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Teachers' Self-Efficacy When Instructing Students with Emotional and Behavioral Disorders in Inclusive Classrooms

Maysoon Atra
Walden University

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Walden University

College of Education and Human Sciences

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Maysoon Atra

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

Review Committee

Dr. Donald Poplau, Committee Chairperson, Education Faculty

Dr. Jason Stroman, Committee Member, Education Faculty

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

Walden University
2024

Abstract

Teachers' Self-Efficacy When Instructing Students with Emotional and Behavioral

Disorders in Inclusive Classrooms

by

Maysoon Atra

MA, Walden University, 2019

BS, New Jersey City University, 2013

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

February 2024

Abstract

Teachers in American public schools have been challenged with implementing effective instructional practices for students with disabilities (SWDs) in inclusive classrooms. Among the broad category of SWDs, students with emotional and behavioral disorders (EBDs) are among those whose social and academic progress continues to be of concern. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to understand perceptions of general education teachers' self-efficacy when instructing middle school students with EBDs in inclusive classrooms within a northeastern school district in New Jersey. The conceptual framework for this study was Bandura's social cognitive theory. The research question involved how general education teachers described their self-efficacy when instructing middle school students with EBDs in inclusive classrooms. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to gather data from 10 purposefully-selected middle school teachers who teach students with EBDs in inclusive classrooms. Interview recordings were transcribed, analyzed, and coded for themes that were used to address the research question. Results from this study indicated that factors, including the national teacher shortage, lack of ongoing PD on inclusive practices, and limited opportunities to collaborate with staff familiar with inclusive teaching compromised their levels of self-efficacy. Findings from this study may promote positive social change by helping general education teachers better meet needs of EBD students in their classrooms. Administrators may use findings from this study to inform their practice when supporting students with EBDs as well as planning for professional development needs of teachers. Furthermore, this study will better inform school administrators about supports that are needed to promote quality learning and teaching environments.

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my three amazing children Ameera, Ameer, and Zedan. You have been so patient and supportive during this very long journey. I hope that as you get older, you will learn that your success will be determined through hard work, dedication, and perseverance. Ameera, as a young lady, I want you to know that regardless of any circumstances that may surround you, you have the capability to do it all! Ameer, I am so proud of the young man that you have grown to be. You are so humble, kind, and compassionate. You are destined for nothing but greatness! Finally, my baby boy Zedan, I began my doctorate with you still baking in my belly. As you got older, it was clear that you were always competing for my attention with nothing other than my laptop. Sometimes you won, and other times your brother and sister had to intervene. Now that my dissertation is over, you have my complete attention! I love you all with my entire soul!

Lastly, I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my parents. My father who is no longer with us would have been so excited to witness this accomplishment.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

In the context of education, inclusion refers to providing differentiated instruction to students with disabilities (SWDs) with the goal of providing them, regardless of their ability, the opportunity to learn with their general education peers (Rosado-Castellano et al., 2022). However, general education teachers often struggle with providing quality instruction to SWDs in inclusive classrooms due to challenges involving lack of professional development and classroom management fluency (Gottfried et al., 2019; Rosado-Castellano et al., 2022; Stites et al., 2018). Such struggles have been further magnified in terms of specifically teaching students with emotional and behavior disorders (EBDs). According to McKenna et al. (2019), further research is needed to assess the arrangement between student needs, instructor ability, and allotment of assets to maximize academic and behavioral outcomes for students with EBDs.

Problem student behavior has been shown to be difficult for teachers, and problematic behaviors among EBD students typically intensify particularly in sixth through eighth grades (Erickson & Gresham, 2019). A teacher's ability to engage these students in a meaningful manner is influenced by several factors. Such factors include engagement in professional development and implementation of evidence-based strategies, as well as perceptions of their self-efficacy when teaching students with EBDs in inclusive classrooms (Sanders et al., 2018).

This study was conducted in a large urban district in the northeastern part of the U.S. Students with EBD are among the lowest performing students within the district as indicated by district and statewide assessment data. Therefore, it is essential to understand

how general education teachers perceive their self-efficacy when teaching students with EBDs and whether their self-efficacy may impact their instruction. Findings from this study may promote positive social change by possibly helping general education teachers better meet needs of EBD students in their classrooms. Furthermore, administrators may use findings to inform their practice when supporting students with EBDs as well as planning for professional development needs of teachers.

In Chapter 1, I include background information on key concepts within this study, the problem statement, purpose of the study, research question, conceptual framework, nature of the study, definitions, assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations, and significance, before concluding with a summary.

Background

Students with EBDs are characterized as displaying one or more of the following attributes which impact their social and academic outcomes: learning deficits that are not directly the result of intellectual, sensory, or health factors, challenges in developing and sustaining positive relationships with others, inappropriate thoughts or behaviors in otherwise normal circumstances, feelings of inferiority or depression for extended periods of time, and development of physical or emotional distress that is associated with personal or school issues (Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act [IDEA], 34 CFR 300.8(c)(6)). The IDEA mandated SWDs are provided instruction with their nondisabled peers in the least restrictive environment (LRE) to the greatest extent possible (20 USC 1412(a)(5); 34 CFR 300.114-300.120).

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2019), among all SWDs between the ages of 6 and 21, the percentage of students spending most of the school day (80% or more of the instructional day) in a general education classroom increased from 47% in 2000 to 63% in 2017. During the same period, the percentage of students who spent between 40% and 79% of the instructional day inside general education classes decreased from 30% to 18% (NCES, 2019). Furthermore, the percentage of students who spent less than 40% of the instructional day inside general education classes decreased from 20% to 13% (NCES, 2019). Therefore, with the increase of SWDs spending 80% or more of their instructional day in general education classrooms, it is crucial that administrators allocate and provide appropriate resources to maximize the success of inclusionary practices.

Inclusion is a process by which SWDs are provided with the opportunity to an appropriate education which involves a comprehensive and methodical organization of educational services (Esposito et al., 2019). Inclusion of SWDs in general education classrooms is motivated by promoting a diverse classroom that values and nurtures differences among students and address the potential for negative outcomes associated with segregated classrooms (de Bruin, 2019; Esposito et al., 2019). Moreover, advocates of inclusion argued that general education settings provide students with greater access to social and academic opportunities (McLeskey et al., 2018). McLeskey et al. (2018) found when given proper supports in inclusive settings, SWDs have benefited, resulting in improved work habits and enhanced social competence.

School administrators are tasked with the responsibility to provide professional development for teachers to support students with a wide range of cognitive and physical disabilities, including those in and out of inclusive settings (Horner & Halle, 2020). However, while a substantial majority of students who are eligible for special education services receive considerable instruction in general education settings, inclusive instruction has presented significant challenges involving implementing effective classroom management practices as well as using evidence-based strategies to address needs of all learners (McKenna et al., 2019). As a result, the IDEA Act emphasizes implementation of evidence-based practices (EBPs) to maximize learning and behavioral outcomes for students in inclusive classrooms.

Garwood and Van Loan (2019) evaluated the degree to which an undergraduate course concentrated on relationship-based approaches to positive behavior support that could influence perceptions of preservice teachers regarding inclusive instruction for students with EBD and reported greater knowledge and understanding regarding the importance of developing positive classroom environments based on compassionate behavior management. Moreover, preservice teachers' perceptions toward EBD students changed as they began to view them as students first as opposed to initial labeling of students by EBD diagnosis (Garwood & Van Loan, 2019).

Mason et al. (2022) examined middle school general education teachers' attitudes and perceptions about inclusion to better inform professional development programs. Compared to middle school teachers, greater negative attitudes occurred among elementary teachers. There was a greater number of students with special needs in

elementary classrooms compared to those at the middle school level. Mason et al. (2022) suggested administrators should focus on providing professional development opportunities that contribute to teachers' self-efficacy, decreased levels of stress, and increased effectiveness with their students. Increased teacher preparation programs and professional development are essential and contribute to effective inclusive practices (Garwood & Van Loan, 2019; McKenna et al., 2019).

Teachers' self-efficacy influences perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors when teaching students (Prewett & Whitney, 2021). However, questions regarding efficacy of inclusive approaches for students with EBDs remain unanswered. McKenna et al. (2019) reiterated the need to address this gap in practice by exploring how general education teachers describe their self-efficacy when teaching EBD students in inclusive classrooms. Understanding teachers' perceptions as it relates to their self-efficacy may help to inform school administrators about supports and resources that are essential to successful inclusive practices. Teachers' high efficacy can lead to improved classroom instruction and positive student achievement (Prewett & Whitney, 2021). Perera et al. (2022) reported higher rates of student achievement because of high teacher self-efficacy.

This study is needed because understanding how general education teachers describe their self-efficacy when working with EBD students may help them better meet needs of these students in their classroom. Teachers' perceptions regarding inclusion are crucial for the implementation of inclusive education (Schwab, 2019). Teachers who perceive themselves to have the ability to successfully instruct students with learning or behavioral disabilities are more likely to include these students in their classrooms

(Yakut, 2021). Teachers' self-efficacy beliefs and strategies to include SWDs may influence their perceptions of inclusive education and accommodation of students (Subban et al., 2021). I addressed a gap in knowledge by describing general education teachers' perceptions when instructing students with EBDs in inclusive classrooms.

Problem Statement

The problem that was the focus of this study is lack of understanding regarding general education teachers' level of self-efficacy when instructing middle school EBD students in inclusive classrooms. The study site was a school district located in northeastern New Jersey. General education teachers within the local district reported instructing middle school students with EBDs has been challenging. Furthermore, diagnostic assessment data as reported by the district's Supervisor of Behavioral Supports revealed students with EBDs are consistently performing at least one grade level below their peers across all content areas. This shows consistent academic and social challenges concerning EBD students.

Inclusive education becomes meaningful when the focus is needs of all students (Messiou, 2019). Mason et al. (2022) reported professional development involving inclusive practices is associated with greater knowledge; this increased knowledge in turn leads to a greater sense of self-efficacy, which is essential for teachers to manage successful classrooms. Teachers have identified challenges involving inadequate knowledge, and further expressed the need for increased professional development and preparation programs to effectively support students with EBDs in inclusive settings (Garwood & Van Loan, 2019).

Preservice programs for general education teachers may not address strategies that are required to instruct students with disabilities (Gilor & Katz, 2021). This lack of skills could possibly impact their self-efficacy. Teacher self-efficacy regarding inclusive practices refers to their perceptions of their ability to address diverse learning needs of students using a variety of teaching strategies within classrooms (Perera et al., 2022). Moreover, it involves judgment of their capabilities to achieve desired outcomes in terms of student achievement and growth, even among students who may be difficult or lack motivation (Van Mieghem et al., 2022).

Of the four major influences that shape teachers' self-efficacy beliefs (mastery experiences, verbal persuasion, vicarious experiences, and physiological arousal), the most significant influence is mastery experiences (Bandura, 1997). According to Hauerwas and Mahon (2018), teachers' self-efficacy as it relates to student outcomes is closely related to teacher behavior, student attitudes, and student achievement. Not all teachers feel they are equipped with skills to effectively support and manage inclusive classroom environments (Gottfried et al., 2019; Mngo & Mngo, 2018; Stites et al., 2018). As a result, lack of knowledge regarding inclusive teaching can contribute to lower levels self-efficacy and increased levels of stress as teachers try to support academic and social needs of SWDs in their classrooms (Metsala & Harkins, 2020).

General education teachers who serve SWDs in inclusive settings must be able to modify instruction and adapt lessons to meet students' individual needs. Inclusion of SWDs has been difficult for general education teachers (Garwood & Van Loan, 2019). However, inclusion of students with EBDs has been perceived to be among the most challenging

(Garwood & Van Loan, 2019). This is because students with EBDs display substantial academic and behavioral deficits which require quality instruction and supports that are targeted to address their specific areas of need (Benner et al., 2022; Kuronja et al., 2019). According to McKenna et al. (2019), further research is needed to assess student needs, instructor ability, and allotment of assets to maximize academic and behavioral outcomes for students with EBDs.

Nature of the Study

The method that was used for this research was a basic qualitative design. Basic qualitative research is the most common design related to research in education and learning and involves making sense of people's lives and experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Qualitative researchers aim to extract in-depth understandings regarding a specific phenomenon within a population (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). Qualitative research emphasizes why rather than what questions involving social phenomena as well as relying on firsthand experiences of human beings as they explain meanings that define their perspectives (Klenke et al., 2016). A universal characteristic of qualitative research is that individuals create reality in connection with their social worlds (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

This study was conducted to provide an understanding of general education teachers' perceptions of their self-efficacy when teaching middle school students with EBDs in inclusive classrooms. In the district, three schools service middle school students with EBDs, from which data were collected. I conducted a systematic data

analysis using NVivo 12 which aided in transcribing, coding, and creating themes from interview data.

Once I received approval from the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB; approval #07-19-23-0721942), I forwarded a request for permission letter to the superintendent of schools. After permission was granted to continue, I emailed building principals of schools that serviced middle school students with EBDs an introduction letter and disclosed the intent of my research. Letters of intent consisting of the purpose of this study as well as participant roles were emailed to prospective participants. Participants taught middle school students with EBDs in inclusive classrooms. A total of 20 teachers who instructed EBD students in inclusive classrooms were recruited. From this group, a random selection of 10 to 12 teachers were selected, and remaining participants were considered in the event that saturation was not met or participants dropped out. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews. In alignment with the research question, I conducted a systematic data analysis using NVivo 12 which aided in transcribing, coding, and creating themes from interview data.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to understand perceptions of general education teachers' self-efficacy when instructing middle school students with EBDs in inclusive classrooms within a northeastern school district in New Jersey. Understanding teachers' self-efficacy when instructing middle school students with EBD in inclusive settings is of great relevance and importance because the district's data trends showed students with EBDs consistently perform significantly lower than their grade

level peers. Teachers with high levels of self-efficacy have been found to persist with students displaying challenging behaviors and were more likely to use effective teaching strategies (Tümekaya & Miller, 2020). Teachers with high efficacy are essential to the formation of exceptional inclusive classroom settings.

An increased understanding is needed about strategies and supports that are required to improve academic and behavioral outcomes of students with EBD (Harrison et al., 2019). To better understand influences and obstacles involved with effective inclusion, greater research is needed to inform school decision-making and inclusive practices. Mason et al. (2022) reported professional development involving inclusive practices is associated with greater knowledge; this increased knowledge in turn leads to a greater sense of self-efficacy, which is essential for teachers to manage successful classrooms. According to Garwood and Van Loan (2019), teachers have identified challenges, such as inadequate knowledge, and further expressed the need for greater professional development opportunities to successfully support students with EBDs in inclusive settings.

Inclusive education for students with EBDs is wide-ranging and multifaceted, and many questions remain unanswered regarding the efficacy of the inclusive approach. As a result, the purpose of this qualitative study was to address this gap in practice by exploring how general education teachers describe their self-efficacy when teaching middle school EBD students in inclusive classrooms. Understanding how general education teachers describe their self-efficacy when working with EBD students will inform school administrators about supports and resources that are needed to promote successful inclusive practices.

Research Question

The following research question was used to guide this study:

RQ: What are perceptions of general education teachers' self-efficacy when instructing middle school students with EBDs in inclusive settings within a northeastern school district in New Jersey?

Conceptual Framework for the Study

The conceptual framework that grounded this basic qualitative study was Bandura's social cognitive theory (SCT). The SCT is a framework that involves understanding and predicting human behavior. Per the SCT, behavior is influenced by personal thoughts and actions. Bandura emphasized influence over goals and outcomes of those goals are greatly determined by people's beliefs about their personal capabilities. The SCT emphasizes individual level of proficiency and competency influences ideas and beliefs (Bandura, 1993). Bandura (1997) characterized self-efficacy as the organization of social, technical, and behavioral skills to achieve a desired outcome. Perceived self-efficacy is defined as people's judgement of their own abilities to organize and carry out courses of action that are needed to achieve desired types of performance (Bandura, 1986). If people perceive themselves as incapable of successfully completing a task or achieving a goal, they are more likely to experience negative feelings. However, if they feel they are capable of successfully completing a task, they will likely experience positive cognitive responses, which in turn may lead to positive performance (Hauerwas & Mahon, 2018).

Self-efficacy is grounded in the SCT, which emphasizes evolution and the exercise of human activity (Wray et al., 2022). According to Bandura (1994), teachers' perceptions regarding teaching SWDs may impact student behavior and academic achievement. Teachers may have the ability to influence their own behavior and behavior of EBD students in the classroom. Teachers' high self-efficacy is associated with positive effects on student achievement, and low self-efficacy is conversely related to poor outcomes involving student success (Perera et al., 2022).

Definitions

The following terms are key concepts that are used throughout this study:

Accommodations: Small changes in the way an assignment or assessment is administered to address student deficits while eliminating all barriers that hinder learning (McGlynn & Kelly, 2019). Accommodations do not change learning outcomes for students; rather, they provide students with access to the curriculum (Kern et al., 2019).

Differentiation: A research-based instructional approach used by teachers which involves providing students with multiple modes of learning to meet diverse needs of all learners in classrooms regardless of abilities (Cowley, 2018).

Inclusion: General and special education teachers providing students with disabilities and nondisabled students with opportunities to learn academic standards and socialization skills in the general education classroom (Brennan, 2019).

Modifications: Substantial changes made to an assignment or assessment when a student's disability impacts his or her own ability to perform the same task or participate in the same way as other students (Joyce et al., 2020).

Self-efficacy: One's perceptions of their own ability to successfully execute a given task (Wray et al., 2020).

Assumptions

Several assumptions were considered when conducting this research. First, I assumed local school district administrators support the undertaking of this study. Furthermore, I assumed participants disclosed their experiences with full honesty and transparency. This is important because this research is intended to better understand general education teachers' perceptions. In order to best guide future practices, participants' true perceptions regarding their experiences were needed. I also assumed that a qualitative approach was most suitable when conducting research for this study. In qualitative studies, followup questions are used to establish clarification and can be used to elicit appropriate responses from participants.

Scope and Delimitations

This study involved gaining a deeper understanding of general education teachers' perceptions concerning the teaching of middle school students with EBDs in inclusive classrooms. Participants were selected from middle school settings that service students with EBDs. These teachers were selected for this study because they instruct students with EBD in general education classes for some or most of the day. The district is in NJ and serves approximately 36,000 students, the largest student population in the state. However, only three of these schools provide services to middle school students with EBDs. Participants' years of teaching experience, age, race, and education level were not considered when selecting participants.

This study involved addressing perceptions of middle school general education teachers who instruct students with EBDs in inclusive classrooms. I used a basic qualitative design to limit the number of participants, which in turn limited the amount of in-depth responses.

Limitations

Limitations within a study cannot be controlled by the researcher, results may not be generalized to populations in other settings and contexts (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). This study has several potential limitations. Semi-structured interviews were conducted which involved flexibility in terms of wording of interview questions. Data collected through interviews were also limited because information did not necessarily reflect experiences of others. A basic qualitative method typically consists of a small sample size which may limit generalizability to other populations. Participants of this study were selected from an urban district located in the northeastern region of NJ. As a result, findings from the study cannot be generalized to other populations. A further limitation is potential bias. I remained cognizant of any biases when collecting and interpreting data. I did not allow my personal biases to influence collection or interpretation of data.

Significance

Findings from this study may be used to address a gap regarding general education teacher perceptions about their self-efficacy as it pertains to teaching middle school students with EBDs. Moreover, my study may offer new insights on how to best instruct and manage students with EBDs in inclusive classrooms. While research has

been conducted on perceptions of teachers regarding SWDs in inclusive settings, few studies concentrated on their self-efficacy as it relates to instruction of students with EBDs in inclusive classrooms.

Findings from this study may lead to positive social change by helping general education teachers better meet needs of EBD students in their classrooms. Administrators may use findings from this study to inform their practices when supporting students with EBDs as well as planning for the professional development of teachers. Furthermore, this study will inform school administrators of support that is needed to promote quality learning as well as build self-efficacy of teachers working in inclusive classrooms. When school leaders provide environments that nurture opportunity and growth, the likelihood of long-term success of school programs becomes maximized (Mavrogordato & White, 2020).

Summary

Teachers in an urban district in NJ are challenged with implementing instructional strategies to support EBD students in inclusive settings. The district where this study took place has reported limited information in regard to understanding teachers' perceptions regarding teaching students with EBDs in inclusive classrooms. As a result, this basic qualitative study involved gaining a better understanding of this topic. Local school district data trends have shown students with EBDs consistently perform significantly lower than their grade level peers.

The conceptual framework that grounded this basic qualitative study was Bandura's SCT. Data were collected from 10 general education teachers who taught in

inclusive classrooms using one-on-one semi-structured interviews. This study may contribute to positive social change as administrators may gain greater knowledge in terms of what supports are needed to maximize self-efficacy during inclusive instruction, which in turn may promote meaningful learning for students with EBDs. Moreover, understanding how general education teachers describe their self-efficacy when working with EBD students may help them better meet the needs of this population.

In Chapter 2, I provide a comprehensive literature review of key concepts and terms related to the phenomenon, theoretical framework, review of studies, and a closing summary.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The problem is that little is known about teachers' perceptions of their self-efficacy when teaching students with EBDs in inclusive classrooms. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore middle school general education teachers' perceptions when instructing students with EBDs in inclusive classrooms. General education teachers were challenged with providing quality instruction to SWDs in inclusive classrooms due to lack of professional development and classroom management fluency (Mason et al., 2022; Øen & Johan Krumsvik, 2022; Stites et al., 2018). Because students with EBDs display challenging behaviors, teachers have reported greater levels of distress and lower levels of self-efficacy when instructing them in inclusive classrooms (Gilmour et al., 2022). They have limited knowledge on implementing academic and nonacademic evidence-based practices among students with EBDs (Gilmour et al., 2022). All students regardless of ability must be provided with quality education in LREs. In this chapter, the theoretical framework is addressed along with definitions and characteristics of the phenomenon. Moreover, studies are highlighted regarding general education teachers instructing EBD students in inclusive classrooms.

Literature Search Strategy

An in-depth literature search was conducted using Education Source, ERIC, and Google Scholar to retrieve peer-reviewed journals from the Walden University Library. I refined the search to include literature that was published between 2018 and 2023. I used the following search terms: *teacher efficacy, emotional and behavioral disorders, inclusion, teacher perceptions, general education, special education, modifications,*

accommodations, classroom management, student-teacher interactions, and peer-student interactions.

Most researchers concentrated on barriers that impact teacher practices in inclusive classrooms, such as lack of access to professional development. There is little research when examining teacher perceptions regarding their self-efficacy as it pertains to teaching students with EBD. This gap in literature inspired the need for further study.

Conceptual Framework

SCT

The conceptual framework for this study was Bandura's SCT. The SCT is a framework that involves understanding and predicting human behavior. Behavior is influenced by personal thoughts and actions. Influence over goals and outcomes of those goals are greatly determined by people's beliefs about their personal capabilities. Accordingly, one's beliefs about self-efficacy can influence how much effort is exerted in terms of a given task, the amount of persistence that is spent when faced with obstacles, and the amount of stress one faces (Bandura, 1997).

Bandura's Construct of Self-Efficacy

Bandura identified self-efficacy as "[individuals'] judgments of their capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performances" (1986, p. 391). Self-efficacy consists of two components: efficacy expectation and outcome expectancy. Efficacy expectation refers to the belief that an individual has the knowledge, competency, and abilities to engage in behaviors or actions that will yield desired outcomes. Outcome expectancy refers to the individual's

perception of the probability of performing a task or achieving an intended outcome at an anticipated level of performance (Bandura, 1993).

Self-efficacy in the context of teaching is established through four types of sources: mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, social persuasion, and physiological and emotional states (Bandura, 1986). The state of mastery is achieved once a given task is successfully completed. Previous successful experiences build a strong foundation for additional successes, further enhancing self-efficacy. The next experiences that potentially establish self-efficacy are vicarious experiences, which involve observing another individual complete a given task. Vicarious experiences have stronger effects on self-efficacy when the observer and observed have similar characteristics, such as age and level of capability. The next source for development of self-efficacy is social persuasion. This occurs when an individual receives words of motivation and encouragement when completing a given task. As a result, individual level of self-efficacy may be elevated. Finally, physiological and emotional states refer to biological and physiological components that help determine how successful or unsuccessful individuals will be when attempting a task. For example, when attempting a given task, an individual may experience sweat (biological) or experience feelings of anxiety (psychological).

Literature Review Related to Key Variables and Concepts

History of IDEA

IDEA 1990

IDEA mandates in 1990 replaced the 1975 Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA). Several changes were reflected in the IDEA 1990. The first change involved language that was used to describe students. Instead of the term handicapped, the IDEA 1990 used the term disabled and then SWDs. The IDEA 1990 also mandated states provide a comprehensive plan for educating SWDs in LREs. Proponents of inclusion asserted placing SWDs in inclusive classrooms could be beneficial socially and academically.

IDEA 1997

During the 1990s, questions were raised regarding assessment procedures of SWDs in inclusive settings. Prior to IDEA 1997 mandates, SWDs were not required to partake in statewide or national assessments to measure academic achievement. IDEA 1997 included a renewal of mandates. Because little data were provided on SWDs, it was difficult to assess differences in academic achievement between SWDs and their nondisabled peers (McLeskey et al., 2012). Increased speculations regarding differences in academic achievement among federal policymakers resulted in reforms in 1997 involving standardized tests and assessments. Policymakers wanted to address the notion that districts had low expectations of SWDs and further advocated for higher standards (McLeskey & Waldron, 2011). This led to increased levels of accountability on schools, as they were required to ensure success among SWDs.

IDEA 2004

The IDEA of 2004 was enacted by Congress and signed by President George W. Bush. Revised mandates were targeted toward maximizing achievement of SWDs. This led to changes that were beneficial to SWDs to guarantee free and appropriate education that would yield favorable achievement. To maximize success of SWDs, the IDEA 2004 involved ensuring all stakeholders were accountable for student outcomes, use of evidence-based instruction and resources, involvement of parents or guardians in development of individualized education plans (IEPs), and reduction of team requirements and requested paperwork (Zirkel, 2016).

LRE

Before the enactment of EAHCA PL 94-142, opportunities to educate SWDs were very restricted. For example, SWDs were either pulled out of general education classrooms or placed in self-contained classrooms with no exposure to their nondisabled peers (McLeskey & Waldron, 2011; McLeskey et al., 2012). However, mandates of the IDEA addressed these injustices by requiring that all students, regardless of ability, be taught in LREs to the greatest extent possible.

EBDs

The IDEA requires all SWDs are provided with educational services in LREs. As a result, general education teachers are spending a significant amount of time instructing students with various disabilities in their classroom, including students identified with EBDs (McKenna et al., 2022). EBDs qualify as a category of disability under which students may be eligible for special education services, supports, and legal provisions.

Emotional and behavioral disorders not only affect individual emotional wellbeing, but may also affect students' physical, social, and cognitive skills (Bettini et al., 2022).

According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI, 2020), mental illnesses such as EBDs are medical conditions that impair a person's ability to process information, think, feel, or relate to others. Between 2018 and 2019, approximately 5.6% of SWDs were classified as having emotional and behavioral disorders (IDEA, 2020).

The U.S. Department of Education (2020) claimed:

An inability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors, an inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers, inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances, a general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression, a tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems. (Sec. [34 C.F.R. § 300.8I(4)(i)(A – E)])

Characteristics of Students with EBDs

While students with EBDs comprise a small portion of the overall population of SWDs, improvements in the identification and quality of services provided to students with or at risk for EBDs have been a focus of the U.S Department of Education for more than 4 decades. Close attention to this specific category of disability has been justified because outcomes for students with EBDs continue to be among the worst compared with typically developing children as well as students in other disability categories (Mitchell et al., 2019). Students with EBDs represent a vulnerable population as they experience a pattern of externalizing and internalizing behavior problems, gaps in academic

achievement, and increased rates of dropping out of school (State et al., 2019). Students who display externalizing behaviors are typically aggressive toward peers and adults, disruptive in learning environments, and display poor prosocial skills (Green et al., 2020). Internalizing behaviors refer to emotional and psychological states and typically include depression and anxiety.

Students with EBD have consistently performed significantly lower academically than their grade-level peers (Fuchs et al., 2018). Smith et al. (2018) reported that students with EBD perform at least one to two grade levels below their grade-level peers in reading, mathematics, and writing. These academic discrepancies are further heightened by the social-emotional and behavioral difficulties, both of which can have lasting negative educational outcomes on students with EBD (Campbell et al., 2019). According to the U.S. Department of Education (2020), students with EBD are twice as to receive in and out-of-school suspensions and expulsions compared to students with other disabilities. Moreover, students with EBD are likely to face higher dropout rates, higher rates of incarceration, and a variety of other negative post-school outcomes (Freeman et al., 2019).

Implications of Inclusion

According to the U.S Department of Education (2022), among all SWDs, students with EBD are less often included in a general education classroom. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (2019), among SWDs between the ages of 6 and 21, the percentage of students spending most of the school day (80% or more of the instructional day) increased from 47% in 2000 to 63% in 2017. During the same

period, the percentage of students who spent between 40% and 79% of the instructional day inside general education classes decreased from 30% to 18% (NCES, 2019).

However, the IDEA (2004) mandates that all students with disabilities to be provided with educational services in the least restrictive environment (LRE). The emphasis of LRE is that all SWDs are instructed with nondisabled peers to the greatest extent possible. The language of IDEA consistently reinforces the importance of eliminating any barriers that have been placed by exclusionary practices. As a result, the practice of inclusion involves integrating SWDs in general education classrooms. When students are provided with an appropriate education with their nondisabled peers in the LRE, they are being equipped for a future of inclusion (Esposito et al., 2019; Westling, 2019).

Inclusion of all students in general education settings is based on the notion that students can make academic and behavioral gains if exposed to the core curriculum with their peers (Whitlow et al., 2019). Therefore, inclusion has been implemented as an effort to address the significant achievement gaps in core subject areas between students with and without disabilities (Rosado-Castellano et al., 2022). According to Barth et al., (2019), inclusion represents a greater picture than SWDs learning with their general education peers; rather, inclusion is taking away the barriers and challenges that have prevented SWDs from having to equal access to the same resources and opportunities as their general education peers. Moreover, McLeskey et al. (2018) have found that when given proper supports in inclusive programs, SWDs have experienced positive gains in their work habits which correlated to improved social competence.

Challenges to Inclusion

The movement pushing for the inclusion of all students regardless of ability provides SWDs access to learning materials, resources, and exposure to rigorous content as their general education peers, further aiming at narrowing the achievement gap (Rosado-Castellano et al., 2022). However, there is concern that general education teachers are not prepared to meet the demands of inclusive teaching (Lanterman et al., 2021). Teacher self- efficacy is an essential competency for teachers when working in inclusive classrooms (Ismailos et al., 2022). Studies have shown that when teachers gained knowledge of evidence-based, instructional and noninstructional strategies, their levels of self-efficacy and preparedness to teach students with EBD in inclusive classrooms have increased (Gage et al., 2018; Lanterman et al., 2021)

Inclusive classrooms should accommodate to the needs of the special education student in the way the classroom environment and instructional content are presented (Rosado-Castellano et al., 2022). However, according to Mason et al. (2022), many teachers feel that they are not prepared or equipped to teach SWDs in inclusive settings. Mngo and Mngo (2018) conducted a qualitative study to gain a clearer understanding of teachers' experiences and methods used to teach in inclusive classrooms. Results from this study indicated that both special education and general education teachers reported a need for increased administrative support with professional development centered on inclusive teaching (Mngo & Mngo, 2018). Similar findings were demonstrated in a mixed-methods design conducted by Kim et al. (2020). In this study, Kim et al. (2020) explored the perceptions of urban educators during inclusive teaching. Results indicated

that teachers were uncertain with the implementation of inclusion and lacked confidence to support SWDs during inclusive instruction. General education teachers within this study expressed that sufficient training to teach SWDs was not provided from their certificate program. Similarly, special educators reported that sufficient training and opportunities geared toward extending beyond current knowledge were limited (Kim et al., 2020). Teachers' knowledge is closely related to their self-efficacy. Maximizing opportunities for strengthening teachers' skill sets may then transfer to the academic and social success of their students.

Teacher Perceptions

A teacher's belief in their ability and readiness to teach is the most significant predictor of their teaching efficacy (Bandura, 1997). This belief is especially important regarding teaching SWDs because their progress can be incremental, and the outcomes of instructional practices are not immediately observed. As a result, teachers need to feel prepared to utilize effective practices, and without self-efficacy, they are less likely to attempt a task (Bandura, 1997). Moreover, teachers' perceptions about their own abilities and skill level have been found to impact the likelihood that they would implement effective practices for SWDs (Kim et al., 2020; Mngo & Mngo, 2018). The push behind inclusive education is to promote academic and social outcomes for SWDs. Therefore, it is important to understand teachers' perceptions about their ability to utilize effective practices so that inclusive educational programming can continue to advance (Rosado-Castellano et al., 2022). Similarly, if teachers have low self-efficacy and perceive themselves to be incapable of implementing recommended practices, SWDs may be

placed in more restrictive settings due to a perception that the necessary skills and knowledge are not available in a student's school setting (Van Mieghem et al., 2022).

Teachers' attitudes and beliefs about inclusion can significantly impact their implementation of inclusive education (Rosado-Castellano et al., 2022). Attitudes and perceptions are closely related and often used in a context that describes how an individual thinks about something (Tümkiye & Miller, 2020). According to Bandura (1997) background knowledge and personal experience shape the perceptions, feelings, and mental images teachers have about their students and professional practice.

Kim et al. (2020) indicated that teachers were uncertain about the implementation of inclusion and lacked confidence related to an inability of how to instruct SWDs in inclusive classrooms. Mason et al. (2022) examined middle school, general education teachers' attitudes and perceptions about inclusion to better inform professional development programs. Implications from this study further support research that calls for the need to provide professional development opportunities that will contribute to teachers' self-efficacy, decreased levels of stress, and increased effectiveness with their students (Klopfe et al., 2019; Koenen et al., 2019). Stites et al. (2018) examined pre-service teachers' perceptions about teaching in inclusive settings. Results called for an increase in teacher preparation programs and professional development targeted toward effective inclusive practices.

Because students with EBD present significant academic and behavioral challenges, it is important that teachers feel confident in performing the tasks necessary to ensure success among all students in inclusive classrooms (McKenna et al., 2022).

Understanding teachers' perceptions regarding their self-efficacy when working with students with EBD in inclusive classrooms may help identify ways to improve instructional practices and prevent discrepancies in student achievement. Moreover, identifying teachers' perceptions of inclusion may assist school administrators identify supports needed to build the efficacy of teachers working in inclusive classrooms.

EBPs in Schools

Students with EBD are among a vulnerable population that exhibit academic difficulties, poor interpersonal relationships, and often experience poor social-emotional outcomes (Smith et al., 2018). Educators face a significant challenge in addressing the needs of students with EBD, which, if left unaddressed, may lead to a plethora of academic and social-emotional issues (Bettini et al., 2020). As a result, to improve the academic and social outcomes of students with EBD, it is crucial that this population of students receive evidence-based practices (EBPs) and behavior supports from skilled and knowledgeable teachers (State et al., 2019). Evidence-based practices refer to practices that have been subjected to rigorous, systematic research and determined to have generally positive outcomes among the relevant population (Zaheer et al., 2019). Bettini et al. (2020) suggested that among the many challenging considerations made by school personnel, selecting practices that are evidence-based are among the most important. The purpose of identifying and applying evidence-based practices (EBPs) into daily instruction is to ensure that students are exposed to practices that have been validated and deemed effective through empirical research, which in turn can result in positive student outcomes (Lancaster & Bain, 2021). In addition to focusing on student performance, the

use of EBPs in education is intended to heighten the accountability of educators, calling on professionals to utilize instructional strategies that are evidence based.

Teaching students with EBD requires knowledge of EBPs specific to their diverse needs (Cumming et al., 2021). Teachers of students with EBD must also understand how to accommodate and provide individualized approaches to learning. The complex needs of students with EBD require school personnel to make rigorous efforts to provide multifaceted, coordinated, and validated supports (Bettini et al., 2020). In order to minimize academic and behavioral challenges and promote on-task behaviors, Green et al. (2020) suggested that teachers implement higher rates of evidence-based practices (EBPs).

Teacher Self-Efficacy in Classroom Management

A variety of factors influence the probability of student success including teachers' classroom management practices. To increase the probability that students with EBD are able to (a) remain in their general education classrooms, (b) access rigorous academic content, (c) be engaged during learning, and (d) maximize their academic outcomes, general education teachers must effectively utilize high quality, evidence-based classroom management (U.S. Department of Education [USDOE], 2020). Some examples of evidence-based classroom management practices include active instruction and monitoring of students, establishing expectations, providing opportunities for students to respond, and providing feedback to students (Gage et al., 2018). Effective classroom management practices have been found to build positive classroom

environments that are not only structured and engaging, but also promote student learning and growth (Farmer et al., 2019; Gaias et al., 2019).

To maintain a successful and positive classroom environment, students with EBD thrive most often with teachers who are skilled in managing negatively induced behaviors while attending to the needs of their students in the class as a whole (Klopfer et al., 2019). Regulating students' disruptive behavior in the classroom is also important to promote the levels of student engagement and to minimize the loss of instructional time (Klopfer et al., 2019). Research revealed that the lack of engagement and disruptive behavior often expend more than 80% of teachers' instructional time (McKenna et al., 2022).

According to Lanterman et al. (2021), statistically significant outcomes revealed that effective classroom management decreases problem behavior and increases academic achievement. It was found that teachers with high levels of self-efficacy in classroom management utilized more effective strategies to deal with students' behavioral problems in the classroom, which resulted in decreased negative teacher–student interactions and subsequently fewer negative emotions (Lanterman et al., 2021). Similar findings were revealed by Gage et al. (2018) in which student' engagement and effective classroom management were positively correlated. Considering that students with behavioral difficulties are likely to be off-task and disruptive, Gage et al. (2018) noted that these findings were particularly significant for students with and at risk for EBD.

Differentiation

Differentiated instruction is a research-based instructional approach used by teachers to meet the diverse needs of all learners in a classroom regardless of their abilities (Tomlinson, 2015). According to Tomlinson (2017), there are three components to differentiated instruction: content, process, and product. The first component, content, refers to what students need to learn or how will they access the resources necessary to address the learning intention(s). The next component, process, refers to the varying activities that are provided for students to grasp the contents of the lesson. The product is third component which refers to students demonstrating what they have learned. According to Inês et al. (2022) and Tomlinson (2017), when teachers consider all components while developing lessons, they are supporting students' interests and diverse learning needs, all while enabling them to learn at their ability.

Tomlinson (1999) suggested that teachers select differentiation strategies based on a student's readiness, interests, and learning styles. Researchers have identified various representations of evidence-based practices which are used to successfully implement differentiated practices. Some differentiated practices include modifying curriculum and assessments, providing specialized resources, modifying learning tasks, and tailoring instruction (Pozas et al., 2020; Tomlinson, 2015). Weiss et al. (2018) reported findings that teachers who had specific training in differentiation practices to meet the needs of SWDs had greater confidence when developing instructional tasks and strategies to meet the needs of their students.

Differentiating instruction involves providing students with multiple modes for learning; teachers will be able use the information gained from observing and understanding the differences among students to plan instruction (Cowley, 2018). While differentiation can be a challenging instructional practice, teachers' abilities to be effective could be maximized by their understanding of differentiated instructional strategies (Pozas et al., 2020). According to Weiss et al. (2018) teachers' levels of self-efficacy when helping students reach higher levels increased when they developed a deeper understanding of how to differentiate instruction in inclusive settings.

Modifications and Accommodations in Inclusive Classrooms

A crucial component to the success of SWDs in the general education classroom lies within the teacher's understanding of the student's disability and the strategies to best meet the student's needs (Aldosiry et al., 2021). When SWDs are placed in general education classrooms, teachers are required to differentiate instruction by utilizing the accommodations and modifications listed within the students' IEPs and to offer additional supports as needed to ensure access to the general education curriculum (Joyce et al., 2020). Teachers often confuse whether an action is an accommodation and modification (Joyce et al., 2020).

Accommodations are characterized as small changes in the way an assignment or assessment is administered so that the playing field is leveled (McGlynn & Kelly, 2019). Accommodations are intended to address student deficits while eliminating all barriers that hinder learning (Sahli Lozano et al., 2022). Moreover, accommodations do not change the learning outcomes for students; rather, they provide students with access to

the curriculum (Kern et al., 2019). For example, a student who reads below grade level may be offered audio versions or digital texts. A student who may take longer to process information may receive additional time as an accommodation. Accommodations should allow SWDs to demonstrate what they know without impacting the validity or reliability of scores (Sahli Lozano et al., 2022).

Modifications, on the other hand are substantial changes made to an assignment or assessment (Sahli Lozano et al., 2022). Teachers use modifications if a student's disability impacts the student's ability to perform the same task or participate in the same way as other students (Thompson et al., 2018). Like accommodations, new skills are not taught with modifications; rather, modifications adjust the expectations of the curriculum or assessments (Joyce et al., 2020). For SWDs, modifications are used to often lower standards and should be used sparingly unless deemed necessary (Thompson et al., 2018). Some common modifications include shortening a writing task, limiting possible answer options, changing a task from recall to recognition, and having the student work below grade-level standards.

Professional Development of Teachers

Students with EBD continue to experience bleak academic and social outcomes (McKenna et al., 2019). One reason can be attributed to research that concluded that teachers, both in the general education and special education field, working with EBD students, feel they lack the preparedness and skills needs to meet the needs of these students (Zolkoski, 2019). Teachers working with EBD students in inclusive settings need to be supported with professional development opportunities targeted towards

implementing effective practices during daily instruction (State et al., 2019). School administrators are responsible for allocating resources for professional development (PD) to support teachers instructing students with varying abilities in and out of inclusive classrooms (Brennan & King, 2022).

Professional development geared toward inclusionary practices for SWDs is necessary to apply learned skills into effective action (Messiou, 2019). Cooc (2019) examined the PD needs of teachers of students with disabilities. Results indicated that the number of hours engaged in PD targeted towards inclusive teaching practices was positively correlated to how general and special education teachers perceived their competency and efficacy in student engagement. Weber and Greiner (2019) also conducted a quantitative study to analyze the effects of a teacher preparation program on pre-service teachers' perceptions of SWDs in inclusive settings. Their findings revealed that exposure to training programs had positive effects on teachers' perceptions toward SWDs in inclusive classrooms. Furthermore, teachers' levels of confidence in their ability to teach SWDs also increased when provided with meaningful training opportunities (Weber & Greiner, 2019). In another study, Klopfer et al. (2019) analyzed the impact of pre-service training focused on improving the perceptions of teachers toward students with emotional and behavioral difficulties when using EBPs to address behavioral issues. Results echoed the findings of Zaheer et al. (2019) in that when provided with professional development opportunities centered on utilizing evidence-based teaching strategies for students with EBD, teachers reported higher levels of

confidence and efficacy when working with students with emotional and behavioral difficulties.

The sustainability of PD is crucial as teachers have the opportunity learn skills, demonstrate application, and receive feedback (State et al., 2019). Professional development may be offered through initial sessions along with ongoing training for applying, sustaining, and adapting practices to better meet the needs of students and their contexts (Brennan & King, 2022). When teachers have the opportunity to revisit their skill sets, they are more likely to improve newly learned skills (State et al., 2019). State et al. (2019) conducted a study exploring effective forms of professional development when teaching students with EBD. Findings indicated that long-term programs were significantly associated with success in sustainability and application of learned skills. State et al. (2019) further asserted that for sustainability to occur, there must be continued collaboration amongst teachers and administration. Hirsch et al. (2022) further echoed the findings of State et al. (2019) when analyzing the impact of sustained PD on the implementation of positive behavior interventions. Hirsch et al. (2022) emphasized that in order to sustain positive effects of behavior interventions, administrator support and ongoing high-quality professional development should be provided.

School administrators play a critical role in teachers' professional growth, which impacts student outcomes (Wang & Zhang, 2021). When school administrators provide meaningful forms of PD for teachers working with EBD students in inclusive classrooms, they can improve the perceptions of teachers' self-efficacy, increase their competencies, and provide them with valuable resources targeted toward improving students' academic

and social outcomes. With the increasing number of SWDs entering the inclusive classroom, it is crucial that school administrators provide opportunities that address the growing needs of SWDs and the teachers that serve them (Wang & Zhang, 2021).

Teacher-Student Interactions

Developing positive teacher-student relationships can impact students' academic, behavioral, and social-emotional growth (Zolkoski, 2019). With regard to behavioral engagement, Zee and Koomen (2020) reported that teachers' self-efficacy beliefs toward their students increase the likelihood of on-task behavior in the classroom. Furthermore, students with highly self-efficacious teachers have also been found to be more likely to exert effort and persist through task completion (Zee & Koomen, 2020).

Teachers often form their perceptions of students based on previous interactions. If teachers experience negative interactions as a result of student behaviors, they are more likely to form negative perceptions (Rhoad et al., 2018). Students with EBD display many undesirable behaviors, such as aggression, poor prosocial skills, and disruptive conduct (Cumming et al., 2021). Therefore, teachers of students with EBD are more vulnerable to having their perceptions negatively skewed, hence impacting the development of positive teacher-student interactions (Rhoad et al., 2018).

While students with EBD have the most to gain from positive and nurturing relationships, they have been found to struggle with forming and sustaining high-quality relationships with their teachers (Van Loan & Garwood, 2020b). Teachers have been found to provide sufficient emotional support and serve as a secure base to typically developing students, and less likely to provide the same support to students who display

challenging behaviors (Moohr et al., 2021). Research has shown that such unequal treatment has not gone unnoticed and has impacted the social and academic development of EBD students. For example, Scanlon et al. (2020) found children with disabilities had greater displeasure with their relationship quality with teachers compared with students without disabilities, and that dissatisfaction was more significant among students with EBD. Such experiences have been correlated with long-term outcomes for students with EBD including increased drop-out rates, substance abuse, unemployment, and criminal arrest (Benner et al., 2019).

Zolkoski (2019) examined the impact that teachers have on students with EBD. Students felt that teachers had a negative impact on their social and academic success when they failed to demonstrate they cared. The participants expressed that they were not motivated to exert effort in school as a result of their teachers' lack of caring. More specifically, participants reported negative school experiences including increased detentions and suspensions, lack of academic success, and removal from regular school settings. On the other hand, participants in the study who indicated that they felt their teachers cared about them experienced overwhelmingly positive social and academic effects (Zolkoski, 2019). Similarly, studies have shown that students with EBD reported higher levels of motivation and engagement in classroom activities when their teachers maintained patient and caring dispositions (Ginns & Begeny, 2019; Min Wang & Louick, 2020)

Special education teachers have also been found to experience lower quality relationships with students with EBD compared with teachers in general education

classrooms. Teachers indicated that they have experienced relationships consisting of less warmth and greater cases of conflict when working with EBD students (Van Loan & Garwood, 2020b). Similar findings were revealed by Zoromski et al. (2021) in which teachers expressed greater conflict and a more negative emotional tone when speaking about disruptive students; on the other hand, a warmer overall tone was expressed when referring to well-behaved students. Moreover, the findings of Scanlon et al. (2020) further extended previous research indicating that teachers possessed greater negative implicit (unconscious) and explicit (conscious) attitudes towards students with EBD, when compared to typically developing peers.

Koenen et al. (2019) conducted a study focusing on teachers' daily negative emotions in interactions with students with EBD, particularly students with attachment problems. Students with attachment problems have been characterized as having low trust in others, insecurity, poor social skills, and less prosocial behavior in interactions with teachers as compared with securely attached students (Koenen et al., 2019; Taylor & Smith, 2019). Results within this study indicated that teachers with high self-efficacy were less likely to experience intensity of and variability in negative emotions. Moreover, beginning teachers reported to have experienced negative emotions such as feelings of helplessness when working with EBD students. As a result, Koenen et al. (2019) highlighted the need of emotion-focused interventions for teachers to promote positive teacher-student relationships. This is especially crucial because teachers serve as important socializing agents in class and students observe their teachers' classroom interactions throughout the school day. Furthermore, research has shown that teachers'

high efficacy can lead to improved classroom instruction and positive student achievement (Daumiller et al., 2021). As a result, students are likely to develop ideas about the quality of teachers' relationships with their peers with disabilities.

Student-Peer Relationships

Social interactions and relationships with peers typically make up an integral part to one's schooling experience (Petry, 2018). Not only do social relationships become a part of personal memories and experiences, but they also serve as a vehicle for developmental growth and can result in personal benefit (Rossetti et al., 2018). Inclusive education provides SWDs with opportunities to have meaningful interactions with typically developing peers which is intended to help SWDs develop academic and social skills, promote the achievement of educational goals, and contribute to the development of friendship (Edwards et al., 2019).

Students with disabilities in inclusive classes often face problems with peer acceptance, friendships, and peer interactions (Petry, 2018). Research has shown that participating in social interactions has been especially difficult for SWDs (Petry, 2018). In a cross-sectional study, Petry (2018) explored the difficulties in social participation and the attitudes of typically developing adolescents towards peers with disabilities. Results indicated that while the attitudes of typically developing adolescents toward their peers with a disability were neutral, the SWDs were found to be less accepted by their peers, had fewer reciprocal friendships and were less involved in peer interactions than their typically developing classmates.

While developing positive peer interactions and relationships for SWDs is difficult, it has been found that among SWDS, students classified with EBD are among those who experience the greatest challenges. (Van Loan & Garwood, 2020a). Stiefel et al. (2018) indicated that students with emotional disorders felt the least included and demonstrated poor relationships. Considering that the established challenges among students with EBD include disruptive behaviors and academic engagement, Stiefel (2018) reported that additional challenges may arise in EBD students feeling excluded in social situations. Pereira and Lavoie (2018) mirrored similar findings and reported that the social aspects to schooling became more complicated and demanding as students progressed from elementary to secondary school. Moreover, with this increased demand and changes within the environment, including changing staff, students, and procedures, students with EBD struggled with understanding the new social norms as well as developing meaningful relationships. Stiefel (2018) called attention to support systems, including teachers and social workers that may be best suited to improve the feelings of inclusion for students with EBD.

In educational contexts, students with EBD face significant challenges developing and sustaining prosocial relationships with not only teachers, but peers as well (Carter, 2018). Taking part in meaningful forms of social interactions and relationships is considered an essential component of high-quality inclusive education (Bettini et al., 2022). Teachers can play a critical role in ensuring SWDs acquire the skills, supports, and opportunities needed to work with a wide range of peers at their school (Carter, 2018). As a result, Carter (2018) reinforced the importance of ensuring that adequate pre-

service and in-service training is provided and that the staff is equipped with resources to best address the social dynamics among peer relationships.

While teachers are the primary vehicles that drive students' learning, they also facilitate social interactions between students (McGuire & Meadan, 2022). This is because teachers are tasked with establishing classroom communities that set the tone for norms and values for peer interactions. Furthermore, the manners in which teachers interact with students affect students' classroom behaviors, including how they relate to their peers (Zee et al., 2020). McGrath and Van Bergen (2019) investigated how the level of disruptive behavior and friend influence on disruptive behavior differs across classrooms in connection to teacher emotional support. Findings indicated that the incidents of disruptive behavior were elevated in classes with low teacher emotional support compared to classes high in teacher emotional support. Moreover, social network analyses indicated that students were more likely to mimic disruptive behaviors in classes low in teacher emotional support compared to classes high in teacher emotional support. Therefore, the level of disruptive behavior and students' susceptibility to friend influence on disruptive behavior relies heavily on the nature of the classroom environment. Results from this study support a growing body of research demonstrating that teachers play a crucial role in facilitating and influencing peer relationships in the classroom. Students spend a significant part of their day at school, and in addition to being exposed to academic instructions, they are also exposed to social experiences. Research has shown that students' academic outcomes are maximized when students develop positive peer networks (Petry, 2018).

Summary and Conclusions

Contributing factors impact teachers' perceptions of self-efficacy when working with students with EBDs in inclusive classrooms. Teachers feel they are inadequately prepared to teach in inclusive classrooms (Kim et al., 2020; Mngo & Mngo, 2018; Weiss et al., 2021). Some factors include their inability to implement effective classroom management strategies, presence of effective PD, and lack of collaborative relationships among staff and administration. Teachers' perceptions of their self-efficacy greatly impacts both the ways in which they manage their classroom environments and how they understand and interpret support that is available to them (Zaheer et al., 2019). General education teachers often struggle with providing quality instruction to SWDs in inclusive classrooms due to challenges involving lack of professional development and classroom management fluency (Mngo & Mngo, 2018; Rosado-Castellano et al., 2022; Stites et al., 2018). Such struggles have been further magnified in regard to specifically teaching students with EBDs. Moreover, there is a growing need to further explore general education teachers' perceptions when instructing students with EBDs as well as identify specific trainings that would increase their levels of self-efficacy. In order to address this gap and further expand on current findings, thorough and comprehensive research on teachers' perceptions of their self-efficacy when instructing students with EBDs in inclusive classrooms must be conducted.

In the next chapter, the methodology is discussed. This chapter also includes details about the research design, procedures for recruitment, participation and data

collection, instrumentation, role of the researcher, assumptions, limitations, and ethical procedures.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore general education teachers' perceptions regarding their self-efficacy when teaching students with EBDs in inclusive settings. In this chapter, a description of the research design and methodology is presented. Additionally, I provide a description of my role as the researcher, description of participants, ethical procedures that are used to protect participants, process of collecting data, and data analysis plan. Finally, coded themes and procedures that are used to ensure credibility were addressed.

Research Design and Rationale

In order to explore perceptions of participants, the following research question guided this study:

RQ1: What are perceptions of general education teachers' self-efficacy when instructing middle school students with EBDs in inclusive settings within a northeastern school district in New Jersey?

Teachers' high self-efficacy is correlated with positive effects on students' achievement, and low self-efficacy is related to poor outcomes involving student achievement (Perera et al., 2022). General education teachers' perceptions may vary in terms of their abilities to successfully teach EBD students in inclusive settings. Moreover, self-efficacy as it relates to teachers may significantly impact instructional practices, classroom climate, and perceptions regarding educational processes (Kuronja et al., 2019; MacFarlane & Woolfson, 2018). This study was an exploration of teachers' perceptions about self-efficacy when teaching students with EBDs in inclusive settings.

The research design was a basic qualitative design. A qualitative approach is appropriate because the purpose of my research is to explore general education teachers' perceptions regarding their self-efficacy when teaching students with EBDs in inclusive settings. Followup questions, often used in qualitative studies, are intended to establish clarification, and can be used to elicit appropriate responses from participants.

Qualitative research emerged in the 5th century B.C. by the Greeks who studied human interactions and found humans are inquisitive by nature (Edwards & Holland, 2020). Aristotle was one of the first qualitative researchers who made sense of the world by listening and observing (Behar-Horenstein, 2018). Aristotle posited ideas and beliefs are shaped from experience with objects, beings, and events (Behar-Horenstein, 2018). Aristotle suggested thoughts are formed based on what is perceived and experienced through senses.

Qualitative researchers aim to extract in-depth understandings regarding a specific phenomenon within a population (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). Qualitative research involves why rather than what social phenomena and relies on firsthand experiences of human beings as they explain meanings that define their perspectives (Klenke et al., 2016).

A universal characteristic among all forms of qualitative research is that individuals construct reality in interaction with their social worlds (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). Qualitative studies involve understanding how people understand their experiences, create their worlds, and what meaning they characterize to their worlds

(Merriam & Grenier, 2019). Raw and authentic as well as detailed descriptions of lived experiences of others are used to capture perspectives of various populations.

Qualitative research is also often used to seek answers in the real world (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). A benefit of qualitative research is that this method is flexible and highly descriptive. In a qualitative study, the researcher is the primary form of instrumentation who collects and analyzes data (Patton, 2002). Based on participant responses, researchers can ask follow-up questions to gain further clarification in order to gain a greater depth of understanding (Flick, 2018). Qualitative research further involves incorporating expressive language which reflects voices of participants and their lived experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Quantitative methods are best used when testing hypotheses, particularly with large samples, allowing development of sophisticated causal models and replicability across settings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Quantitative methods are not suited to help society understand meanings and implications involving phenomena. I did not select a quantitative research design because my research was focused on responses to open-ended questions. This led to data on the research topic along with an intricate understanding of the study phenomenon.

Role of the Researcher

From the start of the study, the role of the researcher should be clearly established. My role as a researcher was to interview participants and gain an understanding of their perceptions concerning teaching of students with EBDs in

inclusive classrooms. I work in the same school district that participants were selected from. However, I have never taken a supervisory role over any participants.

As a basic qualitative researcher and teacher of SWDs, I identified with students with EBDs being provided with quality learning experiences in inclusive settings to the greatest extent possible. I have however remained cognizant of biases when collecting and interpreting data. Before each interview, I introduced myself and explained that my role was to accurately gather, record, and transcribe information regarding teachers' experiences when instructing students with EBDs in inclusive classrooms. I did not allow my personal biases to influence collection or interpretation of data. I also remained open-minded when interviewing participants and analyzing data to capture participants' true experiences with inclusion when teaching students with EBD.

Methodology

Participant Selection

A purposeful sampling strategy was selected for this study. When using a purposeful sampling strategy, the researcher determines criteria that are crucial to the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Purposeful sampling is commonly used in qualitative research and involves selecting participants that have distinct characteristics regarding the phenomenon of interest (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). As a result, purposeful sampling may lead to greater quality, accuracy, and credibility of data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Participants were middle school teachers who instructed students with EBDs in inclusive classrooms from an urban district located in the northeastern portion of the U.S. Email addresses of potential participants who met criteria were requested from the

district's Supervisor of Behavior Supports. Participants were not invited to participate in the study until I attained approval from Walden's IRB. According to Creswell (2012), using a large number of participants within a qualitative study limits depth of exploration of participants. In order to gain an in-depth understanding of teachers' perceptions, the number of planned participants was a minimum of 10 to 12, or until saturation has been met. Saturation was met when no new information was collected during the interview process and no new themes emerged. In order to determine when saturation was met, I analyzed data during the interview process.

Instrumentation

The primary source of data collection was from semi-structured interviews following an interview protocol (Appendix A). Semi-structured interview questions are less-tightly formatted, allowing the researcher to respond to the situation at hand as well as allowing for the emergence of new ideas on the topic (Flick, 2018). The way in which questions are worded is an important consideration when attempting to extract the type of information desired (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In this study, questions were worded in familiar language to ensure that the participants have a clear understanding of what is being asked. Using words that are familiar to the interviewee and terms that reflect the respondent's worldview will improve the quality of data gathered during the interview (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

For this study, participants were asked questions pertaining to their perception of self-efficacy when teaching students with EBD in an inclusive classroom. Follow-up questions also referred as probes were included to gain a more thorough understanding.

Probes are developed to reiterate what participants have already said. Good interview questions are those that are open-ended and produce descriptive data (Flick, 2018). Because behavior cannot be seen, it is essential that interviewing is used to extract information pertaining to respondents' feelings and how they perceive the world around them. Moreover, interviewing is essential especially when the researcher is interested in past events that are impossible to reproduce. As a result, the interview questions for this study were aimed to extract participants' experiences, perceptions, and needs in relation to the identified phenomenon. Once information was gathered, transcribed, and coded, I provided a detailed explanation of findings. To ensure accuracy of data, content validity was established using member checking.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

Once I received approval from the Walden University Institutional Review Board (Approval #: 07-19-23-0721942), I forwarded the approval letter to the superintendent of schools. After permission has been granted to continue, I emailed building principals of schools that service middle school students with EBD an introduction letter and disclose the intent of my research. General education teachers who instruct middle school EBD students in inclusive settings were identified with support from the district's supervisor of behavioral supports. Letters of intent were emailed to selected participants, who were chosen based on the following criterion: Teachers must teach middle students with EBD in an inclusive setting.

A total of 20 teachers that instruct EBD students in inclusive classrooms were recruited. From this group, a random selection of 10 teachers were selected for actual

participation in the study, and the remaining teachers were placed within a sample frame in the event that saturation has not been met or participants drop out. Once participants have been selected, they were provided with a consent form requiring their electronic signature. The consent form consisted of the purpose of the study, my role as the researcher, and their role as a participant. Moreover, participants were informed of the interview process as well as their rights throughout the duration of the study. Participants were also notified that interviews will be audio recorded for later transcription and they may withdraw from the study at any time. Once all consent forms were signed and returned, I communicated with the participants to set up preferred times and dates for interviews. I gave all participants the option to interview in person or through WebEx, which is web-based videoconferencing application. Interviews were held either after school hours or during the weekend. This will ensure that teachers are not taken away from their professional responsibilities.

Interviews were scheduled for approximately 45 minutes. During interviews, I focused on participants' responses to questions and asked follow-up questions as needed to gain clarity and understanding of their feelings. During interviews, responses provided by the participants were audio recorded and the Nvivo 12 application was used to transcribe, code, and create themes taken from the interview data. The Nvivo 12 application segmented the data in categories to identify patterns and relationships among the categories. Once data was analyzed, I provided each participant a copy of the transcribed interview following the procedure of member checking. This will increase the reliability of this study and helps ensure that the data is accurate.

Protecting participants' privacy is an essential element to conducting ethical research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Data from each interview will be protected and kept confidential as participants' personal identities will be replaced with pseudonyms. The data will also be secured in a locked file cabinet for a minimum of five years. Various forms of data include interview transcripts and voice recordings, After the required period has passed, all forms of data will be destroyed beyond recognition and discarded.

Data Analysis Plan

Data analysis involves developing a process intended to make sense out of the data. Flick (2018) explained the process of data analysis as the “classification and interpretation of linguistic (or visual) material to make statements about implicit and explicit dimensions and structures of meaning-making in the material and what is represented in it” (p. 5). In order to make sense of the data, the researcher essentially consolidates and interprets what the participants have stated through a process of coding (Levitt, 2020). According to Levitt (2020), a code in qualitative data analysis is often a word or short phrase that is frequently used which evokes specific themes within a study.

The data retrieved from this research went through an inductive process of open coding of emerging themes. Open coding provides the researcher with the opportunity to create categories of information from the transcripts (Katz-Buonincontro, 2022). The inductive process of analysis involves synthesizing data to interpret the meanings of specific data and patterns within the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The primary qualitative data analysis tool that was utilized for this research was the Nvivo 12 application which transcribed, coded, and created themes taken from the

interview data. The Nvivo 12 application segmented the data in categories to identify patterns and relationships among the categories. Once interviews were transcribed and data were analyzed, I utilized member checking to check for accuracy. Member checking involves providing each participant with a draft consisting of my interpretation of their experiences and perceptions (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

There are six ways to analyze and interpret the findings of qualitative research: (1) arranging and organizing data; (2) analyzing the data by coding; (3) using the code to develop broad themes; (4) using narratives and visuals to display findings; (5) interpreting the meaning of the results; and (6) validating the findings (Creswell and Creswell, 2017). After the digitally recorded interviews are conducted, I manually transcribed the information and organized the findings on a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. The responses were then coded by identifying similar themes among the participants' responses. Visual representations were then developed to reflect the participants' verbal representations as well as patterns within the findings. In the event that there is discrepancy within the information, corrections were made so all the information in the data is accurate (Saldana, 2016; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Participants received a copy of the transcribed interviews as well as the analyzed data to check for accuracy. If a discrepancy in the information is found, I worked with the participant to ensure the information reflects their true perceptions.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness refers to the extent to which the findings of a study can be regarded as trusted (Urban & van Eeden-Moorefield, 2018). For a study to be considered

as meaningful and useful, the reader must have trust in the integrity of the study (Behar-Horenstein, 2018). There are various modes of establishing trustworthiness as well as many strategies that can be used to ensure that procedures conducted throughout the study are within ethical guidelines.

Credibility

Credibility refers to the extent to which findings reflect the reality of participants' experiences and perceptions (Urban & van Eeden-Moorefield, 2018). In order to maximize the level of credibility established within the study, I represented the findings to reflect the lives of participants, and not my beliefs about them and their experiences. I remained neutral throughout the study and maintained a log of my own thoughts and beliefs related to each interview. Furthermore, I ensured that all participants had a thorough understanding of the research by providing clear and specific implications of the study and its procedures in the informed consent agreement. Moreover, I asked follow-up questions in order to explore all possible realities or the diverse experiences of participants. The credibility of data was further established through a rigorous process of ensuring accuracy of coding as well as member checking. Through the use of member checking, the participants reviewed the transcribed data to ensure accuracy.

Transferability

Transferability refers to the extent to which findings from a study can apply to other populations, situations, or contexts (Urban & van Eeden-Moorefield, 2018). Transferability also involves a rich participation pool that represents the focus of the study and refers to including a comprehensive description and assumptions of the setting

(Burkholder et al., 2016). In order to identify whether the findings of this study have established transferability, I analyzed whether I presented the information and data within this study to the extent that outsiders have a thorough understanding of how the findings emerged as it relates to the sample, the contexts in which they live, and the setting where the data was retrieved from. To create transferability, I used a thick description of the assumptions that are relevant to the study, which may allow the reader to determine whether the findings of the study can be generalized to his or her own experiences. Thick descriptions refer to the process of providing a detailed account when observing and translating situations during qualitative research (Iphofen & Tolich, 2018).

Dependability

Dependability refers to the extent of consistency related to the findings of the study (Urban & van Eeden-Moorefield, 2018). The level of dependability relies on whether enough information has been provided in order to ensure that outsiders have a complete understanding of how the findings emerged. To ensure dependability, I conducted audit trails, which include records of how this qualitative study was conducted. The audit trail includes a collection and recording of raw data as well as field notes regarding my observations, feelings, and dispositions (Flick, 2018). Furthermore, a guiding question that I asked myself references to whether others agree that the data and findings within the study make sense, even if they do not necessarily agree with them.

Confirmability

Confirmability refers to the extent to which the researcher was cognizant of, monitored, and ensured that possible biases did not influence the research process and

representation of findings (Urban & van Eeden-Moorefield, 2018). I established a high degree of confirmability by keeping a journal during the entire research process and noting my thoughts and reactions during data collection or coding to monitor for bias and remain neutral throughout the study (Saldana, 2016). I also used a memo to note any feelings, insights, or possible codes during the analysis process (Urban & van Eeden-Moorefield, 2018).

Ethical Procedures

Ethical Protection of Participants

Ensuring that ethical procedures were conducted is an essential component in research. There are two primary issues that are in the forefront of ethical research: providing participants with an informed consent and ensuring that participants are protected from harm (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). A main priority in all research is providing valid and reliable information in an ethical manner. Ensuring that the information provided within research is trusted is crucial. Being able to trust results provided within research is especially important to professionals in applied fields because the retrieved data is centered around the lives and experiences of people.

Before recruiting any participants, I first obtained approval from the Walden University IRB (Approval #: 07-19-23-0721942) to ensure the data collection meets the standards of Walden University. I minimized the participants' risks and provided informed consent agreement which included unbiased research procedures as well as the potential benefits of the research. It is crucial to be as clear as possible about the nature of the research and the key values that was considered throughout the study, including their

potential implications and how they may relate to the situations in which researchers must act (Iphofen & Tolich, 2018). An informed consent agreement, which is a written statement that will promise participants that their rights will be protected with integrity, was provided to each participant via email. The informed consent agreement included: the purpose of the research, procedures for data collection, relevant information about the study, the potential benefits of the study, and the procedures that will be taken to ensure participants' protection (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Participants were given one week to review the informed consent agreement and return it signed via email. No participant was coerced to join the research and implications within the informed consent agreement provided potential participants with the right to remove themselves from the study at any time

None of the participants have a personal relationship with the researcher.

Participants were provided with an introduction letter consisting of the purpose of the study, allowing them to review information of the study before signing consent forms. In order to build trust with the participants, I engaged in full transparency when disclosing how the data will be used. To further ensure the ethical protection of participants, I established confidentiality of all participants before, during, and after data collection. Data from each interview will be protected and kept confidential as each interview script consisted of pseudonyms. Furthermore, data, including interview transcripts, voice recordings, and any other documents pertaining to participants' data from this study will be kept secured in a locked file cabinet at my home office for a minimum of five years and then discarded properly as directed by Walden's IRB guidelines.

Summary

This chapter included a description of the research design, rationale, procedures for data collection and analysis, and ethical procedures to minimize threats to validity for the proposed study. Participants who met criteria of teaching middle school students with EBDs in inclusive settings were selected. I used a basic qualitative approach and semi-structured interviews were conducted to extract in-depth responses from participants. NVivo 12 was used to transcribe, code, and create themes from interview data. Trustworthiness of data was established using member checking, in which participants reviewed transcribed data to ensure accuracy. Participants were provided with a transcribed copy of interviews and asked to validate information as well as interpretations of their information. Data retrieved from this study will be kept confidential and secured in a locked file cabinet for a minimum of 5 years. Sources of data included interview transcripts, voice recordings, flash drives, and documents pertaining to participant data. After the required period has passed, all forms of data will be destroyed beyond recognition and discarded. Moreover, identity of all participants was confidential. Participation was voluntary, and the option to withdraw from the study was provided to each participant during any point of the research process.

In Chapter 3, I outlined the research design and rationale, discussed my role as the researcher, addressed the methodology for selecting participants, instrumentation, and discussed procedures I used for recruitment, participation, and data collection. Furthermore, I discussed how I analyzed data. Finally, I addressed trustworthiness and ethical procedures.

Chapter 4 includes a description of the setting, demographics of participants, and the data collection process. Furthermore, I provide a description of the process used for data analysis, results from this study, and evidence of trustworthiness.

Chapter 4: Results

This chapter includes an analysis of data regarding the research question presented in Chapter 1. The research question was intended to gain a deeper understanding of general education teachers' perceptions of their self-efficacy when instructing middle school students in inclusive classrooms. Semi-structured interviews were conducted, and emerging themes from interviews were coded and analyzed to answer the research question. Each interview was audio recorded using NVivo 12, and member-checking was used for accuracy of responses. This chapter includes a description of the setting, data collection, and data analysis. This chapter concludes with results of the study and evidence of trustworthiness.

Setting

Research was conducted via WebEx and in person, depending on the preference of participants. The study included participants who taught in a large urban district consisting of a total of 65 schools. During the 2021-2022 school year, the district had approximately 38,000 enrolled students, and of that population, 17.2% were SWDs.

Interviews for participants were either in their homes or classrooms. A total of three interviews were conducted in person and the remaining seven were conducted via WebEx. Participants in the study were general education teachers within a northeastern school district in NJ who taught middle school students with EBDs in inclusive classrooms. Participants included six female and four male teachers whose teaching experience ranged from 2 to 22 years. All participants taught grades 6 through 8 as general education teachers.

Data Collection

Prior to data collection, I obtained and was granted IRB permission (#07-19-23-0721942) to conduct my study. I emailed building principals regarding the nature of my study and received full permission to interview teachers. I began recruitment in July 2023, and participants were recruited from three schools within the same district. These schools were selected because they are the only schools within the large district that service middle school EBD students. A total of 20 emails were sent to teachers who taught middle school students with EBDs in inclusive classrooms. I decided to reach out to 20 teachers because many teachers were not working over the summer break and may have been away on vacation. From the total pool of selected participants, eight stated they would not be able to commit, and two individuals did not respond. However, 10 teachers consented to participate. Participants included six female and four male teachers whose teaching experience ranged from 2 to 22 years. Of the participants, five earned a bachelor's degree and the remaining five attained a master's degree.

Within a day of replying with their consent, I scheduled interviews at the convenience of each participant. I also gave participants the option to select whether they preferred in-person or virtual interviews. Data were obtained through semi-structured interviews which lasted for an average of 45 minutes each. Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed using NVivo 12. No unusual circumstances occurred during the process of data collection.

Data Analysis

This section includes a detailed account of how I analyzed data in this study. This includes the process of transcribing data, analyzing data, and developing codes and themes. I used an inductive process of open coding for emerging themes. Open coding involves creating categories of information from transcripts (Katz-Buonincontro, 2022). The inductive process of analysis involves synthesizing data to interpret meanings of specific data and patterns within data (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

I used Nvivo application to transcribe interview data. After interviews were conducted, I listened to each recording and matched interviews to participants. I provided each participant with a transcription as a form of member checking to ensure their interviews reflected their true experiences and perceptions. Once each participant confirmed accuracy of data, I assigned pseudonyms to further ensure that confidentiality was established.

Open Coding

The inductive process of analysis involves synthesizing data to interpret meanings of specific data and patterns within data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). To accomplish this, I read each transcript and highlighted and annotated repeated words and phrases. I created a Microsoft Excel sheet for each transcription and inserted codes in one column and responses related to each code in a second column.

Once I completed the table, I reanalyzed data and looked for overlapping codes that were closely related. Some participants expressed they would benefit from opportunities to collaborate with their colleagues. As a result, I developed a code for

collaboration. However, some participants did not explicitly use the term but rather expressed that they would benefit from meeting with members of their team to understand various strategies for specific students. I continued this process and analyzed codes that were related or similar and grouped them together. Once all tables were completed and codes were identified, I began to identify themes based off repeated patterns within data. Discrepant cases, or outliers in data, refer to elements of data that do not fit into a specific pattern (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). No discrepant cases existed within data set in this study.

Theme Development

Once all codes were identified, themes were developed based on repeated patterns within data. There were six initial themes that emerged from data: collaboration with team members, need for trained paraprofessional support, need for professional development in differentiated instruction, need for professional development in classroom management, recruitment and retention of staff, and managing work expectations.

Ravitch and Carl (2016) emphasized the importance of reviewing data sets to ensure themes reflected data. I reevaluated codes and themes and decided to combine the need for professional development involving differentiated instruction and classroom management into one theme. Furthermore, I combined need for trained paraprofessional support and recruitment and retention of staff into a second theme. I did this because implications of these themes were closely related. Once themes were reevaluated, the following four final themes emerged: opportunities to collaborate with colleagues that

may lead to increased self-efficacy, sufficient knowledge regarding implementation of EBS, support by coteachers and paraprofessionals, and meeting and managing work expectations.

Development of Theme 1

Theme 1 was developed because of the prevalence from repeated patterns across all participant responses highlighting the importance of collaborating with colleagues to improve level of self-efficacy. This theme was a result of teachers' feelings and perceptions regarding opportunities to discuss specific student needs with teachers that have previously or currently work with their students. For example, Angel expressed that it would be beneficial "if general education and special education teachers had greater opportunities to meet and share ideas." Valerie also echoed this statement expressing that she would have a better understanding of what effective practice looks like if there was greater opportunity "to observe colleagues model certain strategies in live action with students."

Development of Theme 2

Theme 2 was merged from two subthemes: Need for professional development on the topics of differentiated instruction and classroom management. Since the implementation of effective classroom management and differentiated instruction are supported under evidence-based strategies, I decided to combine the two. For example, Destiny explained that outbursts sometimes occur in the middle of instruction and "behavioral strategies or interventions would be helpful" when students display emotional or behavioral challenges. Mark also stated that "My level of self-efficacy

would be higher if I received greater opportunities to learn and practice tailored strategies for instruction.”

Development of Theme 3

Theme 3 merged from two subthemes: Need for trained paraprofessional support and recruitment and retention of staff. I merged both subthemes because they fell under the umbrella of recruiting and retaining qualified instructional and non-instructional staff members. This was a common theme among all interviews. Jessica stated that instruction has been impacted due to “staffing constraints, and because of that, resource teachers are being used to cover classes.” Angel also stated that there is a shortage of qualified “paraprofessionals who are able to implement some accommodations or modifications for specific students.”

Development of Theme 4

Theme 4 was developed as workload and professional responsibilities was a reoccurring theme among participants. This theme came about as participants expressed the expectations that administration required of them. Some of these expectations included filling out data trackers, incident reports, developing Present Levels of Academic and Functional Performance (PLAFP) statements needed for IEPs, etc. Edward expressed how time constraints to meet work deadlines conflicted with the ability to deliver effective instruction to students:

Sometimes, you know, we do have a lack of time. Sometimes administration wants you to do X, Y, Z and then A, B, C and tell you the district is mandating it to be done by Tuesday. I tend to say sure. But then that takes 25-50% of my time

to do clerical work. If you do that, then you take time away from the kids. And I don't have enough time to accomplish my goals. These are extraneous factors that limit our ability, including students.

Results

Ten general education teachers who instruct middle school students with EBD in inclusive classrooms participated in this study. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to gain a better understanding of general education teachers' perceptions regarding their self-efficacy when teaching students with EBD in inclusive classrooms. The interview questions were aligned to the study's conceptual framework which focuses on understanding and predicting human behavior. Bandura's SCT (1993) emphasized that the influence over goals and the outcome of those goals are greatly determined by people's beliefs about their personal capabilities. If people perceive themselves as incapable of successfully completing a task or achieving a goal, they are more likely to experience negative feelings. On the other hand, if people feel that they are capable of successfully completing a task, they will likely experience positive cognitive responses which in turn may lead to positive performance by individuals (Hauerwas & Mahon, 2018).

Once member checking was completed, each interview was provided with a pseudonym for confidentiality purposes. Codes were extracted from each interview to develop themes that aided in answering the research question: What are the perceptions of general education teachers' self-efficacy when instructing middle school students with EBD in inclusive settings within a northeastern school district in New Jersey?

Theme 1: Teacher Collaboration

I asked participants if they had opportunities to collaborate with their colleagues regarding specific student and teacher needs. State et al. (2019) asserted that professional growth is sustained when teachers are provided the opportunity to consistently collaborate with one another. Participants described the opportunities administration provided for teacher collaboration and described which opportunities they feel would be beneficial to maximize their level of self-efficacy when instructing students with EBD in inclusive classrooms. Westley, for example stated, “They (administration) provide PLC (Professional Learning Community) meetings once a week and grade level meetings also once a week.” The participant further stated that these meetings are “mostly centered around implementing the curriculum and tracking data.” He further expressed that he receives “different students with different abilities and I (Westley) don’t have the opportunity to meet with their teacher from last year or work with other teachers to know what strategies work best for specific students.” To increase his level of self-efficacy, he feels that having opportunities for “sharing strategies would help me (Westley) have a stronger sense of confidence.”

Max stated, “I think I’m an effective teacher, but I know what I know, and I do what I do...who knows, maybe I will really know what true effectiveness looks like if we can actually go into other classrooms and see what other teachers do. We can learn from each other and get strategies from each other.” Julia further echoed a similar sentiment and claimed that “teachers have their own strengths, and I (Julia) would love to see how other teachers do things and manage a classroom with students with EBD. The only thing

is that I (Julia) would need is someone to cover my class for a period while I go and visit other classes, but we are short with coverage as it is.”

The overall sentiment among the participants was that while PLC and grade level meetings were provided, little opportunity was given during the contractual workday to collaborate with teachers familiar with inclusive teaching. Participants expressed that most opportunities for collaboration among colleagues was dedicated to implementing curricular resources as well as maintaining housekeeping duties, such as updating data trackers and understanding instructional strategies related to state testing. The universal response among participants was that greater opportunities to collaborate with colleagues regarding successful implementation to inclusive teaching would increase their levels of self-efficacy. Literature supports the value of professional collaboration. According to Richter et al. (2022), professional collaboration among school staff is a strong predictor of job satisfaction, greater self-efficacy for teachers, and improved classroom practices, further leading to higher student performance.

Table 1

Participant Response to Interview Questions 1 and 2

Participant (pseudonyms)	Response to Question 1: What are your perceptions regarding the inclusion of students with EBD in the general education classroom?	Response to Question 2: What behaviors from students with EBD in the inclusive classroom do you perceive as challenging?
Max	I think everyone should have an equal opportunity if the supports are set in place.	Withdrawal from classwork; verbal aggression
Julia	I think all students deserve access to quality education	Refusal to complete classwork/homework; not following directions

Shena	I think inclusive education is important, but some students function best when they are in small classroom settings.	Refusal to complete classwork/homework; impulsive reactions, such as shouting out in class
Westley	I think it's good to include students with EBD, but they have to be ready to adapt.	Verbal/physical aggression; Refusal to complete classwork/homework
Ashley	It's important that everyone has equal opportunity, but it will only work if everyone feels supported.	Poor social interactions with peers/adults
Jeff	Equal access is important but sometimes it doesn't work because we (teachers) don't have the tools to support them (students with EBD).	Withdrawal from classwork; verbal aggression
Valerie	The goal is place students in the least restrictive environment, so yes including students with EBD is important.	Poor social interactions with peers/adults
Angel	All students deserve the opportunity to a fair shot.	Refusal to complete classwork/homework; not following directions
Craig	Inclusion is important because it gives students that have a disability with access to grade level content.	Poor social interactions with peers/adults; not following directions
Dean	I think it's important to include everyone. On the same token, students and teachers need the tools to support the inclusive process.	Withdrawal from classwork; Poor social interactions with peers/adults

Theme 2: Professional Development Opportunities

I asked participants to identify the professional development opportunities they have received and whether they feel that the offered PDs contributed to their perceived self-efficacy. Ashley expressed that “opportunities for PD are offered in the beginning of the year and then quarterly after that.” When asked if additional professional development would be perceived as beneficial, Ashley stated, “Absolutely, I feel that training and seeing things from different perspectives and understanding how to master or work towards mastery is beneficial for the student and the teacher.” When asked about what specific forms of PD she believes would increase her level of self-efficacy, Ashley stated, “I would benefit from understanding social emotional learning (SEL) as it relates to students with emotional and behavioral disabilities. I need to know the ways and

techniques to notice whether a student is going to engage in dangerous behaviors and things like that.” Dean also echoed similar feelings and stated that his levels of self-efficacy would be higher if he had greater exposure to PD related to SEL. “I feel like I could always get a little better when it comes to that. During professional development, I may learn about signs to look for that I am not aware of, like maybe they are experiencing abuse at home or being mistreated elsewhere. If you can pinpoint the warning signs, maybe you can help them to prevent negative behaviors.” Dean expressed that the administration is very supportive when it comes to providing professional development. However, like many of the participants within this study, Max stated that a single session of PD is not sufficient and feels like PD must be long term to sustain its effects. According to current literature (Gümüş et al. 2023), high-quality, ongoing professional development geared toward improving classroom practices is a strong predictor to increased levels of teacher self-efficacy.

Table 2

Participant Response to Interview Questions 5 and 7

Participant (pseudonyms)	Response to Question 5: What forms of professional development have been provided to help support your understanding of students with EBD?	Response to Question 7: What forms of professional development do you feel is necessary for the development of high self-efficacy for general education teachers who instruct students with EBD in the inclusive classroom?
Max	No training specifically for students with EBD. The training that are provided are geared toward implementing the curriculum.	It would be beneficial to have opportunities to observe other teachers model strategies and learn from them.
Julia	No training specifically for students with EBD	Professional development on classroom management strategies when with students with EBD

Shena	No training specifically for students with EBD; I learn mostly from my experiences	Professional development on how to best implement inclusive practices for students with EBD.
Westley	No training specifically for students with EBD	Professional development on differentiated strategies to help students with EBD learn; Professional development on classroom management strategies when with students with EBD; having opportunities for “sharing strategies would help me (Westley) have a stronger sense of confidence”
Ashley	No training specifically for students with EBD	I (Ashley) need social emotional learning (SEL) as it relates to students with emotional and behavioral disabilities. I need to know the ways and techniques to notice whether a student is going to engage in dangerous behaviors and things like that
Jeff	No training specifically for students with EBD. The trainings that are provided are primarily instruction-based.	Professional development geared toward social emotional learning and understanding how to prevent negative behaviors
Valerie	No training specifically for students with EBD	Professional development on classroom management strategies when with students with EBD
Angel	No training specifically for students with EBD. I usually just get strategies from other teachers.	Professional development on implementing accommodations and modifications in the classroom; having more time dedicated to learn strategies from other teachers
Craig	No training specifically for students with EBD	Professional development on how to best implement inclusive practices for students with EBD.
Dean	No training specifically for students with EBD	Professional development geared toward social emotional learning and understanding how to prevent negative behaviors

Theme 3: Sufficient Instructional and Noninstructional Staff

I asked participants whether they felt supported by their co-teacher special education counterparts. The participants within this study explained that the district utilizes a “push-in” model in which the special education resource teacher supports students with disabilities within the general education classroom. Universally, the

participants stated that when the resource teacher is in the classroom, the delivery of instruction can flow smoothly. Furthermore, according to the participants, the general education teacher delivers whole group instruction, and the resource teacher typically supports his/her group by reinforcing learned material and redirecting undesirable behaviors. Shena stated, “When one of my students that has EBD displays disruptive behaviors, he (resource teacher) can immediately redirect the student. However, at times, the resource teacher is pulled to support other classes.” This is the cause of staff shortages that have been a widespread problem throughout the district. It has been reported by the participants that staffing has been a struggle as there is a teacher shortage. “While there has been a documented shortage for some time, it has been exacerbated by early retirements during the pandemic coupled with fewer and fewer college students choosing to become teachers” (Waters, 2023).

A similar sentiment existed in reference to the support given by paraprofessionals. Under NJ Code [Section 6A:14-4.6], a paraprofessional:

may provide supplementary support to a student(s) with disabilities when the IEP team has determined that the student requires assistance in areas including, but not limited to (a) prompting, cueing and redirecting student participation, (b) reinforcing of personal, social, behavioral, and academic learning goals, (c) organizing and managing materials and activities, and (d) implementation of teacher-designed follow-up and practice activities (New Jersey Department of Education, n.d.).

According to Westley, “many times paraprofessionals begin working one day and next thing you know, they just don’t show up to work. Then administration has to hire someone else, and the hiring process takes a while.” Julia further stated that “the absence of a paraprofessional or Resource teacher causes me (Julia) to feel overwhelmed in the classroom because I (Julia) can’t effectively teach all of my (Julia) students while also addressing the needs and behaviors of my (Julia) EBD students.” Nine of the ten participants were empathetic towards the administration and stated that they understand that administration spends a significant amount of time on staff recruitment. The participants understand that teacher shortages are a national problem, however, the frustration of understaffing appears to jeopardize their levels of self-efficacy when instructing EBD students in inclusive classrooms.

Table 3

Participant Response to Interview Question 3

Participant (pseudonyms)	Response to Question 3: What are some of the professional challenges you have experienced regarding the instruction of students with EBD in the inclusive classroom?
Max	There is a serious teacher shortage which impacts the whole teaching and learning experience.
Julia	Lack of meaningful PD; lack of consistency among staff support; staff retention is low
Shena	Teacher shortages; lack of opportunities to understand how to support students with EBD
Westley	Staff shortages; lack of collaboration time with colleagues
Ashley	Lack of understanding how to manage an entire class with different abilities and skill sets; staff shortages

Jeff	I (Jeff) feel like I have been alone in my classroom, and I haven't had opportunities to learn from my colleagues.
Valerie	An inclusion class can consist of up to eight students with disabilities. We (teachers) aren't always given enough information on differentiation strategies. Learning differences are a challenge but when it's coupled with behavioral difficulties, it can intensify the challenge.
Angel	Shortage of staff; lack of meaningful PD on inclusive instruction for students with EBD
Craig	Lack of PD on how to effectively instruct students with behavioral issues all while addressing the needs of the rest of the class
Dean	Lack of meaningful PD

Theme 4: Work Expectations

Theme 4 was: The teacher can meet and manage work expectations. I asked participants if they felt they were given ample time during the school day to explore strategies that may be beneficial to students with EBD in their classrooms. Nine of the ten participants stated that the expectations that associated with their role keep them from maximizing their abilities to cater to the needs of their students, specifically those with EBD. Julia stated, "I feel like I have the confidence to teach all of my students effectively, but when they (administration) ask us to fill out this tracker and that tracker, and then make sure our bulletin boards are up to par, it becomes difficult to actually be successful when teaching." Ashley echoed this sentiment and stated, "Sometimes I feel so overwhelmed and stressed about all the tasks I am required to do. By the time I stand in front of the class to teach, I am mentally defeated, so yes, bad behavior emerges, and I don't even have the energy to address it." When asked if there is anything that administration can do to alleviate the workload so that teachers may focus on maximizing

their levels of self-efficacy, all the participants agreed that administration should place less emphasis on clerical duties and more emphasis on learning how to master teaching and management strategies. According to Herzig (2023), through frequent and ongoing support of school administration, teachers may place greater emphasis on successful inclusive practices, further leading to the development of positive self-efficacy.

Table 4

Participant Response to Interview Questions 4 and 6

Participant (pseudonyms)	Response to Question 4: Can you explain your level of self-efficacy when instructing students with emotional behavioral disorders in the inclusive classroom?	Response to Question 6: What are some specific areas of support you need to maximize your level of self-efficacy when instructing students with EBD in the inclusive classroom?
Max	I think I am pretty confident, but when you factor in the staff shortage and lack of time to collaborate with my colleagues, I would say that my level of effectiveness in the classroom is negatively impacted; moderate level of self-efficacy	We (teachers) need more time to actually practice teaching and less time doing clerical duties.
Julia	Low to moderate level of self-efficacy	Learning how to deescalate negative behaviors; less pressure from administration to complete paperwork and trackers
Shena	Personally, I think I am confident teaching students with EBD, but there are so many other variables that don't allow me to be my greatest; moderate level of self-efficacy	More opportunities to plan with case managers and special education teachers
Westley	Low to moderate level of self-efficacy	Additional PD on strategies to teach students with EBD in inclusive classrooms; administration should place less focus on achieving high test scores, and place greater support in developing confident teachers.
Ashley	Low to moderate level of self-efficacy	More PD opportunities specifically targeted toward meeting the social-emotional needs of students with EBD
Jeff	Low to moderate level of self-efficacy	I need a greater presence of support from the Resource teacher and paraprofessional. It's difficult to carry the heavy load by myself sometimes.
Valerie	Low to moderate level of self-efficacy	More opportunities to collaborate with all stakeholders

Angel	Moderate level of self-efficacy	More opportunities to learn from other teachers
Craig	Moderate level of self-efficacy	I would need more PD and exposure to effective practices to get me at a higher level.
Dean	Moderate level of self-efficacy	More opportunities to collaborate with all stakeholders

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness refers to the extent to which the findings of a study can be regarded as trusted (Urban & van Eeden-Moorefield, 2018). For a study to be considered as meaningful and useful, the reader must have trust in the integrity of the study (Behar-Horenstein, 2018). I established trustworthiness during the process of collecting, analyzing, and protecting participant data.

Credibility

Credibility refers to the extent to which findings reflect the reality of participants' experiences and perceptions (Urban & van Eeden-Moorefield, 2018). For this study, I prioritized the findings to reflect the true experiences and perceptions of the participants and did not insert my beliefs about them or their experiences. I remained neutral throughout the study and maintained a log of my own thoughts and beliefs related to each interview. Furthermore, I ensured that all participants had thorough understanding of the research by providing clear and specific implications of the study and its procedures in the informed consent agreement. Moreover, I asked follow-up questions to explore all possible realities or the diverse experiences of participants.

The credibility of data was further established using member checking. After interviews were conducted and transcribed, I emailed each participant a copy of the

transcription and asked them to kindly review the document and respond within 7 days to check the accuracy of their responses. A total of seven participants responded within a week confirming the accuracy of their responses and had no further edits. Three participants did not respond to the email; therefore, I sent out a follow-up email and provided an additional five days for participants to review their transcriptions. The three participants then responded to the email confirming the accuracy of information presented within the transcriptions and had no further information or edits to add.

Transferability

Transferability refers to the extent to which findings from a study can apply to other populations, situations, or contexts (Urban & van Eeden-Moorefield, 2018). Transferability also involves a rich participation pool that represents the focus of the study and refers to including a comprehensive description and assumptions of the setting (Burkholder et al., 2016). To establish transferability within this study, I described this study and its implications in full detail. This study is limited to middle school, general education teachers who instruct students with EBD in inclusive classrooms within a Northeastern district in New Jersey.

A purposeful sampling strategy was used to recruit middle school general education teachers who instruct students with EBD in inclusive classrooms. Purposeful sampling may lead to greater quality, accuracy, and credibility of the data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). To create transferability, I used a thick description of the assumptions that are relevant to the study, which may allow the reader to determine whether the findings of the study can be generalized to his or her own experiences. Thick descriptions refer to

the process of providing a detailed account when observing and translating situations during qualitative research (Iphofen & Tolich, 2018).

Dependability

Dependability refers to the extent of consistency related to the findings of the study (Urban & van Eeden-Moorefield, 2018). The level of dependability relies on whether enough information has been provided to ensure that outsiders have a complete understanding of how the findings emerged. For this study, I ensured dependability by conducting audit trails, which include detailed records of how this qualitative study was conducted. The audit trail includes a collection and recording of raw data as well as field notes regarding my observations, feelings, and dispositions (Flick, 2018).

Confirmability

Confirmability refers to the extent to which the researcher was cognizant of, monitored, and ensured that possible biases did not influence the research process and representation of findings (Urban & van Eeden-Moorefield, 2018). To establish a high degree of confirmability, I kept a journal during the entire research process and noted my thoughts and reactions during data collection (Saldana, 2016). I remained neutral during the data collection and analysis process and used a memo to note any feelings, insights, or possible codes (Urban & van Eeden-Moorefield, 2018).

Summary

This chapter included analysis of data regarding the research question in Chapter 1. Using a basic qualitative design, I framed my research to gain a deeper understanding of teacher perceptions as they related to their self-efficacy when teaching EBD students

in inclusive classrooms. After semi-structured interviews were conducted and data were analyzed from 10 participants, 90% of participants claimed they were not completely satisfied with their level of self-efficacy. According to participants, lack of self-efficacy can be attributed to lack of relevant PD opportunities, staffing constraints, lack of collaborative opportunities among colleagues, and increasing work demands. A comprehensive overview of findings as well as implications and recommendations are presented in Chapter 5. Furthermore, I address limitations and end the chapter with a conclusion.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Teachers' self-efficacy influences perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors when teaching students (Prewett & Whitney, 2021). According to McKenna et al. (2019), a gap in practice exists in regard to how general education teachers describe their self-efficacy when teaching EBD students in inclusive classrooms. Teachers' high efficacy can lead to improved classroom instruction and positive student achievement (Prewett & Whitney, 2021). The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to understand perceptions of general education teachers regarding self-efficacy when instructing middle school students with EBDs in inclusive classrooms.

I used semi-structured interview questions to gain in-depth responses from 10 general education teachers. Data from interviews were analyzed, and four themes emerged. Teachers openly expressed their perceptions regarding their self-efficacy while instructing EBD students in inclusive classroom and professional development opportunities. I used data to interpret findings, limitations of the study, and recommendations.

Interpretation of the Findings

Data from this study provided for an in-depth analysis, allowing me to reach several conclusions about general education teachers' perceptions regarding their self-efficacy when instructing middle school students with EBDs in inclusive classrooms. Four themes emerged from interviews: opportunities to collaborate with colleagues that may lead to increased self-efficacy, sufficient knowledge regarding implementation of

EBPs, support by coteachers and paraprofessionals, and meeting and managing work expectations.

For Theme 1, participants described their experiences involving amount of time to collaborate with colleagues regarding effective inclusive practices. Collaboration among teaching staff plays a significant role in terms of planning and facilitating productive instructional planning and is also correlated with increased academic achievement and higher teacher self-efficacy (Maurer et al., 2023). Participants expressed the need for more time to collaborate with their peers in order to share ideas and gather strategies to support students with EBDs. While PLCs and grade level meetings were held weekly, overall consensus among participants was that topics centered on curriculum implementation, instructional strategies, and data collection. According to data, little time was provided to discuss high-quality inclusive practices. As a result, participants emphasized the need for increased opportunities to discuss strategies that support successful inclusive instruction through use of best practices. When teachers gain knowledge of evidence-based instructional and noninstructional strategies, their levels of self-efficacy and preparedness to teach students with EBDs in inclusive classrooms increases (Gage et al., 2018; Lanterman et al., 2021).

For Theme 2, participants described their perceptions regarding whether they felt they had sufficient knowledge in terms of implementation of EBPs during inclusive instruction. EBPs refer to practices that have been subject to rigorous and systematic research and determined to have generally positive outcomes among relevant populations (Zaheer et al., 2019). Teaching students with EBDs requires knowledge of EBPs that are

specific to their diverse needs (Cumming et al., 2021). Bettini et al. (2020) noted among many challenging considerations made by school personnel, selecting practices that are evidence-based is among the most important. While the school district provided various opportunities for professional development involving instructional practices, they stated they would benefit greatly from training that was focused on social emotional learning. Furthermore, participants stated levels of self-efficacy would be maximized if they were proficient with deescalation strategies. Complex needs of students with EBDs require school personnel to make rigorous efforts to provide multifaceted, coordinated, and validated supports (Bettini et al., 2020). Teachers who had specific training involving differentiation practices to meet needs of SWDs had greater confidence when developing instructional tasks and strategies to meet needs of their students (Weiss et al., 2018).

Participants expressed that a further challenge to inclusive instruction of students with EBDs is the need for supportive staff. A repeated pattern among participant responses was that there often was a lack of support from special education counterparts and paraprofessionals. In inclusive classrooms, the general education teacher instructs alongside a special education teacher. Furthermore, paraprofessionals are assigned to support students who require an aide as stated in the IEP. Participants agreed staff shortages impacted the teaching and learning experience. According to the Waters (2023), teacher shortages have been amplified by early retirements during the pandemic coupled with a decrease in college students choosing to become teachers. Participants further expressed recruiting and retaining staff has been difficult as the teacher shortage continues. As a result, teachers felt support provided by their special education

counterparts and paraprofessionals was inconsistent and lacking. This in turn has led to reported decreased levels of self-efficacy.

Theme 4 was developed in response to interview question regarding whether participants felt they were given ample time during the school day to explore strategies that may be beneficial to students with EBDs in their classrooms. Participants claimed keeping up work demands while having the responsibility to effectively deliver lessons was unrealistic. Participants stated administration gave teachers tasks, some of which were not directly related to instruction, such as completing data trackers. As a result, not enough time was provided to practice EBPs for students, including those with EBDs. Teachers are more likely to improve newly learned skills when they are given the opportunity to revisit their skill sets (State et al., 2019). State et al. (2019) asserted for sustainability to occur, there must be continued collaboration between teachers and administration.

The conceptual framework for this study was Bandura's SCT. According to the SCT, behavior is influenced by personal thoughts and actions. Participants stated they lacked confidence in their abilities to successfully deliver instruction to students with EBDs in inclusive classrooms. This was attributed to lack of knowledge of best practices as it relates to inclusion as well as lack of ability to deescalate challenging behaviors. According to participants, levels of self-efficacy would increase if they received ongoing training regarding implementing best practices, identifying functions of behavior, and deescalating challenging behaviors. Teachers' high self-efficacy is associated with

positive effects on student achievement, and low self-efficacy is conversely related to poor outcomes involving student success (Perera et al., 2022).

Limitations of the Study

I completed this study with every effort to establish a high degree of trustworthiness through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. However, this study had a few limitations including the selection of participants and generalizability of results. Limitations are factors within a study that are out of the control of the researcher (Amanfi, 2019). For this study, a purposive sampling method was used to interview 10 middle school, general education teachers who instruct students with EBD in inclusive classroom. The data were collected from an urban school district located in New Jersey. As a result, generalization of the findings may not be applied to teachers working at the elementary or high school level. Furthermore, considering that data was collected from an urban district in New Jersey, the results of this study may not be generalized to other geographic regions. To fully understand general education teachers' perceptions of their self-efficacy when instructing students with EBD in inclusive classrooms, additional studies will need to include teachers working in different geographic regions across different grade levels.

Recommendations

I explored the perceptions of general education teachers regarding their self-efficacy when instructing middle school students with EBD in the inclusive classroom. While there are several studies that have explored teacher perceptions regarding the inclusion of students with disabilities (e.g., Kim et al., 2020; McLeskey et al., 2020;

Mngo & Mngo, 2018), few have focused on understanding teacher perceptions regarding their self-efficacy when instructing students with EBD in inclusive classrooms. I support McKenna et al.'s (2019) conclusion that further research is needed to assess the arrangement between student needs, instructor ability, and the allotment of assets to maximize academic and behavioral outcomes for students with EBD. In order to promote successful inclusive practices, there are several recommendations for future research studies. The first recommendation would be to replicate this research with a greater sample size for a better representation of the population, further maximizing the validity. Furthermore, research should be conducted across various localities to better understand teacher needs. Additionally, future research should include teachers across K-12 settings to provide insight into what supports would be needed overtime. Conducting a longitudinal study may provide understandings into the implementation of successful inclusive practices with EBD students. My last recommendation coincides with McKenna et al. (2019) and Garwood and Van Loan (2019) who emphasized the need for increased teacher preparation programs and on-going professional development as they are essential components that contribute toward effective inclusive practices.

Implications

This study's results and analysis provide a groundwork for future research on how to maximize teachers' self-efficacy when instructing students with EBD in inclusive classrooms. The participants within this study expressed a greater need for trainings that will provide them with strategies to identify the functions of behavior and de-escalate challenging behaviors. According to Berkovich and Eyal (2019), the ongoing support of

leaders is key to bringing about change in education. This study's findings can inform school administrators of the support needed to maximize teachers' levels of self-efficacy when instructing students in the inclusive classroom. For example, administrators may select training opportunities that are targeted specifically toward successful implementation of inclusion practices. Furthermore, administrators may provide greater opportunities for teachers to collaborate with one another in order to share insights and perspectives. In doing so, administrators may in turn promote the academic and social growth of students with EBD, further meeting the mandates proposed by IDEA. According to Zagona (2017), in order to increase the likelihood of success in the inclusive classroom for students with EBD, teachers need to have a concrete understanding of the implementation of effective inclusive practices. This study's limitations of including only middle school teachers in an urban district drives the need for further research on exploring the perceptions of general education teachers' self-efficacy when working with students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms across all grade levels. With an increased understanding of how to effectively instruct students with EBD, student access and further success in the general education classroom may thrive. Moreover, a greater understanding of how to effectively instruct students with EBD may promote positive social change as teachers may gain a higher level of self-efficacy when implementing best practices for students with EBD in inclusive classrooms.

Conclusion

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to understand the perceptions of general education teachers' self-efficacy when instructing middle school students with

EBD in inclusive classrooms. Students with EBD represent a vulnerable population as they experience a pattern of externalizing and internalizing behavior problems, gaps in academic achievement, and increased rates of dropping out of school (State et al., 2019). According to the U.S Department of Education (2022), among all SWDs, students with EBD are less often included in a general education classroom. However, the IDEA (2004) mandates that all students with disabilities to be provided with educational services in the least restrictive environment (LRE).

Students with EBD present academic and behavioral challenges to general education teachers that may impact a teacher's perception of their self-efficacy. As a result, this may affect their classroom practices. Research has shown that teachers' high self-efficacy is associated with positive effects on student' achievement, and low self-efficacy is conversely related to poor outcomes in student success (Perera et al., 2022). Therefore, it is crucial to gain an understanding of what general education teachers need to be more successful when working with students with EBD in inclusive classrooms.

This study provides an extension of knowledge regarding teachers' perceptions of their self-efficacy when instructing middle school students with EBD in the inclusive classroom. According to the responses, the general education teachers within this study all believed that the inclusion of EBD students with their non-disabled peers is crucial to support positive academic and social experiences. However, some of the challenging behaviors that coincide with the EBD classification can make it difficult for teachers to effectively manage the classroom and deliver instruction. Participants within this study stated that they need ongoing training opportunities geared toward implementing best

practices, identifying functions of behavior, and de-escalating challenging behaviors. Furthermore, participants expressed the need to have greater opportunities to collaborate with their colleagues to discuss strategies specific to successful inclusive practices. The data presented in this study may inform the practices of administrators as to how they can best support teachers maximize the academic and social outcomes of special education students in the general education setting. It is my hope that positive social change will occur with the recommendations and implementation of ongoing professional development opportunities for general education teachers working in inclusive classrooms. This will provide teachers with a greater sense of knowledge and understanding of how to effectively instruct with students with EBD. This in turn may lead to an increase in general education teachers' levels of self-efficacy. Additionally, it can yield higher student success, further promoting positive social change in education.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Introduction to each participant

Researcher: Thank you for participating in this study. The purpose of this interview is to gather data as it relates to my dissertation topic of “Teachers’ Self-Efficacy when Instructing Students with Emotional and Behavioral Disorders in Inclusive Classrooms.” The duration of interview will be approximately 45 minutes. Your personal identity will not be disclosed, and pseudonyms will be used to protect your privacy. I am solely interested in your perception(s) regarding your experiences teaching students with EBD in the inclusive classroom setting. Please feel free to elaborate your thinking throughout the interview process.

Interview Questions:

1. What are your perceptions regarding the inclusion of students with EBD in the general education classroom?
2. What behaviors from students with EBD in the inclusive classroom do you perceive as challenging?
3. What are some of the professional challenges you have experienced regarding the instruction of students with EBD in the inclusive classroom?
4. Can you explain your level of self-efficacy when instructing students with emotional behavioral disorders in the inclusive classroom?
5. What forms of professional development have been provided to help support your understanding of students with EBD?
6. What are some specific areas of support you need to maximize your level of self-efficacy when instructing students with EBD in the inclusive classroom?
7. What forms of professional development do you feel is necessary for the development of high self-efficacy for general education teachers who instruct students with EBD in the inclusive classroom?