understanding of how special education teachers offer their support of the transition process (Jenkins & Walker,

2021). Jenkins and Walker (2021) also explained that transition and post-school outcomes had been a focal area in special education since 1985, when the U.S. Department of Education began its first long-term study of transition. Initially, research focused on identifying best practices resulting from transition planning had not been effective. However, more recently, it has also been concerned with the relationship those practices have to postsecondary outcomes (Collier et al., 2017; Ju et al., 2018; SnellRood et al., 2020).

Bagley and Tang (2018) emphasized that school leaders are required to staff classrooms with highly qualified, special education teachers who can meet the unique needs of students with disabilities. As such, school leaders are in charge of continuously ensuring that secondary special education teachers are competent in all instructional areas, including the area of transition. Otherwise, teachers who lack transition competencies transition competencies may be the cause of non-compliance with planning transition requirements in fulfillment of the IDEIA (2004).

Transition Competencies

Transition competencies are components of Kohler's Taxonomy for Transition Programming 2.0 (Kohler et al., 2016). The model is used for planning, organizing, and evaluating transition education, services, and programs. There are five taxonomy areas that encompass the transition competencies. This model is an extension of the initial taxonomy and supplies solid practices for transition focused education drawn from successful programs and relevant research (Kohler, 1996; 2016). The competencies are within the five primary practice category areas:

1. Student-focused planning is the first taxonomy area consisting of two competencies: A1) having special educators use information from a variety of transition assessments to inform student-centered transition and career development planning. A2) develop student-centered transition Individual Education Programs (IEP) that ensure student voice in their goals, processes and outcomes.
2. Student development is the second taxonomy area comprised of one competency; B) teachers should: design student-centered curriculum, instruction, assessments, related activities, and accommodations that will facilitate the movement toward identified post-secondary goals.
3. Interagency collaboration is the third taxonomy area with one competency; C) there needs to be a collaborate effort with stakeholders to ensure and increase effective transition services, activities, supports, and outcomes for individuals with disabilities and their families.
4. Family involvement is the fourth taxonomy area consisting of one competency; D) teachers need to actively involve all families with sensitivity and responsiveness to the family's cultural, linguistic, and socio-economic makeup throughout the transition decision-making and implementation process.
5. Program structure is the last taxonomy area with one competency; E) teachers should have knowledge of program structures that uses evidence-informed

practices and research to establish effective programs and services (Kohler, 2016).

A later research study highlighted that one of the primary functions of secondary education is to facilitate a successful transition into adulthood by preparing students for postsecondary education, employment, and independent living. Unfortunately, after high school, students with disabilities often experience poor educational and employment outcomes, both playing a role in their ability to live independently (Collier et al., 2017; Murray et al., 2021).

Summary and Conclusions

Chapter 2 provided a review of the literature related to special education teachers, students with disabilities, and the transition process. This study seeks to understand the support of the transition process as utilized by special education teachers in the high school setting who implement the process to assist students with disabilities for postsecondary environments. Also, an overview of laws in transition, roles of a transition team, central elements of the transition process, evidenced-based predictors in transition, evidence-based best practices for special education teachers, and postsecondary outcomes were examined. In addition, this chapter seeks to understand the gap in practice of special educators. Research has shown that using evidenced-based practices and secondary transition predictors can assist special educators in evaluating and developing transition programs to improve success after high school for students with disabilities. However, research-revealed these high school special education teachers do not utilize research-based practices or transition predictors in their classroom to support their students.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to investigate high school special education educators' perceptions regarding the transition planning process that supports students with disabilities leaving high school in preparation for postsecondary life.

Chapter 3 begins with the research method. This section includes the purpose of the study. The following section presents the research design and rationale and my role, followed by the methodology of the study, including an explanation of the participant selection, procedures for recruitment, participation, data collection, trustworthiness, ethical guidelines, and a comprehensive review of the data analysis.

Research Design and Rationale

The practice and perceptions of special education high school teachers are important for understanding and improving processes for students with disabilities' transition to postsecondary environments. Based on this, the research questions of this basic qualitative study were intended to provide a guide for eliciting a deeper understanding of the perceptions of special education high school teachers that relate to their support of the transition process. The research questions were as follows:

RQ1: What is being done by high school special educators regarding the types of transition planning practices currently being used at the high school and how do the high school educators feel about these practices?

RQ2: How do high school special education teachers evaluate the sufficiency of the transition process? What else can be done?

The problem that was identified was students with disabilities in the United States continue to encounter less than favorable success in employment and education after high school. Special educators lack the skills and knowledge to ensure postschool transition success for students with disabilities (Reeves, 2019). Previous studies addressed secondary special education teachers, transition specialists, and other stakeholders involved in the transition process. However, no studies were found that addressed special education teachers' perceptions regarding the transition process.

Quantitative research methods include numerical data. This type of design is used to examine variables such as attitudes, census, and behaviors. The method also includes large sample sizes when determining results. Although this method is useful in other studies, my study was not related to predictions; it required descriptive data. A quantitative design was not chosen because the purpose of this study was not to examine the statistical relationships between variables using numerical data (see White, 2021). A basic qualitative research design was my choice based on the focus being on one source of data, which was interviews (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

A basic qualitative research design was chosen because I sought to understand high school special education teachers' perceptions of the transition planning process for preparing students with disabilities for postsecondary life. Other research methods were considered and rejected. When using the qualitative approach, the researcher is interested in how a person constructs or interprets experiences (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

The basic qualitative research methodology was considered basic because it is motivated by a researcher's interest in understanding a phenomenon (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Basic qualitative research is commonly found in education, which is related to the current study. There are six common qualitative research designs: phenomenology, ethnography, grounded theory, narrative inquiry, basic, and case studies. Five of the six designs were not appropriate for this study. Phenomenology is the focus on an individuals' lived experiences within their world (Creswell & Poth, 2018), which was not appropriate for the current study. Ethnography is a description of a culture or group (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A case study addresses an uneasiness or concern regarding a phenomenon, and a narrative inquiry takes into account a person's story to understand their experiences, which was not suitable for the current study.

Grounded theory, which is used to explain patterns in data from the field (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), was considered; however, it was not applicable to the current study. The basic qualitative design assisted with the extension of knowledge in how special education teachers perceive their support of the postsecondary transition process (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The basic qualitative design was the best fit for the study because the undertaking informed how individuals make sense of an experience and how special education teachers interpret their practice. Understanding a phenomenon from the perspective of a research participant has the potential to bring about change in the lives of people (Alnaim, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Role of the Researcher

I served as the interviewer for this study. This role was essential to the collection of data and the implementation of their analysis. Although I worked in the same field of education as the participants, I had no personal relationships with any of the participants. In my current employment, I held no supervisory or instructor position that would have involved having power over the participants. My role in this study was an instrument to gather perceptions of high school special education teachers.

Methodology

Participant Selection

The population for this study was high school special education teachers in a professional network who support students with disabilities relating to the transition planning process. A purposeful sampling method was used from an existing network when locating participants. This sampling strategy allowed me to select individuals who had experienced the phenomenon of interest and could provide information regarding the transition process and research questions. By purposefully recruiting and selecting of participants who had key knowledge of the transition planning process and expert experience working with key stakeholders on the learner's committee, I was able to collect appropriate data (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Special education teachers are responsible for the implementation of assessing and monitoring students with disabilities' progress while teaching them in their applicable class setting to increase their functional/academic skills. Additionally, special education teachers need to provide effective transition planning services to prepare

students with disabilities for postsecondary environments (Morgan et al., 2017). High school special education teachers who had at least 1 year of teaching experience in special education and/or were currently teaching students with disabilities age 14 and over were eligible to participate in this study.

Size of Sample

An invitation to participate was sent to 14 high special education teachers to participate in the study after I received Walden University Institutional Review Board (number 10-14-22-0532502) approval. This number of participants was chosen because the study was typical and this number reflected the circumstances of the phenomenon of interest from one category (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Instrumentation

For this basic qualitative study, the objective of the data collection was to provide high school special education teachers' perceptions regarding current practices of transition planning that supported students with disabilities. Audio-recorded, semistructured, one-on-one interviews were conducted. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), a researcher constitutes the most appropriate collector of data, and high school special education teachers were a principal factor in the research data for the current study. Interviewing participants who were primary stakeholders in the transition process may enrich educational decision-making practices that support students with disabilities. An advantage of conducting in-depth interviews is it provides an opportunity to establish rapport with the participants, put them at ease, and generate insightful responses and detailed descriptions of their experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In my

study, three experts in the field of special education were asked to compare the interview protocol with the research questions. All three had degrees in special education and agreed that the interview protocol (see Appendix B) and questions aligned with the research questions after a minor change in one question.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

Before participant recruitment, my proposal was submitted to the IRB for approval and included the informed consent document. The document included the purpose statement and acknowledged how the rights of the participants during my data collection would be protected. To recruit participants, I sent an invitation to 14 high school special education teachers to participate in the study. I contacted the school district for the study site. The principal from the school was contacted for permission as well through an email (see Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The purpose of my study was explained, including why that school was chosen for this study. Data collection took place via telephone instead of the Zoom platform (due to privacy issues). Each interview was 45–60 minutes. Recording data was done using a handheld device.

Additionally, I explained potential benefits that could come from the study for all stakeholders involved. An explanation was given regarding what my research would involve (e.g., semistructured handheld audio-recorded interviews). Once approvals from IRB, the school district, and principal (in this order) were received, I sent emails to the high school special education teachers who met the criteria for the study. A letter of invitation was included. In the invitation, the confidentiality of all information given by the participants was explained. An email was also sent to administrators of special

education teachers asking for names and email addresses of potentially qualified participants in one high school. A letter was sent to potential participants, introducing myself and giving background knowledge of the purpose of the study. In the letter, I included the time frame during which I would be collecting data (approximately 45–60 minutes) via interviews. Data collected will remain locked in a fireproof box for 5 years once my study is completed (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Semistructured recorded virtual interviews were used to investigate how secondary special education teachers implement the transition planning process for students with disabilities as they prepare for postsecondary life. I used audio recording via a handheld device and then transcribed each interview. Transcription was completed as data were collected. Data transcribed from the interviews will be saved on an encrypted flash drive. I will be the only one with the passcode to ensure data safety.

The data management flash drive will be locked in a fireproof box, and its location will be known only to me. Potential participants had the choice of selecting a convenient and agreeable location free of distractions for the interview to transpire. The study addressed a gap in practice regarding inconsistencies in how secondary special education teachers implement the transition planning process for students with disabilities as they prepare for postsecondary life (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I did not manipulate the environment in which the experiences took place. Instead, I gathered textual data and analyze them, taking into consideration the direct questions posed during the interview (see Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Data Analysis Plan

Analysis of data included a process of discovering, inspecting, organizing, and synthesizing the data to answer the research questions and draw conclusions. In qualitative data analysis, the researcher cannot measure the descriptive data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The data set for the current study consisted of transcribed audiotaped recordings of semistructured interviews with participants. The data analysis took place in five steps. Creswell and Poth (2018) suggested the first of five steps in an analysis process is to familiarize myself with the data collected from the transcripts of the interviews and to understand the elements within by managing and organizing the information. I started the process of coding through assigning each participant a numeric code. Using this numeric code, I could protect the identity of each participant. In Step 2, I assigned codes based on emerging elements from the data set. I highlighted phrases that were relevant to my research questions and seemed to be meaningful. There were no instances in which some data were not connected to the conceptual framework.

The interviews were the single source of data for this qualitative study. In Step 3, the data sets had a unique identification number such as C1 (Code one), T1(Theme 1), P1 (Phrase 1), as a straightforward way for tracking items in the data sets. Following, in Step 4, data interpretations were assessed as they develop for sets where there were typical patterns or themes that I coded and labeled each one using a phrase that was a description of the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). During the fifth step, at this point, I looked at the collection of data that I interpreted using information to generalize all that I learned from the teachers' direct answers to questions I posed. Generalizations helped as I created

summaries of the individual special education teachers and recommendations that I will consider in my study.

When analyzing my data, a thematic analysis was used as well as open coding. Coding assists the researcher to systematically organize data. Assigning letters, phrases, words, or numbers can help retrieve specific parts of information from your data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Thematic analysis refers to a form of qualitative research that is producing ongoing themes concluded from data collection. Open coding consists of a set of data being categorized from the interview questions I pose according to the repetition of elements or concepts and labeled with a phrase describing the category (Allen, 2017).

Coding software will not be used in this study. I used manual coding including thematic analysis to complete the data analysis. Lastly, the data will be synthesized, relating the analysis to participants experiences, and my study's two research questions to substantiate high school special education teachers' perception related to the transition planning process to prepare students with disabilities for postsecondary life.

Discrepant Cases

Discrepant data cases are data that cannot be grouped into one of the established categories such as themes (Creswell, & Creswell, 2019). Data must be meticulously scrutinized, including supporting data to decide if research findings (i. e., classifications, groups) should be preserved or adjusted. (Creswell, 2015). Discrepant circumstances might aid in future research study areas. Disparate data that simply did not fit into a group was thoroughly examined to confirm there was no fit to any subject.

Once my research study was completed, there were no occurrences where some data within the themes appeared conflicting. Even though, some contradictions can produce unexpected findings, which might have strengthened the data findings. Any discrepant cases and or contradictions of the data that might modify or add to the final summary of the study was disclosed. For future research areas, a discrepant case could have become a key component to help in identifying any discrepant data that did not fit in a category, was examined making sure there were not any that fit into themes identified.

Trustworthiness

Based on the work of Lincoln and Guba (1985), who are seminal authors on all four areas of trustworthiness in qualitative research for minimizing bias, I started with the first area of the criteria for trustworthiness which was credibility, which refers to truth in the data collected by the interviewer of participants views, interpretations, and representation given of them from the interview questions and answers (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility is one of the most important aspects to establishing trustworthiness.

With credibility a researcher must precisely connect the study's findings with the reality of the topic. I used member checking to validate my interpretation of the data collected from the participants. Member checking included sharing the findings with the research participants for accuracy of their experiences (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The second area is dependability, which refers to one's consistency with the data under the same conditions or situations where the data findings might be reproduced with similar participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The third area is transferability, which in qualitative research refers to whether my research findings will be applicable to transfer

to another situation or generalize across different settings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Followed by the last area of confirmability, which means that the data I collected was represented only based on the responses of the research study participants during the interview (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Nowell et al., 2017). Transparency in qualitative research is a belief that researchers have ethical obligations to facilitate evidence-based claims and make the evidence, analysis, and design of the research public (Moravcsik, 2019). I kept specific records during the research process to maintain consistency and transparency of all interpretations of the data as an audit trail, which was a collection of notes (Moravcsik, 2019).

Ethical Procedures

This qualitative research study concentrated on special education teachers' perceptions relating to the post-secondary transition process for students with disabilities. My proposal was submitted to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for review and approval. After approval was obtained, the approval number was recorded on the document. An informed consent form from each potential participant of this study was obtained (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). I ensured that there was no personal bias by purposeful sampling of the study participants.

The participants in this study were over the age of 18. A verbal and written description was provided that relates to the study's goals in concise language. I explained how the researcher and the participants might benefit from the study. During the interview sessions, the risks participants might have unexpectedly experienced were addressed (e.g., awkwardness, emotions, uneasiness). I made sure participants knew that

they do not have to participate in the study, it was voluntary and may withdraw anytime; there is no penalty. An opportunity for member checking to review and correct any inaccuracy in data from transcripts of the interviews was provided (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). A number sequence was used (e.g., T1) to protect the confidentiality of the study participants.

Summary

In Chapter 3, I described the qualitative method I used to conduct the study. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to investigate special education high school teachers' perceptions relating to the transition planning process for students with disabilities leaving high school in preparation for postsecondary life. I explained how the participants were selected. An explanation of the instrumentation and protocol is also discussed. Following the instrumentation section, I explained the type of procedures, recruitment, participation, and data collection for the study. Open coding of the data and how it was used in a systematic way is discussed. I also explained trustworthiness as it related to my research study and how it was addressed. Ethical issues and procedures are also incorporated in this chapter.

Chapter 4 contains data collection information, results, and findings of my basic qualitative study and the analysis. Details of the data collection are included. Additionally, I recapped my exploration of the investigation including descriptions of strategies currently being used from the high school special education teachers' perspective. I presented my research questions that guided this study.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to investigate high school special education teachers' perceptions regarding the transition planning process that supports students with disabilities leaving high school in preparation for postsecondary life. With an understanding of these teachers' perceptions, there is potential for improving the transition process and outcomes for students with disabilities. Special education high school teachers who use effective transition planning practices have been shown to achieve long-term success for students with disabilities and improve student outcomes after high school (Chang & Rusher, 2018).

From the viewpoint of high school special education teachers, I investigated the transition strategies currently in use. The two research questions that guided this study were the following: What is being done by high school special educators regarding the types of transition planning practices currently being used at the high school and how do the high school educators feel about these practices? How do high school special education teachers evaluate the sufficiency of the transition process? What else can be done? This chapter includes a report on the data collection and analysis, evidence of trustworthiness of the findings, and a presentation of the results.

Setting

The interview recording took place via a handheld device instead of the Zoom platform. Participants' responses were audio recorded. At the time of this investigation, there were no known personal or organizational factors affecting participants or their experiences that would have altered the interpretation of the study outcomes. The

interview settings consisted of the individual participants at their own home, as well as me in my home. This setting ensures confidentiality, privacy, and minimal distractions.

Table 1 includes the demographic information for this basic qualitative study. The table includes the location in which I collected the data, roles that participants held at their school, numerical identifiers used to protect participants' privacy, gender and participants' number of years at the school. Thick, rich descriptions addressed the transition planning process from past to present.

Demographics

Table 1

Participant Demographic Information

| Interview location | Role at school | Identifier | Gender | Number of years at school |
|--------------------|----------------|------------|--------|---------------------------|
| Home | SE teacher | P1 | Male | 6 |
| Home | SE teacher | P2 | Female | 22 |
| Home | SE teacher | P3 | Female | 5 |
| Home | SE teacher | P4 | Male | 7 |
| Home | SE teacher | P5 | Female | 5 |
| Home | SE teacher | P6 | Female | 6 |
| Home | SE teacher | P7 | Male | 22 |
| Home | SE teacher | P8 | Female | 4 |
| Home | SE teacher | P9 | Male | 5 |
| Home | SE teacher | P10 | Male | 10 |

Note. SE = special education.

Data Collection

Selection of Participants

I obtained IRB approval before starting the data collection process. Following IRB approval, I used my professional network to recruit participants. Next, I used the revised consent form from IRB to contact potential participants via email from my

professional contact list. To recruit participants for my study, I looked at my email contacts to see if any of the individuals in the list might meet the selection criteria which were a special education teacher with at least 1 year of experience in special education and/or working currently with students with disabilities age 14 and older. Participants were also required to work with transition plans and the planning process to support students with disabilities transitioning to postsecondary life.

After reviewing the contact list, I used the personal email and phone number to seek participants' interest in being a part of my study. I contacted potential participants via email and went over the purpose of my study and asked if they would be interested in being a participant in the study. I used the personal email address to send an invitation that included the consent form addressing minimal-risk, work-related interviews in the study (See Appendix A). I received back the consent form stating that participants agreed to be audio recorded and interviewed via telephone instead of Zoom (due to possible privacy issues of accidental video recordings).

Participant Responses

After 14 emails were sent to potential participants, 10 agreed to be interviewed and audio recorded. The participants agreed to a private place for conducting the interview to enhance privacy and confidentiality. Additionally, participants consented prior to the interview to be audio recorded only. Several participants had to reschedule their interview due to unforeseen situations. Icebreaker questions were used to confirm that the participants met the selection criteria established for this study. Criteria included

at least 1 year experience teaching high school students with disabilities, working with transition plans, and using the transition planning process.

Participant Confidentiality

The digital handheld recorder was cleared after each interview was transcribed. Recordings were saved to a password-protected encrypted flash drive. To increase the level of confidentiality in data collection and reporting of data, I assigned each participant a numeric code. I kept my notations and encrypted password-protected flash drive in a fireproof locked box that had a digital code known only to me for an additional layer of protection. My use of a numeric code to preserve confidentiality in data collection and reporting was explained to participants.

Data Recording/Interviewing

The interview length ranged from 15 to 49 minutes. Interviews were audio-recorded to enable transcription. For each interview, I used a handheld device to record participants' responses. After each interview, I transferred the recording and saved it to an encrypted password-protected flash drive. The recordings were then erased from the handheld device. There were 10 participants who chose to be interviewed by phone in a secure location of their residence free of distraction and protecting their privacy. I conducted interviews from my home office where no one else could hear the conversation.

The same open-ended questions were posed to each participant (see Appendix B) to ensure uniformity of the data collection process and to give participants a chance to be heard. Due to the semistructured nature of the interviews, some variability was possible.

Clarifying inquiries, probing questions, and feedback were used for all common responses. After each interview was completed, I noticed that one interviewee's interview length was not in the range projected. I addressed the concern by repeatedly listening to the recording to make sure all questions were asked, including follow-up questions. The participant answered all 14 questions.

Data Analysis

My data analysis process included discovering, inspecting, organizing, and synthesizing the data to answer the research questions and draw conclusions (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The data set for this study consisted of semistructured interviews and open-ended questions with participants' responses transcribed from audio-taped recordings. The data analysis process was implemented in five steps as suggested by Creswell and Poth (2018). The qualitative design enabled me to look for patterns and themes. During the first step of the process, I familiarized myself with the data collected from the transcripts of the interviews by managing and organizing the information. I began the process of coding by assigning each participant a numeric code such as 0896 which protected the data and identities of my participants. Next, using the responses from the participants, I discovered recurring codes and categories. I finished coding and classifying the data from the participants' interviews after identifying similarities in the data set. As I analyzed the data, I looked for themes by comparing patterns and connections between and within participants' interview transcripts (see Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Saldana, 2016).

In Step 2, I assigned codes based on emerging features as I read through the transcription from the data collected. I wrote down, underlined, and highlighted phrases that were relevant to my research questions. In Step 3, I tracked items in the data sets. In Step 4, I assessed interpretations as they developed, looking for typical patterns or themes (see Creswell & Poth, 2018). For new categories that may have been missed during the original assessment, I went back and looked at areas of the examined data. When no fresh themes or pieces of information emerged, data saturation was reached. During Step 5, I interpreted using information from the data to generalize all that I had learned from the teachers' answers to the interview questions. Generalizations helped as I created summaries of the individual special education teachers' responses that I considered in my study.

The open coding process made it possible to organize my data in a structured way and strengthen the association with the data (see Creswell & Creswell, 2017). A considerable amount of rich, thick data was obtained during the collection of data. Assigning letters, phrases, words, or numbers helped me retrieve specific parts of information from the data (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Coding software was not used in this study. Lastly, the data were synthesized to answer my study's two research questions addressing high school special education teachers' perceptions of the transition planning process to prepare students with disabilities for postsecondary life. The codes shown in Table 2 were created by categorizing the interview data. Next, the codes were put into categories. Overarching themes were created by combining the categories, as shown in Table 3.

Table 2*Special Education Teachers' Protocol Data Analysis Codes*

| Code |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Transition practices differ from every county, and state |
| On the job training opportunities |
| Connect students with work training programs |
| Connect training with student interest |
| Link student interest with resources |
| Improve collaboration with parents |
| Students' failure to meet goals |
| Supporting students in creating realistic goals |
| Improve skill-based training |
| Parents help students take responsibility for their goals |
| Increase teacher training opportunities of program |
| Transition practices differ by teacher |
| Connect academics to transition goals |
| Get students to think outside the box |
| Improve planning process through skill-based training for teachers |
| Manage transition process for teachers and training |
| Life skills and self-advocacy |
| Improvement on teacher follow-up with student and goals |
| Student skills improvement through updated assessments provided by county |
| Put appropriate transition goals in place |
| Career surveys, work study programs, school-to-work trainings |

Table 3*Special Education Teachers' Themes Developed from Data Analysis Codes*

| Code | Theme |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>Connect academics to transition goals</p> <p>Student skills improvement through updated assessments provided by county</p> <p>Improve planning process through skill-based training</p> <p>Life skills and self-advocacy</p> <p>Get students to think outside the box</p> <p>Link student interest with resources</p> <p>Career surveys, work study program, school-to-work training</p> | <p>SE teachers' perception is that their use of assessments surveys, career assessments, are useful in assessing students' needs; however, they should align with future priorities (dreams, interest, and goals) of students and their families.</p> |
| <p>Students' failure to meet goals.</p> <p>Supporting students in creating realistic goals</p> <p>Parents help students take responsibility for their goals</p> <p>Putting appropriate transition goals in place</p> <p>Improve collaboration with parent</p> | <p>SE teachers' perception is that unrealistic goal setting can be a barrier to writing and implementing a successful transition plan.</p> |
| <p>Manage transition process for teachers and training</p> <p>Increase teacher training opportunities</p> <p>Improve skill-based training</p> | <p>SE teachers' perception is that transition specialists are individuals they use often for some of their training and are an added benefit to assist them with writing students' goals correctly for IEPs and the transition process.</p> |
| <p>Transition practices differ from every county and state</p> | <p>SE teachers' perception is that they had no exposure to, or completed program development, evaluation, as well as improvement.</p> |
| <p>On-the-job training opportunities</p> <p>Connect students with work training programs</p> <p>Connect training with resources</p> | <p>SE teachers' perception is that they could benefit from additional strategies, and/or support.</p> |

Discrepant Cases

There were no discrepant cases identified in the data. Most of the high school special education participants shared some of the same perceptions of the transition planning process (Creswell, 2015). Also, no disparate data was found that did not fit into a group. Some contradictions may produce unexpected findings, which may strengthen the data findings (Rouet et al., 2016). No data within the themes appeared conflicting.

Results

This study was designed to understand perceptions of high school special education teachers regarding the transition planning process. The results are organized in regard to the two research questions of the study. Assessments, barriers, and training relating to transition services were the emerging themes revealed for research question number one. In research question two, the emerging themes were: program implementation, and support for high school special education teachers implementing the transition process.

Research Question 1

What is being done by high school special educators regarding the types of transition planning practices currently being used by high school and how do they feel about these practices? According to results special educators perceived that transition planning practices differ from county to county, and state to state based on demographics. Results below of current practices of the teachers revealed that planning is ongoing, through the use of assessments, surveys, and progress monitoring to ensure they had adequate information on students' abilities, interest, and preferences to write transition

plans. The educators also felt that while current practices supported students with disabilities, more extensive planning information in the area of updated interventions/ activities, linking student interest with needed resources, and collaborative efforts among all stakeholders would enhance their practice to significantly make an effect on improving their students' outcomes after high school.

Theme 1: SE Teachers' Perceptions of the Use of Assessments and Surveys in Transition Planning

High Special Education Teacher P1 has been employed as a special education teacher in his high school for six years. He teaches in a resource room to support (math and social studies) for students with disabilities, who are functioning at very low cognitive levels "mildly intellectual disabilities" (MID). When asked what some of his current transition planning practices were used to support students with disabilities preparing for postsecondary life, his response was that "they differ from every county and states based upon regions demographics and it is a continuing evolving process, depending upon availability of community services."

P1 shared "he uses the same transition surveys that are given to all students to begin the process." "When they begin the process of transitioning into postsecondary life, they complete different surveys with questions that are used annually to identify items that will hopefully allow them to be successful (needs, preferences, interest), and that data or information will be used to help build their plan." Subsequently, the assessments and surveys are there to prepare them... basically it is, well looking at a few things to prepare the student and family with options for life after high school. Being that they may

not go to the two- or four-year college, which is a typical route, or technical school route, the results would be able to give them options of what they might want or be able to do in the future, and resources to support them along the way. “Whether it is academic or postsecondary schools or the workforce.”

Other special education teachers like P4, felt that the transition planning practices currently being used such as assessments and surveys were “a little confusing getting started.” Also, that...once you start working, it is one of those things where you wish you could have “more time.” After the assessments are completed, you want to really sit down with the students and go over the information with them thoroughly. However, there is generally not enough time allotted for this to happen. He noted, “you are pulled in many directions, (different meetings, “staff, department, professional development) leaving you with inadequate time to explain information with the students.

P4 continued, by stating, the current practice he uses to assist students that needed advocating skills was, “well, having a set schedule, opening up my lessons,” is that “it involves verbal responses” and those students that are “non-verbal have the opportunity to use the pad system to advocate for themselves.” They also, “use their own voice to utilize the vocabulary needed to have a conversation and knowledge to say what they want or what is it that they need.” The assessments and surveys play a big part in assisting my students and are a great need for their future endeavors.

P3 had been employed with the school for 8 years. She also worked with transition plans for high school students with disabilities for 9 years. She stated that she “helps her students along the way as she is planning her information and activities for

them.” “My planning is pretty extensive sometimes. “There is a lot I use specifically within transition alone.” In the transition program, our district provides qualifying students that align with the Community Based Instruction, (CBI) program to the support facility (our section of the department) from school to post-secondary life.” So, again I teach qualified students in our school district application based specific criteria (how to fill out applications, understanding the language within the application process, that will assist them in being a part of the transition program.”

Then, within the transition program practices, we have specific curriculum in which we use, that is geared toward transition and functional academics and independent living skills. P3 continues the conversation discussing perceptions of her responsibilities regarding the transition process. “My responsibilities within the practice are to write appropriate measurable academic goals, based upon the students’ transition assessment.” Also, “training for education/employment” to “provide each of their goals and abilities according to their interest. Using their story” to make sure I use that to drive observing the student to see what they in to become successful.

P6 had been employed with the school for six years. She also worked with transition plans for high school students with disabilities for six years. When asked what her perceptions were of the current transition planning practices used to support students with disabilities preparing for postsecondary life, her response was that most things being used right now are career surveys, and career assessments. She feels the issue is the career surveys and assessments are not adequate, or there is not a plan after the surveys or a plan for them (students) to go to college.

P8 stated, currently as a special education teacher he is his own support for transitions. When it comes to responsibility, there are time limits, and he feels there is not set enough time aside when talking to students to assist them immediately in making decisions. Post school predictors are based off of what type of student or high school, including what the student wants to do in life. P8 states that she starts the transition process with a great questionnaire, students IEPs, and whatever applies to their levels. She also, used surveys to help the students and himself understand their wants, preferences, and interest.” It is the only evidence-based strategy in use.

Currently, P8 feels he plays a key role for his caseload. He feels “time” is the biggest barrier in high school to serve the student. When working on the transition plans and the time it takes in planning and implementation there is no time to converse with the student for immediate feedback. To help the teachers at his school, there is a transition specialist he utilizes to assist him with the process. He states “we start off with the student’s freshman year, and the process of transition should be implemented on how they complete their goals. This action could play a key role in preparing the student for their transition from high school, so I use goal setting practices for the information we write on goals for each student.

P8 noted, to support my students, I try to consistently work on some types of skill set. Then I (self) reach out to the individuals who teach them. I advocate for all my students. Any resources I can find such as scholarships, websites, counselors, grants, technical schools, colleges to support them. Also, (strategies) I utilize reading books, and surveys to open their mindset. Surveys lead to other things such as (programs). Surveys

reference questions and scenarios which offer connections with likes and dislikes of the students as well as independence.

P7 expressed that currently, his experience utilizing the transition planning process is that it has been well as you know, you can change it up every year. But it serves its purpose in terms of just getting an idea of what the plan is when the students are ready to graduate from high school. He stated that they (transition practices) need to be updated as opposed to just regular goals and objectives, just the types of goals given as well. Then again, in my practices we are doing things of what the county wants. However, some of our “children need different goals and objectives than what the county is providing. He also feels that the current goals are solid for the general education of students but feels they should be updated in terms of from the evolution of not only education but what the students’ needs now than 15 to 40 years ago. The specifics to this are the “educational and the career goals, “the important goals.” One just to make sure that I’m on the same page as the student as well as the parent in regard to what career they would like, whether a four-year college, technical school, or “just being a “working resource” for the student as well as the parents from transition services coordinators. The only evidence-based strategies utilized are the ones based on the county regarding the survey that is used, the goals and objectives provided throughout the county. He states, he is an integral part of the process because he along with the student are...basically depending on which county you are in..... Regarding postschool predictors, there’s the career interest survey, there is an online one like that just to see exactly what they

(students) like. He feels engaging with them more and using the resources provided or given by the county will help with decision making.

According to P7, the transition plan is a plan that is touched on every year. The plan is used to just make sure that the student is in sync with that they want to do after graduation. It is a fluid plan that interchanges from year to year. This plan gives the parents what the goals are and then how to accomplish those goals. For training, P7 gets professional development, various trainings...you are...helping with the activities. Normally, it is only the student and special education teacher, then there are some counties that say “you must list the parent. He stated, “my job (role) solely, is to just make sure everything goes well as planned for the student in graduating from high school.

Some challenges and barriers are just getting the students to “think outside the box.” They may get stuck on one thing they like and not understanding that there are other things outside of that. Sometimes just being able to talk to the students on a one-on-one basis where there are no distractions can be a barrier as well as challenging. Challenges and barriers affect me “a little bit” because when you are trying to not use the same traditional goals and objectives it does not always work for the student. So, you want new goals that cater more specifically to the student.

There are transition specialists to support us at our school. The specialist informs us whether our transition goals are written correctly, how to write them, how the county wants them written, and what needs to be in them. P7 feels this way because transition services change from year to year, possibly from semester to semester and it probably

helps in terms of the county's and going from one high school to another...you will be able to keep the consistency. There is no ambiguity in it. According to P7, he thinks there are some differences in how high school special education teachers implement the transition process. Not all teachers complete transition planning practices the same, just in terms of getting to know the student, asking them about their goals, as well as what they would like to do after they graduate from high school. Also, asking them what their goals are for after high school.

Much like the other participants in the study, P2 uses a career entry survey to ask a variety of questions about students with disabilities interest. Questions such as, do they want to work inside or outside help identify what jobs might be available to them, and considered a career path. For example, if they wanted to be a mechanic because they like cars, they look at all the different aspects of cars and look for a variety of jobs that might spark and support their interest.

P5 has worked with transition plans for about two years. She has been teaching at her school for 5 years. Her transition planning practices currently being used to support students with disabilities is that when she interviews the students, some of the things they do in terms of figuring out what the student is going to do, almost feels like as a teacher she is parenting them. She shares, what she means by this is parents can help their students alongside the teachers to become more independent. To implement the transition process special education teachers set aside some time in the day to collaborate with the admissions department to help them with the students' IEPs regarding community placement in the student's transition. Much like the other participants in the study, P2

uses a career entry survey to ask a variety of questions about students with disabilities interest. Questions such as, do they want to work inside or outside help identify what jobs might be available to them, and considered a career path. For example, if they wanted to be a mechanic because they like cars, they look at all the different aspects of cars and look for a variety of jobs that might spark and support their interest.

In general, most of the special education teachers considered their current practices to be adequate. They used typical documents; variation of surveys and assessments, and goals that support academics to help build transition plans and services. However, they were somewhat inconsistent when planning transition activities, writing goals, and collaborating with parents to support the students with disabilities. P1, perceived that teachers practices varied across the districts, likewise, P3, P7, P9, and P5 noted, there was a lack of guidance for students' vision, and collaboration efforts with parents to support students were insufficient.

Overall, the participants felt that while assessments are useful, they should be in alignment with what the students with disabilities' future priorities are. Teachers and parents want their students and children to have profitable careers. Thus, updated information on assessments and alignments with educational skills programs, will help special education teachers to promote career fields that are of interest to the student. In turn, bringing new awareness to resources may encourage collaborative support from students and parents.

Theme 2: SE Teachers' Perceptions Were That Funding and Student Buy-In Are Barriers When Implementing the Transition Planning Process for Students With Disabilities

According to P1, he feels that when implementing the transition process, “We have specific IEP goals, and lesson plans that adhere to specific transition goals that are tied with academic rubrics.” It is implemented every day in the classroom. Coinciding with the implementation portion of the transition process, he continued to say, in some situations, “one of the biggest barriers is getting the students on board” with the goals that you and the parents have discussed. It can be very difficult for students to want to work in certain career fields, or certain programs. This is because “some programs are limited in their capacity,” and they may not have a program that a student wants to do. So, it can be a barrier if “the transition goal does not line up with the interests and values the student” wants to do.

P1 reflects on his students by asking “number one does the student have the capacity to understand what they want to do as an adult in life?” He noted, I asked such a question because they spend the majority of their experience at home, they are not independent, but taken care of by the household. Therefore, that is one of the biggest barriers. P7 shared, “he has no real barriers.” He just wants to ask them “what do you want to do?” Why do you want to do it? How long do you want to do it. Asking questions of this nature to the students will help them understand that their opinions are supported by the teacher, which will assist them to open up about their thoughts, make decisions, and advocate for themselves.

P5 felt that some challenges and barriers are really following up with the student and their parents. Additional challenges are figuring out if they have done anything with their parents and not just with the teachers. The barrier is the parents not taking accountability of their child's transition planning.

When perceiving barriers as you prepare students to leave high school, a situation you might find is a student in a wheelchair. Getting to the job site might be an issue. Maybe the student can follow directions and get the job done, however they are not motivated like typical students (without disabilities). You must constantly encourage them. They can do the work but are not independent enough to do it without someone close by standing right there with them.

P4, explained that "the one consistent barrier (situation) that I found myself battle with is seeing students not accepting who they are." They neglect their goals, almost like they are in denial." Not only that, but "they also don't want to ask for their accommodation/and or modifications." Having that understanding I have with them, "I want them to speak up for themselves (self)." Those are the barriers that impact special education students dealing with the transition."

P6 shared that the "biggest challenge is funding." Those are funds from the district and outside sources." Because for job skill training, you have jobs for students to go to or transition plans to implement." You must have the appropriate outside sources to help within the school system. Some challenges and barriers are just getting the students to "think outside the box." They may get stuck on one thing they like and not understanding that there are other things outside of that. Sometimes just being able to talk

to the students on a one-on-one basis where there are no distractions can be a barrier as well as challenging.

Challenges and barriers affect me “a little bit” because when you are trying to not use the same traditional goals and objectives it does not always work for the student. So, you want new goals that cater more specifically to the student. Some challenges and barriers are just getting the students to “think outside the box.” They may get stuck on one thing they like and not understanding that there are other things outside of that. Sometimes just being able to talk to the students on a one-on-one basis where there are no distractions can be a barrier.

According to P10, students sometimes have unrealistic goals based on past performances. Whether it is academically or physical challenges, I would have to tell the student in certain words “hey” you can’t be or do that.” That is not going to be for you! This will become a barrier to student fulfillment leaving high school. You never want to tell a student that they can’t achieve something but, the student has a .5 grade point average (GPA), and they want to be a doctor, you try to steer them in other directions. That is the “biggest” barrier.

Consequently, findings also show that there can be numerous barriers when special education teachers attempt to develop a transition plan. These barriers range from funding for resources, to student buy-in. Participants expressed that even with teacher-student conversations students do not buy in what is being discussed for their future. For example, when there are limited resources in an area that the student desires, special educators find it difficult to work on goal setting and write specific goals. Participant P7

expressed, “students want what they want” and will not think outside the box. They cannot get their students to search for other avenues. Therefore, the special education teachers run into roadblocks and need parents’ guidance to help the student be accountable to look in more than one area for careers.

Theme 3: SE Teachers’ Perceptions Were That Training to Implement the Transition Planning Process Makes for More Efficient Practices

Best practices were broken down into several groups. These groups included student and family involvement, functional and comprehensive instruction, inclusion placement and experiences, inter-personal and inter-agency collaboration. For students with disabilities, in a study by the U. S. National Longitudinal Transition Study (NLTS,) effective practices were identified for postsecondary outcomes. Although special education high school teachers reported they understood the value of evidence-based practices in a study by Jones (2009) the teachers also stated they lack the knowledge to utilize these practices in the classroom (Aldossai, 2017). P3 shared that the types of training she received is “training at the school district, or as the state makes changes regarding the IEP information, that is as far as they go with the training.” Initially, you would receive training once a year. Then, if you “were a new teacher, you received training extensively on how to write out transition and IEP goals.” In the first two years that I was a transition teacher, I think I only received training maybe once. “I say, not very much training was provided to me.” I “felt that was a shortcoming for me.” However, “I felt it was under the assumption that you knew what you were doing.”

In a similar study, of secondary special education teachers, they reported that they did not have the necessary training needed to use evidence-based practices even though such practices were important for successful outcomes in transitioning SWD to postsecondary life (Aldossai, 2017; Plotner et al., 2016). P3 also shared that the types of training she received is “training at the school district, or as the state makes changes regarding the IEP information, that is as far as they go with the training.” Initially, you would receive training once a year. Then, if you “were a new teacher, you received training extensively on how to write out transition and IEP goals.” In the first two years that I was a transition teacher, I think I only received training maybe once. “I say, not very much training was provided to me.” I “felt that was a shortcoming for me, and it was under the assumption that the teachers knew what they were doing.”

P6 expressed that, “there is no specific type of training, other than the training we do with their IEP. The college transition specialist gives them (students) options. The special education teachers train themselves to prepare kids for transition life after high school if they are not going to college. So, you want new goals that cater more specifically to the student. P6 continues to say, when asked her perception of the transition planning process was, “My perception of this plan is it needs to be overhaul.” This is “based on the type of disability the student has, or that they are capable of doing.”

More “skills-based training needs to be put into place” to be able to employ the students or help them build a life outside of high school. P6 expressed that, “there is no specific type of training, other than the training we do with their IEP. The college transition specialist gives them (students) options. They train themselves to prepare kids

for transition or life after high school if they are not going to college. For training, P7 gets professional development, various trainings from transition services coordinators. P8 felt that one situation is, if teachers had “a connection to get enough time to get training,” or have training offered to the students that would be a big help.

P10, shared that most the training comes from their districts platform (CTLIS). It is all completed online. The special education teacher will have to be active in going in and reading about implementing it, other than that “there is not a lot of training done in our county for the transition planning process.” P5 also shared that as for training, at the beginning of the school year the teachers go to workshops to discuss transition plans but, she does not remember them discussing things like “what to put toward a goal it just depends on the kid.”

Therefore, “skills-based training for special education teachers needs to be put into place.” Such training will allow the special educators to employ the students in the direction that best fits their needs or help them build a life outside of high school through community resources that link with their interest. P6 expressed that, “when there is no specific type of training, other than the training we do with student IEPs, we can only rely on the transition coordinator or specialists. With additional training special education teachers knowledge will increase affording them the ability to write quality goals from evidence-based transition research, constituted by district mandates.

Research Question 2

How do high school special education teachers evaluate the sufficiency of the transition process? What else can be done? Several of the participants in this study had not evaluated the transition process. Also, they did not have any exposure to program development, improvement, or evaluate any programs for sufficiency which would be used to assist them with the transition planning process for students with disabilities leaving high school.

Theme 4: SE Teachers' Perceptions Were That Being Able to Evaluate and Assist in the Development of Programs Is a Critical Component and Is Needed in the Transition Planning Process

Stufflebean (2017) defined program evaluation or process as a systemic assessment of furthering its development and seeking to identify process components that need to be improved. All high school special education educators are mandated by the IDEIA legislature to use effective transition planning practices that can help students with disabilities achieve long-term ongoing success as measured by their postsecondary goals and improve their outcomes after high school (Rusher, 2018). P7 conveyed that “I evaluated the programs with the coed (general education) teacher through a survey. It is “pretty efficient” in evaluation of the students, so it comes out in their favor “in what the student would like in terms of their career.”

The use of a program evaluation proposes to examine the current post secondary transition process, attitudes, and beliefs to identify if there are inconsistencies in the delivery system that currently may prevent an efficient process from equipping students

with disabilities to successfully live in a 21st century world after leaving high school (Marshall et al., 2020). Evaluations can provide findings to assist transition team members to make data-based decisions to dissolve any inconsistencies that may evolve. According to Marshall et al (2020) leaders must take the time to work collaboratively with stakeholders to support student learning and teacher efficacy.

Most of the participants expressed that those assessments, which evaluate skills needed for different programs lay the groundwork for transition planning. However, they also conveyed that when thinking of evaluating, or developing a program, “they had not been exposed to or offered opportunities regarding this type of assessing.”

After the analysis of the responses, it was determined that the issue at hand is not a gap in the published literature that requires a dissertation format, but an opportunity for the researcher to conduct this study to determine the current worth and value of transition planning process, program, and delivery by high school special educators. Other than the students’ on P2, and P10’s caseload, they do not play a role in the development or improvement, including evaluation of transition related services programs. They noted that “I basically just implement the program.” According to P9, in a way “yes and no I play a role in program development, improvement, and evaluating transition related services. P10 expressed, that “we kind of give feedback on what’s going on.” At our school system the district board makes those decisions. You can give feedback but, “mainly they come back to us and give feedback on what to work on more or what to change or vice/versa.”

The district wants to “keep everything in house.” They compare numbers regarding what is going on in our county and what is going on in the state. Then (county/district) will want us to implement according to their recommendations what needs to change. Especially, when we have our district meetings in special education. P9 stated, “they will come to us, instead of us going to them,” and they have an entire team come from elementary through high school. We kind of get the whole thing figured out looking at what works and what did not work. “So, you get to do a little bit through your feedback, but not as much as the county does.”

Many teachers perceived they were not equipped to facilitate this type of assessment, and should be a part of their training, because the conversation only comes up during professional development. Their responses addressed a lack of budgeted funding for training them. Special education teachers transition practices, services, and the students post-school outcomes can improve when every stakeholder is informed, trained, and knowledgeable of what is required to implement a more robust, efficient transition planning delivery program (Kohler, 2016).

Theme 5: SE Teachers’ Perceptions Were That Transition Specialists’ Support for Teachers in Transition Planning Is an Added Advantage in Supporting the Transition Planning Process

For students with disabilities, a high level of support is needed (e.g., individualized instruction, personal strategies, setting postsecondary goals, etc.). Support comes from various areas (school, teachers, family, community, inter-agencies, and other stakeholders (Evans et al., 2010). As special education teachers begin the preparation for

student with disabilities to move through and exit high school, one of their specific roles are to provide effective transition planning support, instructional transition education for student with disabilities, coordinating various activities for student employment, developing IEPs, which contain a section for the transition plan used for postsecondary life. Nine of the participants shared that “yes I utilize the transition specialist to train us on new information, different resources, and programs.” “They check to make sure our plans for the students are written correctly, help me stay focused on managing my student caseload in the transition process, by supporting me with resources based on my students’ skills, preferences, and interest.” Only P5 stated, “I think, yes, but I don’t know how they are utilized.

In consideration of support, which refers to resources made available to special education high school teachers and students with disabilities. There is a responsibility for special education high school teachers to collaborate and develop a plan of activities that will support SWD through and beyond high school that matches their interest and postsecondary goals (U.S. DOE, 2020). P10 expressed, that he has a transition specialist at his school however, “I do not use them as much as I should.” Special education high school teachers are provided with some professional development to enhance their learned individualized instructional skills. However, they perceive the sessions do not adequately equip them with all tools needed to develop clear pathways for planning transition success. Both students with disabilities and special education high school teachers work together in the aspects of what the transition process serves. P6, expressed, that I use the transition specialist to help when I am talking to students about their next

steps in the process, so they don't wait until the last minute for information." In terms of this aspect, the type of support utilized is especially important.

Support included but was not limited to the following: family, peer relationships, community, emotional and social assistance, and instructional. Whether high level or minimal support, the right type for the situation should be applied (effective plans), the function should serve its purpose (ensuring all needs of students with disabilities are met for successful transition), and measurement (to assess progress on measurable goals). Another aspect of support in the process is the students' parents. As contributors to their child's life and educational experiences, (e.g., attend postsecondary education, be gainfully employed, participate in the community) parents are one of the critical components to the transition planning team, and process (Kohler, 2016). Parents are the students' first teachers. Encouraging a parent to participate in the process can strengthen the value of individualized appropriate instructional programs designed for their child (Kellems & Morningstar, 2010).

The teachers perceived that "parents supply information to the team about skills and needs for independent living, and any help they feel the student required when seeking to achieve preferred postsecondary goals." A fundamental part of educational policies in the U.S. are regarding education and is explicitly addressed in both Every Student Succeed Act (ESSA) and IDEA, which is parent engagement. Being actively involved allows the parent to be an equal partner in the decision making of activities presented for discussion (ESSA, 2015; IDEA, 2004).

Summary of SE Teachers' Responses

Some of the high school special education teachers' perceptions of transition planning practices currently being used are that it differs from county to county and state to state based on regions and demographics. Another participant felt it could be a little confusing getting started. Several high school special education teachers felt that "funding, time, and resources" was the biggest challenge. All the high school special education teachers felt that a transition specialist is in their school and is a beneficial factor to the transition planning process. Some of the participants shared that they did not utilize post school predictors and were not aware of any. Research has found a set of predictors of in-school activities that positively connect with achievement in education, employment, and independent living after graduation from high school (Mazzotti et al., 2021). Mazzotti et al., (2021) study emphasized that if teachers could understand post-secondary predictors they can help schools, districts, special education teachers, determine whether they are employing techniques that are backed in research to affect change where it is most needed. Teachers and the community programs may have the chance to carefully investigate what tactics and variables are carried out with fidelity (Marzzotti et al., 2021).

The high school special education teachers such as P1 reported that as a special education teacher he plays a "critical role," the most important role in the development, improvement, and evaluation of transition related services." Other participants' like P4, P3, and P6, also felt their role was critical to the process. The students' ideas should be put on the "front end of research" which will help the student. The high school special

education teacher participants agreed that there are barriers and some challenges. P3, and P6, felt that getting parents on board with the activities for the students, funding, and “economic status” when implementing the transition process. You must have the appropriate outside sources to help within the school system.

All the high school special education teachers felt that a transition specialist is in their school and is a beneficial factor to the transition planning process. Most of the participants felt that having parents and counselors helped them implement the transition planning process. Three of the study participants did not utilize and were not aware of evidenced-based practices. Most of the high school special education teacher participants P4, P1, P3 said, for “support” the resources utilized are school and community resources, transition plans, community field trips, placement programs, community-based instruction, and transition specialist. Several high school teachers interview participants feel that “work study programs are great for training (strategies) the students. P4 was not aware of any right off hand.

Of the 10 participants most of the high school special educators did not have additional information to share that might contribute to the study. Except, P6, which felt that it is important to train parents and everyone that works with the student (team). This includes counselors, and principals. Also, inform the team so they know what programs are out there, and make them accessible to the students and their families. In turn, such communication would enhance the decision-making process.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Qualitative is interpretive research that includes self-reflection as a key element in the research process. To ensure the dependability of this study, open coding, and member checking were used to minimize researcher bias.

Credibility

Researcher credibility elicits truthfulness of the data or a study participants perspective, as well as the researchers' interpretations of them (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Nowell et al., 2017). To strengthen the credibility of my data, I used audio recorded interviews. I transcribed the recordings verbatim to the participants responses. My use of this approach presented truth in the data collected. In addition, to enhance credibility I used member checking to validate that I accurately interpreted the data.

Transferability

Results might be transferable when sufficiency of details about the setting and participants as well as the research context is included in the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Nowell et al., 2017). In the results I provided a rich, thick description of quotes from the participants to enable the reader to critique whether the findings have the capability to be transferable. Transferring would include generalization across different settings or individuals in the situation.

Dependability

A study would be considered reliable based on the researchers' processes and descriptions (Nowell et al., 2017). This is possible if the findings can be reproduced with the same consistency under similar conditions or with similar participants. I used a

thematic process to analyze my data to recognize themes over various participants. Additionally, the studies dependability was enhanced by the inclusion of a comprehensive account of the research studies processes, which will enable future researchers' in reproducing this study if deemed needed. Finally, I created numerical codes for the participants to help keep them unidentifiable in the research.

Confirmability

When results reflect participants' viewpoints, and opinions rather than the researchers' the results are verifiable (Nowell et al, 2017). I used rich, thick participant quotes that portray emerging themes. Participants were able to validate that my interpretation of the data accurately reflected their perspectives through the member checking approach, which increased the study's confirmability. I kept specific notes during the research process to maintain consistency and transparency of all interpretations of the data. An audit trail was maintained, as a collection of notes (Moravcsik, 2019).

Summary

In Chapter 4, information was shared as I explored and described the transition practices currently in place from the perspective of High School Special Education Teachers. The following were the two main questions that guided this basic qualitative study: What is being done by high school special educators regarding the types of transition planning practices currently being used at the high school and how do the high school educators feel about these practices? How do high school special education teachers evaluate the sufficiency of the transition process? What else can be done? In

Chapter 5, I discussed the details of data collection and data analysis. How the data was broken down into discrete parts using open coding. Also, if there were any trustworthiness issues, I explained how they were addressed. Finally, participant responses provided a rich detailed description of the high school special education teachers responses to the semi-structured interview questions. Schlossberg's Transition Theory, and The Taxonomy for Transition Programming 2.0 model (Schlossberg 1995; Kohler et al., 2016) was used to analyze the data in Chapter 5, below contributing to a discussion, conclusions, and recommendations.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to investigate high school special education teachers' perceptions regarding the transition planning process that supports students with disabilities leaving high school in preparation for postsecondary life. This study was critical because only 35% of students with disabilities graduating from high school have workforce skills. With an understanding of these teachers' interpretations, there was potential for improving the transition process and outcomes for students with disabilities. Special education high school teachers who used effective transition planning practices have consistently been shown to achieve long-term success for students with disabilities and improved student outcomes after high school (Chang & Rusher, 2018). From the viewpoints of high school special education teachers, I investigated and discussed transition options. Furthermore, this study was intended to provide a deeper understanding of the perceptions of high school special education teachers regarding the transition process. In Chapter 5, interpretations of findings are presented, and limitations of the study, future research recommendations, and implications are provided, followed by the conclusion.

Interpretation of the Findings

The results of this study revealed that connections between transition predictors for postschool success and secondary transition evidence-based practices were missing. The study's findings also confirmed that although there are research-based resources to support secondary special education teachers through guidance of program creation, improvement, and evaluation, participants in this study indicated that these resources

were not discussed in trainings, in professional developments, or by leaders in the field. Stakeholders on the team who understand the elements required for effective transition practices, and who use a consistent process for planning and decision making, are better able to support high school special education teachers and make a significant impact on students' outcomes for a successful transition to postsecondary life.

The biggest transitional hurdle perceived by the teachers was lack of involvement in curriculum planning, decision making, and county leadership, which did not allow for collaborative efforts by high school special educators to have a voice in the planning stage for curriculum, the knowledge or opportunity of developing programs, and (community agencies) needed resources. The teachers completed tasks of the process by what the county told them to do (i.e., forced on them), not collaborative efforts by the whole team. Such an action could hinder students' future after high school, due to misconception, inconsistencies, or understandings, including teachers' ability to evaluate effectiveness of programs and activities used to assist in the process for student success.

Students' needs, preferences, and interests must drive transition service requirements (IDEA, 2004). Assessments provide ongoing individualization for careers or extended educational endeavors that impact student choices for the future. This process can help students with disabilities better understand their needs, preferences, and interests in relation to postsecondary settings. However, in the current study, high school special education teachers' responses revealed that although assessing is a great method to provide opportunities for teachers to make data-driven decisions, most of the curriculum planning came from their county office. The teachers' role was to execute the

plans according to what was decided by the superiors. Daily duties for program evaluation, strategic planning, and rules and procedures including but not limited to resource creation and allocation are closely related to those of school leaders.

Administrators should ensure that evidence-based transitional methods are supported by resources such as knowledgeable staff and professional development. P4 responded that “during preplanning, professional development is like a ‘sit and git’ presentation from a PowerPoint from the county.”

Responses from P10, P1, P7, P2, P9, P8, P5, and P4 indicated that they relied on administrative decisions to move the transition planning activities forward. Their voices were minimal. Given the expectations that special education teachers oversaw progress monitoring, only the data spoke, not the person assessing the information. Progress monitoring is a systematic strategy used in assessing students’ skill level (Brady et al., 2021; Schlossberg et al., 1995). In special education, this essential strategy ensures that students are making appropriate progress toward their goals set in their IEP. High school special education participants reported that the use of assessments laid the foundation for the transition planning process.

In the area of assessments, there are researched determinants of postschool performance in the evaluation field. Predictors can be used to aid in the development, improvement, and assessment of programs. According to the research, understanding postschool success variables can assist schools and districts in determining whether high school special educators are employing empirically validated ways to effect change in crucial areas (Mazzotti et al., 2021). However, the data analysis indicated that P1 through

P10 were not aware that such predictors existed. P6, P4, P8, P1, and P5 disclosed that during special education meetings, leaders did not mention any research-based transition predictors, postschool predictors for postschool success, or knowledge of research-based ethical decision-making practices executed by leadership (see Brady et al., 2021). Also, Brady et al. (2021) noted that school administration is accountable for ensuring that special education policies and procedures are followed at the school level. The regulations governing special education departments are thoroughly understood by special services administrators. Although special education is one of the most disputed subjects in education, research has also shown that school leaders frequently lack the legal knowledge and leadership skills required to ensure these students are ready for life after high school (Brady et al., 2021).

According to the conceptual framework of Kohler's taxonomy for transition programming 2.0 model, there are five transitional competencies to assist special educators with best practices: student-focused planning, student development, interagency collaboration, family involvement, and program structure. All have ethical considerations within each category/competency. For example, an ethical consideration for assessments would be making sure all students with disabilities had access to available assessments related to their interest. All 10 special education participants in the current study, when asked if they knew of these competencies, indicated that they had not heard of the Kohler taxonomy for transition programming 2.0 model or the transition competencies. Therefore, a connection between transition predictors for postschool success and high school special teachers understanding of them was missing. Kohler et al.'s (2016)

taxonomy encompassed effective evidence-based practices that would help secondary high school special educators in connecting all five competencies to implement transition-focused education that would enhance students with disabilities in their transition to adult endeavors. The transition 2.0 tool divides the actions and predictors into five groups and serves as a tool to help IEP teams pay attention to special education practices and policies that have been found to predict beneficial educational outcomes. All five of the categories incorporate the potential for ethical decision making across the transition process.

Component 1: Student-Focused Planning

The analysis indicated that students and parents were equally resistant in the process of transition. For example, P9 noted that “students don’t want to ask for their accommodations.” P4 responded that “the parents don’t encourage their child to have an active part in the process,” whereas P7’s response was that “students are not accepting who they are. Most of them seem to be in denial that they are students with a disability.” Guidance through training was missing among special educators and parents in the high school setting to ensure that their planning for transition goals aligns with priorities of the families and students’ (see Brady et al., 2021; Kohler et al., 2016).

Component 2: Student Development

When students are an active participant in the IEP and the transition planning process, there is an elevated perspective of whether their goals can be obtained (Mazzotti et al., 2021). Analysis of the results indicated special educators recognize the need to teach their students skills to assist in developing academic success. However, they do not

know what those skills are and how to teach the skill. P1 indicated that connecting academic to secondary goals, play a critical role in students' success. P10 reported that "the first and second years of high school, students are off track. ... Their grades suffer including the grade point average." P9 also reported that "having training offered to them in this area, including evaluation resources mandated by county leaders would be beneficial." Those types of connections would help the students (outside agencies). What was missing was training for high school special educators regarding a clear connection between academics and secondary transition goal setting.

Component 3: Interagency Collaboration

Regarding interagency collaboration, continuous employment needs to occur for students with disabilities upon their graduation. In the current study, I found that there must be relations occurring outside of the facility in a collaborative manner during the transition services. Vocational rehabilitation services play a major role in students' courses, getting them career counseling, and providing needed job training to improve their skills for future employment endeavors. Assistance in finding a job that suits students' interests and preferences, including their families' desires and aspirations for their children, is also a need for success. To have a fully collaborative experience, information about the students' activities, academics, and supporting information must be communicated among all stakeholders. Such discussion would create opportunities to strengthen high school special education teachers' transition planning practices and individualize the students plans, which would assist in writing measurable, achievable goals. The missing link was limited opportunities for these teachers to be afforded

comparable resources for their students' transition activities that are suffused with the instructional plan of action. P1 and P6 agreed that "resources are in abundance in some counties and lacking in others." P6 also disclosed that "limited resources can mean the difference between flourishing and stagnating for our students." P3 divulged that

if we are given the chance to voice our opinion to the county on not only what works and does not work for the student, but also what we see is needed to help the student, it would make the planning process more beneficial.

Component 4: Family Engagement

The family engagement component of the transition process is a precise predictor of student success (Brady et al., 2021; Scheef & Mahfouz, 2020). There are three focus areas related to families: involvement, empowerment, and preparation. When considering the involvement of families in relation to the transition planning process, families of students with disabilities require access to an interpreter who is not a family member but rather someone from an agency outside the school who provides services as needed (Kohler et al., 2016). The interpreter's cultural background should be considered an asset of value (ethic of critique). Involvement allows the parents to help their child with a plan for life after high school. What was found in this area of the process was that parents can be a barrier. According to P5, "parents are resistant to encourage their child to take accountability for helping in transition planning." What was missing was an assurance that family members, especially parents, are actively participating in IEP meetings alongside their child, as well as outside of school as an advocate for their child, including encouraging the child to take responsibility for their future. Kohler et al. (2016) also

noted that families' contributions can impact the transition planning process in a positive manner.

One aspect for all stakeholders to remember is that "the parent is the child's first teacher." Parents know their child better than anyone. *Empowerment of families* regarding transition considers what the student and family need from the connection between community and help with finding access for support networks who have knowledge regarding effective transition practices (ethic of care). The third component of family engagement is *preparation*, which entails making sure parents are aware of their rights including the students' as they relate to IDEA, and specifics of the transition processes (ethic of justice). When families' opinions are valued amongst the teachers, school, and outside agencies, parents can be a bridge between school and their community for the child's success or frustration after high school (Brady et al., 2021; Kohler, 2016; Scheef & Mahfouz, 2020).

Component 5: Program Structure

Kohler's taxonomy for programming 2.0, regarding the transitions program structure requires adaptable program alternatives to be offered to meet the requirements of each individual student and to represent the language and cultural diversity of the student body. Regular strategic planning should be completed with input from various stakeholders, especially in education. This also includes partnerships with community organizations. Collaboration during the strategic planning process is recommended. Joint activities target obstacles to students' transfer to post school life. Study participant P8, disclosed that "Their school's program structure has limits." In this study it was found

that of the 10 participants interviewed “not one of them were aware of the program structure status” at their school system. With limits associated with program structure, what was missing here is the research study participants’ ability to sustain effective collaborative efforts between themselves with county and outside agencies.

Each of the five categories mentioned previously had ethical decision points for IEP team members (high school special education teachers, parents, leadership, outside agencies) to consider during implementation of the transition planning process. The components of the taxonomy are not stand alone, each required by-in amongst stakeholders. If the process were handled incorrectly, it may jeopardize students with disabilities outcomes, compliance, as well as professional ethics (Kohler, 2016).

Limitations of the Study

In this study there were three main limitations. The first limitation yielded participants only from high school special education teachers. This influenced the broadness of information regarding the transition planning process. The second limitation in the study was that special educators’ practices varied from county to county, and state to state. This limitation could cause inconsistencies within the practices of these teachers, which may impact students with disabilities postschool outcomes. The third limitation was that special education teachers teaching on the middle school level in eighth grade also, teach students with disabilities and start the transition planning process when students turn age 14, but was not included in this study. The use of these teachers may give more depth of information to research. However, even with another level for the transition process and how it might provide a considerable difference at this time is

unknown. Regardless of the limitations, the data provided by this current study and findings can be equated to prior and present-day literature.

Recommendations

Recommendations are derived from the study's findings and its design's constraints. Schlossberg's Transition Theory (1984, 1995) and the Taxonomy for Transition Programming Model 2.0 created by Kohler et al. (2016) served as the conceptual framework through which the results of this study were established. I concluded that future studies should concentrate on family involvement, the use of middle and high school special education teachers' knowledge when implementing the transition process. Utilizing the recommendations offered from this study may make it transferable from one setting to another.

Also, professionals in special education face ethical and moral quandaries on a regular basis; these frequently go unsolved. The hurdles to group ethical decision-making are related to 1) a misalignment between individual and group viewpoints on what is best for students. 2) a lack of training in how to speak for and collaborate with others when ethical difficulties emerge. 3) A fear of retaliation or uneasiness with others who may disagree, including time away from teaching.

The individual needs of each student with a disability should be at the center of all decisions made by school officials who support special education programs. Some school administrators, however, recognize that the interests of the student and the collective interests of the school environment can contradict ethically. To resolve this disagreement, school administrators must rely on special educators to advocate for

students, listen to special educators and other service providers, collaborate with IEP transition teams, and believe that planning for a student's specific interests will improve the group. Unfortunately, such discussions may be encountered by conflict rather than collaboration.

As discussed in the literature review of this study, a systematic literature review by the National Secondary Transition Technical Assistance Center (NSTTAC, 2013) was completed that included the identification of secondary transition evidence-based practices and predictors of students post school success. In the first comprehensive literature review the research was focused on pinpointing secondary transition evidence-based practices for students' skill development. The second review focused on a connection in research that would determine in school secondary transition program components that may be associated with positive school outcomes for students with disabilities (Rowe et al., 2021; Wilkinson, 2020). Utilizing the recommendations offered from this study may make it transferable from one setting to another.

Implications

This study was conducted to listen to the voices of high school special education teachers regarding their perception of the transition planning process. The impact for positive social change may take the shape of professional development goals for teachers, such as expanding their knowledge base, building strong ethical values, commitment to encouraging/supporting collaboration, and participatory ways to decision-making that can influence change where it is needed, such as program creation, evaluation and improvement.

Additionally, to provide excellent ethical leadership for transition teams, today's school leaders should consider both the inside and outside pressures that utilize legal compliance as the starting and ending point for issues that arise and recognize the significance of successful transition planning for students with disabilities and the broader community. When faced with a dilemma, county/district leaders and special educators should follow a consistent decision-making procedure.

Their perceptions of the transition planning process could be utilized to address imperfections in the process and improve activities for post school outcomes of students with disabilities after graduation. For secondary teachers, resources as well as the programs are successful only when effort is given to investing in them through the educational system. Consistency in practice is important for all stakeholders involved in the transition process. Most importantly, students with disabilities parents must involve themselves in the accountability role their child plays in their own education success. Future recommendations for research include inviting middle school eighth grade special education teachers as potential participants in the study. With the support of school leaders, parents, communities, district, and county policy makers, high school special education teachers and students with disabilities will be limitless in providing sound guidance, for programs and activities to enhance students endeavors as they enter adulthood.

Conclusion

For students with disabilities, transitioning to life outside of high school will be a lifelong voyage. To assist these students requires all stakeholders, parents, teachers,

policy makers, and service providers to continue collaborating to help the students have a straightforward transition to adult life. The results in this research study of high school special education teachers reveal there are gaps in the student with disabilities transition planning process to prepare them for postsecondary life. In this study the gaps are differences in practices across counties and states. The district mandates what should be put in transition plans that require special educators to do what they are told. Without feedback from these individuals who work with the students directly and daily on academics, and skills-based learning, their practices will not align with legislative mandates. Legislation puts emphasis on utilizing evidenced-based practices which have been proven to increase positive student with disabilities postschool outcomes (Rowe et al., 2021). However, this study revealed that such practices are not known by these educators.

The gaps occurred because secondary high school special education teachers lacked knowledge and skills which prevented them from implementing appropriate transition procedures (Mazzotti et al., 2021; Reeves, 2019). This present study revealed missed opportunities for open communication between special educators and district leaders, of the varying ways of writing IEP plans, and implementing the transition planning process across counties and districts. In the future, if secondary high school special education teachers are made aware of secondary transition research-based practices and predictors of positive postschool success, have their voice heard regarding evaluation, development, and improvement of programs, through collaborative efforts with all stakeholders, (students, parents, principals, administration, county, and state

leaders) improvement in student outcomes may occur. High school special education teachers understand that student success is dependent on collective work, not individual work.

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Appendix A: Email Invitation to Participate in the Study

Dear **(Insert Participant's name)**:

This email is an invitation for your consideration to participate in a research study I will be conducting as a component of my Doctoral degree Department of Special Education at Walden University under the supervision of Dr. Billie V. Andersson. The purpose of the study is to investigate high school special education teachers' perceptions regarding the transition planning process that supports students with disabilities leaving high school in preparation for postsecondary life.

Your participation in this study is strictly voluntary and will involve an audio-recorded interview using a handheld device and lasting approximately 45-60 minutes. Should you decide to participate, the interview session location will be your choice, and interviewed via telephone instead of zoom (due to possible privacy issues of accidental video recordings). In the session, you can decline to answer any questions. Additionally, you can withdraw from the study at any time.

Please see the consent form below in the email. Sign and date. The window to partake in this study is open for two weeks. Thank you in advance for your assistance with this study.

Sincerely,

Anne Bell
Walden University Doctoral Student

Acquiring your Consent:

If this study is understood and you are ready to make a decision, please denote your consent below.

Printed Name of Participant _____

Date of Consent _____

Participant Signature _____

Researcher's Signature _____

Appendix B: Interview Protocol

Icebreaker Questions:

- How many years have you been working with transition plans for high school students with disabilities?
- How long have you been teaching at this school? What has been your experience utilizing the transition planning process?
- The purpose of this interview is to obtain information that will help me understand your perception of the transition planning practices that high school special educators utilize.

Teachers Interview Protocol:

1. What are your perceptions of transition planning practices currently being used that support students with disabilities prepare for postsecondary life?
2. What are your perceptions as your responsibility postsecondary regarding the transition planning process when preparing students with disabilities for postsecondary life?
3. What types of post school success predictors do you utilize when preparing students with disabilities for postsecondary life?
4. What is your perception of the transition planning process? Describe it.
5. What types of training do you receive to implement the transition planning process for students with disabilities? Describe them. What evidence-based strategies if any, do you use?

6. As a special education teacher what role do you play in the program development, improvement, and evaluation of transition related services?
7. What are some challenges or barriers you perceive in implementing the transition process?
8. Do you have a transition specialist for support? If so, how is this person utilized? If not, do you think this support is needed?
9. How do high school special education teachers implement the transition process for students with disabilities as they prepare for postsecondary life?
10. Situation: What do you perceive are barriers when preparing students with disabilities to leave high school for postsecondary life? Describe.
11. Self: What is the current practice you use to assist the students that need advocating skills for the workforce?
12. Support: What type of resources do you utilize to help students with disabilities prepare for life after high school?
13. Strategies: What are some current transition programs you utilize? Are there any other transition programs you can recommend that are needed to help you prepare students for post-secondary life?
14. Is there any other information that you feel might be important and will contribute to this study?