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Head Start Teachers' Perceptions of Inclusion Classroom Challenges and Needs

Jessica Rinehart
Walden University

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Walden University

College of Education and Human Sciences

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Jessica Rinehart

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Walden University
2024

Abstract

Head Start Teachers' Perceptions of Inclusion Classroom Challenges and Needs

by

Jessica Rinehart

MS, Walden University, 2014

BS, California Baptist University, 2010

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Early Childhood Special Education

Walden University

February 2024

Abstract

Early childhood inclusion classrooms are becoming more prominent, but Head Start teachers need more job training to prepare them for the diversity of students in their classrooms. The purpose of this qualitative research study was to investigate research questions about the challenges faced by Head Start inclusion teachers, the strategies they use in the classroom, and the suggestions they have for improved resources or training. The conceptual framework that guided this study was Bandura's social learning theory, which suggested that teachers can learn through observation or modeling of others. Using a case study design, nine Head Start teachers with at least one student with an individualized education program within their classroom were interviewed. Two lesson plans per participant were collected. Data were analyzed through coding. Three themes emerged: Head Start teachers' challenges and perceptions of working within the inclusive environment, a lack of knowledge of students with special needs, and teachers were not supported while working with these students. Although most teachers identified students who will be receiving extra assistance during different activities on their lesson plans, the accommodations were not detailed. Head Start teachers suggested smaller classrooms, extended training in specific disabilities, and resources to implement what students with disabilities need in the inclusion classroom. Understanding Head Start teachers' challenges regarding students with special needs and their chosen strategies will allow educators to make positive social changes in the future to foster best practices.

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Dedication

To my grandparents, who always saw the best in me and knew that I would do something great one day.

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I want to thank Dr. Kimberley Alkins, my mentor, who has been an excellent sounding board throughout this journey. She has always been purposeful with her advice, which has allowed me to advance through this process. She was the motivation that kept me going and knew how to lend a helping hand when needed. Dr. Phyllis LeDosquet has been so insightful in lending her advice and thoughts on how to set up my research to excel with my study.

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Table of Contents

List of Tables	v
Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study.....	1
Background.....	2
Problem Statement.....	3
Purpose of the Study	4
Research Questions.....	5
Conceptual Framework.....	5
Nature of the Study	6
Definitions.....	8
Assumptions.....	8
Scope and Delimitations	9
Limitations	9
Significance.....	10
Summary.....	11
Chapter 2: Literature Review.....	12
Literature Search Strategy.....	13
Conceptual Framework.....	14
Introduction to Framework	14
Elements of the Framework: Observational Learning	15
Elements of the Framework: Cognitive Experiences.....	15
Elements of the Framework: Self-Efficacy.....	16

How Social Learning Theory Has Been Used in Other Research	19
How Theory Applies to Current Study	20
Literature Review Related to Key Variables and Concepts.....	20
Inclusion and the Law	20
Inclusion in Practice.....	23
Head Start Programs	26
Head Start Inclusive Environment	29
Teacher Education	30
Support for Head Start Teachers.....	31
Recommendations for the Field	33
Summary and Conclusions	35
Chapter 3: Research Method.....	37
Research Design and Rationale	37
Role of the Researcher	39
Methodology	41
Participant Selection Logic	41
Instrumentation	43
Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection.....	47
Data Analysis Plan	48
Issues of Trustworthiness.....	49
Credibility	50
Transferability.....	50

Dependability	51
Confirmability.....	51
Ethical Procedures	52
Summary	53
Chapter 4: Results	54
Setting	54
Demographics	56
Data Collection	56
Data Analysis	57
Interview	57
Lesson Plan	59
Evidence of Trustworthiness.....	60
Results.....	61
Theme 1	61
Theme 2	64
Theme 3	66
Summary	68
Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations	70
Interpretation of the Findings.....	71
Connection of Findings to the Key Concepts	71
Connection of Findings to Conceptual Framework	73
Limitations of the Study.....	74

Recommendations.....	74
Recommendations for Practice	75
Implications.....	76
Implications for Positive Social Change.....	76
Methodological Implications	78
Theoretical Implications	78
Conclusion	78
References.....	80
Appendix A: Interview Protocol.....	98
Appendix B: Lesson Plan Rubric.....	101
Appendix C: Coding for Interview Question 1	102
Appendix D: Preliminary and Final Codes by Interview Question	103
Appendix E: Categories and Themes by Research Question.....	106

List of Tables

Table 1. Participant Interview Information.....	57
Table 2. Emergent Themes and Research Questions.....	59
Table 3. Head Start Teachers' Lesson Plan Modifications to Teach Students With Special Needs.....	66

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Head Start teachers are expected to work with diverse students in their classrooms and incorporate students with special needs into their classrooms, which is known as an inclusive environment, allowing a student with special needs to be educated in an environment with their typically developing peers (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). Head Start requirements indicate that at least 10% of their enrollment must be students with special needs. Within this inclusive environment, Head Start teachers must adapt their curriculum so that all children, including those with disabilities, can learn. Head Start teachers can differentiate their curriculum to meet the needs of students with disabilities. However, there is still concern about meeting the needs of students with special needs within these classrooms (Muccio & Kidd, 2018). Understanding Head Start teachers' perceptions, skills, and knowledge to work with students with special needs can address a gap in the research to identify what is necessary to support these teachers. Understanding what Head Start teachers require to support their students with special needs can create a change within the educational community. Strengthening Head Start teachers' knowledge within the preschool environment can create positive change for students with special needs because it can better prepare students for future grade levels.

In Chapter 1, I describe the background, the problem statement, and the purpose of this research study. Following this are the study's research questions and a description of the conceptual framework that guides this study. Next, I discuss the nature of the study, followed by definitions of key terms and assumptions underlying the study. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the scope, delimitations, limitations, and

significance of the study, as well as a chapter summary.

Background

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Part B, requires schools to offer free and appropriate education, calling for an inclusive student environment (Bryant, 2018). Along with IDEA, the Head Start performance standards require that the programs meet the needs of their students with special needs (Lee et al., 2016). Head Start facilities encourage students with special needs to receive their education in a general education classroom, an inclusive environment (Barton & Smith, 2015). Head Start is the nation's largest publicly funded preschool program, serving over 1 million children annually (Sabol et al., 2020). Head Start served more than 130,000 students with a disability in the 2012–2013 school year, exceeding their 10% ratio by 2% (Lee et al., 2016). With the number of inclusive students in classrooms increasing, teachers need resources to support their students adequately.

Due to the increase in the number of students with disabilities receiving services within general education classrooms, teachers are expected to possess a variety of teaching methods to work with students with varying abilities (Rakap et al., 2017). But teachers are not appropriately trained to work with inclusion students (Bryant, 2018), and many do not feel they had adequate resources to support the students within their inclusive environment (E. M. Anderson & Lindeman, 2017). Teachers must have confidence in their skills to teach in their inclusive environment (Park et al., 2016). However, due to a lack of resources, professional development, and teachers' knowledge, having to implement the federal guidelines can leave teachers overwhelmed without the

proper resources to implement these changes (Muccio & Kidd, 2018).

In this study, I identified what Head Start teachers believe are the challenges of teaching within an inclusive environment. I also identified practices that can be used to improve how Head Start teachers implement their curriculum for students with special needs. First-hand insight into Head Start teachers' perceptions and what could better support their teaching strategies are lacking and would allow for positive change within the preschool settings.

Problem Statement

Early childhood inclusion classrooms are on the rise, with more children identified with different learning abilities (Bruder, 2016). In 2015, 66.6% of U.S. preschool-aged students under the IDEA, Part B, were served in early childhood programs, and 12.1% included Head Start classrooms (Lee et al., 2016; U.S. Department of Education, 2018). The problem is that preschool teachers need more formal and on-the-job training in inclusive practices to increase their comfort level in working with students with special needs (Bryant, 2018). A Head Start teacher must have the minimum requirements of a child development associate degree (Early Childhood Learning & Knowledge Center, 2022a). To obtain a child development associate's degree, an individual must complete 120 hours of formal early childhood education and demonstrate mastery of the materials (Council for Professional Recognition, 2017). Most U.S. community colleges follow the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) Profession Preparation Standards, which has a baseline of qualifying standards that all early childhood professionals should follow upon graduation from their

degree program (Kaplan, 2018). But the NAEYC acknowledges a problem with the varying education programs and quality across states, leading to a lack of accountability and quality preparation programs for early childhood educators (NAEYC, 2020). Additionally, many early childhood teacher-training programs do not offer an appropriate amount of coursework or training in special education. Teachers have expressed the need for more inclusion training or coursework opportunities (Kwon et al., 2017).

For an inclusive environment to benefit all students, teachers must diversify their curriculums to meet the needs of learners, including those with specific goals and needs (Rakap et al., 2017). However, obstacles to the success of an inclusive classroom can be skills and confidence in their practices (Muccio et al., 2014; Yu, 2019). Head Start teachers can have high-quality inclusion classrooms with adequate knowledge, skills, and resources (Muccio & Kidd, 2018). Though Head Start regulations state that teachers have at least 15 hours of high-quality professional development a year, there are no mandated training topics (Early Childhood Learning & Knowledge Center, 2022c). Inclusion benefits all students in the classroom, but teachers need more professional development to assist them in differentiating their specialized interventions for their students with special needs (Yu, 2019).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to investigate the challenges faced by Head Start inclusion teachers, the strategies they use in the classroom, and the suggestions they have for improved resources or training. The goal of an inclusive environment is students with disabilities learning along with their peers (Robtson, 2017).

Thus, Head Start teachers are expected to make changes to fully incorporate all students, no matter their ability, into the routines and activities of the classroom. Determining what Head Start teachers know about teaching in an inclusive environment is important in defining what resources and supports teachers need to appropriately educate students with special needs in their classrooms. Exploring the knowledge and training of Head Start teachers as they relate to preparation for teaching this diverse group of students can affect future educators' work in these classrooms.

Research Questions

I addressed the following research questions in this study:

1. What are Head Start teachers' perceptions about the challenges of teaching in an inclusive classroom?
2. What strategies do Head Start teachers use to teach students with special needs in inclusive classrooms?
3. What suggestions do Head Start teachers have for improved resources or training?

Conceptual Framework

Bandura's (1971) social learning theory was the conceptual framework for this study. In social learning theory, Bandura suggested that new patterns of behaviors can be taught through personal experiences or the observation of others. Head Start teachers teach their students using adaptive behaviors learned through observations within their environment or behaviors from their higher education experiences. These types of behaviors influence the way that Head Start teachers work with their students in their

classrooms. Social learning theory identifies that individuals can learn new behaviors through the observation of others or through a direct experience they had with an individual (Bandura, 1971). Social learning theory suggests that observations, modeling, and cognitive activities can influence positive behaviors in individuals based on reinforcement through the activity or self-reinforcement from previously learned experiences (Bandura, 1971); these experiences can be reflected in a teacher's methods of instruction. Skills to work with students with special needs can be taught through professional development training to enhance further Head Start teachers' knowledge of students with special needs.

Head Start teachers must adapt their learning based on their students' needs. Bandura (1971) suggested that individuals can learn from personal experiences. In learning what strategies Head Start teachers use when working with their students with special needs, this research helped identify how teachers can meet the needs of their students with special needs. In this study, I explored how Head Start teachers' perceptions about the inclusion classroom, the challenges, and the needs that they face can influence students with special needs within the inclusive classroom. A more detailed explanation of social learning theory and how it is pertinent to Head Start teachers and their inclusive students will be provided in Chapter 2.

Nature of the Study

The nature of this study was a case study design using interviews and lesson plans to understand Head Start teachers' perceptions of the challenges they have to teach students with special needs in inclusive classrooms. A qualitative case study design

allows for the collection of different pieces of data to explore a phenomenon within a field of study (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Interviewing Head Start teachers provided an in-depth narrative (Yin, 2018) of everyday struggles and challenges these teachers face in working with students with special needs. I interviewed nine Head Start teachers in the central United States. I recruited participants with at least one student with an individualized education program (IEP) within their classroom from at least four Head Start facilities. This process allowed me to collect documents and interviews from various Head Start facilities to gather meaningful experiences from various participants (Seidman, 2006) to better investigate the perceptions of Head Start teachers.

I also examined two lesson plans from each participant for the current academic year to identify their reflective use of prior education or knowledge while working with students in an inclusive environment and how they implement these adaptations into their daily activities. The data collected allowed for more in-depth analysis (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006) of Head Start teachers' training and knowledge to work with students with special needs in an inclusive environment. Using interviews will allow the participants to share their unique experiences (Seidman, 2006), and collecting lesson plans allowed me to see how teachers make adaptations for their inclusive students. Adaptations should be listed on teachers' lesson plans for students with special needs. However, the specific child's name should not appear, and modifications should be listed for students with varying needs. Once the data were collected, they were coded to identify common themes among the Head Start teachers.

Definitions

The following are special terms and definitions represented in this study.

Head Start: A federally funded program that promotes school readiness for preschool-aged children in low-income families (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2019).

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA): A law that allows children with disabilities free and appropriate public education and related services (U.S. Department of Education, 2019).

Inclusive environment: A school environment that provides equal learning opportunities within a mainstream classroom (Symeonidou, 2017).

Preschool: Children 3 to 5 years old in an educational environment (U.S. Department of Education, 2019).

Assumptions

There were several assumptions related to this study that I believe to be true. One assumption is that Head Start teachers who participated in this study taught students with special needs in an inclusive environment. The criteria for participation in this study were that the participant must be a Head Start teacher and have at least one student with an IEP within their classroom. I also assumed that teachers would be honest and truthful when answering the questions during the interview process. Another assumption about the Head Start teachers was that they met the minimum job requirements for the title of Head Start teacher.

Scope and Delimitations

Head Start teachers within the central United States were invited to participate in this study, and nine teachers were selected to be interviewed. Teaching assistants were not selected for this study because they likely would not meet the minimum requirements of a Head Start teacher. This study is unique to teachers who meet the Head Start requirements, which might not be the same requirements for all preschool teachers in other educational settings. Although there are unique requirements with Head Start, this study can potentially affect all Head Start preschool classrooms across the United States.

Limitations

A limitation of this study was that the sample consisted of Head Start teachers within a central U.S. state. Out of the potential participants, only nine were chosen. Due to its concentrated area of focus, this research will not provide information regarding all Head Start facilities.

Another study limitation was the number of children with special needs within the classrooms. While there is a 10% requirement for special needs in the total enrollment in the Head Start program overall, there is no requirement for the minimum (or maximum) number of students with special needs that are to be in each classroom. The number of students with special needs in each classroom, either high or low, can create the need for alternative teaching strategies. Teachers select these strategies based on their prior experience working with students with special needs or sometimes the lack of students with special needs that have come through their Head Start classrooms.

One bias that was brought to this study was the knowledge that I have in working

within a Head Start facility. It teaches me how one Head Start teacher perceives the challenges within an inclusion classroom. One way to address these biases was that the interviewees selected were not teachers I have worked with. I also collected multiple forms of data from the interviewees through an interview and a collection of lesson plans to establish triangulation to guarantee consistency in my data collection.

Significance

This study could contribute to the field by providing insight into Head Start teachers' perceptions of the challenges of working with students with special needs in their inclusive environment. With the mandate in the IDEA that students with special needs be served within the least restrictive environment for their learning, more students are entering a general education classroom (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). With the number of inclusive students rising in Head Start classrooms, the teachers must have the educational materials, knowledge, and skills to support those students.

Understanding Head Start teachers' knowledge of teaching students with special needs in an inclusive environment can create positive social change that could lead to more pre-service education or professional development offered to these teachers. Early childhood students with special needs and Head Start teachers can benefit from this research because the results provide knowledge on working with students with special needs. Not only would it benefit the Head Start teachers and students directly, but it would be a turning point for the Head Start organization to offer more inclusion-directed training for their educators.

Summary

Head Start teachers can provide insight into the inclusive preschool environment that has not been extensively researched. The purpose of this qualitative research study was to investigate the challenges faced by Head Start inclusion teachers, the strategies they use in the classroom, and the suggestions they have for improved resources or training. According to the available research on inclusive environments, teachers need more on-the-job training to work with students with special needs (Bryant, 2018). There is a lack of information that identifies how Head Start teachers work in an inclusive environment. I used Bandura's social learning theory as the conceptual framework to look at how Head Start teachers have used adaptive behaviors (Bandura, 1971) to change their teaching methods and how they adapted their lesson plans. This study's findings can provide insight into Head Start teachers' challenges working with students with special needs in their inclusive environments.

Chapter 2 provides a background of existing research related to the topic of inclusive preschool environments. Federal policies, such as the IDEA, Head Start programs, and teachers' resources within an inclusive environment will be reviewed to provide deeper insight into understanding Head Start teachers' perceptions of the inclusive environment, their challenges, and their needs. I also provide more detail about the conceptual framework guiding this research and the research related to the key concepts in this study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to investigate the challenges faced by Head Start inclusion teachers, the strategies they use in the classroom, and the suggestions they have for improved resources or training. Preschool-inclusive classrooms are on the rise, with more students with disabilities in general education classrooms (Jacoby & Lesaux, 2017). The lack of information regarding Head Start inclusion teachers initiated the research for this dissertation. Head Start is a federally funded program with lower educational requirements for its educators than for certified general education teachers. I wanted to examine how Head Start teachers deal with challenges similar to those of general elementary education teachers in an inclusive environment.

There are numerous articles about the inclusive classroom environment, but few focus on Head Start teachers. Head Start teachers differ from other early childhood, such as kindergarten and elementary school teachers. Both groups of teachers must follow federal guidelines, but Head Start teachers are not required to meet state certification standards to become a teacher. Researchers such as Muccio et al. (2014) and Park et al. (2016) have shared various insights on early childhood education and the teachers within this field. Gelfer and Nguyen (2019) discussed the current research on certified teachers and their work within the classroom environment. Still, there is not much research that addresses the uniqueness of Head Start teachers in inclusive environments, and Head Start programs might not be able to help students with disabilities (Lee et al., 2016).

This chapter will detail the research strategies I used to locate the research for this literature review, followed by the discussion of Bandura's (1971) social learning theory,

the conceptual framework guiding this study. I discuss the benefits of social learning theory in early childhood, where observational modeling is commonly used. Lastly, I provide a synthesis of existing research to support the need for the current study.

Literature Search Strategy

I conducted my review of research on inclusive preschool environments to gain knowledge about the field. The keywords used to search included *students with disabilities, preschool teachers, inclusive environment, preschool inclusion, inclusive classrooms, early childhood programs, inclusive preschools, Head Start inclusive environment, and least restrictive environment*. I searched these key terms using the following academic databases from the Walden University library: Educational Research Information Center, EBSCO, and SAGE. I also used U.S. federal websites related to the Head Start program and the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education website. The Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education website was used as a reference point because Missouri is located in the central United States, like the state where I conducted the research.

Using these databases and combinations of keywords produced various resources relevant to the early childhood field. Most of the research found using the combinations of terms focused on elementary education, as there is not as much research conducted in the preschool realm. When including resources within the literature review, I tried to stay within 2015 to 2021, but I included seminal work from years prior, especially in the conceptual framework section.

Conceptual Framework

Introduction to Framework

In this study, I examined Head Start teachers' teaching challenges in an inclusive environment. Teaching in an inclusive environment demands that teachers adapt their instructional strategies to their students' various learning capabilities. In identifying a conceptual framework, finding one that dealt with individuals and how they learn from their surroundings was essential. Bandura's (1971) social learning theory suggests that the best way to learn is through observing others and that behaviors that others produce are either deliberately or indirectly related to the influences of others they have witnessed. Additionally, Bandura's social learning theory suggests that individuals act based on other people's behaviors and the consequences attached to them, which is considered a cognitive experience. Bandura (1969) identified that adults, peers, and other models interpret influential roles presented in symbolic forms. Bandura suggested that through observational learning and modeling, observers could change their reactions to these observations that were consistent with what they had just witnessed. Primary behavior modes are learned within social situations (Khan & Cangemi, 1979). According to Bandura (1971), social learning theory assumes that an individual who observes a behavior will either act on it or not. Therefore, the behavior that has received the most positive reinforcement is the likely behavior that an individual will follow. Social learning theory can be identified through observational learning, cognitive experiences, and self-efficacy. All pieces work together to create social learning theory.

Elements of the Framework: Observational Learning

Observational learning is absorbed through modeling behaviors followed by reinforcement or punishment. People watch what others do, the consequences attached to those actions, and ideas on how to perform new behaviors that will guide their actions. An individual's environment influences behavior, and settings are part of their making, whether in work, home, school, or other environments. Whether an individual will use what they have observed in the environment and what they have observed will have any lasting effect on their behavior will be stored in their experiences and organized for future use (Bandura, 1979). Frequent observational opportunities allow individuals to strengthen their reinforced behaviors and the imitative process (Khan & Cangemi, 1979). Observational learning is critical through Bandura's social learning theory, demonstrating that an individual can learn behavior from others just by observation (Aschenbrener & Johnson, 2017).

Elements of the Framework: Cognitive Experiences

Cognitive experiences determine what knowledge an individual takes away from the environment; therefore, the individual creates new knowledge outside of personal experiences (Bandura, 1979). By creating new knowledge, the individual has created a behavioral consequence to the experience, creating a course of action (Bandura, 1979). Identifying the newly observed cognitive experience allows individuals to reproduce these observed behaviors because they are associated with a positive experience (Khan & Cangemi, 1979). These experiences can alter individuals' perceptions of their capabilities, allowing them to grow their skill sets even more.

Elements of the Framework: Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy is when individuals can have restraint over their thoughts, motivation, and actions, which allows them to create change within themselves (Bandura, 1989, 1993). The desire to create changes comes from creating goals for oneself to get to a point where their motivation has created new change. Self-efficacy will influence an individual's actions because it will help or stop them from the goal or task. This behavior will ultimately alter an individual's environmental conditions based on their self-efficacy and motivation to persist throughout the challenge ahead (Bandura, 1989). Individuals who have a high sense of self-efficacy visualize success and optimistic scenarios. In contrast, individuals with low self-efficacy doubt their skills and think about situations that could go wrong (Bandura, 1993). An individual's self-efficacy is affected by the positive or negative influences in the surroundings, and it can encourage individuals to strengthen their thought processes or bring about their struggles (Bandura et al., 2001). A person's self-efficacy can influence how they put effort into a task at hand that might be difficult.

Bandura et al. (2001) also confirmed that an individual's self-efficacy belief contributes to occupational pursuits. Self-efficacy is key to a person's feeling of competence (Chan et al., 2020) within their job. People with high self-efficacy will also have high persistence rates and will keep struggling in failure cases (Kula & Taşdemir, 2014). People do not choose a career path they believe they cannot succeed based on their effort. The belief that individuals can make a change within their career is the motivational tool within their self-efficacy (Bandura et al., 2001).

Self-Efficacy and Teaching

Teachers' self-efficacy can vary by department, with pre-school teachers having the lowest and science teachers having the highest (Kula & Taşdemir, 2014). Teachers with higher self-efficacy “devote more classroom time to academic learning, provide students with difficulty learning the help they need to succeed” (Bandura, 1993, p. 140). Effective teaching and learning cannot happen in an uncontrollable classroom; a teacher's self-efficacy directly affects the quality of their teaching (Jackson & Miller, 2020). Teachers' personalities are based on various experiences, knowledge, beliefs, and values modeled through their interactions in social settings (Mpofu & Nthontho, 2017). Teachers who lack confidence in their classrooms can easily be angered by disruptive students instead of managing the situation (Jackson & Miller, 2020). Teachers require modeling and mentorship in teacher education programs to allow individuals to learn the character dispositions required for teachers (Mpofu & Nthontho, 2017). Working alongside someone within the special education department could help alleviate some of the challenges that general education teachers face within their classrooms. Both alternative and traditional certificate teachers need more opportunities to observe within classrooms and have hands-on experiences with experienced teachers (Jackson & Miller, 2020).

Further, as pre-service teachers begin their college experience with an idea of who they are, it is through that self-efficacy that they grow their teacher knowledge and seek mentors to be their source of knowledge. Teachers require modeling and mentorship in their teacher preparation programs to gain the dispositional traits required for teaching

(Mpopfu & Nthontho, 2017). Working with other professionals within the field demonstrates to pre-service teachers how collaboration can function throughout their years. Research shows that allowing pre-service teachers to observe and collaborate with certified teachers to put their knowledge into practice allows them to challenge and encourage their ability to create effective learning environments (Jackson & Miller, 2020). The more teachers have collaborative learning experiences in the early stages of their careers, the more likely they are to be open to collaborative learning in the future (Clarke, 2012). Working together can also promote a positive teaching model that teachers can use during stressful situations that can arise on the job (Sheridan & Young, 2017). New teachers can struggle with classroom management, and the lack of management causes teacher stress, burnout, personal emotional exhaustion, and teacher turnover rates (Jackson & Miller, 2020). Professional development opportunities and realistic examples that new teachers can use as a reference allow them to identify positive modeling situations of culturally responsive teaching, increasing a teacher's self-efficacy (Cruz et al., 2020).

Giving teachers additional support through professional learning communities can strengthen individuals' learning abilities, increasing their self-efficacy and positively affecting how teachers work with their students (Mintzes et al., 2013). Positive reinforcement and modeling opportunities are everyday things that should be seen within an ECE classroom provided by a teacher or peer (Choi et al., 2018). Evidence-based practices and high-quality professional development are fundamental ways to increase teachers' self-efficacy (M. A. Conroy et al., 2019). Additionally, observing others

teaching lessons they are confident in allows them to provide constructive advice to teachers who are unsatisfied with the subject matter. Professional learning communities also allow teachers to work with subject-matter teachers, discuss the subject's importance, and advance their ability to present classroom information (Mintzes et al., 2013). Receiving constructive advice and emotional support from peers will enable teachers to build their self-efficacy (Mintzes et al., 2013). Role models are instrumental in education as a source of inspiration, providing roadmaps for possible career paths and enhancing motivation (Ahn et al., 2020). Professional development sessions can give educators the self-confidence they need to enter a classroom, knowing they have the resources and proper support to succeed (Murawski & Hughes, 2021).

How Social Learning Theory Has Been Used in Other Research

Bandura's social learning theory has been used in many studies in the medical field or with children and their social-emotional experiences in classrooms. Aschenbrenner and Johnson (2017) used Bandura's social learning theory to focus on children within schools, noting that one valued outcome of modeling in education is that it enhances a sense of belonging, especially for typically negative-stereotyped groups. However, there has not been much research in the educational field about collaboration between teachers who teach students with special needs and general education teachers. Due to early childhood teachers not having a certification in special education, IDEA recommended that they co-teach with specialized services to help develop their skill set for working with children with special needs (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2015). Teacher preparation programs ensure teachers can support students (Steinbrecher et al.,

2013). But less evidence is available documenting that teachers are effectively prepared to meet the unique needs of students with disabilities (Gilmour, 2018). However, students with diverse needs are in inclusive environments with general education teachers who may not have the trained knowledge to accommodate some of their students.

How Theory Applies to Current Study

Social learning theory applied to Head Start teachers within their inclusive environments. Developing supported research on the role of social learning could support recommendations regarding the policies and practices needed to support learning within and across educational organizations (King & Paufler, 2020). Allowing Head Start teachers to observe other early childhood professionals who teach students with special needs, and promoting positive teaching models, could help increase their positive self-efficacy (see Sheridan & Young, 2017). Collaboration is a crucial component of being a successful teacher, and having the self-efficacy to motivate individuals plays a significant role in how teachers have a positive effect in their school classrooms (Tschantz & Vail, 2000). Bandura's social learning theory is essential to the conceptual framework for this study. Through observational learning, Head Start teachers can imitate and model certain behaviors that benefit their students (see Raičević, 2017).

Literature Review Related to Key Variables and Concepts

Inclusion and the Law

In the early 1970s, students with special needs could be rejected from public schools and not given a proper education. The U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare estimates that there were more than 8 million children and youth with a disability

in the United States, and half of them were not receiving a public education, or they were not receiving an education that was appropriate for their needs (T. Conroy & Yell, 2019). Public Law 94-142 was created in 1975, stating that students with disabilities between 3 and 21 would have access to a free and appropriate public education within the least restrictive environment. This law had to be implemented no later than 1980 (Cohen, 1979). Public Law 94-142 benefited students previously unable to receive services for their learning disabilities.

Congress learned that there were issues with implementing the law to ensure that students received the required educational services. Over the years, amendments were made to Public Law 94-142. One of the most extensive amendments was in 1997 when Public Law 94-142 changed to IDEA, requiring all students to access the same curriculum. The IDEA is a law based on the 14th Amendment ensuring equal educational opportunities for students with disabilities through free and appropriate public education (Kramarczuk Voulgarides et al., 2017).

Least Restrictive Environment

IDEA ensures that all eligible students with disabilities receive free and appropriate education, a legal definition that has not changed over 45 years (Yell, 2019). The IDEA is now the primary federal law that shapes the education of children with disabilities from birth to 21 (Congressional Research Service, 2019). IDEA was implemented to support students with special needs, and educational providers welcomed these students into their educational programs. IDEA, Part B, aims to improve the education of all children with disabilities between the ages of 3 and 21 (Congressional

Research Service, 2019). The most significant obligation under the IDEA is the free appropriate public education provisions (Zirkel, 2019). Free and appropriate public education is guaranteed to students with disabilities through special education and related services (T. Conroy & Yell, 2019). When the IDEA was reauthorized in 2004, it added attention to the least restrictive environment (Kramarczuk Voulgarides et al., 2017).

The attention added to the least restrictive environment ensures that a child with a disability is served in an educational setting that is the least restrictive environment (Lim, 2020). The least restrictive environment provision requires that students with disabilities are taught with students who are nondisabled in their least restrictive environment unless the severity of the disability is not achieved within the general education classroom (Raj, 2022). The least restrictive environment is meant to be a setting where the student can engage with their peers to the maximum extent possible, including accommodations or modifications that make the environment accessible to the student (E. J. Anderson et al., 2022).

Although there is a general understanding of what the least restrictive environment should look like, there is a lack of consistency across states and school districts- creating a disconnect in the information reported about the benefits of inclusive education for all students in a general education setting, students with or without a disability (Lim, 2020). A student's IEP team, which includes their teachers and parents, determines the best accommodations for the student (Kupzyk et al., 2022).

Individualized Education Program

Once a student has qualified for special education services, a student's free,

appropriate public education and least restricted environment are established through a team process that produces an IEP (Kurth et al., 2022). The IEP indicates the students' measurable goals to meet to progress in the general education curriculum (Congressional Research Service, 2019). The IEPs must include provisions for special education professionals and related service personnel to meet the needs of students with disabilities. Once goals are created for the student, the IEP team is responsible for deciding where the student's learning will take place, what support they might need, and developmental goals based on the student's present levels of academic standing (Kurth et al., 2022).

These individualized goals created in the IEP are the most appropriate education for that student, addressing how that student will participate in the general education curriculum (Grenier et al., 2022). General education teachers felt it was their responsibility to teach their content material to their students with special needs (Barry, 2021). In this same study, the special education teachers agreed that they did not support their students learning the general education material (Berry, 2021). Early childcare providers are sometimes not seen as general or special education teachers. They are often excluded from developing an IEP because they are not legally required to be there due to a lack of certification (see Sheppard & Moran, 2022).

Inclusion in Practice

Integrating children with special education needs into the inclusive environment may not include them as equal classroom members based on the severity of their needs (Rodriguez, 2021). In 2015, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and Department of Education noted the importance of students with disabilities being

included in high-quality early childhood education programs, stating that the importance was on the education, not the placement of the program being within a public school (Love & Horn, 2021). Inclusion classes are founded on the importance of the quality of the different school settings where children with disabilities can be included. Inclusive classrooms can look different depending on the setting and the education level the teacher provides to their inclusive students. Inclusive classrooms are not just the teacher's sole responsibility; learning opportunities for students with special needs are also part of the program that houses these students. Due to different "funding sources, attendance eligibility criteria, teaching and staffing patterns, and program standards" (Love & Horn, 2021, p. 206) can create a variety of inclusive education classrooms.

Inclusive classrooms can have unrealistic and unreachable demands placed on educators; full inclusion suggests that students with severe disabilities depend on their teachers to know how to work with all students (Rodriguez, 2021). Teachers identified large classroom sizes, lack of training, and the inability to work with other professionals who work with students with special education needs as hindrances when using differentiated instruction (Strogilos et al., 2021). Some disabilities present problems that make it difficult to accommodate the curriculum. Appropriate instruction for all students requires special education, including teachers with special training, because there is no "one size fits all" learning (Kauffman et al., 2018). Teachers can have the best intentions to implement their inclusive environment. Still, it becomes a challenge when teachers do not have the skills to modify their curriculum to facilitate a properly inclusive classroom (Bemiller, 2019).

General education secondary teachers reported feeling unprepared and undertrained in teaching in the inclusive classroom (Clark-Howard, 2019), particularly in making adaptations and responding to challenging situations (Dignath et al., 2022). The real challenge is to prepare better and educate teachers; the lack of prepared teachers demands changes to teacher education programs (Miesera et al., 2019) so that teachers can adequately meet the needs of their inclusive students. Most universities worldwide are still separating the general and special education programs, which leaves general education teachers feeling alone to handle the inclusive environment without proper training and knowledge (Crispel & Kasperski, 2021). Bemiller (2019) conducted a study exploring what teachers needed to educate their students with special needs. One of the problems that Bemiller identified in the study is that there are limited funding and resources for teachers to work with a special needs curriculum or to collaborate with other teachers; over half of the teachers agreed that it was essential to be able to collaborate amongst other team members (Bemiller, 2019). Wulfert (2021) noted that Bandura believed that models could strengthen or weaken an individual's thinking and behaviors. Teachers want to collaborate with other professionals to include all students in the classroom (Olsson et al., 2020).

Elementary education teachers reported that they do not have enough knowledge in the special education field, which leaves them feeling inadequate and frustrated (Olsson et al., 2020). Teachers who do not receive proper training for working with students with special needs can experience exhaustion within the field. Teachers collaborating with external special education partners allows teachers to receive new

ideas and support from experts in special education (Sannen et al., 2021). It is up to the teachers to reduce students' barriers within the inclusive environment; if there is no clear definition of what an inclusive environment should look like, then there will always be misconceptions about how the environment should be implemented.

Head Start Programs

The Head Start program, established in 1965, was implemented to help tackle the rise of poverty and poor academic rates among poverty-stricken families (Jin & Lee, 2022; Sabol et al., 2020). In 1965, Project Head Start was a summer program for disadvantaged children entering kindergarten or the first grade in the fall (McAndrews, 2023). Enrolling over a million students that summer in over 13,000 centers, it became a year-round program on August 31, 1965 (McAndrews, 2023). In 1975, Head Start Program Performance Standards were implemented to regulate the structural quality of the programs across the country; these performance standards were then updated in 2016 (Sabol et al., 2020), and in the latter half of the 1980s, Head Start changed their emphasis from IQ scores to kindergarten readiness. In 2004 the Head Start budget reached an all-time high of 6.8 billion dollars (McAndrews, 2023). Since the 1990s, there has been a 175% increase in Head Start enrollment, reaching approximately one million children a year (Markowitz & Ansari, 2020). These numbers have multiplied over the last several years. During the 2020-2021 school year, Head Start served over 839,000 preschool-aged children, with over a million including children birth through five years old and their families (Early Childhood Learning & Knowledge Center, 2022b).

The idea of Head Start was to help the whole child, family, and society by

providing students with educational, medical, and dental needs while supporting their families with social services (Early Childhood Learning & Knowledge Center, 2022b). Head Start was built to break the cycle of poverty, providing families with an all-inclusive program (Wilson et al., 2022). Children of mothers who do not have a high school education are at a greater risk for poverty, influencing their social-emotional functioning skills; however, parents with students enrolled in Head Start were less likely to use spanking or punitive disciplining techniques than parents who did not have students enrolled in Head Start (Jin & Lee, 2022). Most Head Start children come from lower socioeconomic families; thus, teacher-and-child relationships are critical (Chen et al., 2020). Students of low socioeconomic status are at a higher risk of low academic achievement, dropping out of school, crime, and even teenage pregnancy (Chen et al., 2020). Teachers' relationship with their low-socioeconomic-status children can help promote their students' ability to thrive despite their circumstances.

The Head Start program is in place to promote kindergarten readiness through physical health, literacy, cognitive skills, social-emotional development, and overall learning (Lee, 2019). Head Start performance standards promote kindergarten readiness through the least restrictive environment. More than 15,000 centers have more than 41,000 classrooms providing early education services to families (Sabol et al., 2020). In attempting to keep Head Start a high-quality place, Head Start policymakers quickly learned that they had difficulty retaining teachers who had early childhood knowledge. Not until 2013 were 50% of Head Start teachers in centers required a bachelor's degree (Wilson et al., 2022). There is a correlation between teachers having a higher level of

education leading to higher measures of learning in the classroom environment (Sabol et al., 2020). Increasing the educational requirements for Head Start teachers were an advance in the right direction. Head Start teachers with higher education levels can provide higher quality care and have greater resources (Wilson et al., 2022).

Developmentally appropriate practice is a framework where early childhood educators are taught how to create strength-based, play-based approaches to engage their students in learning; this was created by the NAEYC (Walter & Lippard, 2017). Teaching with developmentally appropriate practices shows teachers develop individualized child-centered learning while building a caring and nurturing environment (Harding et al., 2019).

In the 2020-2021 school year, over 67,000 children had an IEP, and 13% of students enrolled in Head Start (Early Childhood Learning & Knowledge Center, 2022b). Approximately 2.8 million children who can go to school have a disability; these disabilities can vary from vision, hearing, cognitive, social and emotional, and motor development (Lee & Luellen, 2021). Head Start is mandated by federal law that requires that 10% of their enrollment be students with special needs (Lee & Luellen, 2021). Head Start programs may need more quality resources or highly educated teachers (Lee & Luellen, 2021). Quality inclusion may not be supported enough for Head Start teachers, who rate high on the Classroom Assessment Scoring System, which could negatively affect the individualization teachers receive in inclusive education (Love & Horn, 2021). Despite the importance of the early childhood field, minimal research supports the teachers in ensuring a high-quality environment for young children (Harding et al., 2019).

Instructional support for inclusive practices has been a major request from Head Start teachers. In contrast, non-Head Start teachers are more likely to have focused in-service professional development sessions and support with their various needs (Love & Horn, 2021).

Head Start Inclusive Environment

In the early 1970s, there were no public preschool services for children between 3 and 5 years old in many states, except for Head Start programs, which catered to low-income families and preschool-age children. The Head Start, Economic Opportunity, and Community Partnership Act of 1974 required Head Start to designate 10% of its enrollment to students with special needs. In the first year that the Act was enacted, students with special needs exceeded the 10% ratio and took up 13% of those Head Start spots across the United States (Cohen, 1979). Preschool students with special needs exceeded the federal requirement that was put into place.

Currently, as students with special needs enter general education Head Start classrooms as their least restrictive environment, they are not taught by certified teachers. Head Start policy states that 50% of teachers nationwide must have a bachelor's degree, and the remaining teachers must have a minimum of a child development associate degree. Currently, this policy allows Head Start facilities to have a variety of educated staff; one facility could have all teachers with a bachelor's, all with a child development associate degree, or a variety of anything in between (Sabol et al., 2020). The IDEA only requires that the special education teachers who work with students with special needs on their IEP goals meet the state certification requirements (Cohen, 1979). Special

education-certified teachers have skills that can influence the classroom environment, which could also be a variable in deciding who is qualified to teach (Gilmour, 2020). Making appropriate instruction a reality for all students requires special education and providing teachers with special training (Kauffman & Hornby, 2020).

Head Start programs serve a majority-minority population, with a quarter of the population African American and a third Hispanic American (Aikens et al., 2020).

African American and Hispanic American students have been viewed as non-traditional by the majority culture, deeming them deficient because they behave and learn differently, thus forcing them into special education (Brown et al., 2019).

Teacher Education

More than 2,000 early childhood education preparation programs exist in the United States. To guarantee that the early childhood field succeeds, the field of study must become a priority within society (NAEYC, 2021). These early childhood education programs help fill child-care programs, Head Start centers, and center-based schools, with 35% of these teachers holding bachelor's degrees (NAEYC, 2021). In 2014, Head Start placed new performance standards on their teachers, where 50% of the teachers in over 41,000 classrooms had to have a 4-year degree in early childhood or a similarly related field (Sabol et al., 2020). As for the remaining teachers, they needed to have a child development associate or an associate degree in early childhood.

Most students identified with a disability spend their time in a general education classroom, where typically, a general educator's knowledge in special education is limited (Fallona & Johnson, 2019). Many teachers need to prepare to face diversity in the

general classroom, and most need more skills to implement an inclusive curriculum (Adams et al., 2021). Teachers must have a combination of skills, knowledge, and positive attitudes when using inclusive teaching; teachers who lack these strategies often have a negative perception of students with special needs, which can impact the teaching within the classroom environment (Adams et al., 2021). One of the biggest challenges a teacher faces within an inclusive environment is adapting the curriculum to meet the individualized needs of students to fit the student's developmental level or unique learning style (Gelfer & Nguyen, 2019). These challenges are partially due to a lack of teacher training programs that do not adequately cover the knowledge and skills required to work with students with special needs (Adams et al., 2021). Imitating special education techniques could be one way to promote inclusion. Imitation is a powerful way of learning knowledge, skills, and rules of social behavior and building social relationships (Olsson et al., 2020).

Support for Head Start Teachers

It is not enough that Head Start teachers have positive attitudes about working in inclusive environments; they must receive specialized training to increase their knowledge of the inclusive environment (Yu, 2019). Policymakers have become more aware of the importance of professional development in the early childhood field. In 2016, Head Start teachers were required to have 15 professional development hours. Head Start Performance Standards further stated that professional development must be research-based. Teachers must have follow-up strategy sessions with their educational coach (Harding et al., 2019). Chen et al. (2020) identified that teachers lacked proper

teacher preparation programs, preservice teacher education, and in-service training that allows them to work with some of their Head Start students. A coaching session can provide Head Start teachers with specific feedback based on observing that teacher's classroom (Harding et al., 2019).

Coordinating practices between the special and general education teachers would benefit the inclusive environment by allowing a unified goal among the teachers for their students in the least restrictive environment (Byrd & Alexander, 2020), allowing for direct collaboration between the general and special education teachers and providing new teaching strategies to their peers. Early childhood and special education teachers receive different training on inclusion and educating children with special needs. Early childhood education teachers need additional in-service professional development comparable to early childhood special education; without the additional support, Early childhood teachers will be less likely to implement the inclusive environment (Love & Horn, 2021). Achieving inclusion would require effort and knowledge about disabilities and practices for inclusion among colleagues (Olsson et al., 2020).

Early childhood research identifies that children from impoverished families are more concerned about having social-emotional or behavioral concerns that can negatively affect their student's academic learning (Cashiola et al., 2020). Students from a low socioeconomic status tend to show more aggressive behaviors than their peers, and many Head Start teachers working with these students "lacked the sensitivity when helping these children" (Chen et al., 2020, p. 1175). In Chen et al.'s (2020) qualitative study, teachers admitted that children's disruptive behaviors, other Head Start demands, and job

stress contributed to harsher discipline. Head Start teachers have also expressed concern about limited resources in incorporating IEP goals into their curriculum (Munchan & Agbenyega, 2020). Head Start teachers need an environment with supportive measures; when they do not, there is a higher risk of teacher turnover (Eadie et al., 2021). Approximately 25% of Head Start teachers quit yearly (Wilson et al., 2022). Research suggests that programs that provide teachers with rich professional development have teachers with high job satisfaction and lower teacher turnover and burnout (Harding et al., 2019).

Teacher turnover can be due to factors ranging from an individual's educational level, personal life, self-efficacy, or salary. Salaries for preschool teachers are an ongoing issue within the United States, specifically with more than 40% of Head Start teachers qualifying for federal needs assistance (Wilson et al., 2022). Additionally, Head Start teachers have copious amounts of paperwork that needs to be completed among the daily challenges with behavior students, which teachers feel take away from teaching in their classrooms.

Recommendations for the Field

In-service training provides opportunities to educate teachers on accommodations they can make in their inclusive environment. For teachers to be prepared to work in an inclusive environment, they need to be thoroughly trained in teaching students with special needs; studies have continuously shown that teachers are aware of the concept of inclusion but are unsure of how to implement it in their general education classrooms (Adams et al., 2021). Head Start teachers have shared concerns about the lack of

resources for implementing inclusive practices, such as working with a student's IEP into the current curriculum (Love & Horn, 2021). Teachers are unprepared to meet the demands and responsibilities of a student with special needs; they are unaware of special education practices, resources needed, added workload, and the time it takes to implement (Adams et al., 2021).

Head Start teachers are separated from early childhood special education teachers during training because they are seen as different entities. There is no formal training on differentiation for in-service teachers in mainstream schools as part of their professional development (Strogilos et al., 2021). Many requirements for teachers to teach such diverse learners come from federal, state, and local agencies putting these mandates in place (Byrd & Alexander, 2020).

Head Start programs often have little training in meeting the needs of young children with disabilities; peer coaching has been recommended for teachers to find an adequate replacement for not receiving proper training. Peer coaching would allow teaching teams in early childhood programs to provide peer coaching to enhance the use of implementing research-based practices (Golden et al., 2021). Collaborative efforts between different teachers when working on plans to improve the educational response to students with special needs are meaningful (Rodríguez-Oramas et al., 2021).

Teachers' educational backgrounds vary greatly by organization, with less than half of Head Start teachers having a bachelor's degree. In contrast, general education teachers must hold a bachelor's degree and meet state licensing certification (Love & Horn, 2021). Even still, general education teachers do not know the best ways to work

with their students with special needs (Byrd & Alexander, 2020). Having Head Start teachers share training with the special education department would allow for a coaching design to promote learning in an inclusive environment (Yu, 2019). Head Start teachers who received more training in special education were more competent in implementing individualized services to their students with special needs (Yu, 2019). Co-teaching modeled classrooms with the special education teacher and the general education teacher working together leads to academic growth in the students and gains to the general teachers' abilities (Fallona & Johnson, 2019).

Summary and Conclusions

In researching Head Start teachers' perceptions of their challenges in teaching students with special needs within the inclusive environment, the amount of research was abundant about education. Public Law 94-142 was implemented so students with disabilities could access a free and appropriate education within the least restrictive environment. The Head Start, Economic Opportunity, and Community Partnership Act of 1974 requires Head Start enrollment to consist of a minimum of 10% of students with disabilities, requiring Head Start teachers to be able to teach these students within their classroom environment. Head Start policymakers learned that Head Start schools had difficulty retaining teachers educated in early childhood education. Thus, in 2013, Head Start required their teachers to have a bachelor's degree. Head Start policymakers believed that these teachers could educate their students with developmentally appropriate practices.

Inclusion is a component of the IDEA, noting the importance of educating

students with special needs in a high-quality learning environment. Teachers' main difficulty is that they do not have the proper training and abilities to work with students with special needs. A qualitative case study design will allow research into Head Start teachers' challenges with their inclusion classrooms. Interviewing and collecting data from eight to 10 Head Start teachers allows for new knowledge to be gained for the educational community. Inclusion in research is a common topic for general elementary education. The topic discussed is how to make it appropriate for students in their learning environment. Unfortunately, this topic is not commonly researched for Head Start teachers and their preschool students. Head Start teachers also receive students in their classrooms, which is being used as an inclusive environment. However, most Head Start teachers do not know about working with students with special needs.

Coaching sessions allow Head Start teachers to receive feedback on their work within their classrooms. Coaching sessions allow Head Start teachers to get resources on areas they need to strengthen within their classroom. Researchers have suggested merging general education and special education classrooms to allow collaboration between the two fields. In-service training opportunities that focus on inclusion and disabilities allow educators to expand their knowledge and make changes in their classrooms.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to investigate the challenges faced by Head Start inclusion teachers, the strategies they use in the classroom, and the suggestions they have for improved resources or training. Exploring the knowledge and training of Head Start teachers as they relate to preparation for teaching this diverse group of students can affect future educators' work in these classrooms. Chapter 3 includes a description of the research design and rationale, the role of the researcher, and the methodology. The methodology consists of the reasoning behind the participant selection, instrumentation, and data collection. I discuss the data collection, followed by issues of trustworthiness and ethical procedures, and end with a chapter summary.

Research Design and Rationale

Head Start teachers must work with typically and nontypically developing students. The Head Start program requires that 10% of students with special needs are enrolled in their centers. This requirement brings a diverse population of students into the general education classrooms that Head Start teachers may not be prepared for. Head Start teachers work in an educational setting to help students and families in low-income neighborhoods.

I used a case study design to address the research questions:

1. What are Head Start teachers' perceptions about the challenges of teaching in an inclusive classroom?
2. What strategies do Head Start teachers use to teach students with special needs in inclusive classrooms?

3. What suggestions do Head Start teachers have for improved resources or training?

Qualitative researchers seek to understand how individuals make sense of their lives, giving insight and clarifying their experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). A case study is an in-depth look into a group to gain answers to a specific phenomenon (Kekeya, 2021). Case studies allow the researcher to explore a phenomenon happening within an organization (Naughton et al., 2010). Case studies have been used in different childcare facilities to understand common issues across the field (Naughton et al., 2010). A case study design allowed me to investigate a phenomenon witnessed within the Head Start school. Specifics that need to be researched are what Head Start inclusion teachers have regarding resources, strategies, or training that assist them in working with students with disabilities within their classrooms.

The design consisted of teacher interviews and lesson plans from the current academic year to understand Head Start teachers' knowledge and skills to work with students with special needs in inclusive classrooms. Interviews provide qualitative information, allowing interviewees to express themselves and offer suggestions. Interviews allow the participants to share their unique experiences (Seidman, 2006). When conducting an interview, the researcher must ask open-ended questions followed by probes and requests for more details to enhance the data collection (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Interviewing Head Start teachers from other centers gave more details about the phenomenon being studied based on their interactions with students with disabilities (see Naughton et al., 2010).

Additionally, gathering lesson plans from teachers I interviewed allowed for rich data collection about the research, giving insight into the teachers who wrote the lesson plans and their values and perspectives (see Saldaña, 2021). Documentation could be reports, daily operating schedules, and activities (Kekeya, 2021). Adaptations should be listed on teachers' lesson plans for students with special needs; although the specific child's name should not appear, modifications should be listed for students with varying needs. Using the information from the lesson plans can create in-depth questions during the interview process to create a more genuine and honest picture of the phenomenon being studied (see Ravitch & Mittenfelner Carl, 2016).

I interviewed nine Head Start teachers from various Head Start facilities in the central United States metropolitan area. I collected and examined each teacher's two lesson plans for the current academic year to identify their reflective use of prior education or knowledge while working with students with special needs in an inclusive environment and how they implement these adaptations into their daily activities. The data collected allows for more in-depth analysis (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006) of Head Start teachers' training and knowledge to work with students with special needs in an inclusive environment. Once the data were collected, they were coded to identify common themes amongst the Head Start teachers.

Role of the Researcher

My role as the researcher in this study was valuable as an individual who has worked in a Head Start facility. As a researcher, I must identify any biases I might have within the field. I had to self-reflect and identify my potential bias to approach the

participants with less preconceived beliefs about the study and better identify with the individuals' personal experiences (Ravitch & Mittenfelner Carl, 2016).

To manage professional relationships with participants, I did not interview anyone I worked with while a Head Start teacher. I no longer work within a Head Start facility, but I did not interview friends or coworkers who are still in the field. Being open and honest about the research is essential in having positive relationships with the participants throughout the study (see Kekeya, 2021). The participants must be comfortable being open and honest with their responses and seeing me as a possible influence within their facility.

A researcher's position within the field could contribute to their bias and interpretation of the findings, but being aware of biases can allow for a more authentic study (Green, 2021). In creating my research questions, I had to have researcher reflexivity. Researcher reflexivity is the researcher's ability to address their influence throughout the research process (Ravitch & Mittenfelner Carl, 2016). Addressing my influences was important when constructing the research questions so that they are not created with the desired outcome but for a more neutral response. The interview process demands a constant mindset of learning new themes about the topic (Naughton et al., 2010). In creating the interview questions, it is essential to question the study and have follow-up questions to understand what the interviewee says so that irrelevant data are not collected (Naughton et al., 2010). I managed biases in responding to interviewees during the interview process and did not make assumptions about what they were saying. Using information from teachers' lesson plans also allowed me to pull information from

their classroom setting and formulate questions in advance. These procedures helped eliminate most of the biases that could invalidate this research.

Methodology

Participant Selection Logic

I interviewed nine Head Start teachers from seven Head Start facilities in states across the United States. Initially, I planned to use purposeful sampling to recruit participants from seven different Head Start facilities in a central U.S. metropolitan area. Purposeful sampling would have allowed me to focus on at least two participants from each Head Start facility and use documents to strengthen my research (see Schoch, 2019). I did not receive any volunteers. Then, I contacted another Head Start grantee in the same metropolitan area, and they declined to share my research with their teachers. When this happened, I posted my recruitment flyer on publicly accessible Head Start social media platforms. Through this process, I purposively recruited nine participants from seven different Head Start facilities in different states. Qualified participants were chosen on a first-come, first-served basis. This recruitment process allowed me to collect documents and interviews from various Head Start facilities to gather meaningful experiences from various participants (see Seidman, 2006) and better investigate Head Start teachers' perceptions.

The data collected allowed for more in-depth analysis (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006) of Head Start teachers' training and knowledge to work with students with special needs in an inclusive environment. Data saturation could be gathered in as little as six interviews, the importance being on the quality of the questions and the details provided

(Fusch & Ness, 2015). I also examined two lesson plans from each teacher for the 2022–2023 academic year to identify their reflective use of prior education or knowledge while working with students in an inclusive environment and how they implement these adaptations into their daily activities.

The criteria for participation in this study are that the participant must be a Head Start teacher and have at least one student with an IEP within their classroom. Part of the Head Start policy is that 50% of teachers nationwide have a bachelor's degree, while the remaining teachers must have a child development associate degree (Sabol et al., 2020). Based on Head Start policy, they must have at least a child development associate degree to be a Head Start teacher. The baseline for educators in Head Start is that there can be a range of education in their teachers within one facility, ranging from associate to bachelor's and even master's degrees. These differences will allow various responses throughout the research questions to identify how things are similar or different for these Head Start teachers. These differences in teachers' education can change how one teacher's responses and documentation differ within the same school and state.

I had to recruit Head Start teachers through social media. I posted the flyer about my study on the sites. I asked if teachers were interested in contacting me to learn more about the study if they met the requirements identified on the flyer. I scheduled the interview once I verified that they met the study criteria. The teachers I selected to participate in the study were provided with a consent form. The consent form indicated that their name nor information would be shared with anyone, nor would their participation in the study affect their job. I provide more information about the consent

form in the Procedures for Recruitment and Ethical Procedures sections.

Instrumentation

I used an interview protocol and lesson plans for data collection in this study. Using an interview protocol (see Appendix A) allowed for the primary source of research gathered in this study. Structuring my interview questions based on Head Start teachers' experiences, knowledge, and opinions allowed Head Start teachers to share their specific experiences while working in the education field (see Ravitch & Mittenfelner Carl, 2016). Interviews consisted of individuals who currently have the Head Start instructor title and at least one student in their class with an individualized education plan. According to Head Start policy, a Head Start instructor could be an individual with a child development associate, a bachelor's degree, or higher. Knowing the Head Start policy validates that the instructor currently meets Head Start guidelines to have the position as the instructor within a general education classroom. Lesson plans allowed me to see how Head Start teachers are using their best practices to make adaptations for their students. Section 1302.31 of the Head Start program performance standards states that Head Start programs ensure teachers implement lesson plans (Early Childhood Learning & Knowledge Center, 2018).

Interviews

I conducted one interview with each participant. The interview lasted from 10 – 45 minutes. I used an iPad to record the interview sessions so that I could transcribe the interview for clarity and later code and categorize the data into themes. In looking for knowledge within the Head Start field and creating my questions, it is essential to

understand the teachers' perceptions of their challenges within an inclusive classroom. I used prior research discussed in Chapter 2 to guide me in creating nine interview questions.

- **Question 1:** What do you consider to be an inclusive classroom? Lim (2020) identified no clear definition of what an inclusive classroom can or should look like. An inclusive classroom should welcome students into a general education classroom, where students with disabilities can learn around their typically developing peers. With no clear definition, classroom teachers can rely on their interpretation of inclusion in setting up their classrooms, allowing adaptability based on the students in their classroom.
- **Question 2:** What challenges have you previously encountered or are currently dealing with teaching students with special needs in Head Start classrooms? Fallona and Johnson (2019) discovered that elementary education teachers have expressed that they do not feel competent enough in special education. This information is valuable when considering a Head Start instructor, who might have fewer educational credits than an elementary education teacher.
- **Questions 3 & 4:** What challenges have you encountered integrating students with IEPs into your classroom? What concerns or nervousness, if any, do you have when working with students with an IEP? Part of the requirements of the IEP is that it must include provisions for special education professionals and related service personnel to meet the unique needs of each student (see Congressional Research Service, 2019). Love and Horn (2021) identified that

Head Start teachers shared concerns about the lack of appropriate resources to implement an IEP properly into their current curriculum. These questions can help understand what those challenges might be.

- **Question 5:** What ways do you include students with an IEP in your classroom? Munchan and Agbenya (2020) identified in their research that limited resources exist for implementing IEP goals into the curriculum. Understanding where Head Start teachers are starting with their knowledge and experience on including students with IEPs in their classes can lead to a better understanding of the available resources.
- **Question 6:** How are lesson plans structured to allow accommodations for students? Kwon et al. (2017) stated that training for teachers should allow them to make modifications to lesson plans in class. This led me to create this interview question, which will be beneficial when collecting the lesson plans. In my experience, any student who requires adaptations due to language, IEP, or a behavior plan must be identified in that teacher's lesson plan.
- **Question 7:** Who do you think is responsible for the growth of IEP goals with individual students? A student who qualifies for an IEP must have it completed and re-evaluated by special education services. Setting these goals aims to progress the general education curriculum (see Congressional Research Service, 2019).
- **Questions 8 & 9:** What educational training have you received that has provided you with beneficial knowledge and strategies for working in an inclusive Head

Start classroom? What educational training and resources do you need for working with students with special needs in inclusive Head Start classrooms? Tschantz and Vail (2000) and Kwon et al. (2017) have identified that early childhood educators are lacking in special education. Ilik and Sari (2017) identified necessary resources for creating and implementing accommodations in a high-quality inclusive classroom.

Lesson Plans

I examined two lesson plans from each participant for the 2022-2023 academic year to identify their reflective use of prior education or knowledge while working with students in an inclusive environment and how they implement these adaptations into their daily activities. Adaptations should be listed on teachers' lesson plans for students with special needs. In anticipation of receiving teacher's lesson plans, I created a rubric to help identify the different areas teachers focused on with their students. Research has shown that teachers should be able to modify their lesson plans (Kwon et al., 2017), while Love and Horn (2021) identified that Head Start teachers lacked the resources to implement an IEP into their curriculum. Identifying how students are being identified in their lesson plans would validate what past research has identified as the requirement for teachers. However, the specific child's name should not appear, and modifications should be listed for students with varying needs. Teachers' lesson plans will demonstrate how teachers prepare to assess their students' progress across multiple domains. Childcare facilities are expected to assess their student's growth in literacy, language, and numeracy skills (Walter & Lippard, 2017). Head Start facilities must abide by the state's early learning

standards when working with local education agencies. In the area where I conducted my research, public schools are in session for approximately 185 days, with an average of 37 lesson plans in a given school year.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

The plan for data collection was a combination of interviews and document collection. I interviewed nine Head Start teachers from facilities across the United States. When scheduling interviews, I asked participants if they were comfortable completing the interview portion at their work site or would like to meet outside their school. I wanted the participants to feel as comfortable as possible and made sure that I offered them a place outside their work setting. I emailed the potential participants who met the study criteria a consent form and scheduled a time that worked best for them to conduct the interview and collect lesson plans. I asked participants to indicate their consent by responding “I consent” to the email.

I conducted the initial interviews virtually. I recorded the interview using an iPad to replay it for comprehension purposes and transcribe it. The interviews ranged from 10-45 minutes. If there were any follow-up questions, I contacted participants through their preferred method and discussed any information that needed clarity. The participant was sent a copy of the interview transcript to summarize their ideas. Once participants had at least 48 hours to review their interview data, they could withdraw or allow me to use their data in the study. If there were no further questions or concerns, they were thanked for their time in participating in the study.

Data Analysis Plan

I conducted a case study design using interviews and lesson plans. Once the interviews were completed, I transcribed and coded them to identify the themes to address the research questions. Choosing this coding process should show the commonality with the participants based on their work within the education field. The data analysis plan will include the following steps:

Step 1: I read through the transcripts to ensure that I understand the material and the accuracy of the information given.

Step 2: I used the initial coding of the interview material to identify words or short phrases encompassing the data collected.

Step 3: I highlighted and identified critical codes related to the interview questions using the direct phrasing of the interviewees. (Saldaña, 2021).

This process revealed patterns within the data, creating identifiable themes.

Saldaña (2021) stated that patterns are indicators that reveal an individual's daily life.

Identifying the responses from the interviewees should allow for similarities between the participants. The interview questions (see Appendix A) align with the research questions.

Interview Questions 1-4 relate to RQ1, which seeks to understand possible challenges

Head Start teachers face while working in an inclusive classroom. Interview Questions 5-

7 relate to RQ2, identifying strategies each participant uses while working with students

with special needs in their classrooms. Finally, Interview Questions 8-9 relate to RQ3 to

understand what Head Start teachers think would be valuable resources or training that

could be introduced into their school.

Following the responses from Interview Question 6: How are lesson plans structured to allow accommodations for students, I used participant responses to identify the coding necessary for the lesson plans. I examined two to four lesson plans from each participant and used their identifiers to highlight key areas in their lesson plans. The use of lesson plans should be a standard requirement from the centers each interviewee works at, and they should have identifiers to show how adaptations are being made for these individual students.

In identifying discrepant cases, Ravitch and Mittenfelner Carl (2016) stated that it is essential in the data analysis that the researcher looks for information that will change their findings. When conducting research, I must consider all aspects of the research, not just what I think I gained. When a researcher is narrowly focused on completing a research project, it is easy to overlook some of the subject's interests and perspectives (Bickman & Rog, 2009). Discrepant data can challenge my preconceived notions about the collected data and my understanding of my own because it can challenge my findings. It is crucial to question why we believe our data collection will have a standard path but to understand the different experiences of our participants (Ravitch & Mittenfelner Carl, 2016). I can present a fully transparent study by including research rich with details and accounting for all participants' perspectives (see Ravitch & Mittenfelner Carl, 2016).

Issues of Trustworthiness

Issues of trustworthiness are the means that qualitative researchers use to evaluate the thoroughness of a study (Ravitch & Mittenfelner Carl, 2016). In this research study, trustworthiness will be achieved through credibility and transferability by using

interviews and data collection to member check the data in the study. Dependability and confirmability will be met with thorough information about each step of the research process.

Credibility

Credibility is a way for the researcher to consider all the information from the data collection and the interviews and verify that the documentation collected fits the purpose of the study (Ravitch & Mittenfelner Carl, 2016). Establishing credibility and transferability can be seen in the presentation of the thick description of the interviews so that readers can have the rich data collection and the context available to allow other researchers the ability to transfer aspects of the study design to identify other relative factors (Ravitch & Mittenfelner Carl, 2016).

Using interviews and data collection allows for a direct interpretation of the participant's reality and their perspectives to become a part of the data triangulation process (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). One of the ways that qualitative research establishes its credibility is through member checking. One way that credibility was established in this study is by member checks. Sending an email to the participants to have them elaborate or to ask a follow-up question if needed will create participant validity.

Transferability

Transferability relates to the ability of a research study to be transferred to other areas while maintaining its specificity (Ravitch & Mittenfelner, 2016). This research study is being generalized to a location in the central United States. With Head Start being a federally funded organization, there are locations throughout the United States.

The findings of this study can be transferred to other locations and their individualized locations but maintain the core concepts of the study to be used as a prototype model (see Shenton, 2004). Merriam and Tisdell (2015) noted that qualitative research could begin as a specific entity but can guide future decisions to establish generalizations.

Dependability

Dependability is the stability of the data (Ravitch & Mittenfelner Carl, 2016). The premise of dependability is that a researcher has a purpose for the way they are collecting their data and that the data directly relates to the research questions being asked.

Dependability and credibility rely on each other within the study, and you cannot have one without the other (Kekeya, 2021). Triangulation is a step used to ensure dependability, which is used in this study. Triangulation can be seen in the data by acknowledging that the interviews and the lesson plans are multiple data sources that can authenticate the study. In looking at the study design to account for a rich contribution of sources, it was imperative to choose multiple Head Start locations, more than one teacher from each school, and collect multiple lesson plans from each. Triangulation occurs when a research topic is looked at from multiple perspectives rather than just one (Kekeya, 2021).

Confirmability

Confirmability is the ability of the researcher to challenge themselves throughout the research design (Ravitch & Mittenfelner Carl, 2016). I had to identify my personal bias when interpreting the data to establish confirmability. I needed to review all data collection documentation to ensure I was representing the data correctly. Shenton (2004)

noted that confirmability could be traced through the processes that the researcher used to complete the research. If I had questions about a response to an interview question, I contacted the participant to clarify the topic. Triangulation of the data can also validate that the participant's responses and data were used to conduct the research.

Ethical Procedures

This study requires Institutional Review Board approval from Walden University. Once the Institutional Review Board approval is obtained, I contacted Head Start center directors about posting a flyer about the study and how the potential participants can contact me. Once I determine that the participant meets the study criteria, they will be emailed a consent form and asked to respond through email with "I consent" if they are willing to proceed. In the email with the consent form, I gave them options for scheduling the interview and requested that they send in two to four lesson plans for the current academic year. Participants will be allowed to complete the interview at a place of their choosing outside of their work setting, allowing their participation to be anonymous from their workplace.

The initial interview will be conducted in person. The information gathered through the study will be stored in a locked cabinet at my residence for 5 years and then disposed of according to Walden University policy. All information that is gathered from the study will remain confidential. I deidentified any materials with their or their school's names.

I have previously been a Head Start teacher in the area where I conducted the research. I will not be reaching out to the individual schools I have worked at so that I do

not have any conflicts of interest arise. Although I have worked within the field, I must keep my viewpoint out of the research I am conducting to get the most unbiased information for the study.

Summary

In Chapter 3, I identified that this qualitative research study was meant to investigate the challenges Head Start inclusion teachers face, the strategies they use in the classroom, and their suggestions for improved resources or training. Participants were selected from Head Start locations within a central U.S. metropolitan area. Qualified Head Start teachers were used to collect data through interviews and the collection of lesson plans. The interviews were transcribed, coded, and identified for themes. The information gathered in this study achieved credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Chapter 4 will include the research study's setting, the participants' demographics, and the data collection process. I detail the data analysis and the different approaches to identify the evidence of trustworthiness. Finally, I discuss the results of the study.

Chapter 4: Results

This qualitative research study was conducted to investigate the challenges Head Start inclusion teachers face, the strategies they use in the classroom, and their suggestions for improved resources or training. Exploring the knowledge and training of Head Start teachers as they relate to preparation for teaching this diverse group of students can affect future educators' work within these Head Start inclusion classrooms. The research questions were created with a case study design that aligned with the purpose and problem of this study. The data collection for this qualitative study consisted of nine interviews and 18 lesson plans. I aligned the interview questions with the research questions. I asked eight standard interview questions to all participants, and follow-up questions were used when there was a need for clarity and re-direction to the topic. Once I transcribed all interviews, I coded and categorized the data into themes. I analyzed the lesson plans to answer the questions on the lesson plan rubric (see Appendix B). In Chapter 4, I discuss the setting for collecting the data, the demographics of participants, the data collection and analysis, evidence of trustworthiness, the results, and the concluding summary.

Setting

The setting for this study expanded the central United States. I initially contacted local agencies in charge of Head Start schools in the local community. One of the partner agencies worked with me in getting the research requirements out to some of their staff. In some of the schools I had requested to contact, I was told they were going through teacher turnovers and that other schools were available. Ultimately, no one responded

from that partner agency, so I contacted another agency across state lines to see if they would be interested. But they were unwilling to work with me due to their fear of a time commitment for their teachers and their staff shortages.

Due to the lack of interest in my surrounding area, I recruited on social media. I found Facebook group pages with Head Start or Early Childhood somewhere in the title. With the requirements for participating in my research, I needed to be specific in contacting groups that worked directly with Head Start and Early Childhood. Once I identified some groups, I requested to join the Facebook pages. Once accepted into the group, I posted my flyer on the group page. The response was positive, and I received interest from participants. The main interest came from Head Start social media pages that were identified as being for either Head Start teachers, early childhood professionals, or Head Start teacher support groups. Knowing that one of the pages was labeled a support group may have influenced some participants. My research study offered an opportunity for teachers struggling in their classrooms, and this could have been seen as a way for their concerns to come out in a way that would not be relayed back to their administration.

Participants were from seven Head Start facilities; three teachers worked for the same school. Due to participants being located throughout the central United States, eight interviews were conducted through Microsoft Teams. One interviewee could not log onto Microsoft Teams, so I recorded the interview using FaceTime on my iPad, where all participants' audio files were also saved.

Demographics

Ten participants consented to participate in this qualitative study. One of the participants (Participant 8) admitted that they did not meet all the requirements to participate, and I removed their interview from the sample. Thus, nine participants were eligible to continue with the study. These nine participants came from seven different schools within the central United States. Some of the participants' Head Start schools have close partnerships with district schools within their area, and some are their entity. Requirements to participate in the study were that they had to be a Head Start teacher and have at least one student in their class with an IEP. During the interview process, many of the teachers spoke about their level of education, even though it was not a direct question. In completing all nine interviews, six teachers had some special education endorsement, while the remaining three did not.

Data Collection

Eight participants could meet through Microsoft Teams for a virtual interview that lasted between 11 and 45 minutes, depending on the participant; an hour time block was set aside for all participants if needed (see Table 1). One of the participants could not get onto Microsoft Teams through their phone, so we used FaceTime. However, I still used my iPad to audio record the interview. The audio files are password-protected on my iPad. Once the interviews were completed, I uploaded the audio file to Microsoft Word to initiate the transcript process. Once it was in Microsoft Word, I could re-play the audio file to ensure the transcript was accurate. All participants emailed me two lesson plans that were a part of the data collection process. Most participants sent in their lesson plans

to me before their interview, while some needed a reminder to send in a copy of their lesson plans and emailed them to me after the interview. The only variation in the interview process was the one interview I conducted over FaceTime on my iPad. However, I still audio-recorded the interview the same as the other interviews. The interviews, recordings, and transcripts were consistent.

Table 1

Participant Interview Information

Participant	Interview Date	Interview Duration	Interview Platform
Participant 1	03/23/23	24 minutes 29 seconds	Microsoft Teams
Participant 2	03/30/23	21minutes 13seconds	Microsoft Teams
Participant 3	03/27/23	11minutes 04 seconds	FaceTime
Participant 4	04/15/23	16 minutes 17 seconds	Microsoft Teams
Participant 5	04/12/23	29 minutes15 seconds	Microsoft Teams
Participant 6	04/29/23	27 minutes 36 seconds	Microsoft Teams
Participant 7	05/08/23	11 minutes 12 seconds	Microsoft Teams
Participant 8	05/02/23	23 minutes 32 seconds	Microsoft Teams
Participant 9	05/10/23	45 minutes 09 seconds	Microsoft Teams
Participant 10	05/15/23	17 minutes 05 seconds	Microsoft Teams

Note. Participant 8's interview was removed from the sample because they did not meet the study criteria.

Data Analysis

Interview

After completing the interviews, it was essential to transcribe them immediately to understand my participants' experiences and to identify if I had any questions about their responses. I used Microsoft Office to start the initial transcript, and from there, I would listen to the audio file and correct any words or phrases that were wrong in the initial transcript. All participants were given a number attached to their interview and lesson plans to keep their records confidential. I began coding once all nine interviews had gone through this process. Each interview question was broken down into a table

with identifiers: the participants, their direct quote to the interview question, the preliminary code, and the code itself. This process was completed for all eight interview questions. This process allowed me to see the participants' responses instantly and then identify keywords that they used to answer the interview questions. Once those preliminary codes were identified, I identified a final code representing the quote and the preliminary code. See Appendix C for an example of the preliminary and final coding for Interview Question 1 for each participant. Appendix D includes a list of all the preliminary and final codes by interview questions.

As I reviewed the codes brought out by the research questions, there was a commonality between them. I combined these commonalities into the categories and then later put the categories into themes. Once I coded and categorized the data and identified themes, I analyzed the interview questions related to the research questions and themes (see Appendix E). Interview Questions 1-4 are directly related to Research Question 1. I took the coded information from the first four interview questions and used that information to answer the first research question. This process continued for Research Question 2, which is aligned with Interview Questions 5-7, and Research Question 3, which was related to Interview Questions 8 and 9. Many participants agreed on what these questions represented to them and their students. There were some vague "no" or "none" answers regarding concerns or nervousness about working within the inclusive environment. When I reviewed the teachers' responses to these questions, they stated they have support from their school district or a disability coordinator. Table 2 shows how the themes relate to the three research questions.

Table 2*Emergent Themes and Research Questions*

Research Question	Themes that address the question
RQ 1. What are Head Start teachers' perceptions about the challenges of teaching in an inclusive classroom?	Theme 1: Head Start teachers' challenges and perceptions of working within the inclusive environment were an overwhelming lack of knowledge of students with special needs, and teachers were not supported while working with these students.
RQ2. What strategies do Head Start teachers use to teach students with special needs in inclusive classroom?	Theme 2: Some Head Start schools use curriculums that offer accommodations within their lesson planning books; although most teachers identified students who will receive extra assistance during different activities on their lesson plans, the accommodations were not written on the lesson plan.
RQ3. What suggestions do Head Start teachers have for improved resources or trainings?	Theme 3: Head Start teachers suggested smaller classrooms, extended training in specific disabilities, and resources to implement what students with disabilities need in the inclusion classroom .

Lesson Plan

I analyzed the lesson plans using a rubric (see Appendix B) to identify how teachers were documenting working with their students with special needs and what accommodations were used. In Microsoft Word, I created a table in which I input information from each lesson plan to indicate if teachers were identifying their students with IEPs, what they were targeting, how the activity was modified, and if the IEP goals were being assessed. I created the rubric based on Kwon et al. (2017), stating that teachers should be able to modify their lesson plans. In knowing this information, it was important to see how teachers are identifying these students who need the modifications

and how the modifications are being identified in their lesson plans. Lesson plans not only give teachers and their assistants the outline of the learning goals for the day, but they should also show how to make those goals attainable for all students who need those accommodations.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness was achieved through credibility and transferability using detailed descriptions of participant responses. Credibility is a way for the researcher to consider all the information from the data collection and the interviews and verify that the documentation collected fits the purpose of the study (Ravitch & Mittenfelner Carl, 2016). The thick description of the interviews and the data collection presented transferability and credibility. Using interviews and data collection allows for a direct interpretation of the participant's reality and their perspectives to become a part of the data triangulation process (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

Triangulation can be seen in the data by acknowledging that the interviews and the lesson plans are multiple data sources that can authenticate the study. Participants were sent a copy of their transcript from their interview. They were allowed to clarify any information that was presented. I used the teachers' lesson plans to strengthen the interview responses and show evidence that justified and documented how students were or were not represented.

Confirmability was achieved by working through the collected data and seeking answers from participants if clarification was needed. Instead of assuming what they meant to say, I would ask follow-up questions during the interview or send them a

follow-up email asking them to clarify.

Results

In this section, I will discuss the themes that emerged from the interviews and the lesson plans collected during the data analysis. Three themes emerged concerning the research questions. Theme 1: Head Start teachers' challenges and perceptions of working within the inclusive environment were an overwhelming lack of knowledge of students with special needs, and teachers were not supported while working with these students. Theme 2: Some Head Start schools use curriculums that offer accommodations within their lesson planning books; although most teachers identified students who will receive extra assistance during different activities on their lesson plans, the accommodations were not detailed. Theme 3: Head Start teachers suggested smaller classrooms, extended training in specific disabilities, and resources to implement what students with disabilities need in the inclusion classroom.

Theme 1

Theme 1 aligns with the first research question: What are Head Start teachers' perceptions about the challenges of teaching in an inclusive classroom? The identified theme is that Head Start teachers' challenges and perceptions of working within the inclusive environment were an overwhelming lack of knowledge of students with special needs, and teachers are not supported while working with these students.

The responses from Interview Questions 1 - 4, are directly linked to the first research question. What the participants informed me is that there is an understanding that an inclusive environment is a fusion of diversity. Participant 4 identified an inclusion

classroom as:

An inclusive classroom means that you have a range of kiddos. Some of them have IEP, and some of them do not. Whether they are or not, regardless, they are included in everything that we do; we have modifications and accommodations to help them when needed.

The second interview question addressed what challenges Head Start teachers have had or are currently encountering within their classrooms regarding their students with special needs. There was an even split between participants on the challenges they faced: a lack of support from their supervisors and teachers having a lack of knowledge about disabilities. Many of the teachers who said that they lacked support indicated that many of their students "fell through the cracks" or "could not progress fully" because additional support was needed to have the time to work with their students with special needs. However, the teachers did not have the additional personnel. Participant 9 offered a different challenge they are having and said, "In the last two years, I'm going to reflect on the last two years because it's really since the pandemic. It's a different atmosphere; it's the aggressive behaviors". This teacher was very specific in speaking about the last two years in her classroom, she has seen a rise in aggressive behaviors that have caused harm to individuals within the classroom. Even though Participant 9 focused on the past two years, the quote demonstrates what the other teachers have stated: there is a lack of knowledge on how to work with these students, and the teachers need help.

Interview Question 3 elicited responses similar to Interview Question 2. The question was, what challenges have you encountered integrating students with IEPs into

your classroom? Some teachers have assistance from a special education team. Other teachers are caught in the in-between; their students have not qualified for resources but are in the process of getting their IEPs approved, so then they will have additional resources available to them. Participant 3 said,

I have had some that came in with an IEP, and they will have like the therapists, and there is one lady, who will come out and she will help us with activities, or she will sit down, and she will explain more in-depth with the child and be one-on-one with the child when we can.

Participant 6, who does not have support from a special education department, said,

How it used to be in our district is we use to have an actual SPED teacher that would come in and pull out the sped student to work with the SPED students. However, now that they are integrated, and our SPED caseload is heavy nowadays, it is getting really more difficult to try and hit everyone.

In Interview Question 4, I asked, "What concerns or nervousness, if any, do you have when working with students with an IEP?" The majority of the teachers said that it was a lack of knowledge with certain disabilities. Participant 9 stated,

My concerns are because we have a lot of aggressive behaviors, OCD, diagnosis, severe autism spectrum disorder, and that is something that I'm not used to being diagnosed at such an early age because, generally, it is a developmental disability.

Teachers are being presented with students who have new behavior challenges. Without assistance from the special education department or their directors and a lack of knowledge of working with students with special needs, they are struggling to meet the

needs of their students.

Theme 2

I developed Theme 2 from the responses for the interview question related to the second research question: What strategies do Head Start teachers use to teach students with special needs in inclusive classrooms? The identified theme is that some Head Start schools use curriculums that offer accommodations within their lesson planning books; although most teachers identified students who will receive extra assistance during different activities in their lesson plans, the accommodations were not written on the lesson plan. In coming to this theme, I used Interview Questions 5 and 6 and the lesson plan rubric (see Appendix B).

Interview Findings

Interview Question 5 addressed: In what ways do you include students with an IEP in your classroom? The main code identified is "Understanding that all students are different and need different accommodations, specific to each child's needs." Participant 5 was the only one who had a different code: "lack of resources for student and teacher on handling behaviors." Participant 5's experiences are different from the others,

We do the best we can, but yet again, like last year, I had 6 kids with behaviors out of 17 and one of those was so significant he was not even on an IEP; he was Head Start, and he was so significant that for $\frac{3}{4}$ of the year, I couldn't move more than two feet from him. I had put two paras at lunch on each side of him, and he lunged across the table and choked a kid.

Participants understand that all their students need help in various areas and different

ways. Teachers have identified that they do not have the resources to handle the students with these different needs in their classrooms.

Interview Question 6 asked: How are lesson plans structured to allow accommodations for students? For the majority of participants, they use individual accommodations to plan their lesson plan activities. Participant 6 identified that,

How we hit a Head Start standard is we have to have like individualization for all of our students in our classrooms. So those initials that are on there (the lesson plan) are where I feel like those students need those interventions or individualization to help them be successful in whatever tasks they are doing.

Another perspective that Participant 7 identified is that:

We just put the initial down, and yeah there's not any place on our lesson plans that say like to do this for that kid, or like as teachers, we just do it. But there is nothing on our lesson.

According to the participants, there is no in-depth information on the lesson plans on how teachers will make accommodations for their students or what that might look like.

Participant 2 stated that it is just my judgment of what accommodations they need. This statement led to me creating the code "no identifiers on how to make accommodations, it is just 'known.'"

Lesson Plan Findings

The lesson plan data aligned with the interview data code, with no identifiers on how to make accommodations. Most students were identified through initials on the lesson plans. Still, the way that a certain activity is to be accommodated is not available.

Two schools use a premade curriculum that offers information about how to modify a lesson, but the modifications are not identified in the lesson plan. There is no way to identify if what is recommended is appropriate for the student's needs.

Table 3 shows that teachers are making accommodations for students; it just is unclear how they are making those changes. Students are identified on the lesson plans by their initials but there is no way of knowing if those students have an IEP or not. Several teachers noted that all students are recognized on the lesson plans, not just students who require additional assistance due to an IEP.

Table 3

Head Start Teachers' Lesson Plan Modifications to Teach Students With Special Needs

Participant 1: Specifications are not identified.
Participant 2: "A lot of it is just my judgment of what kind of accommodations they need".
Participant 3: None listed on lesson plan.
Participant 4: "Really just based on what they need." Nothing is listed on the lesson plan.
Participant 5: Memory Game.
Participant 6: Following rules and directions. Participation in small group activities.
Participant 7: Small group Activity.
Participant 8: Data not included.
Participant 9: Memory Game, Stacking, and Building, Journals.
Participant 10: Summer Flashcards.

Theme 3

The final research question is: What suggestions do Head Start teachers have for improved resources or training? The final theme was identified: Head Start teachers suggested smaller classrooms, extended training in specific disabilities, and resources to implement what students with disabilities need in the inclusion classroom. This theme was based on the responses to the final two interview questions.

Interview Question 7 asked: What educational training have you received that has

provided you with beneficial knowledge and strategies for working in an inclusive Head Start classroom? The responses showed that most participants said they needed both resources and training. Participant 4 stated:

Well, I have my early childhood special education endorsement, so we have got plenty of training in that area, but it is the hands-on stuff that you learn from. Just doing it is really where you, well, where I get my knowledge from.

Participant 10 said:

We are asking for constantly because we do not get that we do not get that at all. It is the truth. We get a lot of conscious discipline; we get a lot of what the state requires. We talk about this all the time; I wish I could have somebody come and talk about this is what you do when an inclusive classroom with conscious discipline.

Participant 3 requested training about specific disabilities. The participant stated, "most of our training is done by people in the house, our curriculum coach, educational director, or senior directors. They are just doing research online like we are. It is not like people that have been taught". Participant 5, who requested resources, identified that "smaller classes and funding to increase because it does not go as far as it used to." In listening to these teachers about what suggestions they have for improved resources or training, it was identified that these teachers are asking for help. Help in getting further in-depth training that would enhance their knowledge of how to work with the students in their classroom. They continue to ask for resources, but they identify that it is not beyond what these teachers are able to learn independently. Real-world examples of how to implement

the knowledge that they are given would allow them to put that new information to use.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative study was to identify Head Start teachers' perceptions of inclusion classroom challenges and needs. In Chapter 4, I presented the setting, demographics, data collection, data analysis, evidence of trustworthiness, and the results. Throughout the process, I identified three themes that relate to the purpose of this study. RQ1 asked What are Head Start teachers' perceptions about the challenges of teaching in an inclusive classroom? Based on the responses from the participants Head Start teachers' challenges and perceptions of working within the inclusive environment were an overwhelming lack of knowledge of students with special needs, and teachers were not supported while working with these students. RQ2: What strategies do Head Start teachers use to teach students with special needs in inclusive classrooms? Head Start schools use curriculums that offer accommodations within their lesson planning books; although most teachers identified students who will receive extra assistance during different activities on their lesson plans, the accommodations were not written on the lesson plan. RQ 3: What suggestions do Head Start teachers have for improved resources or training? Head Start teachers suggested smaller classrooms, extended training in specific disabilities, and resources to implement what students with disabilities need in the inclusion classroom.

In Chapter 5, I will interpret the findings by connecting the themes to the prior research reported in Chapter 2, including the conceptual framework. I will also discuss the study limitations and the recommendations grounded in the strengths and limitations

of the study. I end the chapter with implications for positive social change and conclusions.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

In this qualitative research study, I investigated research questions about the challenges faced by Head Start inclusion teachers, the strategies they use in the classroom, and the suggestions they have for improved resources or training.

Determining what Head Start teachers know about teaching in an inclusive environment is important in defining what resources and supports teachers need to appropriately educate students with special needs in their classrooms. Understanding Head Start teachers' challenges regarding students with special needs and their chosen strategies could allow educators to make positive changes in the future to foster best practices.

The nature of this study was a case study design using interviews and lesson plans. I found participants through social media and scheduled virtual interviews to ask them the interview questions. Three key themes emerged in response to the research questions (see Table 2). Based on the results of this qualitative research study, Head Start teachers' challenges and perceptions of working within the inclusive environment included a lack of knowledge of students with special needs, and teachers were not supported while working with these students (Theme 1). Even though some Head Start schools use curriculums that offer accommodations within their lesson planning books, although most teachers identified students who will receive extra assistance during different activities on their lesson plans, the accommodations were not written on the lesson plan (Theme 2). To best meet the needs of their students, Head Start teachers suggested smaller classroom sizes, extended training in specific disabilities, and resources to implement what students with disabilities need in the inclusion classroom

(Theme 3).

Interpretation of the Findings

In this section, I describe how my findings confirm, disconfirm, or extend knowledge in this discipline by comparing them with what has been found in the peer-reviewed literature described in Chapter 2. I also analyze and interpret the findings in relation to the conceptual framework of this study. Bandura's social learning theory (1971) suggests that the best way to learn is through observing others and that behaviors that others produce are either deliberately or indirectly related to the influences of others they have witnessed.

Connection of Findings to the Key Concepts

Head Start teachers' challenges and perceptions of working within the inclusive environment included an overwhelming lack of knowledge of students with special needs, and teachers are not supported while working with these students (Theme 1). This theme is consistent with information that was obtained through the literature review. Chen et al. (2020) identified that teachers lacked proper teacher preparation programs, preservice teacher education, and in-service training that allows them to work with some of their Head Start students. Bryant (2018) stated that preschool teachers need more formal and on-the-job training in inclusive practices to increase their comfort level in working with students with special needs. Teachers in my study verbalized that there was a lack of support and a lack of knowledge about disabilities. Full inclusion suggests that students with severe disabilities depend on their teachers to know how to work with all students (Rodriguez, 2021). One of the participants in this study stated that once their

students have been fully identified, they are taken out of their Head Start classroom.

In this study, I found that some Head Start schools use curriculums that offer accommodations within their lesson planning books (Theme 2). However, most teachers identified students who will receive extra assistance during different activities on their lesson plans, the accommodations were not written on the lesson plan. In the lesson plans collected from participant teachers, students' initials are written in the lesson plans to demonstrate that most of the students within their classroom are receiving more direct instruction; there is no concrete evidence on the lesson plan to demonstrate what the instruction should be for each student. For children to be in the least restrictive environment, accommodations and modifications must be identified to make the environment accessible to the student (E. J. Anderson et al., 2022).

Having Head Start teachers share training with the special education department would allow for a coaching design to promote learning in an inclusive environment (Yu, 2019). Co-teaching modeled classrooms with the special education teacher and the general education teacher working together leads to academic growth in the students and gains to the general teachers' abilities (Fallona & Johnson, 2019). The IDEA recommends that early childhood teachers co-teach with early childhood special education teachers to develop their skill set for working with children with special needs (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2015).

In referencing teachers' lesson plans, details about what is being modified must be provided. Classroom substitute teachers will not know how to individualize a specific child's learning for the day if the information is not detailed in the lesson plan. To assess

the student's growth within their classrooms, there needs to be documentation to show the progression of growth. These challenges are partially due to a lack of teacher training programs that do not adequately cover the knowledge and skills required to work with students with special needs (Adams et al., 2021).

Connection of Findings to Conceptual Framework

Bandura's (1971) social learning theory guided this study's conceptual framework. Bandura's social learning theory suggests that individuals can learn new behaviors through the observation of others or through a direct experience they had with an individual (Bandura, 1971). Allowing Head Start teachers to observe special education teachers would allow them direct experiences in learning new techniques for working with their students with special needs. Some Head Start schools use curriculums that offer accommodations within their lesson planning books. Although most teachers identified students who will be receiving extra assistance during different activities in their lesson plans, the accommodations were not detailed (Theme 2). By providing Head Start teachers with new opportunities to identify students on their lesson plans, they are allowing for the opportunity to create a positive experience (see Bandura, 1979), allowing teachers to grow their skill set. Providing Head Start teachers with opportunities to expand their skill set can lead to positive self-efficacy, allowing individuals to create change within themselves (Bandura, 1989, 1993).

The participants suggested smaller classrooms, extended training in specific disabilities, and resources to implement what students with disabilities need in the inclusion classroom (Theme 3). With the lack of proper training, the inability to work

with special education team members, and large classroom sizes, teachers are prevented from being able to differentiate instruction for their students (Strogilos et al., 2021). Giving teachers additional support through professional learning communities can strengthen individuals' learning abilities, increasing their self-efficacy, and positively affecting how teachers work with their students (Mintzes et al., 2013). Teachers in this study want the time to be able to implement what they have learned during training but also to have more detailed training about specific behaviors and disabilities so that they have the resources needed to work in their classrooms.

Limitations of the Study

One of this study's possible limitations is that I only interviewed participants from the central United States. One additional limitation that could be seen is the shorter interview times with a couple of the participants. They responded straightforwardly without expanding on their opinions or ideas. Other teachers were comfortable sharing examples of students' responses or activities with their answers to give insight into their classroom situations. Another limitation not predicted was how pre-made curriculums would affect the teachers' lesson plans. With the pre-made lesson plans, teachers' activities are planned out for them. These lesson plans do not require teachers to differentiate how they are required to document their changes for students who needed additional assistance because suggestions were provided in their books.

Recommendations

I recommend future research that includes questions about Head Start teachers' education level and the years that they have been in the early childhood field. While

many of my interviewees mentioned that they did have higher educational degrees, I did not include this question in the interview protocol. Understanding the extra knowledge these teachers seek independently from their job requirements and why they felt the need for higher education would be beneficial. This information would bring awareness to whether certain Head Start school settings (e.g., daycare, private preschool, or school district) have more teachers with higher education degrees. If teachers are attached to a school district, fewer teachers might feel they need higher education because they have more support with their inclusive students. In contrast, independent Head Start schools might have teachers with higher education because they take the initiative to learn how to work with students with special needs because they do not have access to the additional resources a school district might provide. This information would be valuable for future research because it would provide a different perspective on Head Start teachers.

Recommendations for Practice

During interviews, Head Start teachers asked for more education on specific disabilities. Previous research has identified that the lack of training, the inability to collaborate with the special education teachers, and the larger classroom sizes are stopping teachers from modifying their instruction for their students (Strogilos et al., 2021). Head Start teachers in this study asked for training and education on working with children with special needs and the time to make the changes to implement what they have learned at their training in their classroom. Based on the findings of this study, the following are my recommendations for the practice:

1. I recommend that Head Start teachers have access to educational training or

classes about how to work with students with special needs.

2. I recommend that administrators allow Head Start teachers more time to collaborate with special education teachers to gain ideas and resources that can be implemented in an inclusive environment.
3. I recommend that Head Start teachers have access to funds or materials to allow them to try materials in their classrooms. For example, if a Head Start teacher needs a sensory product for a student, there would be an area where they could gather things to try in their classroom.

Many teachers in this study admitted that even though some of their students do not have an IEP, they are still identified in areas where they need additional support for continued educational growth. When there is not enough time in a day to meet the requirements set out by Head Start, IEPs, and state standards, students are being left behind in their academics.

Implications

Implications for Positive Social Change

The potential impact for positive social change would help Head Start teachers, their students, and the organization. In this study, Head Start teachers indicated they need more direct knowledge about various disabilities. Knowledge about specific disabilities would prepare Head Start teachers for students who might enter their classrooms. The knowledge would also allow teachers to have the resources in place before a student enters the classroom.

Organizational Level Implications

If Head Start administrators could recognize that the needs of these students in the inclusive classroom need to be properly met, then there could be a change in how to better provide Head Start teachers with the skills and resources they need. At the federal level of Head Start, new mandates could be implemented that allowed teachers to partner with nearby special education departments to learn how to make accommodations for the students entering the Head Start environment. Meeting the needs of inclusive classrooms would benefit not only the organization but also the teachers and students.

Teacher Level Implications

When teachers have the proper knowledge, skills, and support, they have the self-efficacy to make changes and are determined to continue. If Head Start administrators can fully support teachers in an inclusive environment in the ways they ask, then each child would have a high-quality learning environment to attend every day. When teachers are properly supported, there is a lower risk of teacher turnover and vacancies within the field.

Student Level Implications

If Head Start organizations and teachers are better prepared to meet the needs of their students with special needs, students will enter an inclusive environment where their teachers should have the tools and resources to accommodate their learning. Making accommodations to the classroom environment and the learning activities specific to each child would allow students to grow in their learning environment. When students can succeed in their environment, so do their teachers.

Methodological Implications

This qualitative study could be conducted in other areas of the United States and repeated with other Head Start schools. The more information gathered from Head Start inclusion teachers can show whether this trend of teachers wanting more special education training is localized to the central United States or if all Head Start teachers have these needs.

Theoretical Implications

Bandura's (1971) social learning theory suggests that new patterns of behaviors can be taught through personal experiences or the observation of others. Having Head Start teachers share training with the special education department would allow for a coaching design to promote learning in an inclusive environment (Yu, 2019). Using the resources already in place within a school would strengthen Head Start inclusion teachers' knowledge about working with students with special needs.

Conclusion

I explored Head Start teachers' perceptions of inclusion classroom challenges and needs in this study. These Head Start teachers' responses to the interview questions focus on an area lacking attention. Inclusive Head Start teachers are in a unique position in the education field. They are given the responsibility to teach all students in their classroom but are not expected to have the education to work with students with special needs. Many of the teachers I interviewed had a higher educational level than required based on Head Start standards. However, they felt that they needed more education to be beneficial within their classrooms. Head Start teachers want to support the students with special

needs in their inclusive environment, but they must be provided with the resources necessary for a high-quality learning environment for their students.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Introduction:

Hello, my name is Jessica Rinehart. I am in the process of completing my dissertation, which focuses on Head Start teachers. Head Start teachers are in a unique position within the education field, and I am interested in learning about challenges, strategies, and suggestions that you might have with working with students with disabilities within an inclusive environment. Head Start teachers that participated in this study were sent a consent form telling them the details of their participation. The interview will be recorded and could last up to an hour. Each teacher has been asked to bring with them two-four lesson plans.

I maintained confidentiality by giving your interview a number and assigning that number to your lesson plans as well; numbers 1 – to 10 will be used. All interviews will be recorded so that I can re-visit them for coding and clarity. You can stop the interview process and withdraw from the study at any time.

The goal of this interview is to gain information through your personal experiences as a Head Start instructor who has worked with students with special needs within an inclusive environment. Do you have any questions or concerns before we begin?

RQ 1: What are Head Start teachers' perceptions about the challenges of teaching in an inclusion classroom?

1. What do you consider to be an inclusive classroom?
2. What challenges have you previously encountered or are currently dealing with

- teaching students with special needs in Head Start classrooms?
3. What challenges have you encountered integrating students with IEPs into your classroom?
 - a. Please describe or provide an example?
 4. What concerns or nervousness, if any, do you have when working with students with an IEP?

RQ2: What strategies do Head Start teachers use to teach students with special needs in inclusive classrooms?

5. What ways do you include students with an IEP in your classroom?
6. How are lesson plans structured to allow accommodations for students?
 - a. Are there identifiers that dictate the varying needs of students?
 - i. How are they identified?
 - b. How are students with IEP's documented on lesson plans?
 - c. How do you determine how accommodations are made for these students?

RQ3: What suggestions do Head Start teachers have for improved resources or training?

7. What educational training have you received that has provided you with beneficial knowledge and strategies for working in an inclusive Head Start classroom?
 - a. When/where did you receive this training?
 - b. Why do you think the training was valuable?
8. What educational training and resources do you need for working with students with special needs in inclusive Head Start classrooms?

Thank you for taking the time to help me conduct my research that I think is valuable to the educational community. If I have further questions when I go through my notes, may I reach out to you for clarification?

Appendix B: Lesson Plan Rubric

	Identifier	Description	Modification	Example	Assessment
	How are students with IEP's being identified in lesson plans? Example: Students initials, student number, etc.	What is the IEP targeting? Physical, Cognitive, Social, Emotional	What activity is being modified to support the students IEP goals?	How is the modification represented on the lesson plan?	How are IEP goals being assessed? Ex: Summative or Formative
Lesson Plan 1 &2					
Lesson Plan 3 &4					
Lesson Plan 5 &6					
Lesson Plan 7&8					
Lesson Plan 9 &10					
Lesson Plan 11 &12					
Lesson Plan 13 &14					
Lesson Plan 15 &16					
Lesson Plan 17 &18					
Lesson plan 19&20					

Note. Each row will include information from the participant's two lesson plans.

Appendix C: Coding for Interview Question 1

Participants	Direct Quote	Preliminary Code	Final Code
Participant 1	“Classroom, where all students are in there, regardless of what needs that they may need met, whether it be speech or extra academic supports, behavior supports any of that stuff. It is just a classroom that everyone is in.”	All students	Fusion of Diversity
Participant 2	“I think an inclusive classroom is children of all different backgrounds within a classroom. It doesn’t include just disabilities, it includes different races, different socioeconomic, economic backgrounds. Children who come from families who are raised by their grandparents or children who have a single parent.”	Children of all backgrounds: socioeconomic Languages Races	Fusion of Diversity
Participant 3	“That would be all students no matter if they have a disability or not”	All students	All Students
Participant 4	“So, to me, an inclusive classroom means that you have a range of kiddos some of them have IEP’s and some of them don’t. Whether they are or not regardless, they are included in everything that we do, we have modifications and accommodations to help them when needed.”	Students with or without a disability	Fusion of Diversity
Participant 5	“Less than 50% Sped kids”.	Less than half the classroom has special needs	Regulated by quantity
Participant 6	“So, at our school that I teach at our that kids stay in the classroom the whole time. Which is great because that’s inclusiveness. You know, you you’re getting them with their peers and everything. The hard part is we are full in our classroom. So, we have 20 students per each classroom, and then with our sped caseload, we have almost half of our kids are on IEP’s in our classrooms.”	Inclusion	Fusion of Diversity
Participant 7	“I think the least restrictive environment with more individualization”.	Purposeful education with specific adaptations for individualized needs	Fusion of Diversity
Participant 9	“An inclusive classroom follows pretty much the head start performance standards of everybody is included, no matter what behaviors, disabilities. Everybody is included for the same amount of time into all activities.”	All allowed	Fusion of Diversity
Participant 10	“So, to me an inclusive classroom is a classroom where you have children from different backgrounds and with different needs. Some of which are very hard to meet.”	Children that are different based on their needs, or background.	Fusion of diversity

Appendix D: Preliminary and Final Codes by Interview Question

Interview Questions	Preliminary Codes	Final Codes
1. What do you consider to be an inclusive classroom?	<p>All Students.</p> <p>Children of all backgrounds: Socioeconomic, languages, races.</p> <p>Students with or without a disability.</p> <p>Less than half the classroom has special needs.</p> <p>Inclusion.</p> <p>Purposeful education with specific adaptations for individualized needs.</p> <p>All allowed.</p> <p>Children that are based on their needs, or background.</p>	<p>Fusion of diversity.</p> <p>Regulated by quantity.</p> <p>All Students.</p>
2. What challenges have you previously encountered or are currently dealing with teaching students with special needs in the Head Start classroom?	<p>Lack of support: Students falling through the cracks.</p> <p>Teaching students that do not have an official diagnosis.</p> <p>Not enough training. Not knowing what to do with a specific disability.</p> <p>Lots of kids, lots of high needs, lack of support.</p> <p>Behaviors, lack of resources, too much paperwork.</p> <p>How to connect with every student.</p> <p>Working with the public school system, to understand the value that Head Start brings into the classrooms.</p> <p>Aggressive behaviors.</p> <p>None of us have a background in special needs, different language barriers.</p>	<p>Lack of support.</p> <p>Lack of knowledge about disabilities.</p> <p>New wave of behaviors.</p>
3. What challenges have you encountered integrating students with IEP's into your classroom?	<p>Getting help from ADA or the school district. SPED students leave their inclusive class once they are fully identified.</p> <p>They have a SPED team for support, does not feel challenged.</p> <p>Assistance from outside support.</p> <p>Other students copying "bad" behaviors.</p> <p>Students enrolled into pre-k because they meet the age requirement, but aren't ready for a classroom environment.</p> <p>Time, overloaded with a larger SPED caseload, has a difficult time meeting everyone's needs.</p> <p>Doesn't think that she has any problem integrating them into the classroom.</p>	<p>Trained personnel in SPED to assist.</p> <p>Lack of knowledge in working with students with behavioral needs.</p> <p>Age-appropriate children have a hard time adjusting to a school setting.</p> <p>Lack of time to meet the needs of everyone.</p> <p>No Issues.</p> <p>Lack of time to meet the needs of everyone.</p>

	<p>Their school gets more than the usual number of students with specific needs, so there is a multitude of individualized plans. More time spent with students with IEP, and children without get 'forgotten'.</p>	
<p>4. What concerns or nervousness, if any, do you have when working with students with and IEP?</p>	<p>Trainings Concerns for not being able to help each student. Concerns for not being able to give them what they need. Building relationships first. Lots of aggressive behaviors, OCD diagnosis, severe ASD. Not use to this large amount of diagnosis at such a young age. Lack of educational values amongst co-workers.</p>	<p>No Concerns. Lack of knowledge with certain disabilities. Overloaded with needs, but not enough time. Taking time to build trust with the student so that later work is easier.</p>
<p>5. What ways do you include students with an IEP in your classroom?</p>	<p>Accommodations available for students. Accommodations to make students comfortable throughout the day. Individualized per student's needs. Individualized needs based on student. Teacher seems overwhelmed with the number of students that need significant resources. Full inclusion. Supported by a disability coordinator. Individualized Education Plans. Getting students involved into activities, because they are there to be a part of them.</p>	<p>Understanding that all students are different and need different accommodations, specific to each child's needs. Lack of resources for student and teacher on handling behaviors.</p>
<p>6. How are lesson plans structured to allow accommodations for students?</p>	<p>Lack of substantial information from SPED team on how to work with students. Using IEP to make accommodations, while others are just trial and error. Place to identify student with initials, but not the specific accommodations being made. Needs based on individual students. Teachers' intuition. All students have individualization. Individual accommodations based on student's needs. Help from pre-made curriculum that identifies how you can help specific students with their needs.</p>	<p>Individual accommodations. Pre-made curriculum. No identifiers on how to make accommodations, it's just 'known'.</p>
<p>7. What educational training have you received that has provided you with</p>	<p>Talking with other teachers, coaches, instructional coaches,</p>	<p>Resources: In classroom help. Resources and Training.</p>

beneficial knowledge and strategies for working in an inclusive Head Start classroom?	<p>behavior support team are good for getting strategies and advice from. Social and emotional learning.</p> <p>50/50 Most trainings are given by in house staff: Curriculum coach, education directors, senior directors etc.</p> <p>Teacher has early childhood special education endorsement: wants hands on stuff. Learning while working through.</p> <p>We don't need trainings. Teacher feels like a failure.</p> <p>1-2 college classes on specific disabilities (Teacher has a masters of special education).</p> <p>Trainings on how to read IEP's presented from the disability coordinator.</p> <p>There isn't a training available for what we are seeing right now in classrooms.</p> <p>I don't think we have gotten any training for how to use our trainings in an inclusive classroom.</p>	<p>Trainings about specific disabilities.</p> <p>Resources.</p> <p>Resources and trainings.</p>
8.What educational training and resources do you need for working with students with special needs in inclusive Head Start classrooms?	<p>Time.</p> <p>Everyone should have a very thorough knowledge of children with disabilities and what to look for.</p> <p>Money to buy the things to help. (Fidget toys, weighted blankets)</p> <p>Cutting class sizes significantly and more hands-on adult support.</p> <p>Trained Out.</p> <p>Colle/Graduate classes on working with SPED students. Parenting classes to parents.</p> <p>Experience on how to work with students with autism, or operational deviant disorder.</p> <p>Teacher believes that there are needs to be extensive research for the 'pandemic babies.</p> <p>And the influx of aggressive behaviors.</p> <p>I think teachers will need a background in special education.</p>	<p>Time: To implement what is learned at trainings.</p> <p>To be able to meet the IEP standard requirements during a small window of time during the day.</p> <p>Trainings: Classes that are focused on special education, and specific disabilities.</p> <p>Resources: Funding to be able to purchase or gather resources for students that have special needs within the classroom.</p> <p>Resources: Smaller classrooms so that teachers are able to fully assist all their students.</p> <p>Training: Need a background in special education.</p> <p>Training: Special needs.</p> <p>Training: Newer research.</p>

Appendix E: Categories and Themes by Research Question

Research Question	Categories	Themes
RQ1: What are Head Start teachers' perceptions about the challenges of teaching in an inclusive classroom?	Insufficient knowledge. The needs outweigh the time given in a day to be valuable to students.	Theme1: Head Start teachers' challenges and perceptions of working within the inclusive environment were an overwhelming lack of knowledge of students with special needs, and teachers were not supported while working with these students.
RQ2: What strategies do Head Start teachers use to teach students with special needs in inclusive classroom?	Knowledge gap for teachers. Assumptions on what and how to accomplish needs.	Theme 2: Some Head Start schools use curriculums that offer accommodations within their lesson planning books. Although most teachers identified students who will be receiving extra assistance during different activities on their lesson plans, the accommodations were not detailed.
RQ3: What suggestions do Head Start teachers have for improved resources or training?	Seeking accommodations for teachers to support their special education students in all ways.	Theme 3: Head Start teachers suggested smaller classrooms, extended training in specific disabilities, and resources to implement what students with disabilities need in the inclusion classroom.