3-4-2024

Preschool Teachers' Perspectives on Implementing the Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning Teaching Pyramid Strategies to Address Challenging Behaviors in the Classroom

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This is to certify that the doctoral study by

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Walden University
2024

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MA, Brandman University, 2011

BS, University of LaVerne, 2009

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

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February, 2024

Abstract

Preschool teachers in a small county in a southern state are among a growing number of teachers who have expressed concern about not having the skills needed to support young children with challenging behaviors. The Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning (CSEFEL) teaching pyramid was developed to help preschool teachers minimize behavioral problems in the classroom. There is a need for preschool teachers to implement strategies for addressing challenging behaviors in the classroom. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the perspectives of preschool teachers on implementing the strategies of the CSEFEL pyramid to address preschool children's challenging behaviors in the classroom. The conceptual framework in the study was Blumer's interactionist approach, which integrates human interactions in the social world to understand and interpret the environment. A basic qualitative research method with interviews was used to explore preschool teachers' perspectives on the CSEFEL teaching pyramid strategies. A purposeful sample of 11 preschool teachers who had completed training on the CSEFEL teaching pyramid series was selected to articulate perspectives on the implementation of the teaching pyramid strategies to address challenging behaviors in the classroom. Interviews were conducted, and open coding was used to analyze the data collected. The study results showed that the participants believed the CSEFEL strategies did have a positive influence on challenging behaviors. This study may promote positive social change by providing county stakeholders with information that can be used to make decisions on the usage of the CSEFEL teaching pyramid by preschool teachers with children exhibiting challenging behaviors in the classroom.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my children, Angel and Luz Olea. I hope that the long hours I have invested in this process show you that everything is possible. All my accomplishments are for you. You both are my reason, and my life would not be complete without you. I thank God for you. You saved me. You made me want to be someone my children are proud of.

Acknowledgments

To my children, Angel and Luz Olea, thank you for making me the person I am today. You are my motivation, and all I've ever wanted is the best for both of you. To my husband, thank you for sticking by my side through all these years. Thank you for never letting me quit and supporting me in every way possible. Madre, gracias por nunca perder la fe en mi. Gracias por querer me asta cuando no me lo merecia. All my hard work is thanks to you. I love you so much.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

The Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning (CSEFEL) teaching pyramid is an evidence-based systematic framework that provides teaching strategies for childhood educators to work with children demonstrating challenging behaviors (WestEd Center for Child & Family Studies, 2018). Challenging behaviors are any repeated patterns of behaviors that interfere with or risk young children's optimal learning, engagement, or prosocial interactions with peers and adults (Harvey et al., 2021). It is essential for young children with challenging behaviors to receive evidence-based early interventions to support school success (Mitchell et al., 2018). Teachers need evidence-based training to support children's success while in preschool.

In this qualitative study, I explored preschool teachers' perspectives on implementing the CSEFEL teaching pyramid strategies to address children's challenging behaviors in the classroom. My study was conducted in a small county in a southern state where preschool teachers were trained on CSEFEL strategies to address challenging behaviors in the classroom. The results of this study add to the literature on preschool children and challenging behaviors focusing on the CSEFEL teaching pyramid strategies. In this chapter, I present the background of the problem, the problem statement, the purpose of the study, the research questions, the conceptual framework, the study's scope and limitations, and the study's significance. I also present a brief look at the literature on challenging behavior and the need to provide more training to support preschool teachers in working with challenging behaviors.

Background

Teachers with insufficient training and resources often are asked to address preschool children's challenging behaviors (Hemmeter et al., 2021). According to Allday (2018), handling challenging behaviors remains one of the biggest challenges for preschool teachers. An et al. (2019) stated that one in 10 children below 5 years demonstrates challenging behaviors. About 12% to 20% of students demonstrating challenging behaviors are in the schools' general population (e.g., elevated inattention and impulsivity; Owens et al., 2018). Granja et al. (2020) mentioned that although many early educators receive training on challenging behaviors, some teachers continue to lack the essential training to support young children in the classroom. As a result, early educators' skills are often tested when confronted by children demonstrating challenging behaviors. Baughan et al. (2019) found that teachers need more training and coaching on behavior management and communicating social-emotional skills for young children.

Teachers in early childhood programs need to be prepared to support children demonstrating challenging behaviors (Hemmeter et al., 2021). Granja et al. (2020) explained how evidence demonstrated that preschool teachers are more vulnerable to stress and the use of ineffective strategies when managing challenging behaviors. In 2009, a small county presented a basic overview of the CSEFEL teaching pyramid in the research state for the first time. In 2016, the research county offered the CSEFEL teaching pyramid training to 55 early care and education (ECE) providers for the first time. The training series specifically trained ECE providers in CSEFEL teaching pyramid strategies to address challenging behaviors. Now that the program has been in effect for 7

years, my research will allow teachers to share their perspectives on the teaching pyramid model.

According to Zee et al. (2017), more research is needed to determine preschool teachers' perspectives regarding managing challenging behavior. Through my study, I explored teachers' perspectives regarding implementing the CSEFEL teaching pyramid strategies to support them in addressing preschool children's challenging behaviors in the classroom. My research study may contribute to the knowledge gap on how early childhood teachers deal with challenging behaviors in the research county.

Problem Statement

The problem I addressed is the need for preschool teachers to implement strategies that address challenging behaviors in the classroom (see Hemmeter et al., 2021). Preschool teachers in a small county in a southern state are among a growing number who have expressed concern to their administrators about not having the skills needed to support young children with challenging behaviors, supporting Granja et al. (2020). National data have suggested that 10% to 20% of preschool children in the United States display challenging behaviors (Conners Edge et al., 2018). More than one fourth of preschool directors have identified concerns with teachers' preparation to manage challenging behavior (Garrity et al., 2019).

There is a gap in practice on how early childhood teachers deal with challenging behaviors. The CSEFEL teaching pyramid was developed to train preschool teachers in strategies to minimize behavioral issues in the classroom. Now that some teachers in the research county have attended the CSEFEL teaching pyramid training series, a study was

needed to explore teachers' perspectives regarding implementing the CSEFEL teaching pyramid strategies. A local CSEFEL leadership team consisted of county administrators who identified the need to know if teachers in their programs recognized improvement in the classroom after attending the CSEFEL teaching pyramid series (CSEFEL, 2019). Stakeholders in the research county recognized the need for preschool teacher feedback on implementing the CSEFEL teaching pyramid strategies to determine program sustainability. The Teaching Pyramid Benchmarks of Quality Report 2021 (see Appendix A) provided local public data on the need to identify whether preschool teachers feel the CSEFEL teaching pyramid model supports them when addressing challenging behaviors in the preschool classroom. Research county public information from 2016 to 2021 (see Appendix B) showed that 58 preschool programs had completed the CSEFEL series of training, and there is a need to focus on more use of data. Directors in the research county specified the importance of identifying whether preschool teachers believe the CSEFEL teaching pyramid model supports their everyday work when dealing with challenging behaviors in the classroom. Given the evidence of the challenges teachers face when dealing with challenging behaviors, there is a need to understand early childhood teachers' perspectives in the research county regarding implementing the CSEFEL teaching pyramid strategies to support them in addressing children's challenging behaviors in the classroom.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore preschool teachers' perspectives on implementing the CSEFEL teaching pyramid strategies to support them

in addressing preschool children's challenging behaviors in the classroom. I conducted a basic qualitative study using interviews to gain preschool teachers' perspectives on implementing the CSEFEL teaching pyramid strategies. Study results may support county administrators in deciding whether to continue funding CSEFEL teaching pyramid implementation in the research county. In addition, my study results may encourage new preschool teachers to attend the CSEFEL teaching pyramid training series to help them develop behavioral management skills. There is a gap in practice on how early childhood teachers deal with challenging behaviors. The CSEFEL was introduced to specifically train ECE staff on strategies to address challenging behaviors in the classroom. Since preschool teachers in the research county had attended the Teaching Pyramid Model professional training series, a study was needed to explore teachers' perspectives on implementing the CSEFEL teaching pyramid strategies to support them in addressing preschool children's challenging behaviors in the classroom. The results of my research may provide new data for stakeholders in the research community to support decision-making regarding CSEFEL teaching pyramid model funding in the research county.

Research Question

RQ: What are preschool teachers' perspectives on implementing the CSEFEL teaching pyramid strategies and their influence on preschool children's challenging behaviors?

Conceptual Framework

I used Blumer's (1969) symbolic interactionism approach, grounded on integrating human interactions in the social world to understand and interpret environments, as my conceptual framework. Blumer stated that meaning and interpretation of the social world develop from the interaction between people. Schwandt (1998) explained that one's opinions and character respond to and develop through interactions with others. Sathpathy (2013) further explained that symbolic interactionism is a social theory that involves studying communication patterns, interpretation, and adjustment between individuals. The interactionism approach contributed to the understanding of shared standard practices of the CSEFEL teaching pyramid among the participants in my study through the social interactions I had with each participant during the interview process (Blumer, 1969). To interpret the CSEFEL teaching pyramid's influence on preschool teachers in the classroom, I first provided them the opportunity to share their perspectives.

I used Blumer's interactionist framework to understand preschool teachers' interpretations of the CSEFEL teaching pyramid strategies' influence on preschool children's challenging behaviors through the shared social interactions and interview questions used during the interview process. I interacted with preschool teachers using interviews as the primary source to gather data to answer the research question: What are preschool teachers' perspectives on implementing the CSEFEL teaching pyramid strategies and their influence on preschool children's challenging behaviors? The research question focused on the preschool teachers' perspectives on implementing the

CSEFEL teaching pyramid strategies. Blumer's interactionist framework related to the study approach and was crucial to the research question because the theory addresses meaning as arising in the interaction process between people (Blumer, 1969). I explain Blumer's interactionist approach more thoroughly in Chapter 2.

Nature of the Study

I used a basic qualitative research design with interviews to explore preschool teachers' perspectives on strategies used to address challenging behaviors. Qualitative research with an interactionist approach allowed me to gather data in the form of a narrative to interpret preschool teachers' personal experiences using the CSEFEL teaching pyramid (see Al-Ababneh, 2020; Blumer, 1969). The qualitative approach was most appropriate for this study as I was looking to explore the personal perspectives of preschool teachers who had attended the CSEFEL teaching pyramid training series. Because qualitative research involves examining people in their natural surroundings and seeking understanding from their personal experiences and other phenomena, a qualitative approach best suited my study (Ravitch & Carl, 2019).

Al-Ababneh (2020) stated that qualitative methodology is designed to determine the meaning of social phenomena. In my study, the phenomenon was the influence of the CSEFEL teaching pyramid on children's challenging behaviors. Anderson (2017) specified that the importance of interpretive and naturalistic inquiry characterizes qualitative research. Anderson also stated that researchers who undertake qualitative methods prioritize ideologies to engage in sense-making or interpretation of phenomena regarding meanings, values, beliefs, and experiences. The researcher must identify

essential consistencies to make sense of and identify meaning from all the material and data gained from each interview. I used the TranscribeMe! transcription service to transcribe the study interviews after each session. I saved each transcript, reviewed the transcripts multiple times, and then analyzed the data. I used the interview transcripts to code and identify concepts found throughout the collected data (see Gibbs, 2018; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). I used open and axial coding using thematic analysis to analyze the participant interviews to answer the research question.

Definitions

Challenging behaviors: Any undesirable behavior patterns that interfere with children's optimal learning and prosocial interactions between peers and adults (Harvey et al., 2021).

The teaching pyramid: A systematic framework on evidence-based strategies to help early childhood educators meet the needs of the growing number of children with challenging behaviors and mental health concerns (Baughan et al., 2019).

California Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning (CSEFEL) teaching pyramid: The teaching pyramid is the name used by a collaborative on the social-emotional foundation for early learning to describe the training and technical assistance for the approach developed by the national CSEFEL (WestEd Center for Child & Family Studies, 2018).

Social-emotional competence: A set of self-regulation skills, self-concept, self-efficacy, and prosocial behaviors within teachers and peers (Baughan et al., 2019).

Positive Behavior Support (PBS): Research-based assessment, intervention, and data-based decision-making focused on improving children's social and emotional competencies, creating supportive environments, and diminishing the occurrence of problem behaviors (Ai et al., 2022).

Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (PBIS): Evidence-based framework used in schools to create a positive learning climate and reduce challenging behaviors (Cunningham et al., 2020).

Assumptions

The first assumption was that the teacher participants I interviewed would respond with honest perspectives regarding implementing the CSEFEL teaching pyramid strategies. I also assumed that the teachers participating in the study would have experience with children demonstrating challenging behaviors in the preschool classroom. My final assumption was that the teachers selected would represent a diverse group of preschool teachers in the small county. These assumptions were necessary because the quality of interview data depends on the participants' authenticity and understanding (Ravitch & Carl, 2019).

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of this qualitative study was to explore preschool teachers' perspectives on implementing the CSEFEL teaching pyramid strategies and their influence on preschool students' challenging behaviors. The definition of challenging behaviors can differ among preschool teachers based on their perspectives and years of experience (Beaudoin et al., 2018). Teachers' tolerance levels toward children with

challenging behaviors can differ based on preschool teachers' values and background, potentially affecting teacher–child relationships (Sutherland et al., 2018). A theorist who might have been included in a conceptual framework but was not included in my study is Bronfenbrenner (1977), who introduced Bronfenbrenner's ecological system theory. I did not select Bronfenbrenner's framework because I was not looking at the children's macrosystem and the quality and context of the child's environment (see Bronfenbrenner, 1977). I focused on preschool teachers' perspectives regarding implementing the CSEFEL teaching pyramid strategies to support them in addressing preschool children's challenging behaviors in the classroom. My study was the first on the CSEFEL teaching pyramid strategies in the small county in the research state.

The study was delimited to interview a minimum of 10–12 preschool teachers using the following inclusion criteria: completed entire CSEFEL teaching pyramid series of training and 1 year of implementation as a preschool teacher. The geographic delimitation addressed the possibility that behavior expectations of preschool children are dependent on county norms. I excluded supervisors and teaching assistants from the study because they have different roles in the preschool classroom. These delimitations may have limited the transferability of study results to similar populations in other states.

Limitations

This study was conducted with a few limitations. The limitations of this qualitative study included selection, location, lack of observation, and research bias. Participation in the study was voluntary but limited to preschool teachers who fully completed the CSEFEL teaching pyramid training series. Because the CSEFEL teaching

pyramid framework was developed by the CSEFEL in California, the number of available participants was limited. Still, it was sufficient for gathering in-depth data about preschool teachers' perspectives. Due to these limitations, the data may be challenging to transfer to other settings outside the southern state. The current pandemic limited the feasibility of interviewing a more comprehensive range of preschool teachers. Ravitch and Carl (2019) explained the importance of attempting to understand participants in their natural settings. Therefore, the need for preschool teachers' observations created a significant limitation.

I am aware of the biases I brought to my study based on my years of experience with the CSEFEL teaching pyramid model and working with children who demonstrate challenging behaviors in the preschool classroom. I work in the research county, and I am well acquainted with preschool teachers in the research county. I had also completed the CSEFEL teaching pyramid training series and implemented the strategies as a preschool teacher. My personal biases could have impacted my view of participant responses. Therefore, I practiced objectivity during data collection and analysis by using a reflective journal to record my thoughts and potential biases during the interviews. I listened to each interview recording and separated the actual data from my writing thoughts, ideas, and perceptions. Ravitch and Carl (2019) advised that keeping a research journal helps researchers voice their feelings and opinions, which leads to self-reflection.

Significance

My research study results contributed new data on preschool teachers' perspectives on implementing the CSEFEL teaching pyramid strategies and their

influence on preschool children's challenging behaviors. Because the training series is multitiered and training costs are expensive, preschool programs and teachers are interested in identifying whether the CSEFEL teaching pyramid strategies make a difference in addressing challenging classroom behaviors (Hemmeter et al., 2021). In Conners Edge et al.'s (2018) study, the researchers identified that teachers wanted accessible training on classroom strategies to prevent and manage challenging behaviors to reduce the suspension and expulsion of young children. My study contributed new data to the research county that can be used by CSEFEL teaching pyramid stakeholders when making decisions regarding using the CSEFEL teaching pyramid in the research county. My study provided information on the CSEFEL teaching pyramid to be used by other scholars to investigate the model and the effects the framework has on children with challenging behaviors. The study outcomes may contribute to positive social change because the findings may encourage stakeholders in the research county to explore the CSEFEL teaching pyramid further.

Summary

In this basic qualitative study, I explored preschool teachers' perspectives regarding implementing the CSEFEL teaching pyramid strategies to support them in addressing preschool children's challenging behaviors. In Chapter 1, I introduced preschool teachers' problems in implementing strategies that address challenging behaviors in the classroom. I included the background literature that identified the lack of teacher training to deal with challenging classroom behaviors. The chapter also included the research problem, purpose, research question, framework, assumptions, and

limitations. In Chapter 2, I present related literature to demonstrate an understanding of the problem. I also provide details on my conceptual framework, Blumer's (1969) interactionist approach, and how it helped me interpret preschool teachers' perspectives.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The problem I addressed in my research is the need for preschool teachers to implement strategies that address challenging behaviors in the classroom. Preschool teachers in a small county in a southern state are among the growing number of preschool teachers who express concerns about not having the skills needed to support young children with challenging behaviors. In addition, early childhood educators reported that they feel unprepared to support these young children demonstrating challenging behaviors (Hemmeter et al., 2021). In this qualitative study, I intended to explore preschool teachers' perspectives on implementing the CSEFEL teaching pyramid strategies to support them in addressing preschool children's challenging behaviors in the classroom. According to Hallett et al. (2019), social-emotional competence in young children is crucial and can predict school success. Topics of the pyramid framework presented to early-care preschool teachers include nurturing relationships, supportive classrooms, understanding behaviors, and working with families. The CSEFEL teaching pyramid strategies were developed to support early care educators dealing with challenging behaviors. My study explored preschool teachers' perspectives on implementing the CSEFEL teaching pyramid strategies to support them in addressing challenging behaviors in the classroom.

There is a need to gain more information on models such as the CSEFEL teaching pyramid and identify the effectiveness of implementing the strategies with preschool children. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore preschool teachers'

perspectives on implementing the CSEFEL teaching pyramid strategies to support them in addressing preschool children's challenging behaviors in the classroom.

This chapter includes a review of the current literature I explored to define challenging behaviors and identify current training to support teachers in dealing with challenging behaviors and findings on the pyramid framework that offer strategies to implement when working with children demonstrating challenging behaviors. The conceptual framework and relevance of the research are also addressed in Chapter 2.

Literature Search Strategy

I used the Walden Library to search for relevant literature in the following databases: Education Research Complete, ERIC, Google Scholar, PsycINFO, and SAGE Articles. The search words and phrases used included *challenging behavior, disruptive behavior, early childhood education, emotions, expulsion, externalized behavior, preschool children, preschool teacher, positive behavior support (PBS), social-emotional skills, teaching pyramid,* and *pyramid model.*

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework that grounded this study was Blumer's (1969) symbolic interactionism approach. The symbolic interactionism approach integrates human interactions in the social world to understand and interpret the environment. The symbolic interactionist function emphasizes that humans act based on interpretation and understanding (Atkinson & Housley, 2003). Blumer explained how symbolic interactionism rests on human beings acting toward things based on meaning, social interaction, and interpretation. I used social interactions as the primary communication

process to gather the data and interpret the results (Hałas, 2012). Using a socially appropriate method, such as interviews, was particularly useful in understanding preschool teachers' perspectives regarding the CSEFEL teaching pyramid strategies and the influence on preschool children's challenging behaviors. Blumer held a naturalistic stance. He believed that the study of conduct is conducted naturally (Blumer, 1980). Interactionists believe that people develop social skills through communication (Dewey et al., 1917). Mead introduced the interactionism approach in the early 1900s to specify how meaning is created and interpreted through social interactions (Blumer, 1969). Blumer, Mead's pupil, relied on Mead's unpublished work and developed his version, constructing what is now known as symbolic interactionism. Symbolic interactionism stipulates that to comprehend the actions of others, it is necessary to identify and participate in their world.

The logical connection between Blumer's framework and my study's nature was in determining how people react toward processes such as the CSEFEL teaching pyramid model based on the meaning the CSEFEL teaching pyramid creates for each person. Because teachers and children interact daily and engage in CSEFEL strategy implementation and practice in their day-to-day existence, teachers provided insight into their perspectives on the CSEFEL teaching pyramid strategies' influence in their preschool classroom. Blumer explained how meaning derives from social interactions with others experiencing similar situations and how meaning can be modified and interpreted differently by everyone. Blumer's theory supported my study's purpose as it focuses on human behavior, such as interactions between teacher and child during

CSEFEL teaching pyramid strategy implementation that result in gaining preschool teachers' perspectives on implementing the CSEFEL teaching pyramid strategies to support them in addressing preschool children's challenging behaviors in the classroom (see Blumer, 1980). Human beings share the ordinary and preestablished meaning of what is expected, and each guides their behavior by the meanings created (Blumer, 1969).

Blumer's interactionist approach supported me in interacting with preschool teachers to determine their roles through communication and work to interpret and understand each teacher's perspective on the CSEFEL pyramid model strategies (Atkinson & Housley, 2003). Blumer's approach incorporates an exploration of the CSEFEL teaching pyramid strategies, and I explored the influence that CSEFEL has on preschool children's challenging behaviors. I clearly identified the influence through relevant interview questions to create reliable data (Blumer, 1980). This approach helped me design the interview questions to focus on teachers' perspectives regarding the CSEFEL teaching pyramid strategies to understand their experiences. According to Bevir and Rhodes (2016), an interactionist approach involves using evidence provided during interviews to draw holistic analyses and interpret meanings. Brock and Beaman-Diglia (2018) stated that evidence-based strategies, such as the CSEFEL teaching pyramid, could help teachers reduce challenging behaviors by using positive reinforcement and techniques that incorporate classroom visuals for young children. Engaging with preschool teachers was essential to understand their perspectives regarding challenging behaviors. To interpret the influence that the CSEFEL teaching pyramid strategies have

had on preschool teachers' classroom behavior management, preschool teachers must have the opportunity to express their perspectives.

In my study, I explored preschool teachers' perspectives on implementing the CSEFEL teaching pyramid strategies using interviews. The interview process allowed me to interact with a minimum of 10–12 preschool teachers to determine their perspectives through the communication process. The CSEFEL teaching pyramid strategies provide preschool teachers with awareness of the importance of building solid relationships and providing a supportive environment for all children. The teachers' actions are determined by what preschool teachers have learned and are now implementing when dealing with challenging behaviors.

Literature Review Related to Key Concepts

The number of preschool children in the United States who meet the criteria for challenging behaviors has increased rapidly since 1990 (Agbaria, 2022). Preschool teachers in early childhood classrooms across the United States struggle to address challenging behaviors (Aksoy, 2020). Challenging behaviors can be expected in children's development, and providing adequate training to preschool teachers to deal with those behaviors in classroom settings is essential. Children suspended or excluded due to challenging behaviors tend to develop negative attitudes toward school and are 10 times more likely to drop out or be incarcerated as adults (Stegelin, 2018).

Challenging Behaviors

Challenging behaviors include behaviors that interfere with or risk children's optimal learning or engagement in prosocial interactions with adults and their peers (The

Boggs Center on Developmental Disabilities, 2020; Hooper & Schweiker, 2020). Challenging behaviors are repeated patterns of aggressive, noncompliant, or disruptive behavior that interferes with the child's ability to play, learn, and get along with others within an ECE environment (Granja et al., 2020; Salih et al., 2018). Challenging behaviors include violence, noncompliance, not joining activities, not sharing, lack of attention, throwing things, biting, impulsivity, hyperactivity, and crying for no reason (Dal & Akan, 2018; Dickinson et al., 2020; Green, 2018). Young children's aggressive, defiant, and oppositional behaviors can also be developmentally appropriate. However, challenging behaviors are precursors to delinquency and poor school outcomes (Salih et al., 2018). Approximately 14%–34% of preschool children demonstrate challenging behaviors in early childhood classrooms (Rakap et al., 2018). Challenging behaviors are disruptive, damaging, and interfere with interpersonal relationships and academic achievement. Öngören (2022) explained how challenging behaviors can impact children, peers, and adult relationships, creating many challenges in the classroom setting. There are different classifications for challenging behaviors, and the behaviors with specific characteristics are named challenging behaviors in general (Aksoy, 2020).

Challenging behaviors, both external and internal behaviors, interfere with children's academic learning opportunities and social interactions with peers and teachers, including structured academic-focused and less structured social interactions with peers and teachers (Bulotsky Shearer et al., 2020b). Externalizing behavior problems may include extrinsic behaviors such as aggression and hyperactivity. Internalizing behavior problems are introverted and can include somatic and anxiety problems in

young children (Aksoy, 2020; Davis & Qi, 2020). Challenging behaviors interfere with prosocial interactions, decrease optimal learning, and reduce teachers' performance and job satisfaction (Aksoy, 2020). Persistent challenging behaviors in preschool can predict challenges in social skills in grade school when early intervention is not provided early (Garrity et al., 2019).

Many children demonstrate challenging behaviors while learning to navigate and experience peer relationships (The Boggs Center on Developmental Disabilities, 2020). Challenging behaviors decrease children's ability to participate and engage in regular classroom routines (Hemmeter et al., 2022). Children exhibiting challenging behavior in preschool are often at risk for failure in school and adult life (Salih et al., 2018). In the Sibanda (2018) study, secondary teachers in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, identified that social-emotional competence is more important than math and literacy development in young children (Sibanda, 2018). Children must be socially and emotionally competent to move on to academics (Sibanda, 2018). Social-emotional development in the early years can impact children's school success when they do not learn the strategies to work and cope with others (Murano et al., 2020). Sibanda recommended more studies in a private school setting to replicate the results and compare them to the public-school environment.

Preschool children are expelled at more than 3 times the rate of children in K–12, and boys of color are expelled 3 to 4 times more than their peers (Garrity & Longstreth, 2020). An initiative was conducted in Arkansas to reduce the suspension and expulsion of young children due to challenging behaviors, which demonstrated that 40.8% of ECE professionals suspended at least one child within the year of the study, and 9% of ECE

professionals expelled at least one or more children (Conners Edge et al., 2018). The initiative implementation strategies included workgroups, assessments of local needs, and ongoing consultation to guarantee that all stakeholders were on board. Key Arkansas ECE stakeholders established an advisory board committee to develop new policies and action plans. Stakeholders developed formal policies to mandate change. The Arkansas committee established processes for ECE professionals to follow before the dismissal of a child was granted. The initiative assessed Arkansas's local needs and barriers to refine processes, communication, and training efforts. All key stakeholders participated in mandatory training designed to provide all participants with the resources they needed to support classroom practice and support (Conners Edge et al., 2018). Formative assessment results demonstrated that long-term training and support are needed for ECE professionals dealing with challenging behaviors. About 89.5% of the directors agreed that the training helped them understand why children should not be expelled from ECE programs due to challenging behaviors (Conners Edge et al., 2018).

Different factors contribute to children's challenging behaviors in preschool classrooms. Children who demonstrate challenging behaviors are labeled as troubled, often experiencing peer rejection, school failure, and issues in terms of interacting with family members and teachers (Aksoy, 2020). Negative home interactions can sometimes create challenging behaviors (Leijten et al., 2018). The lack of positive parent involvement hinders social relationships that transfer into the preschool classroom. Parents contribute to challenging behaviors by unintentionally rewarding disruptive behavior instead of positive behavior. The lack of good adult presence and adult–child

interactions also increase challenging behavior. A significant factor contributing to challenging behaviors is parental mental health issues that often interfere with positive adult guidance (Conners Edge et al., 2018). Schulz et al. (2019) identified that challenging child behavior is often intensified by inconsistent parenting behavior that unintentionally reinforces disruptive behavior. Schulz et al.'s study on disruptive behavior consisted of 110 parents of young children. The study investigated how young children's disruptive behavior shaped momentary parental thoughts of self-efficacy and feelings of stress predicting parental behavior. Shulz et al.'s study explored parent reactions to disruptive behavior. The results demonstrated that challenging situations created higher stress levels and low self-efficacy in parents (Schulz et al., 2019). Parents who experience low self-efficacy are more prone to frustration and are less likely to persist in dealing with their child's challenging behaviors (Schulz et al., 2019).

An estimated 95% of children with developmental disabilities demonstrate challenging behavior (see Thomas & Lafasakis, 2019). As a result, academic underachievement and learning disabilities are visible in their learning achievements. Thomas and Lafasakis's (2019) study evaluated the effects of an acceptability questionnaire on classroom aides' treatment integrity during behavior intervention plan (BIP) implementation. The study addressed how children with assigned aides who were aware of and educated on the child's disability and the behaviors the child experienced were more likely to support children's growth in the classroom. Intervention integrity was visible when aides were more accepting of and willing to work with children with challenging behaviors. The participants of this study included four female aides who

worked with one preschool-age child with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). All the participants were directed to implement the same BIP strategies when working with the child in the study. The study identified that proper BIP implementation and intervention acceptance demonstrated better implementation integrity and improved behaviors. Like Thomas and Lafasakis, Rivard et al. (2021) identified that about 60%–94% of children with autism present challenging behaviors. Rivard et al. conducted a concept study on the Prevent-Teach-Reinforce-for-Young-Children (PTR-CY) Program, which assessed parent participation with an expectation of demonstrating an association between decreased challenging behaviors with an increase in social interactions and less parent stress.

In Rivard et al.'s (2021) study, an early intensive behavioral intervention (EIBI) was used to promote functional and adaptive skills in children. A functional behavior assessment (FBA) is a behavior intervention tool like the EIBI that may be used to describe the behavior, identify why the behavior is occurring, and design an intervention focused on reducing the unwanted behavior and teaching replacement behaviors supporting the same purpose (An et al., 2019). The An et al. (2019) study identified that to systematically prevent, identify, and intervene in early challenging behaviors, the Division for Early Childhood (DEC, 2014) recommended using a functional-behavioral-assessment-based approach for children whose behaviors may result from a disability.

Research has shown that children of low socioeconomic status (SES) are more likely to demonstrate challenging behaviors, and about 46.5% enter school with limited social-emotional skills (Baughan et al., 2019). Head Start Programs were created to provide comprehensive services to young children and to support families from low-

income backgrounds (Stoiber & Gettinger, 2021). Children living in poverty are reported as engaging in higher rates of challenging behavior than their typically developing peers (Golden et al., 2021). Bulotsky Shearer et al. (2020b) identified that children living in adverse circumstances were more prone to challenging behaviors.

Aksoy's (2020) study explored the most frequent challenging behaviors faced by preschool teachers in the classroom and the discipline strategies implemented to diminish the challenging behaviors. The participants included 10 different preschool teachers of children aged four to five in a city in the mid-south region of the United States. Aksoy identified how challenging behaviors hinder children's development and educational experience and affect classroom management, peer interactions, and teacher job satisfaction. Like Aksoy, Williford, and Vitiello (2020) identified how disruptive behavior hinders teacher satisfaction and impacts teacher practice. Aksoy determined each teacher used different discipline strategies and approaches based on opinions, teacher experience, and background. Aksoy explained how different discipline approaches focus on different situations. Aksoy introduced the various approaches in the literature presently used in the classroom, including the control, social, assertive, instructional, and practical communication approaches. Aksoy's study showed that preschool teachers implemented appropriate strategies to create a better classroom environment. Yoder and Williford (2019) reviewed teacher perceptions of preschool students' disruptive behavior and the impact of teacher demographics, professional backgrounds, and beliefs on their perceptions. In the study, 160 preschool classrooms participated, with 2,427 children between 2 to 5 years old. Yoder and Williford found

that teachers' first impression of children's behavior determined how the teachers would interact with the student. Teacher-child interactions impact how students perceive school and shape their academic experience. A teacher's perception of a student is formed at the beginning of the school year, and teachers have difficulty interacting with students they view as disruptive. Emphasis should be placed on developmentally appropriate behavior expectations and attention skills to help teachers enhance their skills to work with young children (Yoder & Williford, 2019).

DuPaul and Cleminshaw (2020) and Zeng et al. (2021) explained the potential reasons for challenging behaviors in young children and the importance of implementing research-based practices to support preschool challenging behaviors. Research has demonstrated that young children can exhibit high rates of emotions, self-regulation, and self-control difficulties. Children with attention-deficit/ hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and oppositional defiant disorder (ODD) often demonstrate challenging behaviors in the preschool classroom (Zeng et al., 2021). Emotional and behavioral disorders are present in an estimated 9.5% to 19.5% of preschool-aged children (Hardy & McLeod, 2020). According to Zeng et al., about 5.4% of young children with disabilities were suspended or expelled within their study timeframe. DuPaul and Cleminshaw (2020) specified about 53% of preschoolers with ADHD were suspended or expelled from preschool due to challenging behaviors. Zeng et al. confirmed that impairments and developmental delays could also be associated with challenging behaviors in the preschool classroom.

Preschool Teacher Preparation and Challenging Behaviors

The literature I researched on preschool teacher preparation aligns with the purpose of my study as it provides insight into training to aid preschool teachers that work with children demonstrating challenging behaviors (Reyes & Gilliam, 2021). Challenging behaviors can result from numerous factors. Teachers need professional training to address challenging behaviors and social-emotional needs to enhance the development of preschool children (Murano et al., 2020).

Murano et al. (2020) assessed the effects of social-emotional learning on preschool students with challenging behaviors. This meta-analysis included 15,498 students in preschool settings. According to Chow et al. (2020), preschool is a period of optimal development, and children need more than academics to succeed in school and in life. Teachers need the proper training to enhance their skills and build strategies to support social-emotional development within their classroom learning environments (Chow et al., (2021). Chow et al. (2021), examined teacher education versus teachers' years of experience and the association with teachers' reports of exclusionary practices. The examined teacher characteristics helped to understand whether teacher preparation through master's level university training or the opportunity to learn over time through practice is related to how teachers respond to children's challenging behaviors (Chow et al., 2021). Teachers must also model the skills learned when working with young children. Understanding children's needs may help teachers model specific skills they want children to practice in the classroom. Children require support to target specific needs to improve challenging behaviors (Murano et al., 2020).

Positive teacher-child interactions are essential in the preschool classroom (Bulotsky Shearer et al., 2020b). Preschool teachers often lack the skill to identify the start of challenging behaviors. ECE professionals must first recognize the difference between developmentally appropriate behavior versus behaviors outside the acceptable range (Riggleman & Morgan, 2018). Riggleman and Morgan's (2018) pilot study reviewed the effectiveness of the Behavioral Expectation Discrepancy Tool (B-EDT), designed to identify critical behavior expectations within the classroom environment. The pilot study confirmed the importance and effectiveness of helping teachers identify behavior problems and developing interventions to support children's needs. Although the tool demonstrated effectiveness, the pilot study also determined the need for teacher training to identify challenging behaviors better and understand appropriate developmental behaviors (Riggleman & Morgan, 2018).

Understanding the relationship between teacher preparation and classroom management is critical. According to Reyes and Gilliam (2021), teachers must be prepared to know to deal with challenging behaviors. Teachers with training on children's social-emotional and cognitive development felt more capable and comfortable when dealing with challenging behaviors and applying learning strategies that promoted an encouraging classroom environment (An et al., 2019). Quality training opportunities support a teacher's professional knowledge and self-efficacy. Reyes and Gilliam (2021) examined the effectiveness of Ohio's Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation (ECMHC) system in a statewide randomized controlled trial that consisted of fifty-one classrooms, fifty-seven preschool teachers, and one hundred ninety preschool students.

The researchers identified six pathways in their trial study. The following two pathways introduced in the study were believed to change adult behavior and potentially reduce challenging behaviors. Pathway 3 stated increasing teacher self-efficacy demonstrated the importance of teacher training to increase self-efficacy by teaching strategies to reduce challenging behaviors. Pathway 6 stated directly addressing challenging behaviors using evidence-informed strategies also demonstrated the need to teach strategies to address challenging behaviors in the classroom setting. The strategies that demonstrated a reduction in challenging behaviors included training adults to interact positively with young children by providing positive reinforcement (Reyes & Gilliam, 2021). Reyes and Gilliam suggested more intensive teacher training with teacher participation and coaching sessions to reduce challenging behaviors significantly.

Early care and education (ECE) professionals come from diverse educational backgrounds and experiences. Several studies identified the importance of training to manage challenging behaviors in the classroom. Beaudoin et al. (2018) introduced a study conducted on preschool teachers from Croatia. In the study, preschool teachers confirmed the need for more competence in managing challenging behaviors due to the lack of prior experience and training. A study in Japan demonstrated the need for more teacher training when working with children with challenging behaviors (Inoue & Inoue, 2021). Teachers with more training demonstrated more knowledge on how to deal with challenging behaviors in the preschool classroom (Inoue & Inoue, 2021). Beaudoin et al. (2018), investigated the potential influence of experience, education, and access to professional support on their perspectives on managing challenging behaviors. The

results confirmed a correlation between teacher stress and challenging behaviors. The results suggested that preschool teachers needed more classroom management training. Teachers who feel unprepared to manage challenging behaviors result in higher levels of stress and burnout (Jeon et al., 2018).

According to Chow et al. (2021), teachers' education levels and experience impacted teachers' responses when managing challenging behaviors. Preschool teachers with fewer years of experience reported engaging in exclusionary discipline tactics compared to their more experienced preschool colleagues. Chow et al.'s (2021) research question asked why preschool teachers engaged in exclusionary practices in preschool classrooms. Preschool teachers reported various reasons for using exclusionary practices. The study's results showed that preschool teachers' teaching experience and training were directly associated with using less exclusionary discipline strategies when working with children demonstrating challenging behaviors. Chow et al.'s results differ from previous research, indicating that years of experience did not predict the use of exclusionary practices in center-based programs (Zinsser et al., 2019). Significantly, novice teachers benefit from professional development that will help them learn the skills to support children demonstrating challenging behaviors. Chow et al. (2021), suggested future studies to analyze how well teachers use, implement, and maintain suggested strategies for handling challenging behaviors and their perspectives on the efficacy of these strategies.

Parents and teachers must communicate effectively and develop collaborative relationships with positive behavioral support (Chai & Lieberman-Betz, 2018). In their

previous article, Chai and Lieberman-Betz (2018) discussed positive behavior supports, an evidence-based approach that needs to be implemented between teachers and parents to support children with challenging behaviors. Challenging behaviors not only disrupt the school environment but can also negatively impact the family. Chai and Lieberman-Betz provided strategies to help parents of young children address challenging behaviors in the home. Chai and Lieberman-Betz identified three elements to achieve behavior changes in young children. The first element introduced family-centeredness. Family-centeredness is crucial when achieving behavior changes in young children to guarantee the whole family implements the same strategies. The second element discussed the importance of family and professional partnerships to connect the home and school life when working with children with challenging behaviors. The third element identified the importance of children enrolled in inclusion programs to support the child in the natural environment. Chai and Lieberman-Betz discussed how teachers need to work with families to develop and implement strategies that will enable the entire family to participate. Classroom teachers play a vital role in helping families carry over successful classroom strategies to the home environment (Chai & Lieberman-Betz, 2018). Chai and Lieberman-Betz provided information on strategies to reduce challenging behaviors.

Agbaria (2022) identified that teachers often lack the skills to collaborate and communicate with children's families. As a result, the rapport between teacher and parent is threatened. Partnerships between teachers and parents must create a consistent routine between home and school life (Agbaria, 2022). Agbaria explained the possible link between parenting styles and parental emotional intelligence to risk factors for

challenging behaviors among kindergarten children in Israel. The sample size consisted of 524 parents of children 4 to 5 years old. Parents completed three questionnaires to identify parenting style, parent emotional intelligence, and children's challenging behaviors. The questionnaire findings revealed differences in the behaviors parents experienced based on their parenting style. Parents with an authoritative parenting style who were uninvolved with low emotional intelligence were linked to children with more challenging behaviors. Authoritative parenting styles with higher demands demonstrated more warmth toward their children and were associated with children with less visible behaviors (Agbaria, 2022). The study's results confirmed the different outcomes of children's challenging behaviors based on parent involvement. Although the study provided insight into the association of parenting styles, it was essential to incorporate parent perspectives of children's challenging behaviors and the benefits of parent-teacher relationships to support home and school life. Agbaria (2022) warrants future attention to behavioral reports and observations to add reliability and validity to the self-reported results.

Fefer et al.'s (2020) study provided the findings of a preliminary experimental evaluation of an approach to engaging parents of children whose behaviors were unresponsive to the Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (PBIS) Tier 1 approach, which provides universal strategies for all children. The study evaluated a behavioral approach to improve teacher-parent communication and student on-task classroom behavior. The study consisted of multiple randomized baselines (MBL) across participant design with five teacher-student-parent triads. Participants completed two phases,

including a baseline and a positive parent contact (PPC) intervention implementation. The PPC tool is a low-demand positive behavioral intervention created to improve teacher-parent communication to impact children's classroom behavior (Fefer et al., 2020). The study showed an increase in teacher-parent collaboration, but the results did not identify improvements in a specific behavior. Yet, teachers and parents agreed the intervention enhanced the communication they needed to improve the teacher-parent partnership (Fefer et al., 2020).

According to Kelly et al. (2021), early childhood educators and families can successfully prevent challenging behaviors when functional-based interventions and tiered frameworks such as PBIS are used with fidelity. Kelly et al., identified the need for culturally responsive interactions between parents and teachers when addressing challenging behaviors. The researchers conducted a qualitative examination on family members and early childhood educators to design and test a web-based application to facilitate family professional communication to support young children's challenging behaviors. The study was conducted within a four-year multi-stage intervention mixed method with focus groups to gather information from parents and professionals (Kelly et al., 2021). The responses emphasized the importance of communication to build stronger family-professional partnerships. The results suggested better partnerships were built when communication went well, improving positive family outcomes (Kelly et al., 2021).

Bulotsky Shearer et al. (2020a) identified the need for more teacher training to address challenging behaviors. Preschool teachers need early intervention skills to support children in their classrooms. Teachers who use proactive teaching strategies,

positive reinforcement for appropriate behaviors, and nonpunitive discipline support children's behavioral, social, and emotional capabilities essential to academic learning (Aasheim et al., 2020). Preschool teachers are essential in supporting children displaying challenging behaviors (Perle, 2018). Perle found that evidence-based strategies such as positive support are infrequently taught as part of teacher training. Teachers require training that teaches them effective evidence-based practices they can use in the classroom when working with children's challenging behaviors (Perle, 2018).

Blewitt et al. (2020), presented a paper on a conceptual model that integrated evidence and theory-based frameworks providing a roadmap to enhance the quality, methodology, and sustainability of teacher-child interactions critical to the social-emotional development of young children. The stages of the model include the following: a) how teacher attributes influenced the quality of the teacher-child interactions, b) how the types of teacher-child interactions were associated with positive, emotional, and cognitive outcomes, c) how using the Teaching Pyramid Model approach to utilize high-quality interactions supported the implementation to deliver strategies that support children's social-emotional development. The model focused on three teacher attributes that affected teacher-child interactions: self-efficacy, social-emotional competency and well-being, and teacher stress (Blewitt et al., 2020). According to Gerde et al. (2018), self-efficacy, or confidence in one's knowledge and understanding of specific content and is built from training and implementation. Blewitt et al. (2020) introduced evidence from previous studies that demonstrated the benefit of teacher training in improving the teaching approach when dealing with challenging behaviors (see Hemmeter et al., 2016).

Rispoli et al. (2021) agreed and identified the need for early childhood special education teacher training to efficiently implement function-based intervention for challenging behavior**.** Rispoli et al. specified that professional development practices are not universally effective, and just like children, teachers can benefit from differentiated practices. Rispoli et al.'s multilevel approach included behavioral skills training, practice-based coaching, and teacher self-monitoring. Their study results proved that teachers required different levels of support within the multilevel approach to learn and implement evidence-based practices. The results support my study's gap and purpose by providing information on practices and implementation strategies needed to deal with challenging behaviors in the classroom (Hemmeter et al., 2022).

Teacher stress is another factor teachers face when lacking the proper skills to manage challenging behaviors (Blewitt et al., 2020; Reyes & Gilliam, 2021). Reyes and Gilliam (2021) confirmed teacher stress developed from having little training and minimal resources to manage challenging behavior in the classroom. Job stress is associated with lower-quality care and education, which can lead to challenging behaviors in the classroom (Blewitt et al., 2020; Reyes & Gilliam, 2021). In addition, Jeon et al. (2018) stated that teachers who identified higher stress levels were more likely to respond to children with visible anger and frustration. As a result, such teacher responses increased children's anger and frustration in the classroom.

Yoder and Williford (2019) studied teacher perceptions of preschool students' disruptive behavior and the impact of teacher demographics, professional backgrounds, and belief characteristics on their perceptions. Yoder and Williford's study identified

teachers' initial perceptions of children's behavior determined how teachers responded to the children in their classrooms. Evidence demonstrated that child-teacher interactions significantly impact children's school experience. Hemmeter et al. (2021) discussed preschool teachers' concerns about needing more skills to help children with challenging behaviors nationwide. Evidence shows that teachers who lack the appropriate skills to diminish unwanted behaviors may use punitive tactics with young children (Weston, 2020). According to Yonder and Williford, a teacher's perception of their students is formed at the beginning of the school year. Children who demonstrate challenging behaviors create barriers in the child-teacher rapport. Because perceptions can be formed at the beginning of the school year, teachers must know how to respond to children demonstrating challenging behaviors to avoid constraints in developing a positive child-teacher relationships. Preschool teachers must receive adequate training focusing on developmentally appropriate behaviors and expectations for young children (Yoder & Williford, 2019). Yoder and Williford concluded additional studies are needed to gain more insight into teachers' perspectives on children's challenging behaviors in different center types and classroom sizes.

Green et al. (2021) conducted a pilot study examining the effects of bi-monthly individualized professional development sessions on implementing the Teaching Pyramid Model for Head Start teachers. According to Green et al., Head Start teachers felt unprepared when working with children's challenging behaviors. Like my study, Green et al.'s. study focused on the Teaching Pyramid Model, a tool used to train teachers on how to diminish challenging behaviors in the classroom. The teaching pyramid model is a

tiered approach designed to promote healthy social-emotional development, support children's appropriate behavior, and prevent problematic behaviors by training preschool teachers (WestEd Center for Child & Family Studies, 2018). According to Green et al. (2021) the teaching pyramid model is intended to establish an adequate workforce to prevent challenging behaviors by using proactive teaching pyramid strategies in the classroom. The study participants included six Head Start teachers within two Head Start sites. Each classroom had 18-21 preschool-age children, of which 85% were African American and 15% were Latino. The study used a pre and post-test on the Teaching Pyramid Observation Tool (TPOT), which is used to assess teachers' abilities and fidelity when using the Teaching Pyramid Model. Three control groups received four large-group professional development (PD) sessions. Three intervention group received the four large group PD sessions and an additional four individualized bi-monthly PD sessions. The individualized sessions were 45 minutes each and consisted of teacher-led goal setting, discussion and reflection, and resources. The three teachers in the intervention group reported that the individualized sessions helped them learn valuable strategies when working with the children demonstrating challenging behaviors. The results demonstrated the benefits of using individualized sessions for PD. Long-term professional development allows teachers to self-reflect, learn new concepts and strategies, and receive feedback on their current teaching styles (Green et al., 2021). Green et al. discussed successful training requires intensity, focused on specific evidence-based practices, and strategies that engage teachers in active learning and reflection.

Johnson (2019) explored a state agency-sponsored professional development system's impact on implementing a Positive Behavior Intervention Support (PBIS) framework. The study included 132 educators representing early care and education programs in 11 regions. The participants from various programs included Head Start (n=30), collaborative and early childhood special education (ECSE) (n=26), early childhood family education (n=25), school readiness programs (n=23), multi-agency programs (n=14), dedicated ECSE programs (n=7), and center-based childcare programs (n=7). A purposeful sample size included participants who chose to participate and demonstrated interest by applying for the professional development opportunity. All participants signed a verification of interest and commitment form (Johnson, 2019). The purpose of the study was to gather data for the State Department of Education on the efforts to bring the pyramid model strategies to various programs. The statewide professional development system included facilitators to support all 11 regions, master cadres trained to become trainers and coaches, and in-person training for all participants following the Centre on the Social and Emotional Foundation for Early Learning (CSEFEL). Training consisted of six to nine workshops, monthly coaching, and observations to identify the fidelity of implementing the Pyramid Model. Data was gathered from all participating programs' implementation from the fall to spring season. The study demonstrated the importance of staff readiness and buy-in to improve practice implementation (Johnson, 2019). Like Johnson's study, in California the CSEFEL topics reviewed focuses on building relationships, creating supportive environments, and developing and using the intensive intervention. In California, CSEFEL also focuses on

the importance of the workforce: the educators participating in the CSEFEL training. In Johnson's study, preschool teachers were offered coaching sessions after every training session (WestEd Center for Child & Family Studies, 2018). Johnson (2019) identified that further research is needed to provide data on how professional development systems can be adapted to fit the needs of specific programs.

Early Intervention and Practices to Minimize Challenging Behaviors

Research has identified the need for evidence-based interventions to be implemented with fidelity in a preschool classroom to improve challenging behaviors (Mitchell et al., 2018). Intervention fidelity refers to the degree to which the intervention is executed as intended (Sanetti & Collier-Meek, 2019). Preschool children can benefit from implemented interventions used with fidelity when supporting challenging behaviors (Sanetti & Collier-Meek, 2019). According to Hemmeter et al. (2022), intervention fidelity improves preschool children's intervention outcomes. Preschool is the ideal time for early interventions to reduce behavioral problems. Early intervention can prevent behaviors from developing into life-long behavioral issues (Poulou et al., 2018). According to Green et al. (2021), 50% of preschool children demonstrate increasingly challenging behaviors by 3rd grade when intervention strategies are not implemented early on. Practical, evidence-based interventions should be "developmentally appropriate and must focus on proactively teaching skills rather than simply getting rid of the problematic behavior" (Ai et al., 2022).

Steed and Kranski (2020) conducted a systematic review of 53 articles related to early intervention on children under six years old to update and analyze participant

characteristics for the 2,262 participants overall. The literature chosen for the review focused on the date range between the year 2000 to 2018 to reflect the most current research that focused on positive behavioral intervention and support (PBIS). Positive behavior intervention support (PBIS) is used as an early intervention to support children demonstrating challenging behaviors (Steed & Kranski, 2020). The systematic review included a two-step screening process. To be eligible for the study at least one child had been below six years old, the intervention had to be conducted in the United States, and PBIS had to be implemented as an intervention. The children's outcomes were assessed, and an experimental group design, quasi-experimental design (QED), or single case research design (SCRD) had to be employed. The first stage screening process focused on eliminating commentaries, letters to editors, reviews, meta-analyses, and biological/medical studies (Steed & Kranski, 2020). During the second phase, all the inclusion criteria were included. Full-text reviews identified participant characteristics focused on identifying gender, race, disability, social and economic status (SES), and language. A second coder reviewed the inclusion criteria to determine interrater agreement (Steed & Kranski, 2020). Participant characteristics included gender, race/ethnicity, disabilities, and social- economic status. The systematic literature review reported that most gender and disability, race/ethnicity were identified in fewer than half of the studies, and socioeconomic status and language were occasionally reported. In studies that described children's gender and race/ethnicity, assessments of participant characteristics discovered that boys and Black and Latino children were overrepresented in studies. These articles focused on children with challenging behaviors receiving PBIS,

providing even more information on implementation strategies to deal with challenging behaviors (Steed & Kranski, 2020).

Ogundele (2018) stated that early childhood mental health disorders are prevalent. Mental health issues can include internalizing and externalizing problems in young children, which may escalate if not treated early. A substantial body of evidence demonstrated that effective early intervention strategies could help preschool teachers reduce challenging behaviors. Johnson (2019) found that interventions such as the positive behavior intervention and support (PBIS) and the pyramid model are frameworks used to support children's social-emotional and behavioral needs. Carr and Boat (2019) used PBIS strategies that focused on building relationships, positive guidance and following through with clear expectations. Carr and Boat believed behavior is learned and can be changed with the appropriate teacher guidance.

A high percentage of children with disabilities demonstrate challenging behaviors in the classroom (Dunlap et al., 2018). Among the various developmental delays that children demonstrate are difficulties with age-appropriate behavior and self-regulation (Dunlap et al., 2018). Early intervention is critical for children with disabilities to support growth before children enter kindergarten. Mellano De La Cruz et al. (2019) explained the correlation between children demonstrating challenging behaviors and children's literacy capacities. Children with literacy delays presented disruptive behavior, aggression, and anxiety which interfered with classroom participation (Mellano De La Cruz et al., 2019). Literacy delays create feelings of boredom, anxiety, and embarrassment for children. In another study conducted in Maine, Fairman, and Johnson

(2019), said children with disabilities demonstrated typical age-appropriate behaviors due to classroom adjustment. More children entering school are “very angry” due to trauma exposure (Fairman & Johnson, 2019). Interventions for children with disabilities are often introduced during free play and routine activities (Jolstead et al., 2017). Jolstead et al. (2017) suggested interventions used for children with disabilities who demonstrated challenging behaviors to include: prompting the target behavior, play-related activities, reinforcing appropriate behavior, modeling specific social skills, direct instruction of appropriate behavior, and teacher modeling. Challenging behaviors can develop into more significant behavior issues delaying children’s academic achievements and negatively affecting their learning environment if not treated early (Green et al., 2021).

Conners Edge et al. (2018) identified that the lack of early intervention could create ongoing social-emotional issues in childhood and adolescence, to include ongoing behavior issues in the classroom, low scores, eventual school dropout, and even incarceration. Children’s persistent challenging behaviors could impact play skills, emotional regulation, and social interactions with peers (McGuire & Meadan, 2022). Young children with persistent challenging behaviors often show social-emotional delays in grade school and are at higher risk for grade retention, referral to intervention, or special education (McGuire & Meadan, 2022). Young children who engage in persistent challenging behaviors may be more successful in school and have more positive outcomes when teachers build positive relationships with the children (McGuire & Meadan, 2022). When teachers work to create a socially inclusive environment that

integrates children with persistent challenging behaviors, the frequency of these behaviors may decrease (McGuire & Meadan, 2022).

Additionally, when children stay socially included in their classroom environment, they have opportunities to learn social skills instead of being removed from the class due to their persistent challenging behaviors. Keeping the children in the classroom allows teachers to support the children who engage in challenging behaviors in a socially inclusive environment (McGuire & Meadan, 2022). McGuire and Meadan (2022) identified the need to investigate the professional development of early childhood teachers as researchers also continue to explore the needs of children with challenging behaviors. The need to explore professional development for early childhood teachers supports my research study as I will explore preschool teachers' perspectives on the CSEFEL teaching pyramid strategies, a strategies learned through teacher training to support teachers who work with children demonstrating challenging behaviors.

Social-emotional learning interventions, such as the pyramid model, promote and enhance social-emotional competence in young children. When the pyramid model was used, improvements in children's social skills were visible in the classroom setting (Hemmeter et al., 2021). Luo et al. (2021b) reiterated how targeted interventions such as the pyramid model demonstrated improvement in children's social-emotional competence (SEC) when implemented with fidelity. The teaching pyramid model provides ECE educators guidance on using evidence-based strategies to promote social-emotional competence and prevent or address challenging behaviors (Hemmeter et al., 2021). The

teaching pyramid was not developed as a curriculum; instead, the teaching pyramid provides teaching strategies for teachers to provide universal practices, prevention, and individualized support. The teaching pyramid strategies are embedded in classroom activities and routines (Hemmeter et al., 2021). The model is a tiered approach that includes promotion, prevention, and intervention. Fostering nurturing and responsive relationships, providing high-quality supportive environments, and teaching social-emotional skills are embedded into the first tier of the teaching pyramid, also known as the promotion tier. The prevention tier emphasizes focused instruction for at-risk children with limited social-emotional skills. The last tier, the intervention tier, emphasizes the need for individualized behavior intervention plans to target specific behavior. The prevention tier requires collaboration between the teacher, parents, and professionals to enhance implementation between home and school life (Hemmeter et al., 2021).

Hemmeter et al. (2021) explained how the teaching pyramid is an evidence-based tool currently used to support children with challenging behaviors. Hemmeter et al.'s current study examined the effects of the teaching pyramid professional development intervention versus the business-as-usual (BAU) professional development when working with children using a cluster randomized efficacy trial. The intervention professional development consisted of high-quality workshops, classroom implementation materials, and 16 practice-based coaching sessions that included observations, debriefing, reflection, and feedback. The BAU classrooms only used the Teaching Pyramid Observation Tool to assess the classroom environment. Teachers received professional development unrelated to the study and provided a survey to identify previous

professional development. The study consisted of 92 classrooms (45 intervention and 47-BAU) and 92 teachers, serving a total of 997 children that included 250 focal children at risk for social-emotional or behavioral outcomes (Hemmeter et al., 2021). Pre and post-intervention data were collected from the teachers using a rating scale focused on social, emotional, behavioral, and other developmental outcomes. Data was also explicitly collected on the focal children to focus on social interactions and challenging behaviors using an observational coding system (Hemmeter et al., 2021). The study's results demonstrated significant positive effects for all children whose teachers participated in the intervention professional development vs. the BAU professional development. Focal children demonstrated improved social interactions compared to their peers in BAU professional development classrooms (Hemmeter et al., 2021).

One child's disruptive behavior affects their learning and the other children trying to learn in the classroom (Perle, 2018). To target the function of specific behavior, teachers need to understand why the child performs the specific behavior (Allday, 2018). Pokorski (2019) introduced group contingency strategies that effectively minimize challenging behaviors in the classroom. Pokorski defined group contingencies as the relationship between a behavior and its consequence. According to Pokorski, group contingencies are intended to support the behavior of an entire group. Pokorski identified three group contingencies that may minimize challenging behaviors in a high-quality environment. The dependent group contingencies are when one or more children engage in a particular behavior to receive reinforcement. In an interdependent group, contingencies are when all children must engage in a specific behavior to receive

reinforcement. The independent group contingency is identified when the child demonstrating the behavior receives the consequence (Pokorski, 2019). Pokorski confirmed group contingencies have resulted in positive outcomes because contingencies are often used in PBIS. The process includes a plan to be created after child observations. A plan is created, identifying the contingency that will be used. The plan is then implemented, modified, and maintained as needed (Pokorski, 2019). With adequate planning, group contingencies can effectively support and manage targeted behaviors (Pokorski, 2019).

Children who engage in unwanted behaviors intend to escape undesired activities, gain attention or items, or lack knowledge and awareness of what to do or expect (Harvey et al., 2021). Pokorski (2019) documented visual schedules to support engagement, transitions, and children with disabilities demonstrating challenging behaviors. According to Harvey (2021), visuals support children with limited communication and provide clear expectations for young children during routines, transitions, and activities. The California CSEFEL also introduced visual supports as an intervention to improve or prevent challenging behaviors in the classroom (WestEd Center for Child & Family Studies, 2018).

Baughan et al. (2019) and Hallett et al. (2019) used the pyramid model for their studies. They explored the tool's effectiveness when working with children demonstrating challenging behaviors. Baughan et al. (2019) primarily focused on using teacher coaching to improve pyramid model practices for Head Start teachers. The researchers investigated the individual influence coaching had on three Head Start

teachers. The study results identified the importance of social-emotional competence in young children and its association with long-term school success. The pyramid model was defined as a specific approach to positive behavior intervention and support (PBIS) designed to support teachers on implementing evidence-based strategies to help improve children's social-emotional development (Baughan et al., 2019). Three different levels/tiers of support are included in the model that helps teachers decrease or prevent challenging behaviors (Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, 2021). Tier 1 prevention supports positive teacher-child relationships and the development of supportive environments. Tier 2 prevention provides clear instructions for social-emotional assistance to target developmental needs in the classroom. Tier 3 intensive intervention provides individualized support for young children demonstrating persistent unwanted behaviors in the classroom. The researcher identified individualized coaching sessions that supported teacher growth over a one-day training. Individualized coaching sessions provided ongoing support for classroom challenges and held teachers accountable for the action steps identified in their individualized plans. Mitchell et al. (2018) explained how many schools across the United States and worldwide used school-wide positive behavioral interventions and supports (SWPBIS) to support children demonstrating challenging behaviors. As Baughan et al. (2019), and Mitchell et al. (2018) explained, the three support levels depended on the child's behavioral needs. The SWPBIS framework allows teachers to engage in data-based decision-making, implement and monitor behavioral strategies and build sustainable systems to promote fidelity implementation amongst teachers (Mitchell et al., 2018).

Blewitt et al. (2020) introduced two frameworks significant in early childhood settings. The Teaching Through Interactions Framework describes the interactions associated with positive child outcomes. The Pyramid Model is tiered approach used to support social-emotional competence in young children. The systematic approach provides implementation strategies to help improve social-emotional health. Yet, Dunlap et al. (2018) identified a limitation with studies conducted on the PBS approach to reduce challenging behaviors. Dunlap et al., stated that positive behavior support (PBS) studies are often conducted on a few participants with single-case experimental designs limiting group comparisons. Dunlap et al., found limitations in a study conducted in Mainland China, identifying the limitations of a small population and the need for fidelity in implementing teaching pyramid strategies.

Green et al.'s (2021) presented a pilot study with a pre and post-test design that examined the effects of two different professional development (PD) approaches. The pilot study examined the effects of bi-monthly individualized PD sessions on implementing the pyramid model for Head Start teachers. Participants in the study included six Head Start teachers selected based on two criteria: consistently reporting incidents of challenging behaviors to office staff and teacher requests for assistance with at least two students demonstrating challenging behaviors.

The six classrooms were divided into a controlled group (n=3) and an intervention group (n=3). Individualized PD sessions were the study's independent variable (Green et al., 2021). The controlled and intervention groups received four large-group PD sessions. The intervention group received four more individualized bi-monthly PD sessions than

the control group. The individualized coaching sessions consisted of 45-minute sessions that included teacher-led goal setting to self-reflect, discussion and reflections on implementation strategies, and extra resources were provided by the researcher (Green et al., 2021). The individualized sessions allowed participants to discuss problem-solving challenges and strategies, and participants had the opportunity to create action plans to implement in the classroom. Reszka et al. (2019) explained how coaching sessions held preschool teachers accountable for the action plan's execution, and follow-up was expected at the next coaching session. The Teaching Pyramid Observation Tool (TPOT) was used in the pre and post-assessment. The pre and post-data results revealed that the intervention group demonstrated more significant gains in the universal tier pyramid model practices than the control group. The universal tier includes establishing an effective workforce and building positive relationships between the teacher and child (Green et al., 2021). Post-interviews were conducted with only the intervention group to determine if the individualized PD was a valid approach to PD. One hundred percent of teachers reported how the individualized PD helped them learn valuable strategies to implement in the classroom when dealing with challenging behaviors (Green et al., 2021). The overall results demonstrated that the bi-monthly, individualized PD used in the study were more effective than using the large group approach for PD (Green et al., 2021).

Hemmeter et al. (2022) emphasized the importance of using age-appropriate frameworks, such as the pyramid model to support children's challenging behaviors. Positive outcomes in young children's challenging behaviors were visible because

teachers were trained and learned strategies to implement (Hemmeter et al., 2022). The pyramid model is an evidence-based tool that provides age-appropriate teaching practices in three different tiers. The study used TPOT to assess teacher performance after using the teaching pyramid training and coaching. The TPOT is an observational, judgment-based instrument designed to measure classroom-wide implementation of universal and targeted practices associated with the pyramid model and teachers' capacity to individualize practices and implement individualized behavior support plans determined at tier three (Luo et al., 2021a). Snyder et al. (2018) confirmed the importance of peer coaching sessions after teacher training to reinforce the implementation of the framework introduced. Golden et al. (2021) stated that peers provided coaching and required teachers within each team to observe and provide feedback to one another by applying pyramid model strategies. During the coaching sessions, teachers observed each other and conducted focused observations on their practices. Snyder et al. (2018) explained how individualized coaching had been recognized to advance trainee content knowledge. Coaching offers the opportunity to try new approaches to classroom management and receive guidance on improving implementation. Reszka et al. (2019) agreed that implementation fidelity resulted from coaching teachers after receiving training. Coaching maximized teacher outcomes because action plans were developed and consistently revisited (Reszka et al., 2019). An et al. (2019) included that coaching is a relationship-based process that improves existing skills, develops new skills, and builds the competence and confidence of preschool teachers. Coaches hold teachers accountable

for consistently delivering interventions when working with the teacher in the classroom (Sanetti & Collier-Meek, 2019).

DuPaul and Cleminshaw (2020) introduced the pyramid model as a multitiered support system (MTSS) for supporting social-emotional competence for all preschool children. Several randomized controlled trials demonstrated that children who received some MTSS exhibited fewer challenging behaviors (DuPaul & Cleminshaw, 2020). Busch et al. (2018) and DuPaul and Cleminshaw discussed the need to choose environmentally and culturally appropriate interventions focused on positive guidance strategies and establishing clear classroom expectations. Busch et al. used strategies from the pyramid model, including opportunities for self-expression, setting clear classroom expectations, and teaching children alternative conflict resolution strategies. In addition to DuPual and Clemishaw, Wood et al. (2018) introduced the importance of antecedent interventions, also known as preventative approaches, used in the pyramid model. Antecedent intervention includes child observations to determine the function of the behavior. With observations, documentation is required. Documentation provides validity and may identify patterns of behavior (Wood et al., 2018).

In contrast, CSEFEL introduced positive descriptive acknowledgment (PDA) to support desired behaviors. A PDA describes what teachers see the child doing. For example, a teacher may say, you are walking in the classroom; you are safe rather than using phrases like “good job.” DuPaul and Cleminshaw (2020) summarized the importance of early intervention for young children to support academic success entering elementary grades. Effective MTSS procedures in preschool classrooms reduce the

probability of children entering kindergarten with challenging behaviors. Previous literature introduced “token reinforcement” practices to enhance children’s motivation (Ross, 2015). According to Ross (2015), token reinforcement provides a symbolic presentation for children. When children demonstrate desired behaviors, children are given tokens to reinforce the behavior (Ross, 2015). On the contrary, CSEFEL provides positive descriptive acknowledgment PDAs to enhance desired behavior in the classroom (DuPaul & Cleminshaw, 2020; West Ed., 2018).

Dickinson et al. (2020) discussed best practices to deal with challenging behaviors. According to Dickinson et al., early intervention that worked with both the child and the family demonstrated better outcomes. Dickinson et al. addressed five procedures discussed in current literature to reduce challenging behaviors. The procedures included using assessment-based intervention and strategies where children are taught appropriate replacement behaviors. The procedures included altering children’s physical/social environment/activities to prevent unwanted behaviors, implementing a multicomponent intervention to prevent, replace, reinforce desirable behavior, and using family-centered approaches. All strategies presented limitations when not presented with fidelity (Dickinson et al., 2020). Findings demonstrated a significant variability based on teacher training and experience working with young children (Dickinson et al., 2020).

Like Dickinson, Luo et al. (2021a) agreed on the importance of providing evidence-based strategies such as the pyramid model to promote classroom promotion, prevention, and intervention practices to promote positive social-emotional and behavioral outcomes. Luo et al. (2021a) presented a study conducted in China on

implementing pyramid model strategies to enhance children's social-emotional competence (SEC). The researcher described SEC as a multidimensional, complex construct. The SEC included emotional expressiveness, emotional knowledge, regulation of emotion and behavior, social problem-solving, and social relationship skills (Luo et al., 2021a). Chinese teachers use social-emotional practices (SEP) aligned with the pyramid model to support young children demonstrating challenging behaviors. Considerable research indicated SEP supports childre's SEC related to school readiness. The Social-Emotional Teaching Practice Questionnaire- Chinese (SETP-C) was used to examine and analyze preschool teachers' responses to using SEP, such as the teaching pyramid, to improve SEC. The study included new information on the benefits of the pyramid model when used with fidelity to improve challenging behaviors in the classroom.

Summary and Conclusions

In this chapter, I presented how Blumer's (1969) interactionist approach was used as the conceptual framework for my study. I specified how the interactionist approach was the foundation of the study because it helped me explore preschool teachers' perspectives on the influence of the CSEFEL teaching pyramid strategies. I then reviewed appropriate literature to support the study's focus and purpose. I identified the different definitions and interpretations of challenging behaviors. I explained how evidence-based practices support preschool teachers' abilities to reduce challenging behaviors, the impact in preschool classrooms, the importance of teacher-child interactions, and factors that contribute to challenging behaviors. In the final section of

my literature review, I introduced current practices that support preschool teachers when dealing with challenging behaviors.

The results of my study added new information to the existing research on the pyramid model because I explored 11 preschool teachers' perspectives on implementing the CSEFEL teaching pyramid strategies to support them in addressing challenging behaviors in the classroom. Other researchers may use the information from my study to explore different research regarding the effectiveness of the CSEFEL teaching pyramid. The literature I researched acknowledged the gap in practice on how early childhood teachers deal with challenging behaviors, specifically, the CSEFEL teaching pyramid. Through my study, I gathered the latest information on the CSEFEL teaching pyramid in the research county and provided data on preschool teachers' perspectives regarding implementing the CSEFEL teaching pyramid strategies. In Chapter 3, I will describe the method I use to conduct my study. I presented the research design, how the methodology supports the gap in practice, the participant recruitment process, instrumentation, and data analysis plan, as well as other key steps in conducting my study.

Chapter 3: Research Method

In this qualitative study, I explored preschool teachers' perspectives on implementing the CSEFEL teaching pyramid strategies to support them in addressing preschool children's challenging behaviors in the classroom. Blumer's (1969) interactionist approach was used as the conceptual foundation for my study because I gathered preschool teachers' perspectives on implementing the CSEFEL teaching pyramid strategies by interviewing them to understand and interpret their experiences. Through my research, positive social change may occur because I determined that the CSEFEL training series successfully supports teachers in addressing challenging behaviors in the classroom. The study results may also support continued funding for the CSEFEL teaching pyramid model in the research county. The study results may encourage new preschool teachers to attend the CSEFEL teaching pyramid training series. In Chapter 3, I provide information on the study's rationale, my role as the researcher, the methodology, interview processes, the data analysis plan, and steps to ensure trustworthiness and ethical procedures.

Research Design and Rationale

The research question that guided my study was the following: What are preschool teachers' perspectives on implementing the CSEFEL teaching pyramid strategies and their influence on preschool children's challenging behaviors?

A basic qualitative design using interviews was used in my study. I collected data from interviews with a purposeful sampling of 11 preschool teachers trained on the CSEFEL teaching pyramid strategies. In a qualitative study, a researcher studies a

phenomenon in a natural environment to make sense of or interpret the information provided by study participants (Ravitch & Carl, 2019). Qualitative research involves collecting empirical materials such as personal experiences, life stories, interviews, and interactions and describing everyday moments and meanings in individuals' lives (Ritzer, 2004). I used the research question to explore preschool teachers' perspectives on implementing the CSEFEL teaching pyramid strategies and their influence on preschool children's challenging behaviors. According to Ravitch and Carl (2019), qualitative research involves an attempt to contextualize individuals or groups in their natural environment and reflect their perspectives and personal experiences. Prior (2018) and Rubin and Rubin (2012) explained that using a naturalist constructionist model to interview and gain information from participants in a study is an effective research method. A basic qualitative study can involve talking to those who know or experience the problem of interest (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Prior specified the importance of building rapport to access the participants' perspectives on a particular experience. Data for basic qualitative studies are collected through observations, interviews, or document analysis (Ravitch & Carl, 2019). An interview is a discussion to obtain information, opinions, or facts from participants (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018; Thomas, 2013). The ontology in qualitative research is the nature of the participants' reality (Al-Ababneh, 2020). Al-Ababneh (2020) explained that an ontology assumption in a qualitative study is subjective, as seen by the participants in the study. The ontology aspect of this study was the preschool teachers' perspective on the CSEFEL teaching pyramid strategies. Ryan (2018) explained that ontology relates to the researcher's values regarding what is real

and what someone believes to be accurate. The epistemology within an interpretivist approach focuses on the situation's details and is subjective (Al-Ababneh, 2020). I explored preschool teachers' perspectives on the influence of the CSEFEL teaching pyramid in their preschool classroom (Ryan, 2018).

Due to pandemic restrictions, focus groups and classroom observation considerations were eliminated. Focus groups are ideal for creating a dialogue among the CSEFEL teaching pyramid community. In focus groups, the researcher acts as a facilitator to move the conversation forward (Prior, 2018; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Focus group discussions on the CSEFEL teaching pyramid strategies amongst preschool teachers could have been used to explore preschool teachers' perspectives.

Observations are one component of qualitative research that involve seeking out observable data related to the focal topic (Ravitch & Carl, 2019). Observations of child–teacher interactions and CSEFEL teaching pyramid strategies in the preschool classroom may have improved my exploration of preschool teachers' perspectives on the influence of the CSEFEL teaching pyramid strategies. However, I was unable to obtain permission to complete face-to-face observations due to the continuance of the COVID pandemic. Stryker (2008) explained that studies using symbolic interactionist perspectives often include participant observations to understand the participants' world. Blumer's (1998) interactionist approach, the conceptual framework for my study, integrates human interactions in the social world to understand and interpret the environment. Gibson and Lehn (2021) explained how an observer could examine participant responses by examining facial expressions and body language. Although I explored the CSEFEL

teaching pyramid strategies' influence on behavior management, it is critical to identify if preschool teachers use the tool with fidelity. Researchers use individual interviews to help gather other people's experiences and effectively explore perspectives (Prior, 2018; Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

A quantitative research method could not have been used to answer the research question because the focus of this study was not testing a hypothesis or examining relationships between variables (Edmonds & Kennedy, 2017). According to Edmonds and Kennedy (2017), a quantitative approach depends on defining relationships among dependent and independent variables and focuses on statistical analysis. This study did not involve any statistical analysis. Qualitative research studies often involve participant interviewing. I used a qualitative method to explore how preschool teachers construct meaning and identify their perspectives on the CSEFEL teaching pyramid strategies (see Prior, 2018). In this research study, the qualitative inquiry method involved data collection to find meaningful patterns and themes. Interviews were an effective method to collect data to explore teachers' perspectives. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), interviews are necessary when a researcher cannot observe actions and behaviors.

After considering a qualitative case study method to answer the research question, I concluded that a basic qualitative method would be the most effective. A basic qualitative research approach was the most applicable for this study because I did not attempt to solve a problem but rather to understand and interpret the problem.

Through my research, I sought to understand the problem and interpret preschool teachers' perspectives on implementing the CSEFEL teaching pyramid strategies and

their influence on preschool children's challenging behaviors. Teachers' perspectives were captured through the interview process, where teachers shared personal experiences using the teaching pyramid strategies. The results of my study provide additional information to researchers and scholars seeking information on preschool teachers' perspectives and challenging behaviors.

Role of the Researcher

For this study, the role of the researcher was to gain insight and attempt to understand preschool teachers' perspectives. I conducted interviews to gain preschool teachers' perspectives on the CSEFEL teaching pyramid strategies. I did not provide my insight or contribute to interviewee responses. I was careful not to show any reaction to participant responses that might not align with my beliefs and used a reflective journal to note any personal concerns. The role of a researcher is also to build relationships with the participants with care, intentionality, and transparency (Ravitch & Carl, 2019). Building relationships with participants was essential to building rapport toward authentic engagement. I have worked in early care and education for over 20 years. During my preschool teaching experience, I needed to receive adequate training to support all children in the classroom. I worked with families who lived in adverse circumstances, and children's challenging behaviors were often visible in the preschool classroom. Professional development opportunities should have offered proper staff training to learn strategies to support children demonstrating challenging behaviors, which preschool teachers in my community often requested. My experience motivated my research focus.

According to Roberts (2020), researchers need to explore and be aware of their personal biases and viewpoints in order to prevent assumptions and prejudices from interfering with their studies. I have a professional relationship with the ECE community in the research county. To prevent my personal biases, assumptions, and viewpoints from interfering with my study, I kept a reflective journal to write my thoughts in during the study. Ravitch and Carl (2019) identified the importance of a researcher's awareness and personal experiences. Because of my lack of experience and adequate training to support children with challenging behaviors, I had a CSEFEL professional colleague peer review my data analysis to guarantee that my personal experiences did not influence my interpretation (see Ravitch & Carl, 2019). I only used the follow-up questions in Appendix E to eliminate my reactions and nonverbal cues. I used member checking to validate the transcriptions after each interview (Ravitch & Carl, 2019). I remained objective during data collection and analysis by being open to other perspectives and actions. Ravitch and Carl (2019) and Rubin and Rubin (2012) identified the importance of a researcher knowing where they stand with a research issue. Interviews may only be suitable if a researcher can refrain from expressing strong feelings about a topic (Ravitch & Carl, 2019; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Despite the wide variety of viewpoints and opinions expected from the preschool teacher participants, I worked to understand each teacher’s perspective by listening to the participants share their experiences and identified meaning throughout the interview (Anderson, 2017).

I recruited 11 preschool teachers who completed the CSEFEL teaching pyramid training series in the research county. Purposeful sampling ensured that participants were

intentionally selected based on training and experience with the CSEFEL teaching pyramid. Purposeful sampling included individuals in the county outside my workplace. Preschool teachers from my workplace were excluded from the study to prevent ethical issues and any potential perceived influence over the participants contributing to the study. Participation in the study was voluntary. Each participant received a $25 Amazon gift card as a token of my appreciation for their participation in the study. Due to current COVID-19 restrictions, all interviews were conducted via Zoom or phone. I included a confidentiality statement in the informed consent form to explain how all the information collected will remain confidential and protected. Confidentiality was necessary for participants' individual privacy and protection of how the data were used (Ravitch & Carl, 2019; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). I protected all the participants' identities in the study by using pseudonyms such as Teacher 1, Teacher 2, etc.

Methodology

Participant Selection

The population I sought was qualified preschool teachers with ECE backgrounds who had completed the CSEFEL teaching pyramid training series. I used purposeful sampling strategies for this study to identify, invite, screen, and select participants to contribute to potential social change by sharing their perspectives (see Durdella, 2019). I recruited preschool teacher participants from various early childhood education programs in a small county in a southern state who had completed the CSEFEL teaching pyramid training series. Participant selection from various ECE groups created diversity within the study. Early childhood programs in the small county consist of Head Start, center-based

programs funded by the Department of Education, private-sector programs, religious programs, and family home childcare programs. I identified 97 preschools in the selected study county (see ChildcareCenter, n.d.). Participants in the different ECE programs provide a more diverse study selection with different backgrounds and experience. All participants invited to participate in the study were preschool teachers in ECE classrooms. I contacted program administrators from different programs via email requesting assistance to gain contact information for preschool teachers in their programs who had completed the CSEFEL teaching pyramid series of training (Appendix C). The email specified the research intent and the participants needed for my study. The email informed program directors of my intent to recruit preschool teachers from their program and gain access to the email addresses of potential participants who had completed the CSEFEL teaching pyramid series of training.

To recruit preschool teachers for my study, I emailed an invitation to all potential participants inviting them to volunteer in the study (Appendix D). The email was an invitation to participate in the study. The invitation included details about the study purpose, study conditions, participant criteria, and contact information for interested volunteers to respond by email if they were willing to participate. I started with purposeful sampling by selecting a few relevant participants gained through program directors' support to create a chain of interviewees within different programs (see Ravitch & Carl, 2019). I then used a snowball purposeful sampling strategy to gain more participants. Given the focus of the inquiry, the first selected participants provided other relevant contacts within their programs (Ravitch & Carl, 2019). Researchers use a

snowball sampling strategy to conveniently find an intentional target population by connecting with professionals within the field (Leighton et al., 2021). Participation in the study was voluntary, and interviews were conducted outside teachers' work hours to eliminate influence by other staff and administrators. Due to the pandemic, most interviews were conducted via Zoom or phone.

The first 11 preschool teachers who volunteered to participate and met the criteria were emailed the informed consent form, which included a description of how I was going to assign numbers for participants to remove teacher identifiers. The consent form also outlined how the interview was going to be recorded and how I would use participant responses in the study. Teachers were asked to reply "I consent" via email to participate in the research study. Ravitch and Carl specified that a sample of 10–12 participants is recommended for saturation when a study focuses on individuals' perspectives.

The study participants included preschool teachers from various ECE programs in a small county who had fully completed the CSEFEL teaching pyramid training series. Although the CSEFEL teaching pyramid is also offered for infants and toddlers, the study did not include that age group. Martin et al. (2018) established many young children demonstrate behavior problems that can be developmentally appropriate; as a result, infant and toddler programs were ruled out for this study. Preschool teachers of the classroom were the only participants in the study. Although teacher assistants work alongside preschool teachers to support young children, preschool teachers are often

responsible for the classroom's flow and function when dealing with challenging behaviors and were asked to participate in my study.

Instrumentation

Interviews were the main instrument for data collection in my study. Through the interview process, I had the opportunity to interact with the participants and document information presented from real-life experiences using the CSEFEL teaching pyramid strategies. In a qualitative study, the researcher gathers and analyzes the data (Twining et al., 2017). I used an interview protocol (see Appendix E) to guide each interview and only gather data on preschool teachers' perspectives on implementing the CSEFEL teaching pyramid strategies to address challenging behaviors. The interview protocol started with an introduction. I revisited the purpose of the study and obtained consent before beginning with the interview questions.

Open-ended interview questions encourage meaningful answers from the participants' knowledge and perspectives. I used Blumer's symbolic interactionism framework to support the development of my interview questions. Probing questions were included in the interview protocol and were used to understand participants' perspectives further. The interview protocol also included a closing statement to inform participants that they would receive a summary of the study findings. Almost all interviews occurred in a neutral environment outside of work via Zoom or phone. Each participant had the opportunity to decide on the location and communication source. As the interviewer, I was flexible and accommodated the participants in their decisions.

All interviews were audio recorded with participant approval for later transcription and analysis (see Ravitch & Carl, 2019; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Audio recordings allowed me to review the interview to create codes and find patterns in the interviews. All audio recordings were transcribed through TranscribeMe! transcription service after each interview to ensure all the information was included. McGrath et al. (2018) and Rubin and Rubin emphasized the importance of quickly transcribing each interview to reduce transcribing more than one interview at a time. Because I am aware of my biases, I kept a reflective journal to point out my biases. I used the reflective journal to write my thoughts and opinions throughout each data collection and analysis.

I conducted one 45–60-minute interview each week to have ample time to gather and organize the data. I prepared semi-structured interview questions in advance (Appendix E) to gain rich, detailed information on teacher perspectives of the CSEFEL teaching pyramid strategies. Although my interview questions were prepared ahead of time using Blumer's symbolic interactionism theory. Building a relationship with the participants was essential. I wanted the participants to feel comfortable, so I planned to take a few minutes to talk and regulate the pace before jumping into the actual interview questions (see McGrath et al., 2018; Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

Participants were recruited from numerous early childhood education programs in the small research county consisting of Head Start, center-based programs funded by the Department of Education, private sectors, religious programs, and family home childcare programs. There were approximately 39 preschools in the selected study county

(ChildcareCenter, n.d.). All 11 participants invited to participate in the study were preschool teachers in ECE classrooms. I recruited participants by contacting program administrators from different programs via email (Appendix C). I planned to recruit a few relevant participants gained through program director support and then created a chain of interviewees within different programs (see Ravitch & Carl, 2019). After receiving preschool teacher email addresses from program directors, I emailed the invitation to the preschool teachers soliciting their participation in the study (see Appendix D). Once I gained a few participants from the first recruitment attempt, I then use a snowball purposeful sampling strategy asking these teachers to recommend other colleagues. I used the strategy to find an intentional target population by connecting with professionals within the ECE field (see Leighton et al., 2021).

After gaining approval from Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB), I selected participants for the study. I emailed the participants the informed consent to review and set up a time for the interview. Almost all interviews were conducted via Zoom or phone outside preschool teachers' work hours. During each interview, I revisited the consent form to guarantee the participants were willing to participate in the study.

I ensured all participants' confidentiality in the study by not revealing their real names but representing them in study documents only by the letter T for the teacher and a numeral, such as T1, T2, and so on. The study participants were guaranteed all recorded interviews were kept safe and locked in a secure cabinet in my home office for five years. The computer used for the study was always password protected.

I used member checking for interview validity and provided each participant with a two-page summary of the results. Study participants were kept up to the 60-minute agreed time during the interviews. I informed the participants that their participation was voluntary and that they could stop the interview when they no longer wished to participate. Before I proceeded with the interview, I asked the participants for their permission to record the interview. To ensure I gave every participant the same introduction, I read the interview protocol before starting with the interview questions (Appendix E). I recorded the interview with a recording device or via Zoom and use notes to reflect on the interviews. I wrote down nonverbal responses and note comments that stand out during the interview.

Roberts (2020) specified how researchers use interviews to gather data when it is impossible to observe study participants' actions, reactions, and feelings. I used an audio recording device for one interview and recorded via Zoom to record the interviews and save each interview to a password-protected personal computer using participants' pseudonyms to keep study data secure. I also kept a research journal to avoid biases during the interviews. I wrote my thoughts and concerns to practice objectivity during the data collection. I intentionally listened to each interview recording and separated the actual data from my written thoughts, ideas, and perspectives. Keeping a research journal help researchers voice their feelings and opinions, which leads to self-reflection (Ravitch & Carl, 2019).

At the end of each interview, participants received a $25 Amazon gift card showing appreciation for their participation. I informed each participant of the follow-up

steps, including data transcription and analysis. I used the TranscribeMe! transcription service to transcribe all the interview recordings to ensure validity (Gibbs, 2018).

Data Analysis Plan

The data analysis plan involved reflecting on the information essential to answering the research question to draw a meaningful conclusion from the interviews (Saldaña, 2016). I gathered the data in words rather than numbers and pursued a descriptive interpretation of the CSEFEL teaching pyramid strategies from the participants interviews (see Gibbs, 2018; Thomas, 2013). To begin the data collection process, I recorded each interview with the participant's approval gaining detailed data on the participant's experiences. The interview process helped me gather specific data on each preschool teacher's perspectives on implementing the CSEFEL teaching pyramid strategies and its influence. I used verbal and nonverbal interactions to shape communicative meaning during the interview process (see Blumer, 1969). I specified identified body language or reactions in my research journal to help me document the interview information (see Bailey, 2008; Gibson & Lehn, 2021). From the data collected from the interviews, I use TranscribeMe! transcription service for transcription accuracy and time management. Each transcript was printed and saved on a flash drive as a backup. After interviewing a participant, I immediately sent for transcription before moving on to the following interview. Next, I read the word document transcripts and listened to the audio recordings several times seeking to become familiar with the data and understand the participants' perspectives (see Delahunt & Maguire, 2017).

I began by organizing the data into meaningful units of analysis. I hid unusable data that includes words or phrases that did not accurately transcribe. I also hid irrelevant statements that do not pertain to the interview questions or responses. I reviewed the transcripts multiple times before the first cycle of coding. I then started the first cycle of coding analysis by creating a three-column table on a Word document for open coding (see Ravitch & Carl, 2019). Open coding is reached by segmenting data into tentative labels and describing them in single words (Ravitch & Carl, 2019). Color coding will be used during the first coding cycle to differentiate between concepts, semantic themes, examples, and commonly used phrases. The left side of the table will identify transcript information. I used the middle column to write down codes, commonly used phrases, and examples from the transcripts that can help create an understanding and generate meaning from the data. The right column was used to write my notes as I progressed through the first data analysis cycle. Tracking commonly used phrases from participants' perspectives on the CSEFEL teaching pyramid strategies helped me identify concepts or semantic themes.

During the second coding cycle, I connected the meanings of some of the open codes assigned in the first cycle. In the second coding cycle, I transferred relevant data to a new Word document to reduce and eliminate repetitive statements (see Ravitch & Carl, 2019). Data reorganization was consistent during the data analysis and recoding and recategorizing (Saldaña, 2016). I cut and pasted concepts, examples, and commonly used phrases to a new Word document to maintain organization and reduce data as I continued

to reanalyze the data (see Gibbs, 2018; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Each Word document was saved and filed by date to help me identify my most recent work.

Once codes were identified within the transcripts, I started categorizing the data. Categories connect related codes with similar meanings (Saldaña, 2016). Through data analysis, I identified categories that reflected teachers' perspectives regarding the CSEFEL teaching pyramid strategies. I then reanalyzed the data and began categorizing the data into emerging themes as patterns arose. Patterns provide reliable evidence demonstrating habits and essential factors related to the CSEFEL teaching pyramid strategies (Gibbs, 2018; Saldaña, 2016). Semantic themes were developed from the coding, categorization, and analytic reflection based explicitly on the participants' words (Delahunt & Maguire, 2017). I reviewed the emerging themes to ensure that the data supported the themes (Delahunt & Maguire, 2017). Then, I verified that the themes were transparent and checked for overlapping and other potential themes in the data. I refined the themes to identify relevance to the research question and further examine for relationships, similarities, and differences. I sought to identify discrepant cases, if any existed, and used these cases as a learning opportunity. I identified how discrepant data complicates or changes my understanding and interpretation of the data presented (Ravitch & Carl, 2019). All the interview questions were to gain preschool teachers' perspectives and CSEFEL teaching pyramid strategies in the preschool classroom to diminish the probability of discrepant cases. Using thematic analysis, I described my findings of the preschool teachers' perspectives in relation to the research question.

Trustworthiness

I safeguarded the trustworthiness and validity of the study through member checking and an external review. As mentioned by Ravitch and Carl (2019), trustworthiness is an alternative term for validity in qualitative research design. Trustworthiness outlines the degree to which researchers and readers are convinced that a research study has captured a significant experience or process related to the research topic (Levitt et al., 2017). Research participants are an essential aspect of research. It is a researcher's responsibility to ensure the credibility of the research and that the study demonstrates value and trustworthiness.

Credibility

I ensured credibility by only asking the ten interview questions reviewed by an ECE expert with CSEFEL knowledge and approved by the URR to identify if the participant's interview responses could answer the research question. The data interpretation focused exclusively on the information the participants provided. Ravitch and Carl confirmed that 10-12 participants are sufficient to gain saturation from a study seeking individuals' perspectives. I also established the study's credibility by conducting member checking and having an external review of my data analysis. A peer with professional knowledge in the early education field and the CSEFEL teaching pyramid reviewed interview questions and the study findings and checked for biases. I kept a reflective journal to ensure my perspective did not affect my research. In the reflective journal, I wrote my thoughts, ideas, controversies, and new knowledge from the preschool teacher interviews. I supported reflexivity with a reflective journal, where I

gathered my thoughts and focused on who I am as a researcher (see Ravitch & Carl, 2019).

Transferability

Transferability ensured that the findings were relevant to other settings and times (Burkholder et al., 2016). Transferability was established by using participants in various programs in the ECE field in the research county. Because research demonstrates challenging behaviors are a nationwide concern, my study was relevant to other programs using the CSEFEL teaching pyramid or other models that support understanding challenging behaviors. Transferability was ensured by the rich detail of the participant's responses. Rich details allowed the reader to measure the transferability of the information provided from the results of my research. Transferability included descriptive data that could be used as a resource for other researchers in the field (Ravitch & Carl, 2019). I presented the data from my research identifying a minimum of 10-12 preschool teachers' perspectives in detail for other researchers to use and compare in new studies. Conrad and Serlin (2011) and York (2020) suggested that it is also the readers' responsibility to generalize the findings and apply the information I provided to their circumstances. After conducting my study, I explained how my findings could be further explored in other research studies (see Conrad & Serlin, 2011; York, 2020).

Dependability

Dependability refers to using uniform procedures to reduce researcher bias (Ravitch & Carl, 2019). The data collection process for my study was uniform. I only used the interview questions and follow-up probes listed in Appendix E. I attempted to be

transparent through my data collection and analysis, providing a clear connection to my research purpose and question. Early childhood education providers from different programs can confirm that my research is dependable and valid when gaining different perspectives from the participating preschool teachers (see Ravitch & Carl, 2019). I established dependability to the reader by providing details of the steps I took from the beginning of my study to my research findings. Haven and Grootel (2019) specified dependability means another researcher conducting the same study will have similar results with the same participants in the same context. Conrad and Serlin (2011) introduced six elements that I referenced to create dependability in my study. Having a design compatible with the research question and providing an explicit explanation of my role as a researcher were the two elements at the top of the list. Conrad and Serlin, and Haven and Grootel explained the importance of findings demonstrating relevance across other data sources, such as within the ECE community, and looking at teachers' perspectives concerning challenging behaviors. The fourth element detailed the importance of specifying the basic theoretical and analytical framework, including my basic qualitative study using the conceptual framework of Blumer's interactionist approach. An external reviewer with ECE and CSEFEL knowledge reviewed the interview questions and my findings, checked for biases, ensured that the responses were not influenced by what I expected to hear and that the data matched the findings.

Confirmability

According to Ravitch and Carl (2019), confirmability determines whether the data are appropriately interpreted and can be confirmed by other researchers. Confirmability

was established through critical reflection and dialogic engagement with a peer field expert who could challenge my thoughts and force me to see the research and data from various perspectives. I established confirmability by only providing data that reflected the participants' perspectives on implementing the CSEFEL teaching pyramid strategies to support them in addressing challenging behaviors in the classroom. I used a reflective journal throughout the data collection and analysis process to eliminate fabrication due to my biases on the CSEFEL teaching pyramid (Gibbs, 2018). I practiced reflexivity by examining my biases, beginning each interview with an open mind, and documenting the participants' exact words to eliminate my biases (Ravitch & Carl, 2019). Although qualitative researchers are not objective, researchers must ensure the data can be confirmed. Researchers must also be realistic about their potential biases within the research process (Ravitch & Carl, 2019). I scheduled dialogue engagement opportunities with a CSEFEL professional colleague at different stages throughout my research, including but not limited to the creation of the qualitative interview questions, between interviews, during the data analysis process, and to review the final data analysis to assure the participants' perspectives were reflected and not mine.

Ethical Procedures

Formalized ethical research guidelines and committees are in place to protect participants in the research process and to show fidelity to the participants involved (Ravitch & Carl, 2019). I received Walden University IRB approval before moving forward with participant recruitment. I followed the recruiting process previously described, including obtaining consent from all participants in the research study.

Participation was voluntary, and I informed every one of their rights to stop participating at any time. A vulnerable population was not participating in my study, and I used pseudonyms to protect the participant's identity. The study was conducted outside the participant's work and environment, and I did not have any personal connections to the participants.

Informed consent was necessary because participants have the right to know the research process from beginning to end (Croucher & Cronn-Mills, 2019). The informed consent document was an explanation of the participant's rights. Before the interview began, I reviewed the informed consent document to participants and specified how I was going to use pseudonyms to protect their identity, how participants had the right to early withdrawal, and refuse to answer any of the questions presented.

Protecting one's privacy was essential, and participants were informed that I would be the only person accessing the data (in the form of the audio recording and transcribed responses). Maintaining confidentiality was the approach I used in my study to protect participant privacy. Participants had the right to disclose what they wanted me to know. I stored all the written and transcribed data collected from each interview in a locked filing cabinet in my home office. I stored the digital data on my personal computer, which is password protected. After five years, I will destroy all data collected from each interview by shredding or deleting all files from my computer.

Summary

In Chapter 3, I justified the research study design and rationale. I specified my role as the researcher and explained how I would eliminate potential biases I may have

encountered during the process. I provided a detailed rationale for the methodology I used. I provided a description of the interview and the data analysis process. I completed Chapter 3 by explaining how trustworthiness was supported in my study and explained the procedures I followed to ensure participants' privacy and follow ethical guidelines. In Chapter 4, I describe the results of my study.

Chapter 4: Results

The focus of this qualitative study was exploring preschool teachers' perspectives on implementing the CSEFEL teaching pyramid strategies to support them in addressing preschool children's challenging behaviors in the classroom. To achieve this, I recruited 11 preschool teachers from a small county in a southern state where preschool teachers were trained on CSEFEL strategies to address challenging behaviors in the classroom. I conducted a basic qualitative study using interviews to gain preschool teachers' perspectives on implementing the CSEFEL teaching pyramid strategies. I was guided by one research question about how preschool teachers describe their perspectives on implementing the CSEFEL teaching pyramid strategies and their influence on preschool children's challenging behaviors. In this chapter, I describe how the study was conducted, explain how I analyzed my data, and address the study results.

Setting

The recruitment plan procedure slightly changed to meet the circumstances. Instead of emailing prospective participants my study invitation, I asked program administrators to forward the study invitation to the preschool teachers in their programs (see Appendix D). Participants were recruited from numerous early childhood education programs in the research county. I received immediate interest from candidates in the research county. I successfully interviewed 11 participants from various early childhood education programs.

I recruited 14 participants, but only 11 were interviewed. The 11 participants were female; five were Caucasians, and six were Hispanics. The only male participant who

agreed to participate did not present himself for the scheduled Zoom meeting. Two interested participants did not meet the study criteria. All study participants worked with 3- and 4-year-old preschool children. The participants worked in various programs in the research county that served preschool-age children. The participants also came from different educational backgrounds. Due to participant preference, one interview was conducted face to face, and the remaining interviews were completed via Zoom. I used a portable recording device for the face-to-face interview. The homogeneity of the participant demographics made it possible to attain saturation.

Table 1

Participants' Demographic Information

Participants	Years of implementation	Education level	Type of program	Race
Teacher 1	3 years	Master's	Head Start	Caucasian
Teacher 2	8 years	Bachelor's	Head Start	Hispanic
Teacher 3	14 years	Associate's	State funded	Hispanic
Teacher 4	4 years	Some college	State funded	Caucasian
Teacher 5	5–7 years	Bachelor's	State funded	Hispanic
Teacher 6	4 years	Associate's	Family CC	Caucasian
Teacher 7	11 years	Master's	Private sector	Caucasian
Teacher 8	4 years	Bachelor's	Private sector	Hispanic
Teacher 9	10–13 years	Bachelor's	State funded	Hispanic
Teacher 10	3 years	Some college	Family CC	Caucasian
Teacher 11	1 year	Bachelor's	Military base	Hispanic

Data Collection

After I received IRB approval, I looked up all the ECS programs in the research county to gain program administration information. I emailed each program director information on my study and my contact information. The program directors forwarded my informational email on my study to preschool teachers in their program who might be

interested in participating. I then waited for participant responses. I emailed the invitation (Appendix D) and the informed consent to teachers who declared interest in participating in my study. Once the teachers responded with "I consent," I scheduled a Zoom meeting interview. I conducted one interview per week between May 2023 and July 2023. Fourteen preschool teachers declared interest in participating in the study; two interested participants did not meet the study criteria, and one did not attend the scheduled Zoom meeting. Eight participants met the predetermined criteria of being lead teachers working in the preschool classroom. One was a preschool teacher who would transition into a new role. Two participants ran their family childcare and had preschool children enrolled.

All the study participants reviewed sample questions listed on the informed consent. The first 10 minutes of the interview were used to get to know the participant better. We discussed their current role, years of field experience, and educational background. The interviews lasted about 30–45 minutes. I recorded and transcribed the interviews using the TranscribeMe! transcription service. All audio data and TranscribeMe! transcriptions were electronically stored in a password-protected computer.

One unusual circumstance I encountered during the data collection was that I knew four participants from previous employment and training. The participants understood my role as a Walden University student, and as such, biases were averted. The interview expectations were discussed at the beginning, and the participants understood my role as the researcher. Although I knew four participants from previous employments, I continued with the interviews because I had not had any personal

interactions with them in over 5 years. One participant requested to meet face to face as a personal preference. We met at a coffee shop. All the interviews were conducted outside the preschool teachers' work schedules.

The study interviews were recorded and downloaded for transcription using the TranscribeMe! transcription service. The transcription service took 1 day to complete each transcription. After each transcription, I reviewed the audio, downloaded transcribed documents to my computer, and saved the transcripts as a Microsoft Word document. I used pseudonyms to code each teacher using a T for teacher and the number (T1–T11) according to the order in which the interviews were conducted. I played each audio twice after each interview, compared it carefully to the transcriptions, and made corrections as needed. I read the transcripts several times and removed my and the participants' filler words and other sounds that were not part of the study. Each participant reviewed and approved the transcription for accuracy.

The data analysis plan was slightly changed to simplify the first coding process. I first planned to create a three-column table for the first coding process. After reviewing Saldaña (2016), I learned a better strategy that did not require cut and paste of the data. I used comments on the Microsoft Word transcription copy to code the data. I color-coded to differentiate between interview questions, examples of strategies, commonly used phrases, concepts, and patterns. I then created a three-column table. I inserted transcription information into the left column. The middle column held the emerging patterns and semantic themes, and the right column contained my notes.

Data Analysis

The study data were analyzed using open coding. Initially, the first coding was going to be completed on a three-column Word document. In the right column, transcription information was going to be added. The middle column was going to list the codes or important phrases identified, and the last column would list my comments, biases, and questions. Instead, I used a transcription copy and identified words and phrases that stood out. I color-coded to differentiate between interview questions, examples of strategies, commonly used phrases, concepts, and patterns. I read the transcripts multiple times to help me become familiar with them, understand the views participants expressed, find parallels in opinions, and identify common words or phrases study participants used to express their perspectives on the CSEFEL teaching pyramid strategies.

The analysis process began by reading through each transcription and finding relevant information to answer the research question. I identified commonly used phrases and patterns in participants' responses. A consistent pattern identified between all the participants was the importance of the visuals used in the classroom to support children with conflict resolution. All the participants talked about the importance of implementing the strategies with consistency to see the change in children's behavior. Another pattern identified was the impact of the pandemic on children's social-emotional development. One commonly used phrase I consistently heard was "I love CSEFEL" when I asked the participants about their overall perspective. I asked prompt questions to gain more detail as to why each participant loved CSEFEL. Another commonly used phrase identified

between five teachers was that “children become leaders.” I identified meaning from the open codes and categorized the data that reflected perspectives. The data analysis process moved from coded units to more significant representations, which were categories that evolved into themes. I reduced 28 categories to 12 categories, as 16 categories overlapped with other categories. I generated themes from categories to create meaning from the perspectives of the participants’ raw data. Six themes were identified: fidelity, variety of modalities, promoting social-emotional competence, effects of the pandemic, child/teacher interactions, and the home and school life connection.

Results

The data revealed that the 11 participants had different years of experience and levels of success implementing the CSEFEL teaching pyramid strategies. The data also revealed that the 11 participants’ perspectives showed that the CSEFEL teaching pyramid strategies influenced preschool children’s challenging behaviors, creating positive outcomes in the preschool classroom. Each of the participants described different CSEFEL strategies used in the preschool classroom. Most participants were able to articulate and define the specific CSEFEL strategies. Others described the actions, allowing me to categorize the strategy. All participants described strategies that specified different modalities to support all children in the preschool classrooms. Most participants described the importance of fidelity when implementing the CSEFEL teaching pyramid strategies. Some introduced the effects of the pandemic and the current behaviors preschool teachers experienced when the children returned to the classroom setting.

Interestingly, some of the described behaviors were presented in other studies (Dal & Akan, 2018; Dickinson et al., 2020; Green, 2018).

Results for the Research Question

The research question was as follows: What are preschool teachers' perspectives on implementing the CSEFEL teaching pyramid strategies and their influence on preschool children's challenging behaviors? The overall perspective from all the participants indicated that the CSEFEL teaching pyramid *did* influence preschool children's challenging behaviors and created positive outcomes in their preschool classrooms. According to T6, using the CSEFEL strategies helped children act happier and created smoother days. T7 explained how children learned emotional intelligence from the strategies, resulting in empowerment. According to T7, the teachers saw fewer challenging behaviors, less fighting, more language used in the classroom, and less crying because of the implementations. T7 explained how children looked for teacher support rather than taking frustration out on each other. "The children were taking turns, listening to each other's words, and knowing the classroom expectations; safety in the classroom improved, and relationships improved." T7 said, "I think it's wonderful. I really do think it changed our field a great deal because it gave us tools." T8 said, "I have seen a change because there's been a change in me. I feel more equipped with tools, with strategies I can use." According to T8, the CSEFEL teaching pyramid strategies are an excellent resource for preschool teachers to have as a guide. According to T8, CSEFEL helped children become more aware of their emotions. T8 said, "CSEFEL helps children to express themselves in a positive way without hurting themselves or hurting others." T9

explained how she had seen children transition into leaders rather than followers. T9 continued to say that CSEFEL strategies build children's self-esteem, allow them to articulate their wants and needs, and help them make their own choices. According to T10, CSEFEL provides children with the vocabulary to articulate their emotions and helps them reduce their stress levels and meltdowns. According to T10, children are now naturally engaging with peers, problem-solving, demonstrating they know how to share, and can make different choices independently. T11 shared a story about a child who enrolled in her preschool classroom midyear. Before enrolling, the child struggled with routines and expectations due to continuous family relocations. The child required extra services to support behavior management. According to T11, the child's behavioral change was a good outcome because the whole teaching team worked together and implemented the same CSEFEL teaching pyramid strategies. Overall, the participants explained how implementing the CSEFEL teaching pyramid strategies helped reduce challenging behaviors in the classroom because children learned how to navigate their emotions, became emotionally aware, learned emotional literacy, learned to explore and navigate conflict resolution, and learned the standard language to express their wants and needs.

Fidelity

In general, all the participants explained how using the tool with fidelity was necessary for the strategies to positively influence preschool children's challenging behaviors. To the participants, fidelity meant committing to implementing the strategies repeatedly. Repetition helped children learn, understand, and practice the routines and

expectations while becoming socially and emotionally competent. T11 explained how consistently implementing the strategies is critical to seeing a behavior change. According to T5, the children were managing their problems with peers by the end of the year. According to T5, she no longer intervened with conflict resolution by the end of the year because the children helped each other problem-solve. T1 and T2 explained how implementing the strategies since the beginning of the year had helped reduce the challenging behaviors and made the year smoother. According to T6, the adults must model the same practices to create consistency. However, T7 explained that she created consistency by meeting with her teaching team to ensure that they were on the same page and implementing the same strategies. According to T7, the children and staff held each other accountable because of consistent classroom expectations. T7 said, "The consistency has improved as a result of implementing CSEFEL with fidelity." Lastly, T7 explained how having all the teaching staff trained created fidelity in practice, with everyone working together to implement the exact expectations and use the same language. T9 stated how she used the strategies consistently and modified the strategies to fit her teaching style. T9 explained how children have different learning styles, and each strategy does not work the same for all children. T11 added how she began to see a change in children's behavior when the whole teaching team was on the same page and using the strategies consistently. T11 explained how using the strategies with fidelity helped children understand their own emotions. She began to see children talking things out, solving their problems, and beginning to empathize with each other. Unlike all other teachers, T2 explained that she did not struggle with children demonstrating challenging

behaviors. T2 stated that her consistency and follow-through helped children understand the classroom expectations. It was clear that the participants felt that consistency in practice and teacher follow-through influenced a change in children's challenging behaviors.

Variety of Modalities

Twenty-eight different CSEFEL teaching pyramid strategies were identified or described by all 11 participants. Most preschool teachers could label the strategy, yet a few described the actions, providing me with enough detail to identify the strategy. The strategies described included different modalities to support all learning styles. The strategies identified ranged from visuals to verbal cues, hands-on opportunities, and teacher modeling. T10 explained how the CSEFEL strategies provided teachers with the same tools and consistent language in the preschool classroom.

Table 2 shows the strategies identified by the participants in order of frequency.

Table 2

Strategies in Order of Frequency

Strategies	T1	T2	T3	T4	T5	T6	T7	T8	T9	T10	T11	Total
Visuals	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	11
Expectations	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	10
Emotional literacy	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	10
PDAs	X		X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	9
Child/teacher relationships	X	X		X	X		X	X	X	X		8
Home/school connection		X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X		8
Solution kits	X	X	X	X	X			X	X		X	8
Calming down strategies		X			X	X	X	X	X		X	7
Environments		X		X	X	X		X	X			6
Individualization		X	X	X		X	X		X		X	6
Tools to manipulate			X	X		X	X		X		X	6
Cozy area	X		X			X	X		X		X	6
Respect of children		X		X				X	X	X	X	6
Modeling		X			X	X	X		X		X	6
Teacher helpers		X	X		X				X		X	5
Tucker Turtle	X				X		X		X		X	5
Stop and listen				X			X		X	X	X	5
Open-ended questions				X		X	X	X	X			5
	X				X		X				X	4
Targeted support				X		X	X		X			4
Social stories	X		X				X					3
Introduce items before displaying	X		X								X	3
Role play/puppets		X			X						X	3
Hands-on opportunities		X					X		X			3
1st and then							X	X	X			3
Teacher check-in meetings							X				X	2
Emotional deposits										X		1

In Table 2, I described the strategies identified by the participants in order of frequency. The participants freely described or labeled the CSEFEL teaching pyramid strategies they implemented in their preschool classrooms when working with children demonstrating challenging behaviors. The participants discussed the strategies that best worked for them in the preschool classroom.

Visuals are a fundamental strategy presented by the CSEFEL teaching pyramid model, and all 11 participants acknowledged the importance of visuals. T9 said, "Visuals are the foundation of CSEFEL." All 11 participants talked about the visuals they use in their preschool classrooms to support children demonstrating challenging behaviors, recognize the routine, and help children solve conflicts with other peers. T5 said, "Those visuals give them prompts as to how they can resolve their problems." T5 also explained how the CSEFEL teaching pyramid visuals help nonverbal children. Nonverbal children look for teacher support and point to the strategy identified on the poster. According to T11, the visuals influenced children tremendously. The visuals provided the children with cues rather than words.

T5 also felt the CSEFEL strategies empowered children to self-regulate and deal with conflict in the classroom. The effectiveness of strategies differed between teachers. The strategies were used in different ways in each classroom. For example, T8 described a strategy she called the 1st and then strategy using two visuals. The first picture shows what the child needs to do in that instant. The second picture shows what the child needs to do next. She felt the strategy helped children understand what was expected of them in sequence. The 1st and then strategy included two visuals: the first showed the children

what was expected of them, and the second visual showed the next step for the children. T8 felt the 1st and then strategy created predictability and helped children know what to expect. Like T8, T9 felt the 1st and then strategy helped children understand and know what to expect next.

Five out of 11 participants discussed the Tucker Turtle strategy. Tucker Turtle is a scripted story that teaches children how to respond to situations that make them angry. According to T5, Tucker Turtle created much success in diminishing behaviors in the classroom. Tucker Turtle helped children identify their emotions, self-regulate, and build conflict-resolution skills.

Nine participants discussed Positive Descriptive Acknowledgment (PDA), but only T7 introduced a PDA Plus. Positive Descriptive Acknowledgement involves describing children's positive behaviors using explicit and specific language (Fish et al., 2015). A PDA Plus includes a specific comment, linking the description to an expectation or a desired characteristic (Fish et al., 2015). For example, "Thank you for walking inside the classroom; you were being safe." T6 felt PDAs provided external motivators for preschool children. According to T11, PDAs motivate children to want to do the right thing. T11 said, "I love using PDA's." According to T11, PDA's focus is on children's actions. Children hear teachers recognize children's actions, and other children are motivated to show they can do it, too.

The classroom expectations are another strategy 10 teachers identified that influenced children's challenging behaviors. According to Fish (2015), classroom expectations aid children in understanding the purpose of rules and create a link between

behavior and the positive character traits we want children to display. T1 identified the three expectations set in her preschool classroom: We are safe, responsible, and respectful. T5 emphasized the importance of introducing the expectations at the beginning of the school year. As a result, children took leadership roles in the classroom when new children enrolled in the program. The children were assigned to support new students and teach them the routine and expectations. Not only did understanding the expectations reduce challenging classroom behaviors, but children also learned friendship skills and built relationships with their peers.

Ten out of 11 participants explained how emotional literacy helped reduce challenging behaviors in their preschool classroom. Ten teachers consistently discussed emotions throughout the day, using different activities to identify and name different emotions. For example, T1 used what she called an "emotion jar." Upon arrival, each child was responsible for finding the stick with their name on it; they then decided how they felt by putting their stick in the jar, showing one specific emotion. The emotions were discussed throughout the day to help children identify and understand what specific emotions they were currently experiencing. T6 explained how talking about emotions with young children helped them articulate their feelings to others. According to T7, CSEFEL gives children the vocabulary to communicate their thoughts and feelings. Like T1, T8 used emotion cards to help children identify their emotions. T9 explains how CSEFEL gives children the vocabulary they need to build self-esteem and the courage to talk to others. As a result, children can articulate their wants and needs, diminishing some behaviors in the preschool classroom. Teacher 11 described her "emotional check-ins"

with preschool children. Teacher 11 said, “Check-ins were huge for us.” Children arrived, they identified their current emotional state, and the teacher talked to each child about their selection. T11 explained how it worked so well that she had to start using a 5-minute timer to guarantee she had time to check in with everyone. According to T11, visuals were needed to introduce and demonstrate emotional vocabulary. T2 and T11 used role-play as a strategy to introduce emotional literacy. Role play helped children see and label different emotions. According to T11, because children can understand and identify different emotions, they can articulate their emotions and resolve issues independently by the end of the year.

Another twenty-four strategies were identified among all 11 participants. Some teachers implemented the Super Friend strategy, and many had a cozy corner in their classroom where children could go if they needed a break from the classroom or peers. Most talked about the solution kits which differed among all 11 participants. The solution kits held different materials based on the teachers’ interests. T10 introduced emotional deposits, a CSEFEL strategy emphasizing the importance of filling children’s emotional piggy banks with positive feedback and encouragement.

Contrary to the CSEFEL strategies, two participants continued to use “I like” statements. T1 and used “good job” when talking about Positive Descriptive Acknowledgment (PDA). According to CSEFEL, PDAs should help teachers move from praise to acknowledgment. Generic praise statements such as “good job” do not describe the action or behavior they should do more. CSEFEL suggests acknowledgment promotes

internal/intrinsic motivation because the child's efforts and outcomes are recognized and labeled.

All 11 teachers agreed that the CSEFEL teaching pyramid strategies positively influenced preschool children's challenging behaviors. T11 continuously emphasized how the CSEFEL teaching pyramid strategies gave teachers different implementation options. T11 said, "I have a positive perspective on it because I feel like it has helped me a lot."

Social-Emotional Competence

According to Gail and Strain (2019), children with social-emotional competence demonstrate a sense of confidence, the ability to develop good relationships with peers and adults, the ability to persist at tasks, follow directions, articulate, and understand their feelings and others, the ability to manage strong emotions, and develop empathy.

All the participants said the CSEFEL teaching pyramid strategies taught children social-emotional competence which helped them problem-solve and better articulate their wants and needs. Most teachers felt that conversations regarding feelings helped the children with emotional awareness and how to identify emotions. T2 attempted to explain that promoting social-emotional development helped children see the appropriate behavior needed and prevented challenging behaviors. According to T2, if children self-regulate, know themselves, communicate their feelings, recognize someone else's feelings, and are problem solvers, they can concentrate on academics.

T5 explained how she likes the social-emotional part of the CSEFEL teaching pyramid strategies. T5 said, "The emotional literacy, competence, and working with

others is just, I feel, the biggest part of life." According to T6, talking about feelings in the preschool classroom promotes social-emotional competence and reduces challenging behaviors because children learn to articulate their feelings to others.

The COVID-19 Pandemic Effects on Children's Behaviors

Seven participants expressed how the pandemic reduced social-emotional competence in young children, creating more challenging preschool classroom behaviors. A closer analysis of the data showed some teachers felt the pandemic created more internal behaviors such as fear, stress, anxiety, confusion, and delayed speech. According to T6, the pandemic created anxiety in children; "they do not know what to expect next." According to T5, in being nonverbal, expressions of communication came out physically. T5 said, "In this last year, a lot of what we saw in the classroom as far as behaviors with students was a lot of physical expressions." T5 continued by not considering the current challenging behaviors as children trying to misbehave intentionally. T5 explained how CSEFEL tells us behaviors are a form of communication. According to T5, the pandemic changed lives. The pandemic caused isolation, and many families were forced to deal with their children for extended periods. Adults had to learn how to set boundaries. Five teachers explained how coming out of the pandemic, children did not know how to interact with peers because they had been by themselves or in front of the TV for hours. T8 explained how the pandemic greatly impacted children's lives and parenting styles.

According to T8 and T9, the pandemic shifted parenting styles. According to T8 and T9, they saw more of a passive, soft parenting style where rules were neither implemented nor consistent. According to T8, parents wanted to be friends without

structure or expectations. T9 felt the children returned to the school setting with no boundaries and a lack of social skills because parents did not socialize with their kids while at home all day. T9 continued to explain how she felt children were on technology while parents worked from home. As a result, T9 and T10 said more preschool-age children returned to the school setting in diapers and did not have the age-appropriate skills needed in a preschool classroom.

Participant T7, explained that her program did not close during the pandemic. However, the pandemic forced children to separate from their primary caretakers, creating inconsistencies in practices, routines, expectations, and staff. As a result, more children lacked self-regulation skills, low emotional intelligence, and more physical aggression and frustration (Wong, n.d). Most teachers agreed that implementing the CSEFEL strategies with fidelity helped reduce challenging behaviors identified after children returned to the classroom from the pandemic.

The Importance of Child/Teacher Relationships

Eight out of 11 preschool teachers emphasized the importance of a positive relationship between the child and the teacher and the home and school life connection as a strategy which helped reduce challenging behaviors in the preschool classroom. According to Gail and Strain (2019), relationships are the foundation of everything humans do. Children with the most challenging behaviors especially need strong relationships. Strong relationships help children learn and practice appropriate and acceptable behavior when interacting with others (Gail & Strain, 2019). T2 was very passionate when she discussed the importance of the relationships she built with the

children. T2 believed building positive relationships made children feel secure and build trust between the child and teacher. Children were more prone to listening to the teacher if a trusting relationship existed. T2 said, “The most important for me is that they trust the teacher.” T2 talked with passion in her voice due to personal experience. She emphasized the importance of respect for the little ones in her classroom. T2 explained how she saw children as children, not as a problem. According to T4, it is all about relationships and knowing the children. T4 said, “That is why I like CSEFEL so much because at the bottom of the pyramid are the relationships. The pyramid starts with us as the teachers, but it is about those relationships with kids.”

According to T4, positive relationships help teachers get to know the children and learn the children’s triggers. T4 explained how building the relationship first is as crucial as setting up the preschool classroom to fit the children’s needs. Preschool teachers use emotional deposits to strengthen and build positive relationships with children. According to T10, supportive conversations help preschool teachers get to children’s level and work through conflict resolution.

Home and School Life Connection

Most participants agreed that working and connecting with the parents helped to reduce challenging behaviors in the preschool classroom. The connection between home and school life helped teachers and parents use the strategies consistently in both environments. As a result, the children understood the expectations and used the same language in both environments. Participants understand how parents are the children’s first teachers. Four participants emphasized the importance of working alongside parents

because culture plays a significant role in children's expectations. According to T4, connecting with families helps to create a consistent routine for children. T4 talked about how some families have different expectations. T7 explained how one's culture can influence teaching styles. T10 explained how CSEFEL created more cultural acceptance and allowed teachers to explore different practices. T11 talked about the military culture.

Military children are often forced to move from place to place, creating inconsistencies in routine and expectations. According to T5, education starts at home, so when parents partner with the teachers, the teachers provide the tools. Parents also learn to role model positive behavior, and children will follow. T5 continued to say how the home reinforcement created consistency in practice. T7 explained how she used the CSEFEL Backpack Series for parent education. Each Backpack connection provides information and handouts for parents to learn about children's behaviors, CSEFEL strategies, and different readings. According to T7, the backpack series for parents created consistent expectations for children's behavior.

According to T8 and T9, strong relationships between the home and school life are essential to guarantee both entities are on the same page and implementing the same strategy the same way. T9 and T10 discussed the importance of teacher and parent communication. The strong partnership helped create better bonds between teachers and parents. According to T9 and T10, parent meetings helped parents better understand the importance of using the same strategies at home and created more trusting relationships. Overall, the participants agreed that building consistency between the home and school

environment made a difference and diminished some challenging behaviors in the preschool classroom.

Overall, all participants provided enough data to show how the CSEFEL teaching pyramid strategies did influence preschool children's challenging behaviors. The CSEFEL teaching pyramid strategies provided preschool teachers with the tools to help children explore and navigate their emotions, which helped children with conflict resolution. The CSEFEL teaching pyramid strategies also helped teachers understand the importance of relationships when working with young children demonstrating challenging behaviors. Mitchell et al. (2018) stated how young children with challenging behaviors must receive evidence-based early interventions such as the CSEFEL teaching pyramid to support school success. All 11 teachers agreed on the effectiveness of the CSEFEL teaching pyramid strategies in their preschool classroom. T1 and T6 explained how the CSEFEL teaching pyramid strategies helped children better understand their emotions and use the cozy corner to self-regulate. T2 said, "They become leaders." According to T2, because of the positive influence the CSEFEL strategies have had in her classroom, she would be willing to become a presenter and present on her success using the strategies. According to T3, once the children learned how to manage their emotions, they helped other children learn the classroom routine and expectations. According to T4, the CSEFEL strategies helped children identify their emotions and articulate their wants and needs. T4 said, "I mean, the kids are running the show; we are learning about their lives, likes, and favorites, and we go with it." According to T5, the strategies helped children self-regulate independently and need little to no teacher support. T5 said, "By

the end of the day, instead of having just two helpers, we ended with 5-6 super friends." T7 described one child with whom she felt the strategies influenced a change in her behavior. According to T7, this child started the program with high anxiety, no self-regulation skills, and often got physical. Consistency, practice, and parent involvement taught the child to articulate, "I need my space." T8 said, "I have seen a change because there has been a change in me. I am more patient, I feel more equipped with tools, with strategies that I can use." According to T8, the CSEFEL teaching pyramid strategies helped her navigate through her confidence and her professionalism. She felt the CSEFEL teaching pyramid strategies were an excellent resource to have and revisit when challenging behaviors arise. T8 explained how having confidence in implementing the strategies helped her stay consistent and see a child rather than the behaviors. According to T9, CSEFEL does work, and children need love, structure, and guidance. According to T9, when teachers show children love, they are more receptive to instruction and guidance. According to T10 and T11, with the CSEFEL strategies, children share, work with their peers, and solve problems. According to T11, the only way the CSEFEL strategies will influence children's behaviors is if the whole team is on the same page and implements the same strategies and practices.

The results showed how the 11 preschool teachers believed the CSEFEL teaching pyramid strategies influenced preschool children's challenging behaviors. All the participants described the tool's effectiveness in exploring and building emotional awareness, emotional literacy, conflict resolution skills, self-regulation skills, self-esteem, emotional intelligence, and confidence in preschool children. As a result,

children learn how to use their words and express their wants and needs to others. They could identify their emotions and articulate how others made them feel. Preschool children could navigate problems with their peers independently or with teacher support instead of getting physical. Preschool children became leaders and helped other children problem-solve and find solutions. Children learned to self-soothe and regulate by taking time for themselves when needed. Not only did the CSEFEL teaching pyramid strategies help children, but they also helped the preschool teachers build confidence in their skills to deal with challenging behaviors. The CSEFEL teaching pyramid strategies gave the preschool teachers the universal language to use within the team and provided practical options for children using different modalities.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Credibility

I ensured credibility by only asking the 10 interview questions reviewed by an ECE expert with CSEFEL knowledge and approved by my committee. I also achieved credibility in this study by recruiting participants who were informed about the research problem and were knowledgeable about the topic. All study participants were preschool teachers who had completed the CSEFEL teaching pyramid training series. The data interpretation focused explicitly on the information the participants provided. Eleven participants were sufficient to gain saturation from the study, seeking individuals' perspectives (Ravitch & Carl, 2019). I first established credibility by sharing the transcription with each participant to gain their approval on their perspective. Then, I continued establishing credibility by member checking and having an external party

review my data analysis. One of my peers with professional knowledge in early education and the CSEFEL teaching pyramid reviewed my interview questions and the study findings, checking for biases. I used a reflective journal to ensure my perspective did not affect my research. I wrote my thoughts, questions, and new knowledge I gained from each interview. Though my study participants were from different programs, the cohesion of their views and strategies lent credibility to the study and my results.

Transferability

Transferability is the degree to which a study and its findings can be transferred to other settings and times (Burkholder et al., 2016). Transferability in my study was established by using participants from various programs in the ECE field in the research county and from the rich detail of the participant's responses. One of the ways I ensured transferability in my study was by providing a detailed description of my data analysis method, data analysis, and a detailed description of my findings. I presented the data from my research identifying 11 preschool teachers' perspectives in detail for other researchers to use and compare in new studies.

Dependability

Dependability includes describing the steps the researcher will take through the study from beginning to end. Haven and Grootel (2019) specified that dependability means another researcher conducting the same study will have similar results with similar participants in the same context. The data collection process for my study was uniform. I only used the interview questions and follow-up probes listed in Appendix FE. To ensure the dependability of this study, I gave a detailed description of my research process. I was

transparent through the data collection process and analysis, providing a clear connection to my research purpose and question. I also used a reflective journal during my interviews, where I wrote my personal opinions and thinking. The reflective journal helped to ensure that my biases did not interfere with the transcription and data analysis. During the coding process, I identified reasons for specific coding.

Confirmability

Confirmability refers to the degree to which other researchers can confirm study findings (Ravitch & Carl, 2019). Confirmability was established through critical reflection and dialogic engagement with a peer field expert who challenged my thoughts and forced me to see the research and data from various perspectives. I established confirmability by only providing data which reflected the participants' perspectives on implementing the CSEFEL teaching pyramid strategies to support them in addressing challenging behaviors in the classroom. I used a reflective journal throughout the data collection and analysis process to eliminate fabrication due to my biases on the CSEFEL teaching pyramid (Gibbs, 2018). I emailed each participant their transcript to review. I received confirmation from each participant, and no one had anything to add or change. I then scheduled member-checking opportunities with a CSEFEL professional colleague throughout my research to ensure only the participants' perspectives were reflected.

Summary

The study aimed to explore preschool teachers' perspectives on implementing the CSEFEL teaching pyramid strategies to support them in addressing preschool children's challenging behaviors in the classroom. I interviewed 11 preschool teachers using a basic

qualitative model to achieve this purpose. I transcribed and analyzed the interviews for codes, categories, and themes. I presented the results of the data analysis, which identified how preschool teachers believed the CSEFEL teaching pyramid strategies did support and influence children's challenging behaviors in the preschool classroom. I will report the implications of these results in the next chapter.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusion, and Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to explore preschool teachers' perspectives on implementing the CSEFEL teaching pyramid strategies to support them in addressing preschool children's challenging behaviors in the classroom. To achieve this, I conducted a basic qualitative study using interviews to gain preschool teachers' perspectives. The overall results were that all participants believed that implementing the CSEFEL teaching pyramid strategies did influence a change in preschool children's challenging behaviors.

Interpretation of the Findings

Hemmeter et al. (2021) found that the teaching pyramid model provides ECE educators guidance on using evidence-based strategies to promote social-emotional competence and prevent or address challenging behaviors. According to Hemmeter et al. (2021), the teaching pyramid was not developed as a curriculum; instead, the teaching pyramid provides teaching strategies for teachers to provide universal strategies, prevention, and individualized support. The teaching pyramid strategies are embedded in classroom activities and routines. In this study, the participants identified 28 strategies they implemented in the preschool classroom when working with children demonstrating challenging behaviors. In this study, I found that the most important strategies included promotion, prevention, and intervention. All participants emphasized the importance of introducing the visual or expectations early in the school year. All participants talked about how the visuals, social stories, and conversations minimized escalated behaviors throughout the day. All participants also emphasized the importance of building relationships to help children with conflict resolution throughout the day. All participants

provided examples of how they fostered nurturing and responsive relationships, provided high-quality supportive environments, and taught social-emotional skills, which are all embedded in the first tier of the teaching pyramid, also known as the promotion tier. All participants explained how they used visuals and CSEFEL language as prevention strategies emphasized in the second tier that offers focused instruction for at-risk children with limited social-emotional skills. T11 was the only participant who discussed reaching the last tier of the pyramid. The last intervention tier emphasizes the need for individualized behavior intervention plans to target specific behaviors.

Hemmeter et al. (2021) found that social-emotional learning interventions, such as the pyramid model, promote and enhance social-emotional competence in young children. When the pyramid model was used, improvements in children's social skills were visible in the classroom setting. Luo et al. (2021b) reiterated how targeted interventions such as the pyramid model improved children's social-emotional competence (SEC) when implemented with fidelity. In this study, the collected data demonstrated that using the CSEFEL teaching pyramid strategies with fidelity helped and taught children emotional awareness and literacy. Children began to name their feelings and identify the different emotions. Aasheim et al. (2020) found that teachers who use proactive teaching strategies, positive reinforcement for appropriate behaviors, and nonpunitive discipline support children's behavioral, social, and emotional capabilities essential to academic learning. In this study, I found that the CSEFEL teaching pyramid strategies influenced positive outcomes in preschool children's challenging behavior when teachers created positive relationships with authentic support. In this study,

authentic support for young children consisted of implementing various strategies with different modalities to support all children in the preschool classroom. Perle (2018) found that evidence-based strategies, such as positive support, are infrequently taught during teacher training. Teachers require training that teaches evidence-based practices that demonstrate effectiveness when working with children's challenging behaviors (Perle, 2018). In this study, five participants expressed the importance of training the whole team on using the CSEFEL teaching pyramid strategies to guarantee fidelity in practice within the classroom setting.

According to the WestEd Center for Child & Family Studies (2018), the teaching pyramid model is a tiered approach designed to promote healthy social-emotional development, support children's appropriate behavior, and prevent problematic behaviors in preschool classrooms by training preschool teachers. One purpose of the teaching pyramid model is establishing an adequate workforce to prevent challenging behaviors by using proactive teaching pyramid strategies in the classroom (Green et al., 2021). Green et al. (2021) found that Head Start teachers felt unprepared when working with children's challenging behaviors. Like my study, Green et al. conducted a study on the teaching pyramid model that focused on training teachers to diminish challenging behaviors in the classroom. In my study, seven participants felt unprepared to work with children demonstrating challenging behaviors before the CSEFEL teaching pyramid training.

Harvey et al. (2021) found that children who engage in unwanted behaviors intend to escape undesired activities, seek to gain attention or items, or lack knowledge and awareness of what to do or expect. Like Harvey et al., one participant addressed the

exact reasons why children in her classroom demonstrated challenging behaviors. T3 explained how the preschool children in her classroom often engaged in challenging behaviors because they were trying to escape an activity or routine, wished to gain attention or items, or did not understand what was expected of them. According to Harvey et al., visuals support children with limited communication and provide clear expectations for young children during routines, transitions, and activities. Pokorski (2019) also found that visual schedules supported engagement, transitions, and children with disabilities demonstrating challenging behaviors. Like Pokorski, Busch et al. (2018) used strategies from the pyramid model, including opportunities for self-expression, setting clear classroom expectations, and teaching children alternative conflict resolution strategies. In this study, all the participants discussed a variety of visuals used in their classrooms to provide prompts for children regarding conflict resolution, engagement, transitions, and routine. The study results identified the importance of using visuals to support all children in the preschool classroom. Visual usage in the classroom helped children of all developmental levels. All participants felt that the visuals helped children articulate their wants and needs by allowing them to point to the visuals if needed, expanded nonverbal children's vocabulary, and helped English language learners (ELLs) understand the routine and expectations better.

In contrast, CSEFEL introduced positive descriptive acknowledgment (PDA) to support desired behaviors. A PDA describes what teachers see the child doing. For example, a teacher may say, "you are walking in the classroom; you are safe" rather than using phrases like "good job."

Dickinson et al. (2020) found that best practices when dealing with challenging behaviors that included the child and the family demonstrated better outcomes. My study indicated that children showed positive outcomes in behavior when the parents practiced the CSEFEL strategies at home as well. Parents and teachers must communicate effectively and develop collaborative relationships with positive behavioral support (Chai & Lieberman-Betz, 2018). Chai and Lieberman-Betz (2018) identified elements to achieve behavior changes in young children. One element introduced family-centeredness. Another element addressed the importance of family and professional partnerships to connect the home and school life when working with children with challenging behaviors. Chai and Lieberman-Betz discussed how teachers must work with families to develop and implement strategies to enable the entire family to participate. Classroom teachers play a vital role in helping families carry over successful classroom strategies to the home environment (Chai & Lieberman-Betz, 2018). In this study, eight out 11 preschool teachers introduced and agreed that parent involvement was necessary to guarantee consistency in home and school life practice. The study results showed the importance of building a strong collaboration with the family dynamics to create a consistent routine at home and school. Creating consistency in the child's routine helped the children understand the expectations and hear the same language both at home and at school.

Bulotsky Shearer et al. (2020b) found that positive teacher–child interactions are essential in the preschool classroom. Murano et al. (2020) found that understanding children's needs can help teachers model specific skills they want children to practice in

the classroom. Children require support to target specific needs to improve challenging behaviors. In this study, I found that all teachers role-modeled the positive behavior for children to observe and use in conflict resolution. I found two teachers who role-played to teach children conflict resolution skills. Leijten et al. (2018) found that negative home interactions can sometimes create challenging behaviors. Lack of positive parent involvement hinders social relationships that transfer into the preschool classroom. Parents contribute to challenging behaviors by unintentionally rewarding disruptive behavior instead of positive behavior. The lack of good adult presence and adult–child interactions also increases challenging behavior.

In this present study, I found that the pandemic was a considerable factor in the current behaviors that teachers are seeing in the preschool classroom. Seven participants agreed that the lack of parental involvement and technology use at home with their parents contributed to the lack of social skills and the internal behaviors currently seen in the preschool classroom. In this study, I found that two participants felt that teaching styles shifted to a more passive style where children did not have structure, consistency, or expectations. As a result, children returned from the pandemic to the school setting delayed in social skills, self-help skills, and speech development.

Limitation of the Study

One limitation of this study was that I had no male participants. This limitation was likely unavoidable because only a few male teachers were in the research county. The only male participant did not show up for the scheduled Zoom interview. Davis and Hay (2018) stated that more male teachers are needed. According to Okeke and Nyanhoto

(2021), male preschool teachers could be good role models for children without fathers. Because some participants discussed their role-modeling of the desired behavior, male study participants may have had a more varied perspective regarding the CSEFEL teaching pyramid strategies' influence on preschool children's challenging behaviors. Williams (2020) found that having more male teachers could also improve gender diversity in preschool classrooms, resulting in a more varied perspective. Another limitation of the study was the small sample size, which only included preschool teachers who completed the whole CSEFEL teaching pyramid training series. All other staff working in the preschool classroom were not included in the study. However, several participants believed that the CSEFEL teaching pyramid strategies worked because everyone in the preschool classroom received the same training and implemented the same strategies consistently.

Recommendations

The findings of this study were overwhelmingly positive, confirming that the CSEFEL teaching pyramid strategies are effective when used with fidelity. Some recommendations can be made based on the limitations of this study. One recommendation is related to the small sample size used in the study from one geographic location. Future researchers may wish to increase the sample size or replicate the study in a different region. Different geographical studies may show various findings, which a future researcher can later disseminate through a systematic literature review. Another recommendation based on the limitations is that future researchers may consider applying a quantitative study using survey methodology. Surveys can be conducted in various

settings, such as face-to-face or online. Surveys also allow researchers to collect data about opinions and experiences, allowing them to test whether variables are related. Such a study might elicit different data, providing more participants and testing whether the variables relate to all staff working with preschool children demonstrating challenging behaviors.

While this study revealed that all the participants believed the CSEFEL teaching pyramid strategies created positive outcomes for preschool children demonstrating challenging behaviors, many believed the positive outcomes resulted from all the teaching staff receiving the whole training series and implementing the strategies consistently as a team. It would also be helpful to study the CSEFEL teaching pyramid strategies' influence on preschool children from the student perspective. This might be challenging with preschool children. Still, the findings from such a study could help teachers be more reflective in choosing the CSEFEL teaching pyramid strategies to influence challenging behaviors.

This study's additional finding was that the COVID-19 pandemic significantly influenced the current behavior that children are displaying in the preschool classroom. A future study could explore teachers' perspectives on challenging behaviors related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Such a study could investigate the impact the COVID-19 pandemic has created since the children returned to the preschool classroom. Teachers might provide more detail on specific strategies to help children better cope with returning to the school setting.

Wong (n.d.) reported that emerging evidence reveals more visible developmental delays and challenging behaviors in young children from the "COVID generation." The COVID-19 generation demonstrates a lack of social-emotional skills needed to succeed in the preschool classroom. According to Wong, more children do not know how to play with their peers and cannot focus on activities. The COVID-19 generation is more prone to outbursts, physical aggression, and separation anxiety (Wong, n.d.). In my study, eight out of 11 participants discussed the impact on children's development because of the COVID-19 pandemic and agreed that the pandemic did affect children's internal behaviors, causing more anxiety and fear in the preschool classroom. Future studies could explore factors in preschool children's challenging behaviors connected to the pandemic. Gurgel et al. (2023) suggested that continuing problems with children's challenging behaviors due to the COVID-19 pandemic can lead children to struggle to return to the preschool classroom. The study findings revealed how children are returning to the preschool classroom with delayed skills in communication, self-help skills, and social-emotional development.

Implications

The study findings indicated that while dealing with challenging behaviors may be a significant task for early childhood educators when unprepared (Hemmeter et al., 2021), the participants in this study maintained that the CSEFEL teaching pyramid strategies positively influenced children's challenging behaviors in the preschool classroom. One implication of this study is that new data are available for stakeholders to review and use to make decisions that focus on potential funding to continue using the

CSEFEL teaching pyramid model in the research county. The participants emphasized the importance of having the whole team trained to guarantee that everyone was implementing the same strategies and using the same language to create consistency in practice. Because the CSEFEL teaching pyramid series of training comes at a price for each participant, the data may also help organizations decide to include all of their employees to be trained.

This study may also benefit other preschool staff because it allows them to see the influence the CSEFEL teaching pyramid strategies have when used with fidelity from a teacher's perspective. By reading this research along with participants' words and reactions, preschool staff might better understand the importance of using the strategies with fidelity. To implement the strategies with fidelity, the results showed that the whole team must be trained on the entire CSEFEL teaching pyramid training series. Preschool staff will also read and better understand the importance of building strong relationships with the children in their classrooms, the need to connect the home and school life, how the strategies provide a variety of modalities, and the need to promote social-emotional competence. According to Hallett et al. (2019), social-emotional competence in young children is crucial and can predict later school success.

Study findings could support positive social change because the results may contribute to increased funding to sponsor a tool that demonstrates positive outcomes for children who demonstrate challenging behaviors in the preschool classroom. Study findings can encourage new preschool teachers or staff to attend the CSEFEL teaching pyramid training series to learn practices that positively influence shifting children's

challenging behaviors after the COVID-19 pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic was not part of the study. Still, the results demonstrated the pandemic's impact on children returning to the school setting and the importance of building relationships, promoting social-emotional development, and connecting the home and school life for fidelity in practice.

Conclusion

Challenging behaviors are expected from preschool children as they learn socially appropriate behaviors and learn ways to express themselves. However, for children to become socially and emotionally competent, preschool teachers need to implement strategies that address those specific behaviors. Early childhood educators reported that they feel unprepared to support these young children demonstrating challenging behaviors (Hemmeter et al., 2021). The CSEFEL teaching pyramid framework presents topics that include strategies to create nurturing relationships, foster supportive classrooms, understand behaviors, and appreciate the importance of working with families. The CSEFEL teaching pyramid strategies were developed to support early care educators dealing with challenging behaviors. This qualitative study explored preschool teachers' perspectives on implementing the CSEFEL teaching pyramid strategies to support them in addressing preschool children's challenging behaviors in the classroom. I interviewed 11 preschool teachers for this study and found that all the participants believed that the CSEFEL teaching pyramid strategies did positively influence preschool children's challenging behaviors.

The findings of this study indicate that all the participants believe the CSEFEL teaching pyramid strategies are effective when implemented with fidelity. The findings suggest that consistency in practice and implementation is important for children to learn a routine, understand the classroom expectations, become emotionally aware, and learn how to navigate the different emotions children experience. The study findings imply that all the participants saw a change in the children's behavior because they focused on building strong relationships with both the children and families. Teachers indicated awareness that using a variety of modalities to implement all the strategies helped teachers influence the children in their preschool classrooms. The findings may support positive social change because the results provide new data for stakeholders to use when considering new funding to continue implementing the CSEFEL teaching pyramid model. The findings may also help other ECS professionals understand the importance of using the tool with fidelity to create positive outcomes.

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Appendix A: Local Evidence/ Teaching Pyramid Benchmarks of Quality

Site/Program Name: County in California- CSEFEL Teaching Pyramid Leadership Team Date: 5/26/21

Team Members: See Attendance Sheet

Teaching Pyramid Benchmarks of Quality *with Cultural Responsiveness Considerations in Italics*

Critical Element	Benchmarks of Quality	Select One
A. Establish Leadership Team	1 Team has broad representation that includes, at a minimum, a teacher, administrator, and a member with expertise in behavior support. Other team members might include a parent or family member, teaching assistant, related service specialists, and other program personnel. *The team represents the culture and diversity of the program and the larger community. The team includes the family voice in a manner that represents the diverse needs of program families and the community.*	**In Place**
	2 Team has administrative support. Administrator attends meetings and trainings, is active in problem solving to ensure the success of the initiative and is visibly supportive of the adoption of the model. *The administrator provides continual, explicit statements of active commitment to a) equity and b) developmentally appropriate practices during meetings/trainings.*	**In Place**
	3 Team has regular meetings. Team meetings are scheduled at least quarterly for a minimum of 1 hour. Team member attendance is consistent. *The team schedules meetings at times that are convenient for family and community representatives, provides access to child care, and ensures interpreters are present as needed.*	**In Place**
	4 Team has established a clear mission/purpose. The team purpose or mission statement is written. Team members are able to clearly communicate the purpose of the Leadership Team. *The mission includes a clear commitment to equity and is publicly posted in the multiple languages represented in the program and multiple modes of*	**In Place**

Critical Element	Benchmarks of Quality	Select One
A. *Establish Leadership Team cont'd.*	5 Team develops an implementation plan that includes all critical elements. A written implementation plan guides the work of the team. The team reviews the plan and updates their progress at each meeting. Action steps are identified to ensure achievement of the goals. *Equity goals and practices are included in the implementation plan and reviewed at regular plan reviews.*	**In Place**
	6 Team reviews and revises the plan at least annually. *Family and community input are included in the annual review to guide implementation plan development.*	**In Place**
B. Staff Buy-In	7 Staff members are aware of and supportive of the need for a program-wide system for addressing children's social-emotional development and challenging behavior. *They are also aware of the need for using culturally responsive practices and addressing implicit bias.*	**In Place**
	8 Staff input and feedback is obtained throughout the process – informal conversations with the director, focus group, suggestion box. *The administration creates an environment of trust that provides authentic and open opportunities to discuss race, privilege, and power issues.*	**In Place**
	9 The program Leadership Team provides update on the process and data on the outcomes to program staff on a regular basis. *Team is aware of concepts of implicit bias and review data to look at any disparities in discipline or behavior incident reports*	**In Place**
C. Family Involvement	10 Family input is solicited as part of the planning process. Families are informed of the initiative and asked to provide feedback on program-wide adoption and ways to promote family involvement in the initiative. *Families are recognized as partners.*	**In Process**

Critical Element	Benchmarks of Quality	Select One
C. *Family Involvement cont'd.*	11 There are multiple mechanisms for sharing the program-wide plan with families, including narrative documents, conferences, and/or parent meetings to ensure that all families are informed of the initiative *in multiple languages and modes of communication.*	**In Process**
	12 Family involvement in the initiative is supported through a variety of mechanisms, including home-teaching suggestions, information on supporting social development, and the outcomes of the initiative. Information is shared through a variety of formats (e.g., meetings, home-visit discussions, newsletters, open house, *family friendly handouts, access to bilingual staff). The strategies and/or materials are culturally responsive (e.g., the diversity of the children is represented across the program, in books, pictures, and materials; diversity of the children is represented in pictures, materials and items sent home and in common areas; children's cultures are affirmed and promoted).*	**In Process**
	13 Families are involved in planning for individual children in a meaningful and proactive way. Families are encouraged to team with program staff in the development of individualized plans of support for children, including the development of strategies that may be used in the home and community. *Administrators remove barriers (e.g., scheduling) that impede individual family involvement.*	**In Place**
D. Program-Wide Expectations	14 At least 3-5 positively stated, program-wide expectations are developed. *The team assesses expectations to align them to the family, community, and staff values.*	**In Place**
	15 Expectations are written in a way that applies to both children and staff. When expectations are discussed, the application of expectations to program staff and children is acknowledged. *Adults model cooperative group learning, interactions, and coaching that align with cultural values of the community.*	**In Process**
	16 Expectations and expectation examples (rules) are developmentally appropriate. *The team examines expectations and examples to ensure that they are necessary for positive social development and not simply to make adult lives easier.*	**In Place**

Critical Element	Benchmarks of Quality	Select One
D. Program-Wide Expectations cont'd.	17 All program staff are involved in the development of the expectations. *Staff and families identify expectations that address needs, cultural norms and values of the program and community.*	**In Process**
	18 Expectations and examples are posted in classrooms and in common areas in ways that are meaningful to children, staff, and families. *Expectations are shared with families and staff assist families in the translation of the expectations to rules in the home. Visuals are representative of culture and family backgrounds.*	**In Place**
E. Strategies for Teaching and Acknowledging the Program-Wide Expectations	19 A strategy for embedding information on expectations into large group activities, small group activities, and individual activities is developed.	**In Place**
	20 A variety of teaching strategies are used on a frequent basis: teaching the concept, talking about examples and non-examples, scaffolding children's use of the expectations in the context of ongoing activities and routines, *providing positive descriptive acknowledgement linked with the expectations (PDA Plus).*	**In Process**
	21 Strategies for acknowledging children's use of the expectations are generated and used by all program staff including administrative and support staff (e.g., clerical, bus drivers).	**In Process**
F. All Classrooms Demonstrate the Adoption of the Teaching Pyramid	22 Teachers and program staff have strategies to promote positive relationships with children, each other, and families in place, and they use those strategies on a daily basis.	**In Process**
	23 Teachers and program staff have arranged environments, materials, and curriculum in a manner that promotes social-emotional development and guides appropriate behavior. *The strategies and/or materials are culturally responsive (e.g., the diversity of the children is represented across the program, in books, pictures, and materials; diversity of the children is represented in pictures, materials and items sent home and in common areas; children's cultures are affirmed and promoted).*	**In Place**
	24 Teachers and program staff are proficient at teaching social-emotional skills within daily activities in a manner that is meaningful to children and promotes skill acquisition.	**In Process**

Critical Element	Benchmarks of Quality	Select One
F. All Classrooms Demonstrate… cont'd.	25 Teachers and program staff respond to children's problem behavior appropriately, using evidence-based approaches that are positive and provide the child with guidance about the desired appropriate behavior.	**In Process**
	26 Teachers and program staff initiate the development of an individualized plan of behavior support for children with persistent challenging behavior.	**In Place**
	27 *Classrooms are observed using the Teaching Pyramid Champion Classroom Snapshot or the Teaching Pyramid Observation Tool/Teaching Pyramid Observation for Infants & Toddlers (TPOT or TPITOS) to measure fidelity of implementation.*	**In Process**
G. Procedures for Responding to Challenging Behavior	28 Strategies for responding to problem behavior in the classroom are developed. Teachers use evidence-based approaches to respond to problem behavior in a manner that is developmentally appropriate and teaches the child the expected behavior. *Teachers have received training related to potential bias when responding to behavior challenges and have strategies to reflect on their responses to individual children. Training topics include culture, trauma, and mental health.*	**In Process**
	29 A process for responding to crisis situations related to problem behavior is developed. *Approaches include considerations for trauma and social and emotional development. Teachers can identify how to request assistance when needed. A plan for addressing the child's individual behavior-support needs is initiated following requests for crisis assistance.*	**In Place**
	30 A process for problem solving with other staff members around problem behavior is developed. Teachers can identify a process that may be used to gain support in developing ideas for addressing problem behavior within the classroom (e.g., peer-support, brainstorming session). *The administration and staff consider culture, trauma, and mental health as part of problem-solving behavior. Staff initiates support and uses a strength-based lens, avoiding deficit thinking and negative discussions about children*	**In Place**

Critical Element	Benchmarks of Quality	Select One
G. *Procedures for Responding to Challenging Behavior cont'd.*	31 A team-based process for addressing individual children with persistent challenging behavior is developed. Teachers can identify the steps for initiating the team-based process, including fostering the participation of the family in the process. *Staff encourages family involvement from the beginning and supports are provided to optimize opportunities for family involvement (e.g., child care, interpreters, meetings at times and locations that work for families such as evenings or mornings, before or after work as needed). Teams use family-friendly language, eliminating jargon.*	**In Process**
	32 Strategies for partnering with families when there are problem behavior concerns are identified. Teachers have strategies for initiating parent contact and partnering with the family to promote appropriate behavior. *Families provide input into the development of the process and any related policies regarding crisis situations. Culture and learning needs are part of the family contact plan (e.g., alternate modes of communication if a cell phone is unavailable, accommodations to ensure comprehension).*	**In Process**
H. Staff Support Plan	33 A plan for providing *training, coaching* , and ongoing, in-classroom support on the adoption of the Teaching Pyramid *including culturally responsive practices and implicit bias* is developed and implemented.	**In Process**
	34 Staff responsible for facilitating behavior-support processes are identified and trained *in how to do a functional behavioral assessment, individualize Teaching Pyramid strategies, and how to reflect on their responses to individual children to avoid potential bias when responding to behavior challenges. An individual or individuals with behavioral expertise are identified for supporting staff and families throughout the process of developing and implementing individualized intensive interventions for children in need of behavior support plans. This person may be a consultant or staff member, trained and knowledgeable in developmentally, culturally, and linguistically-appropriate practices as well as trauma-informed practices and infant and early childhood mental health.*	**In Process**

Critical Element	Benchmarks of Quality	Select One
H. *Staff Support Plan cont'd.*	35 *The Inventory of Practice, Teaching Pyramid Champion Classroom Snapshot TPOT or TPITOS* is used as a needs assessment with staff to determine training needs on the adoption of the Teaching Pyramid. *The administration and leadership team encourage and support staff to reflect on their own underlying emotional needs and cultural norms that influence their perceptions and reactions to children's behavior.*	**In Process**
	36 Individualized professional development plans are developed with staff. *Individual plans include topics related to implicit bias and culturally responsive classroom strategies.*	**In Process**
	37 Group and individualized training strategies are identified & implemented *taking into account cultural considerations of staff, including learning and communication styles, problem-solving preferences, and cooperative vs. competitive interactions.*	**In Place**
	38 Plans for training new staff on the Teaching Pyramid and *culturally responsive practices* are identified and developed.	**In Process**
	39 Incentives and strategies for acknowledging staff are identified. *The administration acknowledges staff in ways that are aligned with cultural norms and practices.*	**In Place**
I. Coaching and Technical Assistance	40 A person or team of people are identified as internal support for staff members as they implement the Teaching Pyramid. *To the extent possible, staff should be selected who reflect the culture and diversity of the program and community*	**In Process**
	41 The Leadership Team determines how coaching or technical assistance will be carried out each year. For example, a new staff member may need additional training, coaching, and support for implementation, while a seasoned teacher may need peer or intermittent coaching for sustaining practices.	**In Process**

Critical Element	Benchmarks of Quality	Select One
I. Coaching and Technical Assistance cont'd.	42 Implementation to fidelity is supported by coaching and technical assistance in the classroom, as determined by the Leadership Team. *Practice-based coaching is used to assist classroom staff with implementing the Teaching Pyramid practices to fidelity. Coaching includes ongoing dialogues that address understandings of culture and practices, as well as reflective questioning that challenges assumptions, stereotypes, perceptions, and practices.*	**In Process**
	43 Those providing coaching or technical assistance receive support as well. *The leadership team provides emotional support to coaches as needed (e.g., regular supervision, consultation, building supportive relationships).*	**In Process**
J. Monitoring Implementation and Outcomes	44 Process for measuring implementation is developed.	**In Process**
	45 *The program collects data on behavior incidents and program actions in response to behavior and uses those data to address child and teacher support needs. The data include information on Race/ Ethnicity, Gender, IEP/ IFSP Status, Dual Language Status*	**In Place**
	46 Data are collected and summarized with visual displays. *Team is aware of concepts of implicit bias and review data to look at any disparities in discipline or behavior incident reports.*	**In Process**
	47 Data are shared with program staff and families *in formats that are understandable to a variety of staff, families, and learners (e.g., free of jargon, pre¬sented in multiple modes of communication, differing languages).*	**In Process**
	48 Data are used for ongoing monitoring, problem solving, and program improvement. *Data are used to monitor impact of program systems and practices on equity in discipline.*	**In Place**

	49 Plan is updated/revised as needed, based on the ongoing data.	**In Place**

Appendix B: Local Evidence/County in California- CSEFEL Teaching Pyramid Leadership Team

Ripple Effects Map – Compilation of May 2016-May 2021

Main Concepts	Secondary Branches					
Achievements	Overall trained at 26 I/T sites and 67 Preschool sites, 20 Family Child Care Providers, and 45 SBCEO Preschool Teachers, Assistants, Speech Therapists and Psychologists, 6 Quality Counts Coaches	County part of State of CA Leadership Team	Trained 3 Lead Promotores/Health Advocates in *Positive Solutions for Families – they trained 10 Promotores Countywide – they trained Parents in SBCEO Child Development Programs*	Bilingual Coaches and Trainers	Trained 13 Teachers/Directors in Site Leadership Team	Model is being implemented in Family Child Care Homes and some have become mentors and Parent Advocates
Children's Social/Emotional Competence	Use of Conflict Resolution, allowing space, shows increase on cognitive concepts	calming shelf dedicated to CSEFEL (calming kit, solution Kit, book nooks, backpacks) Teachers/children can use when needed	Children use Solution Kit to support each other– children who would explode – put in area where they can reach it; independently go get it, stay cool and calm	In FCCs, shift from rules (no, no, no) to expectations. Providers are using PDA+ Also focused on emotional literacy, instead of accepting negative – validating and helping children work through it instead of telling them to accept it.	Children are more empathetic.	Children know and use expectations and give PDA to each other In FCCs, at first using a lot of good job, I like … started using PDA in classroom, focusing on positive, shifted from deficit – changed the behavior of the children at home.

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Teacher Leadership	Cultural Shift in way to talk to parents/children. Shifted from pointing out challenging behavior; point out successes. New way to work	Involved in writing policy handbook to include CSEFEL Leadership team is making it all possible – connection with LT, reinforcing it. Appreciate training by WestEd – keeping it fresh.	Level of pride and leadership in the new model. Staff meeting starts with kudos and TP successes, hear a lot of PDA – was awkward at beginning – now natural, pours out.	Leadership team internally has been huge – program goals, internal guidelines, diverse team with teachers actively involved,	New internal leadership teams. County is well-represented at state and now we have leadership teams at the program level – solidifies what we are doing and becomes part of the culture – further implementation.	Teachers/Coaches are using TP to talk to colleagues, other staff, students Sharing the model (PDA, Super Friend) across their agencies
Parent Impact/Family Strengthening	In CAC Head Starts, the Family Service Advocates & teachers are all on the same page	Use/model when children are dropped off and picked up Expectations are known by all teachers, children, and now to homes.	Increase in knowledge of child development and realistic expectations	Parents are learning and using same concepts Parent Advisory Council –created poster for lobby area, list of things to do at home.	Parent Modules are being used at community sites/ Parent Advisory meetings include TP and how to use at home	Internally and externally more accepting During BIP discuss materials; all on the same page
Teacher Skills and Knowledge	Not exiting children and able to articulate why.	Increased ownership of model and increased knowledge/ part of a movement	Teams have worked together on implementing TP - hot spots, Expectations, PDA, etc.	Teachers are using reframing phrases/Cultural shift Empowers teachers to handle issues;	New way to work/Intentionality /Everybody is in!	With Pandemic, emotions, stress – at all sites, teachers understand importance of social/emotional skills are – take deep breath and could reframe and realized that

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						nothing is more important than children feeling safe, - changed teachers' feelings of confidence – could support children.
Community Support	Community model – all on the same page Shared with colleges, parents, funders, county Agencies	Children are front-loaded for entering kindergarten; school districts involved.	Aligns with trauma-informed care	Licensing has been more receptive to use of behavior support plans/ New legislation	At the College level, changes in textbooks and integration of Teaching Pyramid in Courses	Historical change – more valued, preschools and community are asking for more training. New cheerleaders
Policies and Procedures	CSEFEL included/imbedded in policy handbook and volunteer handbooks/Used in Teacher Evaluation Fewer expulsions	CSEFEL is on agenda for staff meetings and management meetings	Inclusion sites includes CSEFEL for typically developing and children with disabilities	Concepts are shared with Boards CSEFEL resource table at front of school	Parent, Volunteer, Sub letters describe the model and why it is used	Same language used across sites and between classrooms. Expectations are visible
Cost Savings	Fewer Referrals/ More time for Director (not dealing with behavioral issues)	Fewer shadow aides	Worker's Comp is down Less absenteeism Less turnover/ better retention	Absolute favorite – PDA – no cost, be real, be appreciative	Sharing resources/grants to provide more training	Have our own trainers/coaches
Sustainability	Really grown since initial work at Systems Change Grant from First 5 support from	Embedded in many sites. Buy-in for the long haul.	Use of local coaches/trainers Embraced it and implemented TP as	Coaches can share with other sites; give strategies, e.g., expectations, what it looks like,	At College level, shift of students in understanding of TP. Come out "talking" TP. They	Improved relationships and brought joy back to teaching.

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	Foundation, Infant/Toddler grant	Shift in programs that went through it years ago – more buy-in, re-visiting strategies, new level of buy-in	culture – reframing, PDA, schedules, using solutions kit, 2 in-house coaching – cost savings and sustainability.	how to set it up. TP is just integration of best practices, PDA and other TP vocabulary is used. Great success with someone with no training yet.	are seeing it in action at many sites (new trend). When not seeing it, they are able to talk about it to others.	Competence, job satisfaction and retention
Next Steps	Training more coaches/ training, especially bilingual, Support continued authorization. Infant/Toddler – tie it in more and get language started.	Offer "Going Deeper" for those who have had 5 Modules. County-wide conference. Get more Special Ed trained – strategies.	Higher Education Conference Bring in SBCC	Work with new Inclusive Early Education Expansion Program grant to develop TP Partner Sites	Strengthen Leadership Team Administrators to have bandwidth to be involved. Training on and more use of data.	More parent involvement Expand "Promotores" training in Positive Solutions for Families

Appendix C: Email to the Director

Date:

[Program Director]

Phone:

Dear Program Director.

I am a student at Walden University working on my Doctor of Education degree in Early Childhood Education. I am currently in the process of writing my doctoral dissertation. I am looking for participants to help me answer my research question: What are Preschool Teachers' Perspectives on Implementing the CSEFEL Teaching Pyramid Strategies and its Influence on Preschool Children's Challenging Behaviors? I am asking if you will inform your preschool teachers about my study and provide me with email addresses for preschool teachers who have completed the CSEFEL teaching pyramid series of trainings to potentially participate in the study. Any contact information you provide will be treated strictly confidential and purely for my academic purpose. Potential participants who are interested in participating will receive a letter of invitation and consent form to view and understand the study before deciding whether to take part. I look forward to your favorable response.

Your collaboration is greatly appreciated. I would be happy to answer any questions or concerns that you may have at any time. You may contact me through my email address. If you agree to provide me with the preschool teachers' email addresses, please reply "I consent" to my email before sharing their email addresses to me. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Maria Suarez

maria.suarez@waldenu.edu

(805) 714-6026

Appendix D: Invitation

Doctoral student seeks participants who implement CSEFEL teaching pyramid strategies in preschool classrooms.

This study will explore preschool teacher's perspectives on implementing the CSEFEL teaching pyramid strategies and its influence on preschool children's challenging behaviors.

Investigating preschool teachers' perspectives on implementing the CSEFEL teaching pyramid strategies and the influence on preschool children's challenging behaviors may contribute new data that can be used by ECE centers and CSEFEL teaching pyramid stakeholders when making decisions regarding the use of the CSEFEL teaching pyramid in the research county. The study outcomes can promote positive social change in the research county as the findings may contribute to further exploration of the CSEFEL teaching pyramid strategies.

This study is being conducted by a researcher named Maria Suarez, who is a doctoral student at Walden University.

About the study:

- Participate in one interview in which you will be asked a minimum of nine questions
- Interview for an hour by via Zoom, or phone
- Allow the interview to be audio recorded
- Allow member-checking
- To protect your privacy, no names will be used in the study
- Participants will be contacted via Walden University email address to confirm the legitimacy and to make arrangements for the interview

Participants must meet these requirements:

- Preschool teacher
- Fully completed the CSEFEL teaching pyramid series of trainings
- Implementing CSEFEL teaching pyramid strategies in the preschool classroom to reduce challenging behaviors

If you would like to share your perspectives on implementing the CSEFEL teaching pyramid strategies and its influence on preschool children's challenging behaviors,

please email Maria Suarez at maria.suarez@waldenu.edu, with an "I consent" to participate. Your thoughts and ideas are a valuable resource!

Appendix E: Interview Protocol

Title of Study: Preschool teachers' perspectives on implementing the CSEFEL teaching pyramid strategies and its influence on preschool children's challenging behaviors

Date:

Participant:

Position:

Location:

Introduction:

Thank you for your willingness to participate in the interview aspect of my study. As I mentioned to you in my email, my study seeks to understand preschool teachers' perspectives on the CSEFEL teaching pyramid strategies and its influence on preschool children's challenging behaviors in the classroom. Our interview today will last no more than one hour during which I will ask you about your perspectives on the CSEFEL teaching pyramid strategies. Prior to the interview, you completed a consent form indicating that I have your permission to record this interview. Are you still in agreement with that? (If yes) Thank you for allowing me to record this interview. If at any time you would like me to stop recording the interview, please let me know and I will stop recording this interview. (If no) Thank you for letting me know. I will only take notes during our conversation. Before we begin, do you have any questions for me? (Discuss questions) If you have any questions during the interview, please ask. I am happy to answer the questions you might have.

Are you ready to begin?

Note to self:

Watch for nonverbal queues

Paraphrase as needed

Ask follow-up probing questions to get more in depth

Record and save audio of the interview

Interview Questions

RQ1: What are preschool teachers' perspectives on implementing the CSEFEL teaching pyramid strategies and its influence on preschool children's challenging behaviors?

RQ1 led to the following interview questions:

Introductory Question

1. How long have you implemented the CSEFEL teaching pyramid strategies in your preschool classroom?

Key Questions

2. Describe the challenging behaviors children currently display in your classroom.
3. What do you believe are the main reasons children demonstrate challenging behaviors?
4. What strategies did you use to reduce challenging behaviors in your classroom prior to the CSEFEL teaching pyramid training?
5. What, if any success did you have prior to your CSEFEL training in dealing with challenging behaviors?
6. What CSEFEL teaching pyramid strategies do you currently implement to reduce challenging behaviors in the classroom? Please describe the results of the implementation.

7. Explain if and how the CSEFEL teaching pyramid strategies have influenced a change in the children demonstrating challenging behaviors in your classroom?
8. As a preschool teacher who has used the CSEFEL teaching pyramid model in your classroom, what is your overall perspective on implementing the CSEFEL teaching pyramid to reduce challenging behaviors?

Possible follow up prompts that I will keep visible as I interview each participant:

What did you mean by…..?

Tell me more about….

You mentioned…. Tell me more.

Can you expand more on …..?

Closing Question

9. Would you like to tell me anything else about the topic?

Closure:

Thank you for sharing your perspectives on the CSEFEL teaching pyramid strategies. I will have your interview transcribed. I will share that document with you as you may want to member check it for accuracy or to make any adjustments. I will also share the results of my study with you once the study is completed.

Do you have any questions?

Again, thank you. Please accept this gift card in appreciation of your participation in my research study.