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Inclusion Teachers' Perceived Barriers to Meeting the Academic Needs of Students With Disabilities

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This is to certify that the doctoral study by

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February 2024

Abstract

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With Disabilities

by

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University of Phoenix, 2005

Alabama State University, 1993

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

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Abstract

Inclusion involves the placement of students with disabilities in the general education setting, learning alongside their nondisabled peers. Unfortunately, many inclusion teachers are often faced with challenges that impact their ability to successfully meet the academic needs of students with disabilities. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to examine general education inclusion teachers' perceived barriers and needs regarding meeting the academic deficits of students with disabilities. Ely's conditions of change theory served as the framework to provide insight into the factors that affect the successful implementation of inclusion. The research questions focused on specific barriers that inclusion teachers perceive as interfering with their ability to meet the academic needs of students with disabilities. This study provided insight into inclusion teachers' perceived needs that may allow them to improve instructional strategies. Data were collected from semi-structured interviews with 12 general education inclusion teachers and analyzed for key themes using a priori coding. The predetermined codes were established from Ely's conditions of change theory. Results from the interviews provided research-based recommendations for schools and district leaders to integrate and improve how teachers meet the educational needs of students with disabilities. These key recommendations include increasing teachers' knowledge and skills through professional development, providing adequate resources, and time for teacher collaboration. Implications for social change include addressing teachers' perceived challenges for effective inclusion practices. This study may contribute to positive social change in the community by providing recommendations to other schools with similar concerns about what may need to occur to meet the needs of students with disabilities.

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Table of Contents

List of Tables

iv

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) 2004 amendment requires that students with disabilities are educated in the least restrictive environment (LRE) to the maximum extent as decided by the Individualized Education Program (IEP) with appropriate support and services (Francisco et al., 2020). One common strategy that school districts have implemented to meet the guidelines of LRE is inclusion. In the inclusion classroom, students with disabilities spend most of their school day included in the general education setting alongside their age-like peers. Inclusion rests on the idea that all students, regardless of their disability, have the right to be incorporated fully into general education. Inclusion is about providing an improved learning environment that considers the unique needs of all students.

Teachers need instruction in effective teaching practices to institute a change in practice. Such instruction guides teachers in overcoming perceived barriers that may impact student success. According to van Steen and Wilson (2020), as schools have become more inclusive, teachers must adjust and change their practices to accommodate the abilities of all students. Ely's (1990) conditions of change model served as the conceptual framework for this study and was used to explain environmental factors that could potentially interfere with the successful implementation of inclusion. While Ely's eight conditions of change include elements that could be considered barriers to successful implementation, research has also examined additional factors based on teacher needs. Other factors to be considered include teacher attitude, lack of empathy, self-efficacy, stress, and professional development. These different factors will be further elaborated on in Chapter 2.

Ely's (1990) conditions of change model contained eight environmental factors that should be implemented when initiating change to enhance its effectiveness. When they are not part of the environment, they become barriers that could impede the successful adoption of

inclusion. These conditions are: (a) dissatisfaction with the status quo, (b) sufficient knowledge, (c) availability of resources, (d) availability of time, (e) reward or incentives, (f) participation, (g) commitment, and (h) leadership. In this study, Ely's eight conditions of change was used to determine if teachers perceive any of these conditions as missing and possibly preventing the successful adoption of inclusion in the school setting. This framework will be reviewed more in this chapter and Chapter 2.

Academic progress is compromised when teachers are not adequately prepared to deliver proper instruction to students with disabilities. Many educators have associated students' need for more progress with limited teacher training (McKenna et al., 2019). According to Francisco et al. (2020), general education inclusion teachers should have an in-depth knowledge of skills when working with students with disabilities. It is critically important that teachers understand what students need since they are at the forefront of providing the appropriate instruction for students with disabilities. Professional development should be prioritized to ensure teachers can meet the needs of students with disabilities.

Teachers depend on meaningful professional development to improve or learn new skills and strategies. Martin et al. (2019) highlighted that teacher professional development is used to guide teachers of inclusion in making changes to instructional practices, which may ultimately produce student success. Providing teachers with opportunities to participate in professional development relative to inclusion strategies will allow teachers to learn effective inclusion strategies and evaluate their current teaching practices through collaboration with other peers on successful strategies (van Steen & Wilson, 2020). It can be an unfair expectation that teachers instruct students with varying abilities when sufficient professional development has not been provided. Ely's (1990) conditions of change note that proper professional development training is necessary to implement change successfully.

This study was conducted in a Midwest state suburban school district because inclusion teachers struggle to meet the academic needs of students with disabilities. Inclusion teachers have repeatedly discussed their challenges and disappointment with school administrators regarding not being adequately equipped to implement effective evidence-based strategies for students with disabilities (teacher, personal communication, May 2020). Along with these challenges, teachers have grown increasingly frustrated with the limited training and support that has created barriers against teachers providing a quality education for students with disabilities. Teachers' struggle with implementing effective evidence-based inclusion strategies has resulted in the district facing continued unfavorable test scores.

This study addressed inclusion teachers' perceived needs for meeting the academic demands of students with disabilities. Findings from this study might lead to social change by bringing awareness and research-based recommendations to school administrators that address general education inclusion teachers' perceived barriers. Understanding teachers' perceived barriers and needs could lead to a more successful inclusion environment and tremendous academic success. The success of inclusion could bring social change to the community by demonstrating a model for the successful implementation of inclusion where students with disabilities are making academic progress.

This chapter expounded on the problem and purpose of this study and the need for further investigation relating to the barriers that educators experience in meeting the expectations of inclusive education. Ely's (1990) eight conditions of change served as the theoretical framework and explained the importance of integrating certain factors that, when implemented collectively, may lead to a successful implementation of inclusion. I also discussed assumptions relating to the participants' responses to interview questions. The process for selecting participants and

limitations with the size of selected participants were also discussed. Additionally, this chapter discusses the gap in practice and possible implications for social change.

Background

The placement of students with disabilities in general education classrooms has increased over the past few decades. Following the 2004 reauthorization of IDEA, the education of students with disabilities has shifted from separate learning environments to general education classrooms wherever possible (Duchaine et al., 2021). In December 2015, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) was implemented in place of the No Child Left Behind Act. This law was established to make public schools accountable for student progress and ensure students with disabilities are provided the same learning opportunities as students without disabilities. This means that the student's IEP team members must consider academic placement in the LRE, the general education classroom, to the maximum extent possible.

Since students with disabilities are now being educated in the general education setting, ESSA mandates that they have an IEP that contains educational goals in alignment with Common Core State Standards (CCSS) (ESSA, 2015). This also means that students with disabilities must demonstrate the same academic progress as their nondisabled peers. To ensure that teachers are working diligently, teachers are held accountable for students' growth measures on annual evaluations. Teachers have expressed growing frustration over lower evaluation scores and not being fully equipped to execute evidence-based practices for special education students successfully.

Teachers' attitudes toward inclusion are essential for success (Parchomuik, 2019). An unfavorable attitude towards inclusion may be a barrier and limit the successful implementation of inclusion programs (Cansiz & Cansiz, 2018). Teachers often display a less favorable attitude

when they feel defeated or overwhelmed in their efforts to create a thriving environment for all students (Engin, 2020). To create a more positive frame of mind, teachers may reach a point where they become dissatisfied with the status quo, which is Ely's (1990) initial condition of change. Becoming dissatisfied with the status quo creates a willingness to want to change factors that are not currently effective.

Additional perceived barriers that inclusion teachers experience that may impact successful inclusion include a lack of empathy, self-efficacy, teacher stress, the need for professional training, and limited experience (Cansiz & Cansiz, 2018). Teachers' ability to adopt school reform and mandated policies is a continual concern as educators attempt to solve issues that impede student achievement (Martin et al., 2019). The changes and lack of guidance on implementing change create barriers that may hinder the overall intent of inclusive education, which is another crucial factor in Ely's (1990) conditions of change.

This study addressed a gap in practice by identifying the teachers' perceived barriers or conditions that are not being met for effective change to occur in the inclusion classroom. Much research supports the challenges that students with disabilities experience in the inclusion classroom. Still, little research addresses the perceived barriers experienced by inclusion teachers that may impact their ability to create an effective learning environment for students with disabilities. Adequately addressing the students' challenges is critically important to ensure that teachers are adequately prepared to handle the services the students need.

This study was needed to address the barriers that inclusion teachers experience when working with students with disabilities. These barriers must be discussed to enlighten school administrators about teachers' perceived barriers and possible solutions for continued challenges. With an increase in the number of students with disabilities placed in the inclusion setting, this study was needed to focus on the experience of students with disabilities and the influence

inclusion teachers can have in creating an effective environment for all students. Many teachers have expressed a need for professional training to address their confidence and increase knowledge in their ability to meet the needs of students with disabilities.

Teachers are the most critical component that affects student achievement. Inclusion teachers are also primarily responsible for educating students with disabilities (Kart & Kart, 2021). Unfortunately, the academic success of many students might be hindered by the barriers that impact the teacher's delivery of effective instruction. Educational practices have shifted in the United States (Kart & Kart, 2021), creating a great need for teachers to participate in new innovative techniques. Teaching strategies need to match the trend as times change and knowledge grows. Professional development can enhance the need to equip teachers in the inclusion classroom.

Problem Statement

The problem is that many inclusion teachers struggle to ~~address t~~he academic needs of students with disabilities. This is problematic because many students with disabilities are not making adequate academic progress in the inclusion classroom, as evidenced by standardized testing data (Butler & Nasser, 2020). Many teachers at the secondary level have expressed concern regarding low testing scores and admit that they are not adequately prepared to accommodate lessons to meet the individual needs of students with disabilities (Teacher, Personal Communication, May 2019). According to Woodcock and Hardy (2017), student achievement could be impacted when teachers lack the content knowledge and understanding of how to effectively expand their abilities to meet the needs of students with disabilities. The primary focus of this study was to examine inclusion teachers' perceived barriers and needs regarding teaching students with disabilities in middle school classrooms.

The perceived barriers for inclusion teachers are a growing concern in the local school district. These perceived barriers, including lack of training, have interfered with implementing practical strategies to increase student success in the inclusion classroom. Cansiz and Cansiz (2017) noted that teacher training for inclusive education contributes to the successful implementation of inclusion. Teachers look to relevant professional training to build their confidence in teaching strategies. Some professional development trainings have little relevance to needs of teachers and could be basically "useless". Classroom teachers rely on being prepared to institute planned lessons. Working with diverse learners dismisses preparedness when teachers have yet to experience professional training. Teachers in the local district have reported to the administration that limited training in evidence-based practices in inclusion has created a significant barrier to meeting the academic needs of students with disabilities (Teacher, Personal Communication, 2019). It prevents them from being effective in their job.

A frequent finding noted within inclusion literature is that general education teachers feel unprepared to adapt the curriculum for students with disabilities (Cameron, 2017). A possible explanation for limited preparedness is that an emphasis and urgency have yet to be placed on ensuring teachers are prepared to work in inclusive settings. According to Cameron (2017), limited teacher training in inclusive practices could potentially negatively impact the academic and social success of students with disabilities. Considering the barriers inclusion teachers face in a district with challenges, professional development should be prioritized. All students deserve a quality education and teachers who can provide quality instruction.

In the inclusion classroom, teachers may need clarification about which strategies should be implemented and how to differentiate lessons when they need to be more skilled in this area. Crispel and Kasperski (2021) discussed that some teachers might feel left alone when obtaining knowledge about evidence-based inclusion strategies most conducive to special education

students. For many inclusion teachers, it is challenging when they are instructing students with various academic skills and have yet to be trained to deliver the best instructional practices to meet the educational needs of all students (Bemiller, 2019). Additionally, general education teachers unfamiliar with special education pedagogies may find it quite challenging to employ accommodations as stipulated in the student's IEP. As the inclusion setting has increasingly become the placement for students with disabilities, the extent of professional development for general education teachers should match this growing trend.

Many middle school students in this district must improve on standardized state assessments. According to Michigan School Data, during the 2018-2019 school year, 847 middle school students were administered the state's reading assessment. In the middle school population, 505 students did not score proficiently. This data also included a subset group of 109 students with disabilities where alarmingly less than 10% of the students met proficiency standards. Poor performance of the subset group has been identified as a pressing matter included in school improvement plans for middle schools.

This district has a gap in current practice and what needs to occur. While the need for improvement and change has been identified as needing great attention, necessary strides to eradicate this problem have yet to happen. The urgency of this issue needs to be addressed and rectified, as evidenced by data that indicates students with disabilities are not making sufficient progress, which contradicts the goal and purpose of inclusion.

During the 2019-2020 school year, teachers across the district collaborated and presented their frustrations to the district's teachers' union. During this meeting, they expressed frustration regarding being held accountable for demonstrating adequate student growth on annual teacher evaluations. They felt defeated because they were not provided sufficient professional training on inclusion strategies (Teachers Union Meeting Notes, January 2020). Teachers also commented

that the district did not prioritize the student's needs. If the district had, they would have ensured students are provided the best educational opportunities possible, which begins with the teachers.

Teachers have argued over the unfairness of receiving low scores on annual teacher evaluations due to students with disabilities not achieving adequate growth on standardized assessments. Additionally, teachers have been cited on informal walk-throughs by the school principal for not applying differentiated instruction to students with disabilities in the inclusion classroom (Teacher, Personal Communication, May 2020). Despite the demand for teachers to demonstrate academic proficiency from students with disabilities, teachers have not had the skills to meet this provision. This has led teachers to question what they must do and how to overcome barriers that prohibit them from achieving a highly effective evaluation rating.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine general education inclusion teachers' perceived barriers and needs regarding meeting the academic demands of students with disabilities. The results provided research-based recommendations for schools and district leaders to integrate and possibly improve how teachers meet the educational needs of students with disabilities. This study aimed to bring insight to administrators, principals, and teachers about the challenges inclusion teachers are experiencing in meeting the needs of students with disabilities. Additionally, administrators may increase their understanding of how these perceived barriers can influence professional development topics related explicitly to include strategies that will enable teachers to meet a wide range of learners.

Research Questions

The research questions for this study were developed based on Ely's (1990) conditions of change.

1. What are inclusion teachers' perceived barriers to meeting students with disability's educational needs?

2. What are inclusion teachers' perceived needs to better meet the academic needs of students with disabilities?

Conceptual Framework

This study was grounded on Ely's (1990) Conditions of Change. Ely's (1990) Conditions of Change are based on eight factors that can be used to explain what is needed to assist teachers with effectively implementing an educational innovation such as inclusion. According to Ely (1990), factors that support the successful implementation and facilitation of change include (a) dissatisfaction with the status quo, (b) sufficient knowledge and skills, (c) availability of resources, (d) availability of time, (e) rewards or incentives, (f) participation, (g) commitment, and (h) leadership. Although Ely's (1990) conditions are listed individually, collectively, they define what needs to occur to create an effective implementation process. A more thorough analysis of Ely's (1990) conditions of change will be explained in greater detail in Chapter 2.

In this study, Ely's (1990) condition of change theory was used to inform the research questions and to define the teachers' perceived barriers to meeting the academic needs of students with disabilities. This study also evaluated the research participants' needs and their relation to Ely's conditions of change. Semistructured interviews were conducted with selected research participants to address the research questions. This method was chosen to gain the perspective of the individual lived experience of the research participants. Ely's condition of change demonstrated what was needed based on the data collected from the interviews.

Ely's theory was also used to explain teachers' perceived needs for the successful implementation of inclusion. Understanding teachers' perceptions regarding implementing

inclusion could assist school leaders in identifying the specific conditions for successful change that are not being met. Recognized teachers' perceived barriers can assist administrators in making informed decisions on areas of weakness and factors that must be addressed to lead to successful implementation.

Using Ely's (1990) conditions of change allowed teachers to describe their specific needs, how they impact successful implementation and possible solutions. These factors also highlighted missing content, which may impact successful inclusion. In Chapter 2, I expound further on Ely's eight conditions of change and the influence of the factors on successfully implementing inclusion. Qualitative semistructured interviews were conducted to respond to the research questions and gain information from inclusion teachers regarding their perception of barriers that impact their ability to be successful. These conditions of change will be used to develop a priori codes to help ground the data collection and analysis.

Nature of the Study

A basic qualitative study was used to answer the research questions by conducting semi-structured interviews. Qualitative methodology was appropriate for this study as it allowed me to focus on general education teachers' individual experiences relating to challenges with successfully implementing inclusion (Creswell, 2018). Qualitative methodology is driven by the desire to explain social behavior as an emerging concept (Yin, 2015). Applying qualitative research was selected as it explicitly embraces the contextual conditions, the social, institutional, cultural, and environmental conditions in people's everyday lives (Yin, 2015). In this study, the problem, purpose, and research questions align with qualitative methodology as this study aimed to explore teachers' perceived barriers and needs when instructing students with disabilities. Semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions were developed to gain an in-depth insight

into the participants' perspectives regarding the barriers experienced when trying to meet the academic needs of students with disabilities in the inclusion classroom.

Conducting one-on-one semistructured interviews allowed me to encourage conversation, react to what the interviewees stated, ask detailed questions, and follow up on the interviewee's initial responses (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The interviews occurred face-to-face through virtual participation. All engagements were recorded after gaining the permission of the participants. Following the conclusion of the interviews, I reviewed the recordings and created transcripts from the recorded interviews. After reviewing the transcripts, I analyzed the collected data and specifically sought to locate emerging themes using a priori coding.

Definitions

Inclusion: placing a student with disabilities within the general education classroom (Brock, 2018).

Least restrictive environment: to educate students with disabilities in general education classrooms alongside peers without disabilities to the maximum extent appropriate (Brock, 2018).

Students with disabilities: Students who are identified as having a disability and need special education programming and services (IDEA, 2004)

Assumptions

There are a few assumptions that were made with this qualitative study. It was assumed that all inclusion teachers were well-trained and capable of educating all students in a classroom with diverse learners. Most general education teachers present a positive outlook toward inclusion and have used a repertoire of strategies in the inclusion classroom. Even with employing several known effective techniques, some teachers still need help implementing evidence-based

approaches in the inclusion classroom that address the academic needs of all learners. The findings of this study can be used to create reasonable solutions to challenges that inclusion teachers experience in implementing inclusion strategies.

In interviews with participants, I assumed they would be open and candid in providing insight into their perceived barriers to successfully implementing inclusion. It was also believed that the participants spoke candidly about their experiences and the perceived need to progress in the inclusion classroom. This assumption was necessary for this study as the research participants shared their experiences. The expectations of authentic responses are required to have validity in the collected data. The purpose of this study was to bring awareness to school administrators of the perceived barriers and needs of inclusion teachers to meet the academic demands of students with disabilities; therefore, candid responses were essential in providing recommendations for improvement.

Scope and Delimitations

This study explored inclusion teachers' perceived barriers impacting their ability to employ evidence-based strategies effectively when working with students with disabilities. This study was influenced by middle school teachers' multiple requests for additional training on inclusion strategies. The request for potential participants was sent to twelve inclusion teachers who instruct students with disabilities in Grades 6-8. For this study, I sought to recruit teachers with at least three years of experience in the inclusion classroom. The participants of this study were fully certified licensed teachers,

Middle school teachers were explicitly chosen for this study as middle school students are included more in the general education curriculum in this district than in the elementary setting. In the selected district, elementary students with disabilities receive most of their

instruction in the resource room for 50% of their school day or in a self-contained classroom. In the high school setting, students are included in the general education classroom, and some may receive instruction in the co-taught classroom.

Considering the targeted environment, I thought of the potential for transferability of the data into context. Implementing the research-based recommendations at the research site could enhance the efficacy of teachers working with learners with special needs. Qualitative researchers use transferability to prove validity by determining if the findings can be successfully transferred to other settings (Ravich & Carl, 2016). For successful transferability, I provided the administration with a thick and thorough description of the findings from my study. This study aimed to address the perceptions of inclusion teachers. The potential for transferability was considered to get the voices of the teachers heard, which also leads to social change.

Limitations

Possible limitations of this study included the sample size. For this study, I selected twelve participants as I focused on one district, and only three middle schools in this district contain inclusion classrooms. With a smaller sample size, there was a chance to gain more purposeful information and avoid redundancy in responses. Another possible limitation was that I am a special education teacher in this district, and there may have been a bias based on my experience and knowledge in special education. A few of the participants are colleagues that I work with daily. I didn't want them to feel I attacked their teaching style, but I explored their perceptions of what they need to implement inclusion strategies successfully. My job as a researcher was to ensure that I did not persuade or influence responses during the interview (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Significance

This study was significant as it aimed to bring awareness to school administrators of the need to examine teachers' perceived barriers and conditions that impact inclusion teachers' ability to be successful in the inclusion setting. This study also was designed to assist teachers in understanding why they continue to have challenges with making necessary changes. Ely's (1990) eight conditions of change will give teachers a greater understanding of why they are having challenges properly implementing inclusion strategies.

Results obtained from this study assisted in creating professional development opportunities that general education teachers need to increase their knowledge of teaching strategies in the inclusion classroom. Professional development is most used to advance teaching skills and techniques when there is a need to improve specific teaching outcomes (Cooc, 2019). Professional development can assist teachers in applying proper support based on problem-solving activities needed to meet the demands of all students in the inclusive classroom (Brown-Chidsey & Bickford, 2016).

Findings from this study could lead to social change by bringing awareness and research-based recommendations to school administrators to address the general education teachers' perceived barriers and needs for meeting the academic demands of students with disabilities. According to Murphy (2018), school leaders are the catalysts in implementing inclusion successfully. Also, school leaders should be directed to ensure that teacher training and professional development are included to engage proper student-teacher interactions that lead to academic success. Specifically, the results of this study provide school leaders with the necessary conditions for change so inclusion teachers can better accommodate students with disabilities.

Over the past five years, the district's performance on standardized tests could have been better than other communities in the state. As a result of this poor performance, the district's

enrollment has also faced a steady decline. With needed corrective measures implemented for inclusion teachers, the community should improve students' academic performance, as evidenced by state assessments. Addressing the research problem is a beneficial factor from the social aspect, as reflected in the district's state performance rating, which also places the district in a more favorable status amongst the community.

Summary

Inclusion aims to provide an equitable education where all students are successful (Bemiller, 2019). As inclusion teachers struggle with barriers that impact their ability to differentiate instruction in the inclusion classroom, students with disabilities continue to fall behind. School administrators have instructed teachers to follow policies and practices regarding inclusion (Bemiller, 2019), but practical training has yet to be provided. While inclusion teachers want to create a thriving inclusion environment, they often need help to overcome barriers that interfere with implementing inclusion. The purpose of this study was to examine inclusion teachers' perceived barriers regarding meeting the academic needs of students with disabilities.

Chapter 2 includes a literature review of recent studies of barriers that general education teachers experience in the inclusion classroom. I expounded on Ely's conditions of change as the conceptual foundation for this study. Ely's conditions of change were used to explain specific factors that need to occur to experience successful educational change. Additionally, I discuss possible recommendations for resolving these barriers.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The problem addressed in this study is that many inclusion teachers struggle to meet the needs of students with disabilities. This qualitative study examined the perceived barriers of general education inclusion teachers regarding meeting the demands of students with disabilities. Over the past forty years, the model for educating special education students has experienced many changes. The earliest forms of special education environments for students with disabilities were in a setting separated from students without disabilities.

As time progressed, the law ruled that special education students must be educated in the LRE to the maximum extent possible based on the students' individual needs. The LRE is often the general education setting for many special education students. This placement shift for special education students into the general education setting is identified as inclusion (Bemiller, 2019).

Many inclusion teachers find instructing students with disabilities with the same content standards as students without disabilities quite challenging. They have expressed that they must be equipped to implement inclusion strategies successfully because they have yet to receive adequate professional training. State school agencies must ensure that teachers are prepared to address the academic needs of all students (Gottfried et al., 2019). It is an unfair expectation that inclusion teachers are tasked with executing evidence-based teaching practices in the inclusion setting without proper guidance from leadership. With the greater responsibility of educating special education students, school agencies must provide teachers with adequate professional training that will equip them to execute this task successfully.

This chapter identified the literature search strategy, conceptual framework, and literature review related to key variables and concepts. I reviewed the literature on the barriers that inclusion teachers may experience. This literature review began with the history of special education as history has shaped and influenced practices in special education. Ely's (1990) eight

conditions of change explained the perceived barriers that inclusion teachers experience that may interfere with implementing effective inclusion strategies. Additional obstacles to inclusion teachers' experience include teacher attitude, lack of empathy, self-efficacy, and teacher stress. This literature review described suggested changes that need to occur to create a more effective inclusion classroom.

Literature Search Strategy

To locate relevant literature relating to this study, I searched several databases to obtain current literature on the topics included in the literature review. I primarily used the Walden University Library to access current literature. I accessed ERIC and Sage through the Walden Library to search for literature with a date of no more than five years since publication. In addition to the Walden Library, I used textbooks from my Walden coursework. When searching for relative articles, I used phrases such as *special education and inclusion, students with disabilities, Ely's eight conditions of change, middle school inclusion classroom, teachers of inclusion in schools, teacher challenges with inclusion, professional development for inclusion, and co-teaching*.

This study's selected peer-reviewed journal articles contain a publishing date between 2017 and 2022. I wanted to ensure that I searched for the most recent and updated studies. While searching for pertinent literature, the following keywords were used to assist in my search: *inclusion, inclusion challenges, inclusion classrooms, inclusion teachers, students with disabilities, differentiated instruction, pre-service teaching programs, teachers' attitudes toward inclusion, teachers' perceptions toward inclusion, teacher professional development, and co-teaching*.

Conceptual Framework

Ely's (1990) eight conditions of change theory served as the conceptual framework to guide this study. Ely's condition of change theory explained the factors that may affect inclusion teachers' effective implementation of inclusion strategies. Ely's theory was beneficial for this study as it contains implications that can be used to influence educational change. The factors in Ely's model that promote successful implementation include (a) dissatisfaction with the status quo, (b) sufficient knowledge and skills, (c) availability of resources, (d) availability of time, (e) rewards or incentives, (f) participation, (g) commitment, and (h) leadership.

Previous researchers have relied on Ely's (1990) conditions of change when seeking to implement an innovation. Many have echoed common threads in Ely's work that Ely's conditions are essential for effective school change. In a study by Gaubatz and Ensminger (2017), using Ely's conditions, the authors examined department chairs' leadership during the change process. It also showed the connection between effective leadership and educational change. This study concluded that the absence of Ely's conditions of change led to barriers impacting full implementation. Gaubatz and Ensminger's showed excellent resistance to implementing the change process when the leaders were not adequately prepared to lead and guide the teachers.

In another study, Gao et al. (2021) used Ely's (1990) conditions to explore factors affecting teachers' intention to adopt online teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. Gao et al. could see that by using Ely's conditions, they could evaluate the impact of the absence of one condition. When all conditions are absent, Gao et al. determined that even the lack of one condition can serve as a barrier to other conditions that interfere with implementing the change process. Gao et al. concluded that a comprehensive understanding of factors that impact teachers' acceptance of online teaching is needed.

All eight components in Ely's (1990) conditions of change benefit this study by providing essential elements that collectively produce effective change. All eight factors of Ely's conditions of change should be carefully applied to ensure the best outcome. Another benefit of employing Ely's condition of change is allowing the concept to serve as a model to follow. This model is used to guide the organization to create effective positive change.

During the planning and monitoring of educational change, the current study benefited from Ely's conditions of change by allowing the eight conditions to serve as a checklist. The goal of the checklist is to ensure that all eight factors are included in the implementation phase. An additional benefit to using Ely's eight factors as a checklist is identifying areas with weaknesses or factors that may need further attention. It also highlighted areas of strength in the organization.

It was noted by Ely (1990) that the eight conditions are designed to work together. According to Ely (1990), the absence of one element can impact the change's effectiveness. Interestingly, Ely does not provide a set model to follow along with a specific set order. As a result, leadership is charged with designing and organizing the best way to implement the factors that work best for the organization.

Ely's first condition of change is dissatisfaction with the status quo. According to Ely (1990), dissatisfaction with the status quo may be developed from frustration caused by the pressure applied to teachers from the state to meet the achievement levels of students. Dissatisfaction with the status quo typically occurs when teachers are convinced that the change will make things easier. Ely's (1990) second condition of change is sufficient knowledge and skill to do the job. Considering the importance of this factor, it is commonly overlooked in education change efforts (Ellsworth, 2000). It is also noted that the lack of sufficient knowledge and skills by those responsible for implementing the change can provoke participants to discontinue pursuing the change process (Ellsworth, 2000). Ely's third condition in the change process is the

availability of resources. Administrators must ensure teachers and students have the necessary resources (Ellsworth, 2000). Ely (1990) emphasized that adequate resources must be available for the expected change to successfully support the implementation. Ely's (1990) fourth condition emphasizes that time must be available to implement the change successfully. When implementing a new change, teachers need time to adapt, integrate, and reflect on what they are doing (Ellsworth, 2000). Rewards and incentives are included in Ely's fifth condition of change.

When a teacher is rewarded for their efforts, the administration sends a message of appreciation. According to Ely (1990), extrinsic or intrinsic rewards can add value to innovation. Additionally, offering rewards for efforts can motivate those carrying out the implementation of change. Teachers want to know their efforts matter (Teacher Communication, 2021).

Participation is Ely's sixth condition of change. Participation is essential for teachers in the "buying in" process (Ellsworth, 2000). Participation in the change process allows teachers to take control of their ownership and role. In addition to participation, the seventh condition of change is the commitment of those involved. Ely (1990) stated that it is essential that there is concrete evidence of implementation support. It is crucial to the change process for members to be dedicated to the purpose of the change.

The final condition of change is the evidence of leadership. According to Ellsworth (2010), in the change process, teachers depend on leadership to guide and direct them through the change. During the implementation phase, leadership provides guidance and sets the tone. The administration has the most significant impact on the success of educational change.

Literature Review Related to Key Concepts and Variable

Special education was designed to address the instructional needs of individuals with disabilities (Francisco et al., 2020). Since its inception, the field of special education has

experienced many changes. Changes have been related to (a) who qualifies for special education, (b) how special education students should be educated, and (c) where special education students should receive their education (Francisco et al., 2020). The following literature review begins with the history of special education and travels to the status of special education reform. Additionally, I discussed inclusion teachers' perceptions of barriers that impact their ability to implement inclusion effectively. This literature review also discussed possible solutions administrators should consider improving.

Historical Perspective of Inclusion

Although we live in a time of rapid change, we need to know and understand our past to make wise decisions in our present. Konnert and Augestein (1995) noted that history is an ongoing and continuous dialogue that connects us to the past. The earliest accounts of the field of special education began in the eighteenth century (Fowler et al., 2011). Special education is unique because of its distinct place for students with disabilities. Special education serves those with disabilities and includes diverse and at-risk learners (Francisco et al., 2020).

In the earliest historical special education accounts, students with disabilities were treated inhumanely and excluded from public education. For nearly 60 years, students with disabilities were educated in a separate facility; some were even institutionalized (Francisco et al., 2020) and sometimes hidden from society. They were hidden away because they were considered not normal. They were judged and ridiculed by society because of their disability (Kelly, 2019).

In 1954, the landmark case of Brown v. Board of Education changed how special education students were educated. The ruling of Brown v. Board of Education brought awareness that individuals with disabilities are entitled to equal rights as their peers. The outcome of the court case granted equality for all students and put an end to the injustice of racial segregation

(Kelly 2019). This case was not only about racial inequality. Still, it is significant to special education because it provides an understanding that all people have the right to equal access to public education.

In 1975, special education experienced another reform that brought growth through The Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) (Fowler et al., 2011). The premise of this law was to ensure that all individuals with disabilities are provided with a free appropriate public education (FAPE). Through IDEA, identified students with disabilities must have an Individual Education Plan (IEP). The IEP ensures that students with disabilities participate in the general education curriculum to the maximum extent possible in the LRE (Gilmore, 2018).

Regardless of the continued changes instituted, the goal has always remained: to increase student achievement and help students with disabilities participate in the general education setting. No Child Left Behind (NCLB, 2001) held public school districts accountable for student achievement. ESSA replaced NCLB and mandates that public schools protect disadvantaged students, leading them to achieve high academic standards (Sun & Xin, 2020). To accomplish this, ESSA requires that all students, including those with disabilities, are instructed by CCSS at their current grade level. This paved the way for schools to ensure that students with disabilities are included in the general education setting to the maximum extent possible, as stated in IDEA. The current state of inclusion in many of our public schools could be better and warrants room for improvement (Francisco et al., 2020).

Description of Inclusion

IDEA paved the way for students with disabilities to have the same educational opportunities as their non-disabled peers through inclusion (Bemiller, 2019). Inclusion places students with disabilities with age-like peers in the general education setting (Bemiller,

2019). With inclusion, students are expected to be fully included in the general education

curriculum to the maximum extent possible in the least restrictive environment, as determined by

the student's IEP team. Inclusion was designed to reduce the exclusion of students with

disabilities from the general education setting and increase the inclusion of students with

disabilities (UNESCO, 2009). According to Farooq and Rafiq (2019), inclusion includes changes

and modifications to academic content, approach, structures, and strategies with a shared vision

for all students in an inclusive environment.

Inclusion does not only encompass the placement or physical location of students with

disabilities in the general education. It is an environment where all students are treated equally

and fairly. The presence of barriers has blocked the opportunities for students with disabilities

over time (Barth et al., 2019). In this setting, all students are afforded the same educational

opportunities and held to the same standards.

In the inclusion setting, students with disabilities receive exposure to the general

education curriculum standards that students may experience in the special education setting. One

of the principles of inclusion is that students with disabilities are educated directly in the general

education setting with their peers (Bemiller, 2019). Although students with disabilities may not

have grade-level skills equivalent to their peers, successful inclusion can be achieved (Gottfried et

al., 2019). Successful inclusion can be achieved when high expectations are set for students

(Gottfried et al., 2019). With proper guidance and instruction, they will most likely work hard to

achieve goals and meet expectations when given high expectations.

Three standard methods are used to deliver instruction that ensures students with

disabilities are included to the maximum extent possible. One method is full inclusion, where

students with disabilities receive all instruction in the general education setting (Gregory, 2018).

The other is co-teaching. This occurs in general education, where a general education teacher and

a special education teacher simultaneously deliver instruction. Students may also participate in small group instruction (Butler & Nassar, 2020). With this approach, students spend most of their school day in the inclusion setting and the remainder with the resource room teacher. With this option, the special education teacher works outside the inclusion classroom with a small group of students in a resource room setting (Butler & Nassar, 2020).

Benefits of Inclusion

Including students with disabilities in the general education classroom has been one of the most difficult changes in our school system. Although it presents several challenges, it is the most beneficial way to promote the academic success of students with disabilities. IDEA (2004) states that implementing inclusion purposefully is more effective for all students than traditional models. Inclusion intends to maximize the educational experience of students with disabilities within mainstream schools (van Steen & Wilson, 2020). Research shows that with accommodations and support, students with disabilities can make adequate progress and grow academically when exposed to grade-level content (Meindl et al., 2020). Positive academic achievement for students with disabilities in the inclusion classroom is more significant than if they only participated in the special education setting separated from peers (Murphy, 2018). The academic success of students with disabilities participating in the general education setting is due to the challenging curriculum that encourages academic learning. An inclusive environment ensures the growth and development of all learners (Kart & Kart, 2021). In the traditional special education setting, students are provided instruction that mainly addresses functional skills.

Studies have shown that students with disabilities benefit positively when receiving instruction alongside non-disabled peers (van Steen & Wilson, 2020). Research shows that students with disabilities in general education classes perform better when the academic

expectations are greater (Kart & Kart, 2021 & Mortier, 2018). Participation in the general education classroom motivates students with disabilities to match the progress of their peers. Contributing to this success is access to a quality curriculum when taught alongside peers by teachers with content expertise (Mortier, 2018). For example, in a typical middle school classroom, science instruction is delivered by a state-certified science teacher. This method is preferred as students receive direction from a teacher specializing in the pedagogy of the subject matter.

Learning alongside non-disabled peers prepares students with disabilities to interact with others inside and outside school. Inclusion also opens the door for social/emotional learning for students with and without disabilities, who are often limited when educated in separated environments (Murphy, 2018). Without inclusion, students with disabilities may feel isolated and lack relationships with nondisabled peers. Many times, students with disabilities may limit communication with nondisabled peers out of fear of not being accepted. Our world is not designed to cater to those with disabilities. As a result, students with disabilities must learn how to function in a world that may not always address their social and emotional needs.

The inclusion environment allows students with disabilities to develop strong relationships with peers and increase acceptance of diversity from non-disabled peers (Egalite, 2019; Murphy, 2018). The inclusion setting also assists students with disabilities in improving their self-esteem (Gallego-Ortega & Rodriquez-Fuentes, 2021). Students with disabilities learn problem-solving skills collectively through collaboration with peers. They begin to focus on their abilities rather than their disabilities. They also start to see what other non-disabled peers can do, which may trigger them to have the confidence and desire to do the same.

Being included in the general education classroom instead of being segregated in a unique educational setting can foster a sense of belonging. One of the premises of inclusion is to

provide equal opportunity and education equality for students with disabilities (Gallego-Ortega & Rodriquez-Fuentes, 2021). Students with disabilities want to be accepted in the same manner as their non-disabled peers. When separated from age-like peers, they may have lower self-esteem or thoughts that they are not good enough to participate actively in the general education curriculum.

Benefits for Students Without Disabilities

Inclusion was created to optimize the learning experience for all students, not just those with disabilities. For general education students, the inclusive environment creates accessibility to other beneficial materials that may not have been previously available (Egalite, 2019). This may include instructional strategies and technology. Egalite (2019) also stated that specialists such as special education teachers could share strategies with inclusion teachers when using co-teaching models to maximize teaching effectiveness.

In the inclusion classroom, children without disabilities learn to decrease prejudice and increase tolerance towards others with differences. Students without disabilities develop acceptance, respect, and appreciation for diversity (Meindl et al., 2020; Roldan et al., 2021). The more students know about diversity, the more willing they are to accept it. Martin (2018) also stated that students without disabilities might develop or increase their empathy toward others with disabilities. Roldan et al. (2021) stated that students without disabilities might improve their ability to help others in need. While learning alongside peers with disabilities, those without disabilities know to decrease prejudice and increase tolerance toward others who may have challenges. They also gain satisfaction and pride themselves in helping others.

Peer relationships in the inclusion classroom can allow students without disabilities to increase their leadership skills. Inclusion provides students without disabilities the opportunity to serve as peer models (Martin, 2018). As peer models, they can encourage positive behavior

practices. This also provides a chance to build and increase one's self-esteem. Students often copy the behavior of others, which can assist with both students' social and emotional development. By increasing social development, students are often more prepared socially beyond school and later in adulthood (Keffallinou, 2020). Social development is grown when associating with those who have learning differences.

Challenges of Inclusion

Dissatisfaction with the Status Quo

Ely's (1990) first condition of change states that for the implementation of innovation to be successful, people must be unhappy with the status. In education, this can occur when teachers become frustrated with the recent performance and seek an opportunity for change to bring more progress. Dissatisfaction with the status quo typically occurs when teachers are convinced that the change will make their job easier. Gaubatz and Ensminger (2017) noted that members dissatisfied with the current situation are more than willing to participate actively in positive social change. According to Ely (1990), dissatisfaction with the status quo may be developed from frustration caused by the pressure applied to teachers from the state to meet the achievement levels of students.

According to Guan et al. (2021), dissatisfaction with the status quo is a good place to start in the change process. It allows those in charge of implementing the change process to express concerns and seek solutions (Guan et al., 2021). For some educators, making a change in practice can be difficult. It can be challenging for some to be willing to make a change as they may have become accustomed to how things have been going in the past and have yet to make changes and adjustments to their teaching style.

Dissatisfaction with the status quo serves as a barrier that may interfere with the successful implementation of inclusion. In situations where teachers are not unhappy with the current state of a particular environment, they may need more motivation to change. To create this move toward social change, teachers may develop discontentment, which leads them to look for a positive change (Ainscow, 2020). The dissatisfaction establishes a frustration that ignites the realization that things must change from their current state. Experiences of dissatisfaction can assist the educator's willingness to accept innovation and actively participate in the successful implementation process.

Sufficient Knowledge and Skills

Ely's second condition of change is sufficient knowledge and skill to do the job. Ely (1990) stated that enough knowledge and skills are essential in the change process for successful implementation. For the change to be fully adopted, teachers need to be knowledgeable about how to put the change into action. According to Gaubatz and Ensminger (2017), members with sufficient knowledge and skills to participate in the change process can support the implementation phase.

Teachers enriched in knowledge and skills create successful inclusion as they can deliver instruction confidently. According to Kirkpatrick et al. (2020), despite the positive impact associated with inclusion, there remains a growing concern over the capacity of teachers to deliver instruction with sufficient knowledge and skills. The problem is that a lack of knowledge and skills can present a barrier in the inclusion classroom as it will interfere with providing students with high-quality instruction.

Educators need to receive sufficient training to overcome knowledge and skills as a barrier. Limited knowledge and skills impact teachers' confidence in their ability to meet the

needs of diverse learners (Ferriday & Cantali, 2020). Professional development or teacher training often strengthens sufficient knowledge and skill.

With proper training, it is easier for inclusion teachers with previous experience in special education to sufficiently meet the needs of all students in the inclusion classroom. A study conducted by Ferriday and Cantali (2020) concluded that teachers were doing a disservice to students with disabilities requiring additional support without sufficient training on inclusion strategies. To improve knowledge and skills as a barrier, teachers report the need for specific, targeted, specialized support that will enable them to provide quality instruction (Ferriday & Cantali, 2020). Professional training in specific evidence-based teaching strategies can dissolve the barrier and possibly create more opportunities for successful implementation.

Availability of Resources

The third condition of change is the availability of resources. According to Ely (1990), the change will be successful with the necessary tools to implement change. Administrators must ensure that teachers and students have the essential resources (Ellsworth, 2000). Ferriday and Cantelli (2020) noted that a lack of resources could be one of the most significant barriers to the implementation process. A lack of resources such as books, technology, and other necessary materials can cause hindrances in the classroom. Help needed to implement inclusion may also include the availability of specialized consultants to assist in teaching strategies (Chu et al., 2020). Teachers depend significantly on resources to provide effective instruction. In the inclusion classroom, teachers employ differentiated instructional strategies that may require various accommodations to meet the students' academic needs, as indicated in the student's IEP.

The availability of resources may affect the teacher's ability to support inclusive education effectively in their classroom. Gaubatz and Ensminger (2017) and Onyishi and Sefotho

(2020) indicated that sufficient funding, support personnel, and adequate equipment are imperative for successful educational change. Teachers have argued that it is an unfair expectation that the implementation of inclusion creates success when teachers have not been provided with the proper resources to make the change happen. When there is a lack of availability of resources, the students suffer.

Lack of resources creates a barrier, hindering teachers' ability to deliver quality instruction. According to Chu et al. (2020), teachers who lack professional training tend to depend more on resources and support to assist in teaching in the inclusive classroom. Teachers have expressed frustration and distress when appropriate resources are not made available. In this age of accountability, ensuring all the required resources are available is necessary.

Availability of Time

Many teachers find that having time to ensure that instruction is delivered effectively is a barrier. Teachers need time to adapt, integrate, and reflect on their actions (Ely, 1990). According to Onyishi and Sefotho (2020), time to prepare has been indicated by teachers as a barrier when it comes to implementing differentiated instruction in the inclusion classroom. Teachers need time to develop and plan effective lessons when implementing differentiated instruction.

Availability of time can work against teachers needing to accommodate lessons to meet the unique needs of all learners. Teachers indicate they need additional time during the school day to develop differentiated lessons (Kart & Kart, 2021). They may need time to make essential classroom adaptations, such as modifying the curriculum or adjusting how content is delivered based on students' needs (Wilson et al., 2018). Time can present a challenge when they must differentiate instruction in the general education classroom for 20-25 students and grading student's work.

In today's inclusion classrooms, students' levels of ability are not all equivalent; therefore, instruction should be differentiated to meet the specific needs of students, which takes time to develop and prepare. According to Kart and Kart (2021), planning time is a significant barrier in middle and high schools. Teachers have mentioned that time restraints interfere with teachers' ability to cover curriculum content over a period set by administrators (Onyishi & Sefotho, 2020). For middle and high school teachers, much of their time in teacher preparation focuses on specific content areas rather than instructional skills. It is unrealistic not to provide additional planning time when teachers must differentiate instruction.

Inclusion teachers have also indicated that time to plan and collaborate with other teachers can be a barrier when preparing instruction for students in the inclusion classroom. Time to collaborate with other teachers can assist in developing lessons for students with disabilities (Kart & Kart, 2021). Special education teachers are an asset during collaboration, as working with students with unique learning styles is their area of expertise. During the collaboration, the teachers can discuss how the students learn and develop and prepare multiple teaching strategies for differentiated instruction. Martin et al. (2019) also noted that time constraints could be a barrier for teachers and administrators when they are not afforded time to reflect or further understand the content when implementing new or continued practices. Working with students with disabilities may require more time and effort than working with students who do not present challenges. This may include additional time spent preparing to ensure the student's unique needs and demands are met in the classroom.

Reward and Incentives

Rewards and incentives are included in Ely's fifth condition of change. Receiving rewards and incentives can motivate and encourage teachers' performance in the innovation

process (Ely, 1990). Feelings of appreciation may lead to teachers becoming more motivated to discover what needs to occur to create a successful inclusion classroom (Gaubatz & Ensminger, 2017). Research suggests that when teachers perceive their work as valued, they may become more motivated to produce excellent work (Yasmeen et al., 2019). Teachers may become inclined to go the extra mile when the administration notices and appreciates their efforts. By receiving rewards and incentives, teachers may develop confidence in their ability as the reward signifies a job well done.

When teachers are not offered rewards and incentives, they can be led to believe that their efforts are unnoticed, and they may feel taken advantage of. It is recognition by the administration that inspires them to put forth a reasonable effort. When this does not occur in the inclusion classroom, it becomes a barrier where teachers lose their motivation to teach or go the extra mile.

Motivators are used to increase the teacher's sense of satisfaction by ensuring that the administration does not disregard teachers' strenuous efforts. According to Yasmeen et al. (2019), teachers can be motivated to perform zealously when an extrinsic reward or incentive is possible. A study by Benito and Scott-Milligan (2018) noted that employees respond positively to motivators from rewards and incentives. Some popular rewards and incentives included increased status, pay, and positive recognition from peers. As a result of their strenuous efforts in the inclusion classroom, teachers should be rewarded for extending themselves and making a difference in students' lives.

Participation

Participation is Ely's (1990) sixth condition of change. Teacher participation is essential to encourage teachers to "buy in" to the change process (Ellsworth, 2000). Participation should

include teachers actively making decisions in the change process (Ely, 1990). Participation in the change process allows teachers to take ownership of their roles. Engin (2020) stated that it is essential for school administrators to strongly consider employing teacher participation during the change process to impact teacher performance positively. Martin et al. (2019) indicated that a working atmosphere where teachers share responsibility and a shared school vision for improvement increases positive implementation. Rojo-Ramos (2021) expressed that teachers must actively participate in the change process to eliminate barriers that could hinder their positive attitude toward the change.

Commitment

Ely's seventh condition of change is commitment (1990). In the change process, commitment from teachers can be a barrier if stakeholders are not committed to the change. Ely indicated that commitment involves stakeholders committing their efforts and time (1990). Teachers who are not committed and dedicated to the success and goals of an inclusive classroom interfere with students' academic achievement. Having a sense of job satisfaction influences teacher commitment (Demirok, 2018). According to Lyons and Bandura (2021), satisfied employees are most willing to be committed to change. In a study by Demirok (2018), the author discussed that committed teachers go the extra mile by spending additional time to complete tasks and have a greater rate of teacher retention. Therefore, to engage teachers, the administration must ensure that teachers are pleased with their current position in the school.

Leadership

Leadership is Ely's (1990) eighth condition of change. Ely (1990) indicated that leadership's expectations and commitment broadly impact the implementation process. The administration can present a barrier to implementing many special education programs when

teachers do not feel supported (Bondi et al., 2019). According to Ellsworth (2010), in the change process, teachers depend on leadership to guide and direct them through the change. Not only does leadership guide in this role, but they are also there to offer suggestions, support, and consultation. When implementing change, it takes strong leadership to guide others to produce successful implementation.

School leadership is responsible for the daily structure of all elements of the schools they oversee. Principals can spend between 36% and 58% of their school day addressing special education concerns (Murphy, 2018). In the leadership role, teachers and all other staff members depend heavily on the principal as a guide and support. As the head of the school, the principal is the one who motivates the teachers (Engin, 2020).

School leadership creates the tone of how the teachers will work together collaboratively to create a successful and positive learning environment (Martin, 2019). In modern terms, leadership can involve all stakeholders. Engin (2020) stated that leadership could be explained through "distributed leadership." Engin (2020) also noted that it is nearly impossible to expect the school administration, usually the school principal, to carry out all the demands and duties alone. The administration can distribute responsibilities to a well-functioning school environment.

Barriers to Inclusion

Teacher Attitude as a Barrier

A positive attitude is one of the most critical factors in implementing inclusion. Teachers' attitudes can profoundly impact the successful implementation of inclusion (Cansiz & Cansiz, 2017; Galaterou et al., 2017 & Gregory, 2018; Singh et al., 2020). It is one's attitude that can determine how a teacher behaves and interacts with their students (Cansiz & Cansiz, 2017 & Gallego-Ortega & Rodríguez-Fuentes, 2021). The attitude of inclusion teachers can be used to

create an environment that offers positive encouragement or negatively obstructs the inclusion process (Gallego-Ortega, 2017 & Rodriguez-Fuentes, 2021).

Students with disabilities are included on an equal basis with peers; therefore, it is essential to address the unfavorable attitudes of teachers. This negative attitude from teachers creates a barrier to a successful and supportive inclusion environment (Cansiz & Cansiz, 2017). When this is the case, the unfavorable attitude toward inclusive education can be one of the most dangerous factors affecting its successful implementation (Gallego-Ortega & Rodríguez-Fuentes, 2021). It prohibits the inclusion teacher from delivering effective instruction and disrupts learning.

Teachers' lack of knowledge in adapting lessons to meet students' diverse needs can often contribute to unfavorable attitudes. Several studies have indicated that professional development could improve teachers' attitudes toward inclusion (Bansal, 2018; Galaterou et al. (2017). Kirschner et al. (2018) supported this by stating that teachers' attitudes regarding implementing inclusive practices are based on teacher training. Gallego-Ortega and Rodriguez-Fuentes (2021) further noted that more time teachers spend in training leads to a more positive attitude. This positive attitude can transcend motivation in creating a thriving learning environment where lessons are adequately differentiated and accommodated.

In the inclusion classroom, the level of disabilities varies from mild to moderate. Cansiz and Cansiz (2017) supported that teachers' attitudes create a barrier based on the type of disability the students have and the severity of the disability. According to a study by Lubke et al. (2018), inclusion teachers found that students with emotional behavior disorders were more challenged in the inclusion classroom than those with other disabilities. Inclusion teachers tend to present more of a positive attitude toward students with a physical disability or a learning disability than students with a behavior disorder.

Considering that students with behavioral challenges can disrupt the learning environment, some teachers firmly believe they should be excluded rather than included in general education (Hind et al., 2019). One known reason Lubke et al. (2018) reported is that students' emotional behavior disorders can disrupt the learning environment with attention-getting behaviors that can be severe enough to warrant removal from the inclusion classroom. The barrier in teachers' attitudes is related to students' behavior challenges that may create an environment where teachers must constantly monitor the behavior and avoid conditions that can trigger negative behaviors (Lubke et al., 2018). According to Gregory (2018), for inclusion teachers to display a positive and welcoming attitude towards those with emotional behavior disorders, they must be convinced and feel comfortable that the students will not disrupt the learning environment.

Lack of Empathy as a Barrier

Lack of empathy is another barrier to the successful implementation of inclusion. Parchomuik (2019) defined empathy as the ability to be sensitive toward the feelings of others. According to Navarro-Maeu et al. (2019), a lack of a positive teacher attitude can also impact the teachers' ability to display empathy. Demonstrating empathy is essential to optimize attitudes toward inclusion and reduce the prejudices and stereotypes associated with students with disabilities (Navarro-Maeu et al., 2019). The lack of empathy can cultivate a barrier in the inclusion classroom where teachers and others are unwilling to understand the challenges that students with disabilities must conquer. This action can leave the student with disabilities feeling unwanted and prejudiced due to their disability.

Teachers who lack empathy toward inclusion students may believe that students with disabilities are a hindrance rather than an asset (Navarro-Maeu et al., 2019). A lack of empathy

can impact the teacher seeing a student with disabilities as they perceive a student without disabilities. Parchomiuk (2019) expressed that professional development for inclusion teachers should also include training in empathy development as an essential skill. To change this perspective, teachers and others may need to increase their ability to put themselves in the shoes of students with disabilities (McKenna et al., 2019). Another method may include spending time with the student, getting to know their interests, and fostering a teacher-student relationship. This exchange allows teachers to demonstrate empathy by understanding the individual's circumstances and further improving the teachers' attitude toward inclusion (Navarro-Maeu et al., 2019).

Self-Efficacy as a Barrier

Along with demonstrating a positive attitude toward inclusion, teachers must possess a high level of self-efficacy. Bandura's (1977) Social Cognitive Theory identifies self-efficacy as a person's belief in their capabilities to perform specific behaviors. If teachers believe they can produce the desired outcome, they will be enriched in self-efficacy and motivated to execute inclusion strategies confidently. Nurindah et al. (2019) stated that self-efficacy is needed to contribute to a teacher's ability to produce effective learning. It is one's confidence in their ability allows them to deliver instruction that will meet the needs of their students.

Instruction delivered by a teacher who is not confident in their ability to meet the academic needs of students is a disservice. According to Kiel et al. (2019), it can be challenging to meet the academic challenges of unique learners when teachers have a lowered level of self-efficacy toward their ability. This reduced level of self-efficacy is attributed to a teacher who needs to learn what to do and be given the tools to perform the job adequately. Most teachers want to see their students excel academically and present their best. They are placed in a difficult

position when they lack the confidence to push students academically or handle difficult situations.

Limited self-efficacy can be a barrier that affects inclusion teachers' ability to successfully execute lessons for diverse learners. The perception of a teacher's ability to address the instructional needs of students with disabilities relies heavily on the teacher's level of self-efficacy (Livers et al., 2020). According to Livers (2020) and Nurindah et al. (2019), limited self-efficacy can affect the teachers' ability to problem-solve, adapt instruction, plan, and design meaningful instruction to meet the needs of all students. Teacher self-efficacy plays a significant role in executing lessons in a classroom of students with varying skills. The teachers' confidence creates trust in their abilities and good judgment. Limited self-efficacy impacts teachers' self-assurance in their ability to address the social and academic needs of students with disabilities. Teachers who present uncertainties in their abilities may also lead to a lack of confidence. Some also become reluctant to put forth effort in attempting.

This sense of self-efficacy may create doubt and feelings of defeat in teachers' abilities. Teachers with a perceived low sense of self-efficacy tend to shy away from challenging tasks, have low aspirations, and dwell on their deficiencies when working with low-achieving students (Bandura, 1993). Low self-efficacy can interfere with teachers' ability to persevere through challenges and unexpected events, thus creating a barrier. Unfortunately, low self-efficacy can also impact teacher retention and burnout (Nurindah, 2019). Unfortunately, many teachers leave the teaching profession frustrated and overwhelmed with challenges. Limited professional training that supports and increases teachers' confidence (Gaines & Barnes, 2017) can be associated with low self-efficacy.

One of the most significant factors interfering with teacher self-efficacy is the confidence typically gained from professional development or teacher training. Kiel et al. (2019) further state

that teachers with higher self-efficacy seem more invested in ensuring that students with disabilities are successful. Stites et al. (2018) concluded that a heightened sense of teacher self-efficacy is often associated with enhanced student achievement, willingness to adopt new instructional strategies, and motivation to provide special assistance to low-achieving students. Nurindah et al. (2019) added that the goal of self-efficacy can be achieved through opportunities and experiences for teachers to improve the quality of learning. A higher sense of self-efficacy is typically observed in teachers who have received adequate professional training and experience and the motivation to meet the demands of all learners in the inclusion classroom.

Stress as a Barrier

Implementing inclusion pedagogies and strategies without sufficient training and experience can ignite stress. Stress becomes a barrier to implementing inclusion when teachers must prepare to handle the dynamics of inclusion (Galaterou & Antoniou, 2017). They become faced with figuring out what specific needs and challenges students have and how to address them correctly, which can put teachers in a stressful situation.

According to Galaterou and Antoniou (2017), a few factors that influence stress for many teachers include a lack of planning time, behavioral challenges, and acceptance of students with disabilities by classmates. Unfortunately, stress can negatively impact our health. All teachers want to see their students do well, and the pressure to meet specific criteria without formal guidance contributes significantly to stress. Additionally, the stress and anxiety associated with the challenges of implementing inclusion have caused some teachers to give up and leave the profession (Koenen et al., 2019).

Planning time can adversely affect inclusion teachers' ability to provide differentiated instruction to students. With inadequate preparation time, teachers fail to deliver quality

instruction (Livers et al., 2020). Lack of planning time influences teacher performance, leading to poor student outcomes. In the inclusion classroom, where students' abilities vary, adequate planning is needed to differentiate instruction. Frustration and stress levels increase when teachers believe they could successfully tackle the task if provided the additional time to plan accordingly.

Another factor that influences stress can stem from behavior challenges in the classroom. According to Koenen et al. (2019), serving students with emotional and behavioral impairments leads to more teacher stress than any other area of disability. Teachers are faced with more behavioral challenges in the classroom than ever before. Teachers become stressed by the interference caused by challenging behavior when trying to create and maintain a productive learning environment. Stress becomes a factor when teachers must simultaneously juggle delivering differentiated instruction and enforcing discipline, along with other classroom happenings (Koenen et al., 2019). This barrier can be decreased when teachers have gained knowledge and strategies in practices that could even eliminate discipline as a distractor.

Inclusion teachers' stress can also be attributed to students without disabilities accepting and including students with disabilities. According to Lubke et al. (2019), it is imperative that students without disabilities view students with disabilities as full members of the classroom and not as outsiders or visitors. Lubke et al. (2019) also stated that teachers have reported that it is often a challenge getting students without disabilities to welcome students with academic challenges. This creates stress for the inclusion teacher as the teacher attempts to create an environment of social acceptance for all members. Having the skills to manage situations that can become stressful can be developed by teacher professional development where the inclusion teacher would learn the best way to handle challenging situations. It is the challenges that come along with inclusion that create stress.

Critics of Inclusion

When a new initiative is adopted, some believe the proposed change is needed to advance special education students' education. On the other hand, some oppose the proposed change and share concerns that the change will not be beneficial or necessary. In the case of inclusion, teachers and other stakeholders may resist the idea because of the critical need for teacher competence (Gregory, 2018). Those who oppose inclusion are concerned that teachers are not adequately prepared to meet the diverse needs of students with disabilities (Egalite, 2019 & Gilmore, 2018). Critics have expressed concern about teacher preparation, causing them to conclude that it is unfair to lump students together in an inclusive classroom without proper support for the students and the teacher (Gregory, 2018). They want to know they can rely on fully knowledgeable teachers to implement inclusion strategies. While inclusion teachers are willing to adapt to classroom assignments, it is very challenging for those not fully trained in providing necessary adaptations.

 Critics are also concerned about the placement of students with behavioral concerns in the classroom. Although the student's IEP team decides placement, Gilmore (2018) stated that the general education setting may only sometimes be the best educational placement for these students. Stakeholders in opposition to inclusion argue that inclusion is not beneficial for students who present behavioral challenges if the placement disrupts the learning environment. Those opposed to including students with behavior disorders say that the disruption takes away valuable instructional time from those who do not present behavior concerns (Egalite, 2019). These students are often removed from the inclusion environment when disruptive behavior occurs to decrease further distractions. Critics are concerned that teachers do not have proper training in preventing behavior incidents or knowledge of reasonable procedures when presented with behavior challenges that jeopardize the learning environment.

Critics conclude that exposure to the general education curriculum for disabled students is considered inclusion. Some have argued that exposure is just that. Karisa et al. (2020) indicated that the mere placement of students with disabilities in the same classroom with non-disabled peers may not always suffice as inclusive education. For some critics, mere exposure is what inclusion should look like (Karisa et al., 2020). The issue with just providing exposure is that students with disabilities are not receiving differentiated instruction that will allow them to achieve academic goals. The students are just sitting in the class without a guide directing how to implement evidence-based strategies.

It can be concluded that critics also oppose inclusion for students who continue failing to make adequate progress, suggesting that inclusion is only practical for some. Gilmore (2018) argued that those in the education system must correct their mistake by equating the academic setting with the actual progress the student is making. This suggests that critics believe that students with disabilities should only be allowed to participate in inclusion with their age-like peers if they can excel academically. Before the idea of inclusion is abandoned, critics should look for a rational explanation for the continued poor progress and the structure needed to assist with academic growth.

Advocates for special education students have suggested that inclusion was created to save money and dismantle special education. Kauffman and Horby (2020) contend that closing special education schools and programs is a tactic used to save money rather than ensuring the inclusion of students with disabilities. This notion can cause a significant worry for some as the importance of money is viewed as taking precedence over students' rights to receive a quality education. Most importantly, when deciding how to use educational funding, the model should consider what is best for the individual child and their right to FAPE (Chartrand, 2019).

In response to the opposition to inclusion programs, Kauffman and Horby (2020) emphasized that further reforms should be made to develop special education programs rather than eliminating special education. It is further noted by Karisa et al. (2020) that there is a need for more changes in the traditional schooling system that will lead to the recognition of learners' strengths and weaknesses rather than the focus on progress with predetermined curriculum targets that are external from the individual. Although the cost of special education programs may be an underlying problem for some districts, some critics argue that students with disabilities are deprived of an appropriate education when participating in inclusion programs.

Possible Solutions to Barriers

Professional Development

A key aspect of implementing successful inclusion begins with teachers' professional development. Professional development is an essential element that aids in supporting teachers with increased knowledge and self-confidence in an area to promote educational success in their classrooms (Gaines & Barnes (2017) and Rojo-Ramos et al. (2021). Gaines and Barnes (2017) also stated that opportunities for professional development should be an ongoing endeavor, as things in our education system seem to change periodically. To effectively respond to the changing needs in our society, teachers need professional training that demonstrates how to provide high-quality instruction. Teachers depend on professional development to bridge the gap between knowledge and understanding to meet the needs of students.

Considering the great need for teachers to implement strategies with high fidelity, it is erroneous to automatically assume that teachers are experts in educating students with disabilities. Chu et al. (2020) argued an alarming disconnect exists between the standards mandated for teachers to implement inclusion and the training and professional development that

supports teachers in meeting these standards. Chu et al. (2020) further stated that a lack of administration providing professional development and training minimizes the importance of continued learning for teachers to learn and develop inclusive teaching practices. Similarly, Byrd and Alexander (2020) indicated that the pressure to meet state and federal mandates minimizes the focus on best practices through professional development. The system fails students when we do not ensure they access high-quality instruction. As school administrators facilitate, inclusion teachers must be prepared to move students forward through professional development.

Being immersed in professional development allows teachers to implement inclusion strategies properly. It develops the teacher's knowledge of the increased responsibility of creating an inclusive environment (Ferriday & Cantali, 2020). Rojo-Ramos et al. (2021) emphasized that special attention should be given to meeting the demands of the challenges associated with inclusion through professional development. This will ensure that students are instructed by teachers skilled in specific inclusion strategies. In an inclusive environment, students must be taught by teachers experienced in harvesting students' learning advancement.

Teacher professional development is the most used method when teachers must change instructional practices that can lead to student success. The outcome of professional development can influence teachers to change their personal beliefs and teaching practices (Martin et al., 2019). Professional development is where teachers learn essential information on managing student behavior, assessments, and expectations (Byrd & Alexander, 2020). It provides the key to the successful implementation of inclusion that guides teachers to having a positive outlook and the needed tools to make inclusion successful.

The positive outlook also transcends teachers increasing their willingness to engage students with disabilities inclusively (Woodcock & Hardy, 2017). Chu et al. (2020) reported that students taught by teachers who have participated in professional development relative to

inclusion significantly outperformed their peers on standardized tests. This proves the importance of professional development. It demonstrates that students succeed when teachers are professionally prepared to meet their academic needs.

Martin et al. (2019) discussed that administrators experienced success with professional development when they allowed teachers to have a voice in selecting professional development subjects. Allowing teacher participation in professional development is more favored than the top-down model, where the district decides on professional development without teacher input (Martin et al., 2019). The top-down method can create barriers to successful implementation and disconnection between teachers and administration. Teachers feel valued and appreciated when administrators hear their voices in educational change.

Allowing teachers to participate in selecting specific professional development topics decreases the barrier associated with teachers' willingness to buy into the change process. Martin et al. (2019) also noted that professional development could be a negative experience for some when the selected activities do not align with the teachers' professional needs, which are critical to any transformation process. Teachers are more willing to actively participate and increase knowledge in a specific area when allowed to seek professional development opportunities.

Professional development opportunities for inclusion teachers should also consider the context of the school. According to Martin et al. (2019), a careful examination of the students' different needs, experiences, interests, motivations, and sociocultural objectives when considering professional development topics. Professional development provided in a suburban district may not be most suited to meet the needs of teachers in a large urban community or a rural district. This may be the situation for some districts, where teacher input is essential in deciding on the type of professional development inclusion teachers may need.

Providing professional development catered to inclusive strategies will only partially resolve the need for successful implementation. Along with including essential elements of special education, teachers must also increase their knowledge of inclusive pedagogies (Woodcock & Hardy, 2017). Teachers must also learn how to handle various diverse needs in a classroom with multiple skill levels. These pedagogies should focus on meeting the needs of all students in the school, which teachers report as one of the most significant challenges in the inclusion classroom.

Teachers must be more knowledgeable and secure in what needs to occur to provide the classroom environment students deserve. Ferriday and Cantali (2020) stated that a lack of professional development might create negative perceptions of inclusion and judgment toward students with disabilities when teachers feel ill-prepared. Prolonging or not providing much-needed professional development may lead to teachers aborting the idea of attempting to create an inclusive environment.

Wanting to deliver high-quality education consistently but needing more skills can frustrate some teachers. Gaines and Barnes (2017) declared that this negative attitude could impact teacher retention. Jackson et al. (2017) note that professional development can also affect teachers' perception of the teaching profession, their identity as educators, and their knowledge and teaching skills. To develop comfortability in the intent and process of inclusion, teachers must be educated in all aspects of inclusion through professional development and training. With inclusion's added challenge to classroom teachers, they must know how to adapt and differentiate instruction based on the student's academic needs and address individual differences.

Coteaching

For students with disabilities, there has been much debate regarding the best setting for unique learners. It is the job of the student's IEP team to collaboratively decide on the student's placement based on their individual needs. For some students with disabilities, this setting may include a more restrictive environment, such as a resource room where students receive specialized instruction from a special education teacher. Another option is the self-contained classroom. In these settings, students with disabilities receive instruction from special educators for most of their school day (King-Sears et al., 2021). Based on the student's disability, students may spend half their day or only one hour in this setting, with the remainder in general education.

As a result of deciding on the best location for special education students, researchers have evaluated the efficacy of student placements, particularly co-teaching. In the inclusion setting, co-teaching has been a growing popular and effective method for students with and without disabilities. It is a service delivery model designed for students with disabilities who receive instruction alongside age-like peers without disabilities from general education and special education teachers in the same general education classroom setting (Lochner et al., 2019). Practical instruction in the co-taught classroom requires proper training through professional development, the collaboration of general and special education teachers in an inclusive learning environment, and strategies that promote cognitive engagement. The general and special education teachers collaborate to create lessons tailored to students' needs.

Closing the achievement gap is essential and can be achieved with the co-teaching model. Many districts across the nation have reported successful outcomes of co-taught classrooms. Combining the expertise of general and special education teachers is assumed to be more beneficial for both students with and without disabilities (Jackson et al. (2017) & King-Sears et al. (2021). Lochner et al. (2019) found that students with and without disabilities who participate

in the co-teaching setting often display higher levels of cognitive engagement linked to learning. As an added benefit, all students experience smaller student-to-teacher ratios (Jackson et al., 2017). The smaller student-to-teacher ratio allows teachers to develop cooperative learning and student-led classroom activities.

Differentiated Instruction

Differentiated instruction is thought of as a pedagogical approach. It includes the students' learning styles and teachers knowing the best instructional method for each student. Differentiated instruction allows teachers to meet students' needs at their skill level. Before inclusion, teachers used the one-size-fits-most method in teaching (Byrd & Alexander, 2020). In the inclusion classroom, teachers must be knowledgeable in differentiating inclusion to meet students' needs.

While students' learning profiles may be similar in many ways, they are not the same and should be viewed as individually different. It is noted by Butler and Nasser (2020) that differentiated instruction provides support to all students of various backgrounds, educationally and personally. This knowledge reflects students' socioeconomic status, race, culture, gender, and particular education diagnosis. It also shows teachers how to incorporate the student's learning styles into lessons.

Teachers should know the best evidence-based strategies for differentiated instruction, most often provided through professional development. Butler and Nasser (2020) indicated that it is essential for teachers to learn how to provide differentiated instruction to diverse learners. Differentiated instruction can be categorized into student readiness, interest, and learning profile (King-Sears et al., 2018). For example, some students may have open-ended responses when providing unit assessments, whereas others may have multiple choice. An additional option may

include text-to-speech, large print, or verbal responses. The correct strategy must be applied based on a student's needs, leading to the student's successful experience.

Summary and Conclusions

This chapter reviewed the current literature on perceived barriers that inclusion teachers experience when working with students with disabilities. Reasonable solutions to these perceived barriers were also discussed. Special education reform has undergone many changes and has had some groundbreaking successes since its inception. An amendment to IDEA in 2004 brought further progression by mandating that students with disabilities be educated in the least restrictive environment (Gilmore, 2018). The Least Restrictive Environment is a guideline that states that students with disabilities must be educated in the general education setting to the maximum extent possible and provided accommodations and related services (Gilmore, 2018). To fulfill the provisions of this mandate, students with disabilities are included and instructed along with age-like peers in the general education setting.

Inclusion aims to prevent student segregation and exclusion while promoting diversity. It also includes advocating for all students, providing equal opportunities, educational equity, and social justice (Gallego-Ortega & Rodríguez-Fuentes, 2021). Studies have proven that inclusion is the most beneficial method for students with disabilities; professional development that includes specific strategies for a thriving inclusion environment is needed for teachers to implement inclusion successfully. Professional development allows teachers to increase knowledge in classroom adaptations, modifying curriculum, or altering content delivery methods (Wilson et al., 2020).

Ely's conditions of change served as the conceptual framework for this study. Ely's framework identifies specific factors that must occur during the change process to implement

inclusion efficiently. These factors can serve as a checklist to ensure successful implementation. Ely (1990) stated that the absence of one characteristic might impact the effectiveness of the change process. Although Ely's conditions are separate items, they work collectively. Ensuring that all elements of Ely's conditions are tactfully in place may create successful educational change. This literature review examined the perceived barriers that inclusion teachers experience when working with diverse learners. The research addresses the perception of inclusion teachers' barriers in the inclusion classroom and conceptually what needs to occur to create a successful implementation.

In Chapter 3 of this study, I discussed the research method and rationale. Chapter 3 discussed my role as the researcher, methodology topics that include participant selection, instrumentation, procedures for recruitment, participation, and data collection. To address the gap in the literature, Chapter 3 described how data was collected from research participants and analyzed. Following data collection, I discussed the trustworthiness of the data and ethical procedures. I also discussed what general education teachers perceive as barriers, what is necessary to cultivate a thriving inclusion environment, and the social change implications.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to examine general education inclusion teachers' perceived barriers and needs regarding meeting the academic demands of students with disabilities. Pursuing the perception of inclusion teachers' barriers and conditions helped identify what needs to occur to create effective inclusion classrooms. This chapter describes the research design, the role of the researcher, and the methodology. Explanations of participant selection, instrumentation, and data analysis are also included in this chapter.

Research Design and Rationale

This qualitative study answered the following research questions: What are inclusion teachers' perceived barriers to meeting students with disability's academic needs, and what are inclusion teachers' perceived needs better to meet the educational needs of students with disabilities? Qualitative research was selected to respond to the research questions effectively. Qualitative research was chosen as it focuses on the interpretations of individuals' direct experiences of the subject. It is appropriate for this study as qualitative research aims to answer why something is or is not part of the participant's experience.

The problem explored in this study was that many inclusion teachers struggle to meet the academic needs of students with disabilities. Qualitative research lets the researcher describe the experiences and perspectives of individuals involved in the phenomenon narratively (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). This study used qualitative data to inform the school district of the teachers' perspectives regarding challenges with fully implementing inclusion. The data also offered possible solutions to what may need to occur to implement inclusion successfully.

Qualitative research provides an in-depth understanding of how people see, view, and approach personal experiences in their everyday lives (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Applying

qualitative methods provides a close examination that leads to detailed descriptions and narratives about the phenomenon being studied. In qualitative research, the researcher uses fieldwork in a naturalistic setting to collect data from the subject. This method allows the researcher to discover and understand a subject and how others experience it. It also provides insight into how and why a phenomenon occurs (Leko et al., 2021).

Role of the Researcher

As the researcher of this study, I gained insight into the thoughts and feelings of inclusion teachers regarding their perceived barriers and needs in the inclusion classroom. To gather research data, I conducted semi-structured interviews with the participants to gain insight. I have taught in this Midwest school district for 13 years, creating a positive working relationship with many participants. Over time, I have developed a relationship with my colleagues where many are comfortable and open to discussing and collaborating on the needs of students with disabilities. Past conversations with my colleagues regarding the problem aided my decision to conduct semi-structured interviews. I have heard their plea frequently over the past few years, expressing the need to establish a more comfortable level with inclusion strategies.

As the Resource Room Teacher, my colleagues depend on my expertise to assist with challenges with inclusion students. With the relationships I have developed with my colleagues, the participants were comfortable during the interview and willing to provide valuable data. Providing a clear understanding of the study's purpose likely provoked participants' willingness to provide thorough responses. I wanted the participants to feel confident that their voices of concern would finally be heard.

The participants working directly with me in my current building presented greater comfort during the interview than the others. I have been in the district long enough that I have

probably crossed paths with the participants who do not work in my school. Knowing that I have a daily working relationship with a few participants, I remained professional and did not allow bias to influence any of the participant's responses during the interview.

To avoid interjecting bias, I closely monitored my questioning and body language to reduce the opportunity for bias. I wanted the participants to feel comfortable sharing their perspectives and trust that the data I gathered was kept confidential. This research study occurred in the same district where I am currently employed and did not present a conflict of interest. I wanted the participants to know that this study was designed to assist with an existing problem in our district. I believe in this district and its initiatives. I have a particular commitment to this district as a proud alumnus. I also wanted the participants to know that sharing their perspectives could give the administration a greater understanding of the issues and what teachers believe is needed to solve this issue.

Methodology

A basic qualitative study was used to answer the research questions by conducting semi-structured interviews. Qualitative methodology was appropriate for this study as it allowed me to focus on general education teachers' individual experiences relating to the challenges of successfully implementing inclusion (Creswell, 2018). Qualitative research explicitly embraces the contextual conditions, the social, institutional, cultural, and environmental conditions in people's everyday lives (Yin, 2015). Qualitative methodology is driven by the desire to explain social behavior as an emerging concept (Yin, 2015). Qualitative methods heightened social problem awareness among teachers and administrators and developed possible solutions.

Participant Selection

This study included twelve research participants. Although twelve is a small sample, it is sufficient to respond to the research questions. In qualitative research, the sample size should be based on the ability to thoroughly answer the research question rather than weighing heavily on the number of participants (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Selecting a sample size of twelve is considered small but can sufficiently assist in making decisions for a broader population. A smaller sample size can adequately be used to answer the research questions in this study. With this study, a smaller sample size aided in answering the research question and provided valuable data.

For this study, I selected 12 research participants. I recruited twelve research participants who are inclusion teachers from the district's three middle schools. To recruit the participants, I contacted the school's administrators and explained the purpose of the study. With the administration's permission, I emailed 15-20 inclusion teachers.

To collect data, I conducted one-on-one semi-structured interviews. Using this interview process allowed me to encourage conversation, react to what the interviewees stated, ask detailed questions, and follow up on the interviewee's initial responses (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The interviews allowed the participants to express their perceptions in a non-judgmental environment. I wanted the participants to view the interview as an opportunity to provide data administrators will review that could lead to social change in the school district.

The school district is in a suburban area with urban and suburban students. The enrollment for the 2022 school year was approximately 5,100 students between grades Kindergarten through twelve, with 98% minority enrollment (Black Americans). The middle school population consists of 1,200 students in four middle schools. In the middle school

population, there are approximately 80 students with disabilities who participate in the inclusion setting.

Instrumentation

In qualitative research, the instrument is identified as the tool used to collect the data for the study (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). In this study, the researcher was the primary instrument. As the researcher, I conducted one-on-one semi-structured interviews with the participants. The interview protocol guide included the questions and prompts that guided data collection. The interview guide is accessible in Appendix A. The participant's responses to the interview questions served as my primary source of data collection.

I selected one-on-one semi-structured interviews to allow me to engage in conversation and encourage participants to share their perspectives comfortably. The instrument presented the same questions to all participants in semi-structured interviews to collect data (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). During the interviews, I took notes on the participant's responses and provided follow-up questions tailored to the participant as needed. The one-on-one semi-structured interviews occurred using the Zoom virtual platform. With the participant's consent, the session was recorded.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

Recruitment

When gathering information for recruiting potential participants, I sought the assistance of school administrators in providing the names and contact information of potential participants. I explained the study to the district administrators, which entailed the criteria of the participants I wanted to participate. After receipt of the names of potential participants, using email, I sent a letter of invitation that thoroughly explained the purpose of the research and their role as a

participant. This letter also requested their consent and agreement to participate in the study. Additionally, this request advised participants that their participation was voluntary, and I ensured their identity would remain anonymous.

After receiving consent from the participants, I scheduled the interviews. I planned to communicate with the participants using email and personal phone calls. The interviews occurred using the virtual platform Zoom. I convened the interviews virtually because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The district has yet to lift restrictions for in-person meetings due to the number of cases impacting this area and the potential for other issues that in-person meetings could bring.

Participation

Upon approval from the Walden University Institutional Review Board, I solicited research participants. I reached out to potential participants through email, explaining in detail the purpose of the study and requesting their participation. Once responses of willingness to participate were received, I provided the participants with informed consent. Following this procedure, I began scheduling interview dates.

At the beginning of each interview, I ensured that I informed the participants that the session was being recorded and again assured them that I would maintain confidentiality and keep their identities anonymous. The advantage of recording the interview was that it allowed me to go back and review the data while analyzing responses. The recorded virtual platform allowed me to analyze the participant's body language and evaluate their facial expressions in response to the interview questions. Although I took field notes during the interview, I reviewed the interviews and created additional notes when I was not pressured to get through the interview.

Data Collection

The interviews were conducted virtually after school hours on the campus of the participant's assigned school. My plan was to be stationed in my office on the campus. The design of the interview consisted of ten questions for the participants. The first five questions responded to research question #1, and the remaining five responded to research question #2. As the researcher, I asked the same questions of the participants in the same order for each interview. Considering the research participant's time, I aimed to interview for approximately 45 minutes after school hours. Some interviews extended this time based on the data provided in the participant's responses and the follow-up questions.

After the interview, I asked the participants if they had any additional questions or concerns. I also thanked the participants for their time and contribution to my study. As a tangible way of expressing my gratitude for their time, willingness to participate, and cooperation, I sent the participants a formal thank-you note. Included in the thank you, I provided the participants with an Amazon gift card within one week of concluding the interview. After I reviewed the transcribed data, I sent the participants a copy of the transcript, asking them to review the data to ensure I had captured their remarks appropriately. I asked the participants if they would like to make changes to the data to please advise. I gave the participants two weeks after receipt of the transcript to make additional changes.

Data Analysis Plan

Data were collected from semistructured interviews that had been recorded and transcribed. Analyzed data was used to understand the perspectives of inclusion teachers' barriers and needs relating to meeting the demands of students with disabilities. The analyzed data aimed to bring awareness to a Midwest school district of inclusion teachers' perspectives regarding the challenges of implementing inclusion effectively. In bringing awareness of the inclusion teachers' views, the data can guide the district in devising a plan to decrease the gap in practice that impacts inclusion teachers confidently applying evidence-based teaching practices to students with disabilities.

After completing the interviews, I reviewed the audio recordings and took the time to listen to the collected data carefully. After reviewing the audio recordings, the recordings were transcribed verbatim into written format. In qualitative research, transcription makes the collected data more accessible to analyze (Leko et al., 2021). After the data had been transcribed, I began the coding process.

The coding process for this study consisted of several methods to make sense of the data. Coding the data included a priori coding. The researcher can create a priori codes in qualitative research before analyzing the data (Saldana, 2016). A priori coding enables an analysis leading to answering the research questions (Saldana, 2016). A priori coding is chosen as it will be most suitable based on the research questions and the ability to establish themes before the coding process begins based on the conceptual framework.

The a priori codes I used for this study are based on Ely's (1990) eight conditions of change. These codes are factors directly taken from the conceptual framework and the literature review and align with the study's research questions. The a priori codes consisted of

dissatisfaction, knowledge and skills, resources, availability of time, rewards or incentives, participation, commitment, and leadership. After placing the data into the a priori codes, I analyzed the data further.

Following the placement of the data into a priori codes, I employed open line-by-line coding. In qualitative data, open coding allows the researcher to examine the data closely and identify similarities and differences (Saldana, 2016). I created codes with open coding as I worked through the transcribed data. I combed through the data manually, line by line, analyzing the data extracted from the interviews. After completing the open coding process, I placed the coded data into the pre-established a priori codes category related to a particular theme. Before beginning the second coding cycle, I reviewed the codes and the collected data to ensure that the codes were organized and clearly understood.

For the second cycle of coding, I employed axial coding. Axial codes are created by looking at how the data can be categorized (Saldana, 2016). When grouping the data, the researcher looks for the codes' relationships and how the codes can be merged. At this point in coding, I took data from the interviews and narrowed it down into themes that emerged from the data. Coding the data also included looking for discrepancies. During the data analysis, I looked for discrepancies in data that did not fit into the themes.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness demonstrates the confidence that the data is reliable and valid. It relates to the degree of trust. Yin (2015) refers to trustworthiness as the study's findings' authenticity, quality, and truthfulness. Trustworthiness is a goal of the study established at the beginning with the participant's agreement and consent to participate in the research and occurs during the data collection. The researchers trust that the participants will respond truthfully to interview

questions. Researchers establish relationships with the participants to note if they can depend on the participant to be trustworthy during the interview. Trustworthiness also occurs after the study (Cypress, 2017). Reviewers of the research trust that the data is factual.

In analyzing the data, the researcher wants to ensure that the data collected is valid. Cypress (2017) defines validity as being justifiable, meaningful, logical, and the quality of being sound. Establishing truth in qualitative research demonstrates that the data collected is what exists and is accurate. To prove validity, the researcher aims to show that the findings are high quality. In qualitative research, validity is mainly concerned with the accuracy and truthfulness of the data (Cypress, 2017). According to Ravitch and Carl (2016), data validity ensures that the research findings are genuinely the participants' experiences and not fabricated. Qualitative researchers use credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability to establish validity.

Credibility

Credibility is the accurate and truthful account of the participant's lived experience (Cypress, 2017). Credibility considers the complexities that are presented in the research. To demonstrate credibility in this study, I linked the study's findings with existing real-life complexities (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). In this study, to establish credibility, I used member checks. With this strategy, I checked in with the participant after I received the written transcript. I reviewed the transcript with the participant to see if something may have been eliminated from the data or if something may need further explanation. I ensured my interpretations were accurate through member checks (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I wanted to make sure that I kept the lines of communication open. The member checks also assured the participants of the value of their provided data. I hope member checks will let the participants know I have represented them well. It will also enable them to ask me additional questions about their participation, perspective, and the collected data.

Transferability

Qualitative researchers use transferability to prove validity by determining if the findings can be successfully transferred to other settings (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). In this study, I provided a thick and thorough description of the research findings to ensure transferability. A comprehensive and exhaustive description allowed readers to compare the results to other contexts (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). A thick description of the data can provide clear and coherent descriptions that make it easier for researchers to interpret. I immersed myself in knowing, analyzing, and understanding the data to accomplish this. I ensured that my interpretations were simple, and data was organized and displayed in a way that was simple enough to follow.

Dependability

Dependability shows the quality of being trustworthy and reliable. Consistency and stability are established over time (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Readers need to know that they can depend on the validity of the data. Dependability allows the researcher to aim to confirm that the data is consistent and repeatable. Audit trails are used to demonstrate the reliability of the research findings. The researcher's field notes, and other records used to collect data created audit trails and provided evidence of the trustworthiness of the data.

Triangulation was also created to prove the dependability of the data. Triangulation uses multiple sources to ensure the data, analysis, and conclusions are valid (Moon, 2019). There are a few strategies that qualitative researchers could use to create triangulation. To establish the dependability of the research data, I made a rich and detailed audit of my coding methods.

Confirmability

In qualitative research, Confirmability refers to the researcher's objectivity during the data collection (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). As the sole instrument of this study, I established confirmability through reflexivity. Reflexivity occurs when the researcher self-reflects on

potential biases and predispositions they may bring to the study (Cypress, 2017). This reflexive journal can be beneficial during the research process in keeping essential notes during the study and confirming findings (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). At the end of an interview, I took a moment to reflect on the interview and added notes as needed while the data was fresh. These notes highlighted responses that related to the predetermined themes that I selected, along with additional perceptions.

Ethical Procedures

Qualitative research uses human and social sciences as an approach to solving problems. Considering that conducting qualitative research involves the use of humans, it is required that the researcher protect the participants without jeopardizing the quality of the study (Taquette & Souza, 2022). As a researcher with human participants, I gained the study's approval using the Walden University Internal Review Board's (IRB's) ethical requirements. Respect for ethical principles is required throughout the entire research process. Ethics involves the rights, responsibilities, and use of the language of humans. According to Taquette and Souza (2022), the ethical principles that guide a research study are based on ensuring human dignity. It is the researchers' responsibility to protect the rights of the participants and ensure they are not going to be caused any harm during the research process.

It was my job as the researcher to ensure beneficence to the participants. Providing beneficence to the participants means that I maintain each participant's welfare and do not cause harm (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I respected my participants by keeping their identities and any other personal information they shared confidential. I ensured that the participants felt free from any unnecessary pressure to participate. As the researcher, I informed the participants about the research, risks, benefits, and participation agreement (Taquette & Souza, 2022). I established trust between myself and the participant, ensuring I did not deceive, manipulate, or intimidate them.

As the researcher, it was crucial to prepare for possible challenges or unexpected events while conducting research and be ready to handle them accordingly. A researcher must be prepared for a participant refusing to participate or withdraw from the study, considering this is their right. In gaining consent, I expressed this to the participants and advised them that they have this right at the beginning of the interview. If a participant chose to withdraw or deny participation, I would not have coerced them into staying the course but respect their decision. Another challenge that could have occurred was a technology issue. If I had experienced an interruption with technology during the interview, I was prepared to discuss rescheduling with the participant.

Protecting the participant's identity was critically important. A breach of confidentiality can quickly occur in research studies where data has been obtained electronically (Taquette & Souza, 2022). I used pseudonyms throughout the research process to ensure confidentiality and anonymity. This includes not identifying the participant by their name during the interview since the interview was recorded. All data, study materials, and transcripts did not have the participant's name as a measure of confidentiality. I shared my confidentiality methods with the participants to increase their trust in me as the researcher.

It was also essential to ensure that the participants' identities were kept confidential, and that all data were securely stored without compromising the content. We live in a time where we depend on data collection occurring electronically. While this is the fastest way, the researcher must take special considerations to ensure the data is stored securely. Before I began the study, I carefully considered any possibility of a breach in data and to avoid this occurrence (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). As the researcher, to secure the identity of the participants, I assigned a unique pseudonym to protect their identity during the recorded interview. I promised the participants to

maintain confidentiality, I did everything I could to ensure I did not disappoint the participants by breaking the line of trust.

As the researcher, I accumulated vast data and field notes during the research process. Some of the collected data was in written note form from field notes and short reminder notes, while others were stored electronically. Any written format was placed into one specific notebook, which I can only access to manage this data. To ensure the safety and protection of the recorded information, I saved the data on an external drive with a name unrelated to the project to protect the participants and the data. This drive is secure and only accessible to me. I have stored the data including field notes on a flash drive and will save for five years. At the end of the five years, I will destroy all content on the saved flash drive.

An integral part of research is sharing the findings. With that in mind, I would like to share the results of my study with the administrative team in the school district. I want to encourage the district to implement the recommendations based on the data from this study. Most new initiatives begin with data to support the need for change. I hope my study's data will invoke positive social change in a failing district. I want to discuss my results as an effort to advocate for the teachers of inclusion and students with disabilities.

Summary

In this chapter, I discussed the research design and rationale for this study and my role as the researcher. I discussed my recruitment, participation, and data collection methods in this basic qualitative study. I also discussed the process for ensuring trustworthiness and ethical procedures. Upon IRB approval, I began my research, and the results of my findings are included in Chapter 4. In Chapter 4, I presented the results of the data collection. This chapter also includes data collection, the data analysis process, the data results, and evidence of trustworthiness.

Chapter 4: Results

General education secondary teachers in a Midwest school district were experiencing barriers that impacted their ability to successfully meet the academic needs of students with disabilities in the inclusion classrooms. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to examine general education inclusion teachers' perceived barriers and needs regarding meeting the academic demands of students with disabilities. Ely's (1990) eight conditions of change explained the factors needed to implement an initiative successfully. The data were collected from semistructured interviews to answer the following research questions: (a) What are inclusion teachers' perceived barriers to meeting the students with disability's educational needs? and (b) What are inclusion teachers perceived needs to meet the academic needs of students with disabilities? This chapter focused on the results achieved from data collection. This chapter described the setting relating to the interview, the data collection process, data analysis, the results, and evidence of trustworthiness.

Setting

The setting for this study was convened virtually using the Zoom platform. The Zoom meetings occurred from an office on the premises of one of the district's middle schools, and the interview participants were in a classroom. The Zoom meetings occurred after the dismissal of the school day as scheduled between me and the participant. The interviews were convened after school to maintain confidentiality and avoid any possible interruptions. Also, COVID-19 restrictions were still in place in this district; therefore, only virtual meetings were allowed during data collection. Scheduling time and location did not present any challenges during the study as I have a working relationship with all the participants, and we know how to navigate our way in search of uninterrupted time.

The participants in this study were twelve middle school general education inclusion teachers, which consisted of three male and nine female teachers. Amongst the twelve participants, there was a mixture of ethnicities represented. All the participants had a minimum of five years of teaching experience. Three participants had more than twenty-five years of teaching experience in this district. Two teachers had only been in the district less than five years. There are four middle schools in the district with 1,200 middle school students. Of the 1,200 students, 94% are African American, 4% are Hispanic or Latino, and 2% are Caucasian. In this district, over 70% of the students receive free and reduced lunch.

Data Collection

Following the receipt of IRB approval from Walden University, contact was made with school administrators with a request to conduct semi-structured interviews with general education inclusion teachers. All the administrators were very welcoming of the idea and supportive of the study. I then sent a personal email to each potential participant explaining the research and requesting participation. The email requesting participants was sent to twenty middle school teachers across the district. I sent the request to more than the targeted population of twelve in case there were invited teachers unwilling to participate or other factors that may have prevented the interview. I analyzed the responses from teachers who agreed to participate and selected twelve for the study. I then sent the twelve participants the informed consent document, and we scheduled the interviews. The interviews took place from May 1 - June 9, 2023.

During the Zoom interviews, I was stationed in my office on the premises of one of the district's middle schools, and the participants were stationed at their assigned schools away from any possible distractions. The duration of each interview was 35 to 45 minutes in length. Using the Zoom platform allowed me to interact with the participant in a more intimate manner where I

could observe and take note of the participant's behavior and physically see the participant's expressions when responding.

After the interviews, I reviewed the Zoom recordings, listening carefully the collected data. I used the recording feature on Microsoft Word to transfer the recorded data from Zoom to obtain a written transcript. I analyzed the recorded data with the transcribed data three times to ensure I captured all recorded data. I then read and reread each transcript several times, submerging myself in the data to familiarize myself with it. I reviewed my field notes to assist with making connections across transcribed data. Following that process, I checked the transcribed data to clean up the responses and ensured the sentence breaks were identified correctly.

Once I had clear transcripts, I sent a copy of the transcript to the individual participants via email. I sent the transcripts to the participants for their review to ensure I captured their data correctly and to make any changes they wanted to occur to the transcript. I gave the participants two weeks following their interview to return the transcript to me with noted changes. I also told the participants I would move forward if I did not hear back from them by the end of the two weeks. As the researcher, the next step was to analyze and code the interview data.

Data Analysis

The data analysis process began after I received each participant's approval of the interview transcripts. I saved all the transcribed data and video of interviews on a flash drive and locked it in my desk drawer. The first step involved organizing the transcripts. Using Microsoft Excel, I opened one file and copied each set of interview data onto twelve different tabs within the file. Each interview participant was assigned a number from 1 through 12 to maintain the

confidentiality of the participant's identity. Each participant's number was associated with the same number tab on the spreadsheet to keep the data organized.

Each spreadsheet contained three columns used to organize data for the coding process. The first column was used to distinguish the dialogue in the rows between the Interviewer (I) and the Participant (P). The second column contained the transcribed data, and the third was for coding. I highlighted the rows with a bold font that included the interview (I) questions to make them more visible and more accessible to distinguish during the coding process, and the participant's (P) responses were in the regular black font.

First Cycle Codes: a Priori and Open Coding

The first cycle of codes included deductive, a priori codes based on Ely's eight conditions of change (1990). A priori codes are established from grounded theory (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The predetermined a priori codes in this study were taken from Ely's eight conditions of change (See Table 1). I began the first coding cycle by employing line-by-line descriptive open coding (See Table 2). I selected the meticulous line-by-line coding task to analyze the data thoroughly and extract as much rich data as possible. I printed a copy of the Microsoft Excel spreadsheets with transcripts and reviewed the data line-by-line for all twelve interviews. While coding the transcripts, I noticed emerging themes, similarities, and differences in participant responses. When completed, I evaluated the data to ensure I saw everything necessary and prepared for a second coding cycle, which included inductive coding.

Table 1

Examples of First Cycle a Priori Codes

Raw Data	a Priori Code
"I feel like things could be run more effectively. There are a lot of inconsistencies in the inclusion Program."	Dissatisfaction of Status Quo
"Proper training. I'd like to have formal training. I'd like to know more about students with disabilities. You just get a sheet with accommodations, and that's it. We need more in-depth knowledge."	Lack of Knowledge And Skills
"We need more teachers. We need more available hands. It would be nice if we had co-taught classrooms."	Availability of Resources
"We need at least a class period weekly. I wish I had time to review lessons with the special education teacher to get suggestions on how to deliver instruction. I would really love that. That idea sounds like a real collaboration."	Availability of Time
"I am very committed to doing what I need to do. I always go above and beyond. No matter what. I'm here every day doing the best I can with what I have."	Commitment
"This is a hard job. Many teachers do not survive because it is a lot of work. We need something to motivate us to stay the course."	Rewards and Incentives
"Teachers want to participate in the implementation Process. We want our voice heard and we know what the students need.	Participation
"We need more administrative support in the form Of additional training."	Leadership

Table 2

Examples of Open Coding

Raw Data	Open Code
"We need training or a coach. We have a math coach and an ELA coach for gen ed teachers, but nothing for inclusion Teachers."	Professional Dev.
"My classes are so large that differentiating instruction for Every lesson for the special education students is often Difficult. It's just all too much."	Teachers are overwhelmed
"Oh my goodness! Can we say this is the biggest barrier? I have some that act out nearly every day. The work is too hard for them so they talk and play around in my class. I'm constantly having to stop class and address behaviors. A day does not go by that I don't have behavior issues.	Classroom behavior concerns
"I've always considered myself to have good classroom management with everything in order. Inclusion has challenged me."	Self-efficacy
"I bet that having collaboration time with the special education teachers would make a big difference."	Needs collaboration Time
"I think that when employees are recognized for their efforts, they are happier in their job and want to work harder no matter what."	Teacher appreciation
"Special education students take the standardized tests with me, and their scores are below the tenth percentile. I could get them up if I had more time to work with them."	Needs more time

"I like that the students are included. It keeps them from being singled out and giving the other kids ammunition to make the special education students feel bad about themselves."	Students self-esteem
"I think one of the things that we absolutely need is more staff, you know, more support services for our students whether that's in the form of a certified teacher more certified special ed teachers or more support staff to push into classes, especially for students that need that additional support. I think that would be beneficial."	Needs support staff

Second Cycle of Coding: Axial

The second coding cycle consisted of creating axial codes. Axial codes are inductive codes extracted from the data (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The process of a second cycle of coding allowed me to take the broader open codes and create them into more narrow axial codes. Creating the axial codes allowed me to see how the broader chunks of data came together as clusters to develop findings (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The axial codes were placed on a spreadsheet in Microsoft Excel that included columns with the established a priori codes associated with Ely's theory. Creating a separate spreadsheet allowed for a more accessible and thorough data analysis. On this spreadsheet, I also included columns with additional a priori codes that emerged from the data, which served as subthemes. I organized the a priori codes on the spreadsheet with a different color for each code at the top. This process of color coding made the data more accessible to view while placing the data with the correct a priori code.

While creating axial codes, I took note of the codes that were repeated. Having the data on the Excel spreadsheet allowed me to make notes and any other notations on the spreadsheet while coding. Once all axial codes were placed in connection with the a priori codes, I continued

to review the data to ensure the codes were placed on the spreadsheet and organized with the

correct a priori codes (See Table 3).

Table 3

Examples of Themes with subthemes

Axial Code	Theme/*subtheme*
"Program for students is always changing"	Dissatisfaction of Status Quo / *Inconsistency*
"Not comfortable teaching students with disabilities" "Limited special education knowledge" "Not sure how to handle challenging behavior"	Lack of Knowledge / *Professional Dev.* *Student Behavior*
"Resources are outdated" "Student -Teacher Ratio; only 1 teacher in class "Lack of Support from Special Education Teacher"	Lack of Resources / *Classroom Setting* *Lack of Co-Taught Classroom*
"Not enough planning time" "Collaboration with Special Education Teacher	Availability of Time *Meaningful collaboration*
"Teachers should be recognized for their efforts"	Teacher Rewards and Incentives
"Commitment impacted by knowledge"	Commitment
"Lack of Support with inclusion"	Leadership

Research Question #2	
"Needs sufficient Professional Development"	Teacher Knowledge and Skills / Professional Development
"Needs Co-Taught classrooms"	Available Resources Co-Taught Classes

"Needs time to collaborate with Special education teacher"	Availability of time / *Meaningful collaboration*
"Teachers need encouragement to increase effort"	Rewards and Incentives
"Teachers should be included in planning process"	Participation
"Teachers need administrative support with strategies"	Leadership

Ely's (1990) eight conditions of change were used to respond to both research questions. Therefore, there was a need to separate the data according to the individual research questions. For this process, I color-coded the responses one color for responses to Research Question #1 on the spreadsheet, and another color was assigned to Research Question #2. I decided to separate the data in this manner for a more precise analysis, making it easier for me to distinguish between the perceived barriers and needs of the participants.

When collecting research data, there is a possibility of incurring discrepant cases. In this study, there were two discrepant cases. I chose to eliminate this data as it did not fit into the theme, and it swayed away from the research questions. One case deemed discrepant was one of the participants sharing that lack of parental support is a barrier that impacts the ability to implement inclusion successfully. The interview questions in this study were designed to gain the perspectives of the participant's barriers and needs related to the school district. Lack of parental support is an administrative concern and is not associated with a teacher's barriers or needs for implementing inclusion. The data relating to parental support only partially serves as a barrier or need in this case. Another discrepancy in data consisted of a participant identifying the need for motivational speakers to encourage special education students. While analyzing the data, I omitted it as it did not aid in responding to the research questions and did not fit with any of the

predetermined a priori codes. The discussion of a motivational speaker is not associated with addressing inclusion teachers' barriers and needs but serves as a suggestion to assist middle school students.

Results

This study identified the barriers and needs that inclusion teachers experience when working with students with disabilities. During the semistructured interviews, some results revealed success with the program, and others indicated a great need for improvement. Using Ely's (1990) eight conditions of change, all eight conditions were used to identify inclusion teachers' barriers and needs. It is also noted that by addressing one factor of the participants' barriers, the participants' needs were also discussed. For example, addressing that lack of teacher knowledge and skills is a barrier also describes teachers needing to increase their knowledge and skills regarding inclusion. The data analysis of this study revealed the following results to the research questions.

Research Question #1: What are inclusion teachers' perceived barriers to meeting the students with disability's education needs?

During the interview, the participants shared their disappointments with the inclusion program and portions of the inclusion program that need improvement. Using Ely's (1990) conditions of change, the participants shared data on their perceived barriers related to Ely's (1990) conditions of change. During the interview process, the following a priori themes were noted: Dissatisfaction with the status quo with the subtheme inconsistency, insufficient knowledge including the subthemes, lack of professional development and student behavior, lack of resources with the subtheme's classroom setting, and lack of Co-Taught classes, lack of time,

with the subtheme lack of time for meaningful collaboration, teacher rewards and incentives, commitment, and leadership.

Dissatisfaction With the Status Quo

A common theme from all 12 participants was their dissatisfaction with the status quo. Data collected indicates that many participants would like to change the program's structure at the middle school level. This dissatisfaction has impacted the performance of the inclusion program. Participant 4 stated, "It's only fair that students with disabilities are included." While most participants agree that students with disabilities should be included, they do not agree with how the program has been implemented.

Inconsistency

Several research participants expressed the subtheme of inconsistency. Participant 1 stated there needs to be more consistency with support services that impact student progress in his class. Having consistency is crucial as it eliminates variety and contradiction in the program. He states that the program is multi-level, and not all students are getting the same support.

> Participant 1: All middle school special education students receive support in Math or Reading. Those who get reading help will need the same support in History and Science, where reading comprehension is required to succeed.
>
> Participant 5: Inconsistency in the program is evident. Inconsistency in the program is apparent because we all speak different languages. We need to all speak the same language and do the same thing to have consistency in the program.

Insufficient Knowledge

The data revealed that insufficient knowledge was among the participants' most frustrating factors. Of the twelve participants, only two reported receiving college coursework for teaching students with disabilities. Participant 2 indicated that they independently researched and learned some best practices for special education. On the other hand, Participant 4 mentioned not having any experience and no college courses in special education, which was the same response for the other nine participants. Participant 3 expressed the desire to take a college-level special education course. With the financial challenge this would present for the participant, paying for a college course is not likely.

Several participants were adamant that it was unfair to teach students with disabilities without having formal training. One of the participants admitted to having a limited understanding of areas of disabilities and what they meant. Participant 1 stated, "I do not possess the skill set to work with students with disabilities." Many others expressed a similar concern. A participant also shared that they were unsure what instruction should look like in the inclusion classroom.

Lack of Professional Development

Unanimously, the participants strongly expressed that a lack of Professional Development impacts their skills with special education students. Professional Development is always the starting point for teachers when making a change. According to Participant 4, "The students have been included for nearly ten years, and we still need to figure out what we are doing." One of the participants indicated that she had requested professional development to administration several times to increase her inclusion skills, and nothing has occurred.

Interestingly, two research participants felt their knowledge and experience was forced. When probing further, Participant 12 shared, "Teaching students with disabilities was pushed on

the teachers without formal training." There was also a feeling of force to meet the student's needs, including accommodations in the IEP and differentiating instruction. This same participant finds this confusing as the district has many expectations for the teachers but has yet to choose to ensure teachers have received the proper Professional Development.

Student Behavior

In a review of the data where participants discussed lack of knowledge as a barrier, student behavior emerged as a subtheme. Student behavior was discussed during the interview as a dissatisfaction with the status quo. When asked about student behavior during the interview process, the participants mentioned this was an additional barrier that makes the inclusion setting challenging. The challenge that Participant 2 struggles with is student inattentiveness during instruction and how to address it. Participant 2 also states, "She is unsure how to manage behaviors properly, especially those with Emotional Impairments."

Participant 2 further states:

> If I remove a student and have them sent to the office for being disruptive, they return as if nothing has happened. It is all just swept under the rug like everything in this school. When this occurs, I do not know what to do. There has not been formal training on how to deal with disruptive behavior. I've received minimal support from the administration, and they continue to add students with Emotional Disorders to my classes.

Participant 6 shared a similar experience, indicating that the students were given a slap on the wrist with minimal consequences. With behavior challenges presented in the classroom and teachers needing to know how to handle these situations, teachers struggle in the inclusion classroom. Participant 4 mentions, "Teacher's workloads have dramatically increased, and disruptive and attention-seeking behaviors make it even harder to be successful."

Lack of Resources

Another barrier that inclusion teachers experience is limited resources. Participant 1 mentioned, "There often needs to be more class materials to accommodate the inclusion of students. Not only that, but some of our current resources are inadequate." Participant 4 stated they've had to use their old resources to meet the reading levels. All participants mentioned that low reading levels make progress in the inclusion setting challenging for students, and they are left to figure out ways to gather materials that address students' reading levels, which is not always an easy task.

The existing barrier with available resources is that the inclusion teachers still need to participate in training on necessary materials. All participants shared that the district has purchased a new curriculum for all core subjects and provided professional development on the material. The training addressed using materials with students needing additional assistance with the standards. In this case, the barrier may not be a lack of resources but the knowledge necessary to apply them to meet the academic needs of students with disabilities. Participant 5 mentioned that knowing which materials suit a particular student can be overwhelming.

As reported by two participants, financial resources have also limited the availability of resources. It was noted that state funding decreases when a school performs poorly. Participant 6 stated, "When your school does not perform well, they take away money for resources." That does not make sense because if our students are not doing well, we need more resources to assist us with closing the gaps in education, and this is not happening." Participant 8 stated, "A lack of funds prohibits the schools from purchasing needed materials. It is like they do not care."

Participant 12 mentioned, "Teachers have been spending their money to purchase supplemental materials." Participant 11 indicated, "Some small grants were rewarded and used to purchase manipulatives." We live in a time of inflation, and access to funding can present

challenges. "In a classroom with varying levels, we need the correct materials," stated Participant 3.

Classroom Setting

Classroom setting can have a significant impact on a successful classroom. While analyzing the data, the classroom setting created a subtheme. This subtheme was made as the data revealed that classroom setting is connected to the theme of lack of resources. It became clear from examining the data that participants were dissatisfied with their class size and the impact of larger class sizes when working with students requiring more attention. Participant 1 stated, "The larger class size can interfere with the teacher's opportunity to differentiate instruction fully." Participant 1 also stated, "The larger class setting increases the volume of our already heavy workload." Participant 3 remarked, "Creating small groups with the larger class is challenging."

Lack of Co-Taught Classrooms

Some participants mentioned that other districts have transitioned to co-taught classrooms and are experiencing success. Participant 4 stated, "Teachers are becoming increasingly frustrated with the lack of support of a special education teacher in the class." Participant 4 further states, "The district does not favor having co-taught classrooms at the middle school level." The effect of not having co-taught classrooms available for special education students continues to create a barrier that could assist with successful academic outcomes.

Additionally, ten of the twelve participants indicated that teaching students with different levels is challenging in the classroom. The challenge that many general education teachers face is increasing the academic skills of students with poor reading abilities in the inclusion setting. Having students with low comprehension levels requires a lot of time to differentiate instruction, which inclusion teachers often need to have.

Lack of Time

The fourth research theme is the availability of time. When asked about time availability, downtrodden facial expressions were observed during the interviews. One of the remarks that stood out more than others was when Participant 12 mentioned, "The district keeps adding to our job description but does not give us time to accomplish these tasks." "The challenge when considering time as a barrier is having the time available to do all that is required," according to Participant 4. All participants mentioned how difficult it is to get everything done when it is time to plan lessons. Many stated they come to work early and leave late to stay prepared.

> Participant 4: Preparing lessons for an inclusion setting takes time and effort. You must ensure lesson plans indicate plans to differentiate instruction for the special education population. Having a Visually Impaired student means the teacher must make time to enlarge items, so they are accessible to meet the student's needs. The teacher also must make a copy of notes that some students may need. All these changes require additional time for preparation. The structure of the schedule only allows time to complete some of these things.

The lack of time eliminates the opportunity to put accommodations together. Participant 6 mentions that limited time interferes with her providing her best to the students. Participant 8 stated that time also impacts creating and executing extension lessons, such as making videos or voice-overs demonstrating step-by-step directions necessary for some students. Participant 12 shared that some student accommodations include reducing assignments, and there often needs more time to make proper preparations.

> Participant 2 shared that she meets with her grade-level team weekly for thirty minutes. Participant 2 also stated,

> The issue with the thirty-minute meeting is that it is not enough time to add special education concerns to our agenda as they would consume the entire session. We discuss

students with low grades and behavior problems. This meeting does not give us enough

time to brainstorm how to assist the inclusion students more effectively.

Participant 7 stated, "The weekly team meetings are not enough time to strategize how to help the

lower performing group of students." "Bottom line, we need more time to collaborate as a team

with the special education teacher," stated Participant 4.

Additionally, Participant 1 stated, "The schedule is so inconsistent that the special

education teacher is rarely able to attend the meetings to provide support or any input."

Participant 12 expresses concern about the time to meet because the special education teacher is

often busy with other special education meetings, which limits any time available to meet with

the general education teachers. Participant 12 notes that special education teachers do not have

the same preparation period as the general education inclusion teachers, which is another barrier

that interferes with the meeting time.

Lack of Time for Meaningful Collaboration

While reviewing interview data, the subtheme lack of meaningful collaboration was

frequently seen as a barrier. Lack of meaningful collaboration is a subtheme that connects with

the availability of time, as during the interviews, the participants highlighted that lack of time

impacts time for collaboration. Many participants expressed that a lack of collaboration between

the special education department and administration can make progress in the inclusion classroom

challenging. "The line of communication should always be open, but it is not," Participant 11

stated. Participant 4 stated, "There is a lack of collaboration between general education teachers

and the special education department." Participant 4 further states that there has been discussion

among peers that special education teachers probably know everything the inclusion teachers

need to know but have not had the opportunity to share due to other restraints, such as time

available to meet and discuss.

Several participants indicated that more collaboration between inclusion teachers, special education teachers, and administration is warranted. They also share that there is a significant communication breakdown. Participant 12 stated, "There needs to be clear communication regarding the parameters of what inclusion teachers are expected to do." Additionally, "Collaboration must occur more frequently to avoid things getting lost in translation," as mentioned by Participant 12. Another participant stated similar sentiments and states, "The expectation of what needs to occur to create a successfully functioning inclusion classroom has not been communicated to us."

Teacher Rewards and Incentives

Teachers put in considerable effort to produce academic success for all students, often going beyond the call of duty to ensure success occurs. This may include volunteering to orchestrate an activity, creating new learning opportunities, working with oversized classrooms, working through challenges and interruptions, etc. Regardless of what the teacher does, whether extra or within their current job description, they want to know that their efforts are recognized and appreciated.

The participants in this study unanimously agree that a lack of receiving rewards and incentives is a barrier. The participants feel undervalued and unappreciated by their current administration. Teachers have admitted that lack of recognition, including rewards and incentives issued by the administration for their efforts, discourages them from giving extra effort. As a result of this lack of recognition for their actions, Participant 7 states, "Teachers have lost their motivation to go above and beyond." With the increasing workload teachers have been incurring, participant 7 stated, "Rewards and incentives may encourage us to do better."

Everyone wants to know they are doing a good job. Participant 4 stated that, "It costs nothing to compliment or show thoughtfulness." Participant 10 reports that her extra efforts are

unrecognized in her teacher evaluation, and she does a lot to assist all students." As a result, she now comes to work, goes home, and does not seek to do anything extra. Participant 10 further states, "Lack of recognition for my efforts hurts my feelings. Teacher colleagues even mentioned they felt bad knowing they invested extra time and effort, and it was not recognized." Participant 4 stated many of her colleagues have developed the attitude of, "I am just here to do my job, and that is it." Participant 3 mentioned that it is sad that there are no rewards and incentives for teachers as the students' progress is ultimately affected.

Commitment

When questioned about commitment, many participants shared that they are highly committed to the process. Participant 5 gave their commitment level a 7 out of 10. Other participants cited concerns that may suggest they possess a lower commitment level. For example, Participants 2 and 7 mentioned being committed to providing quality education to students with disabilities, but the challenge is knowing exactly how to meet the student's academic needs. Participant 4 also discussed having a commitment level of 7 out of 10 while sharing that best efforts are always given. Participant 4 further stated that putting forth so much effort without the assistance of a special education teacher in the classroom may have the potential to lead to teacher burnout. Participant 5 stated, "Teachers make things happen. I know I need to do more, but I do my best with what I have."

Leadership

During the interviews with the participants, they all collectively mentioned lack of support from the administration was a huge barrier. Ely (1990) indicates that expectations and commitment of leadership significantly impact the implementation process. Engin (2020) states that school administrators must consider all stakeholders' ideas, feelings, and expectations. For

inclusion teachers, lack of support from the administration creates a barrier that makes it challenging to be successful with all facets of inclusion.

Participant 2 stated, "Looking at the data, which includes low test scores, can result from a teacher's lack of instructional practices." Participant 7 indicates, "When teachers and administration evaluate data, it is obvious that most students with low test scores are special education students. The sad part is the administration blames the teachers but has not provided the support to make necessary improvements." Collectively, the participants mention the barrier leadership presents is the lack of support that will assist teachers in being successful in the inclusion classroom.

Research Question #2: What are inclusion teachers' perceived needs to better meet the academic needs of students with disabilities?

To build more success with students with disabilities in the inclusion setting, research participants expressed several perceived needs they believe should occur. The themes listed are derived from Ely's (1990) conditions of change and used to respond to the second research question. The themes addressed in this section include the need to increase teacher knowledge and skills with the subtheme professional development, availability of resources with the subtheme's classroom setting and co-teaching, availability of time with the subtheme time for meaningful collaboration, rewards and incentives, participation, and leadership.

Teacher Knowledge and Skills

A popular need expressed by the participants was to increase knowledge about what needs to occur in the inclusion classroom. Ely (1990) states that sufficient knowledge and skills are essential in the change process for successful implementation. Teacher knowledge and skills are needed to provide the inclusion students with effective quality instruction.

Professional Development

Most participants mentioned a need for professional development that will enable them to be more effective in the inclusion setting. Participant 1 indicated knowing how to differentiate instruction but the need to learn more evidence-based practices. Participant 2 emphasized, "We need examples of what the instruction should look like in our classroom. It would be nice for someone to instruct on what would work best for students so they can demonstrate more academic growth." Participant 7 also mentioned knowing differentiating instruction but needs Professional Development for the more challenging things relating to students far below the current grade level. We need multiple professional development sessions to ensure confidence in instructing in the inclusion classroom. "We also need to have follow-up and refresher sessions until the data reveals an improvement," according to Participant 8.

Participant 9 recalled the Special Education supervisor attending a staff meeting and enforcing the importance of following the student's accommodations. Participant 9 was glad to have this information but needs further Professional Development to learn how to implement some of the accommodations. Participant 10 reported, "When special education concerns are mentioned in our meetings, our administrators emphasize the importance of following the student's accommodations. Participant 10 also stated, "This is great, but we do not discuss how to deliver the lessons or anything that will benefit the special education students in the inclusion classroom." Participant 11 stated that, "Professional development is needed because some teachers feel helpless and lack skills to meet the needs of the special education students that need more attention. To meet the student's needs, the teachers need professional training." Participant 12 remarked, "There is a need for professional training to boost confidence when working with special education students. When we're knowledgeable, we perform better."

Availability of Resources

To increase teaching skills, the participants mentioned the need for adequate resources. Teachers need equipment to meet students' unique needs in the inclusion setting. These resources may include technology devices or access to materials related to the student's learning style, including hands-on learning materials. Due to variations in student learning styles, students need adequate resources.

Classroom Setting

Creating the proper classroom environment is essential for an inclusive classroom. The participants in this study expressed how extraordinarily dissatisfied they were with the classroom setting and what needs to occur to develop a more cohesive inclusion classroom environment. Teachers interviewed for this study expressed the importance of a proper classroom setting. Participant 2 stated that the class sizes are often too large and need to be smaller. It was further noted that the larger class sizes interfere with the opportunity to produce effective learning. Some of the district's middle school classes can have 28 -30 students in an English class. "English is a content subject area, and students behind grade level often find it difficult to stay on top of classwork, according to Participant 2." "Teachers need smaller class sizes, considering we have to accommodate lessons for the students with IEPs."

Participant 2 stated there was a need for an academic enrichment class period. According to Participant 2, this additional class period can serve as a study hall, allowing teachers to work with smaller groups and individually with inclusive students experiencing challenges. Participant 11 stated, "Teachers and students need the study hall to review step-by-step directions and to give students time to learn from each other." Participant 1 stated, "An enrichment class period needs to be a small class setting where students can work in small groups or get guided teaching." This setting will allow the teacher to address questions and clarify class objectives. Participant 12

mentioned, "I talk to the special education teacher frequently, and she stated she needs more time to get through lessons with the inclusion students."

Co-Teaching

Nine interviewed participants mentioned the need to move to a co-taught classroom setting. Participant 12 stated that, "Middle school classes should be co-taught. With the content standard challenges for students below grade level in reading and math, a co-taught classroom is a much-needed solution." "This will allow the special education teacher to not only assist the students with IEPs but all of the students," stated Participant 1. Participant 3 stated there is a need for co-taught classes to address behavior concerns and other interruptions during instruction. Co-taught classes will eliminate the disruptions as the special education teacher can address them right then and there.

Participant 5 stated that, "There is a great need for co-taught classrooms to assist students with the reading challenges when working on class lessons. Also, the special education teacher must ensure that instruction is properly differentiated." Participant 9 stated, "The special education teachers know how to meet the needs of students with disabilities better than the general education teachers because they have been formally trained." Participant 7 stated, "The special education teacher is a need in the classroom. A co-taught classroom will enable inclusion teachers to learn best practices from the special education teacher." With our curriculum, there needs to be a special education teacher in the class for support."

Availability of Time

Teachers need time to plan and collaborate with team members in an inclusive classroom. The research participants all indicated a need for additional time. Comments, including requiring more time for planning, were presented in each interview when asked what the participants needed. Several participants expressed the need for additional planning time.

Participant 2 stated that, "It takes much time to plan lessons when you need to differentiate instruction. Participant 1 stated, "Teachers also need time to ensure we provide the proper accommodations." Participant 3 states, "We always rush to get things done quickly. We have a pacing chart we are responsible for following, but we do not have the time to plan for these lessons accordingly."

Regarding time, not only did the participants strongly discuss the need for planning time, but they also mentioned the need for additional instructional time due to the diversity in abilities in the inclusion classroom. Participant 3 stated,

> There needs to be time allowed for a block schedule for Reading and Math classes to assist the performance of all students. The students need more time than the fifty-minute class time allowed. Fifty minutes does not give the teachers enough time to address students' needs. When behaviors are addressed, and lesson objectives are explained, it is the end of the class period. A block schedule that consists of two hours will allow time to do more learning activities and make progress with the curriculum.

Time for Meaningful Collaboration

Collaboration is essential and beneficial to creating a cohesive team. Data collected from the research participants reveal a consensus on the need for collaboration time to occur between the inclusion teachers and special education teachers. Participants 2, 8, and 12 shared, "We need to have a planning period weekly with the special education teachers. Participant 6 states, "There is a great need to spend time consulting and collaborating with the special education teacher. We need time to review lessons, evaluate students' work, and get suggestions on delivering instruction." Participant 2 further states,

> The district needs to consider giving us time to collaborate with the special education teachers. Having that time will make a big difference in how we deliver instruction to

meet our students' diverse and unique needs. Again, that would be too much like the right

thing to do.

Participant 6 explains, "I need reserved time to meet with the special education teacher to guide

me through how to deliver evidence-based strategies."

Participant 12 mentions that co-taught classrooms meet the need for collaboration

between special education and inclusion teachers. Participant 7 stated, "We have weekly team

meetings for thirty minutes, but we need the special education teacher to have time in her

schedule to allow her to attend the meeting. Participant 9 stated, "We need more than thirty

minutes to debrief and discuss strategies. We need the input of the special education teacher

when we are having our team meetings." Participant 8 stated, "During the team meetings, we are

so consumed with other issues that we are left without time to discuss meeting the needs of the

special education students. The only way to accomplish this is if time is built into our schedule to

collaborate with the special education teacher.

Rewards and Incentives

As hard-working professionals, teachers need recognition for their job performance.

Teachers frequently find themselves working beyond the required school hours. It is well known

that a teacher's salary does not match the job description. As a result of their hard work, teachers

should be recognized for their strenuous efforts. Classroom teachers frequently offer rewards and

incentives to students to encourage them to push themself. According to Participant 5, teachers

are motivated when a reward is attached; therefore, teachers need encouragement to improve the

inclusion classroom. Participant 4 stated, "They could at least give us a pat on the back.' It is

difficult to work hard and not receive any notice from the administration regarding job

performance.

Participation

Another theme in the data was the participation of teachers in the inclusion process. Participation includes teachers actively making decisions in the change process (Ely, 1990). The participants in this research study were excluded from planning the implementation process. Participant 1 stated, "One of the reasons teachers should not be denied participation in the implementation process is to allow teachers to buy into the process." Teachers need to feel a sense of ownership. Participant 2 stated, "Teachers know what teachers need; therefore, we should have been included in the planning process. If teachers must implement the program, then teachers need input in the process."

Participant 6 is frustrated that the implementation of inclusion was commanded to her without any participation in the planning process. Participant 6 stated, "As teachers, we must be included when important changes impact our classrooms."

Leadership

To implement inclusion successfully, the role of leadership is an essential element. Effective leadership is key to student success (Makatto & Mudzanani, 2019). Teachers of inclusion look to leaders for guidance and direction. Research participants noted a disconnection in communication between the teachers and the administration. In analyzing the data, one of the greatest needs the participants mentioned needing from the administration is being supported. Participant 2 stated, "The administration is not very supportive when showing us how to meet the needs of students with disabilities." Inclusion teachers need the assurance that they can depend on the administration being actively involved in providing the teachers with the required assistance. Participant 5 mentioned, "Teachers should be made aware of changes by administration ahead of time."

The role of leadership is to guide all stakeholders in the inclusion process. Participant 5 stated, "I'd like to see the administration in our inclusion classroom more to understand what we

need." The part of leadership is central to the success of inclusion. Success begins at the top and feeds into all the other vital members; therefore, inclusion teachers need support and proper guidance from the administration.

Discrepant Cases and Nonconforming Data

The participants in this study overall shared similar perspectives, themes, and experiences related to barriers and the need for a successful, inclusive setting. In qualitative data, there can be collected data that does not necessarily fit into a particular theme. One of the participants shared that a lack of parental support serves as a barrier to the successful implementation of inclusion. Participant 12 shared that many special education students are not progressing well due to a lack of partnership between the school and the student's parents.

Participant 12 saw this as a barrier, as lack of parental involvement can often decrease the student's academic success. While parental participation is an important factor in a child's education, the data did not fit the study's themes. While reviewing this data, I questioned whether it could be viewed as a norm (Ravitch & Carl, 2016) that could respond to the research questions. Parental involvement is crucial for special education students (Kirksey, Gottfried, & Freeman, 2022). When questioning this data, one of the things I observed was lack of parental involvement was only mentioned by one participant. Another factor is the discussion of lack of parental involvement does not relate to perceived barriers and needs in the classroom.

Another part of the data questioned and further deemed discrepant was the need for mentorship. Participant 3 mentioned, "The school should provide strong mentorship programs to motivate the students." Participant 3 perceived that mentorship can provide a positive outcome for middle school students. While this is a good idea, it does not support the barriers and needs that could benefit teachers in the classroom.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Qualitative research requires evidence of trustworthiness in the study's findings. Trustworthiness is a vital component of the research process. To show proof of the results, researchers use credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the data. Each of these elements demonstrates evidence of trustworthiness in the findings. As the researcher, there were lines of communication established that allowed the participants to trust the researcher. The participants needed to be comfortable that transparency was launched from the beginning. I wanted to establish trust between me and the participants to gain their perspectives on the research questions. It is essential that the participants were comfortable that all collected data, including the participant's identity, was concealed and held confidentially.

Credibility

Credibility in qualitative research is trusting the research data and instruments (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Credibility is used to determine if the data is trustworthy. Member checks were used in this study as a measure to prove credibility. After data collection, I checked in with the participant by sending a transcribed copy of the recorded interview via email to the participant. This allowed the participant to carefully review the data and ensure that the researcher captivated the participant's data as intended. This also allowed participants to ask any additional questions and request changes. Establishing member checks continued to keep the lines of communication open, furthering trust.

Transferability

Transferability is used in qualitative research to prove data validity by determining if the findings can be successfully transferred to other settings and maintain the richness of the contents (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). To ensure transferability, a thorough description of the research findings was provided. In this study, transferability was achieved by giving details of the research site, participants, and methods used to collect data. The written data provides clear and coherent

descriptions that are easily understandable. It also allows readers to apply the results to their situations.

Dependability

Dependability in qualitative research shows the quantity of the research findings to be trustworthy and reliable. The data can deliver consistency over time (Janis, 2022). Using rigorous data collection techniques, the dependability of the data was established. During the interviews, notes were taken to ensure the dependability of the data. Each step in my data process is understandable for an outsider. This includes the interview transcript analysis, data processing, a priori coding, and thematic data in my Excel spreadsheet. Dependability was also established by the ability of the data to answer the research questions (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Confirmability

In qualitative research, Confirmability is the extent to which others confirm the researcher's interpretations and conclusions (Nassaji, 2020). As the researcher, I maintained neutrality by allowing the findings to reflect the participant's perspectives and not researcher bias. Confirmability in this study was established by checking and rechecking throughout the data collection analysis to ensure that others could most likely repeat the results.

Summary

This chapter described the setting, data collection process, data analysis, and the results and concluded with evidence of trustworthiness. I described the step-by-step process of collecting data from semi-structured interviews in the data analysis process. The first coding cycle included analyzing and extracting the data using line-by-line open coding. Then, I moved to sort the open codes based on their relation to the pre-established a priori codes.

The second coding cycle included axial coding, where I drew connections between codes using the codes from open coding that best answered the research questions. Once the axial codes were created, I could closely examine the data to discover emerging themes. The themes generated in this study align with Ely's (1990) Eight Conditions of Change, which were used to answer the research questions.

Ely's eight conditions of change were used to answer both research questions. Some factors often crossed over and responded to both research questions. Using Ely's (1990) conditions of change to address the participant's barriers, the participant's needs were also addressed. Chapter 5 will discuss my interpretation of the findings, study limitations, recommendations, implications, and conclusion.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to examine general education inclusion teachers' perceived barriers and needs regarding meeting the academic demands of students with disabilities. Ely's (1990) eight conditions of change theory describes factors that educational institutions must have in place to ensure successful implementation. This study was conducted to understand why students with disabilities in a Midwest school district perform poorly in the inclusion classroom. Data was collected from twelve middle school teachers using semi-structured interviews via Zoom virtual platform. The participants were from three different middle schools in the same district.

This study is relevant and necessary because the inclusion setting needs constant evaluation and a new look after COVID 19, changes to laws and behavior management programs. The research participants' perspectives in this study determined which elements based on Ely's (1990) conditions of change theory were essential factors that interfered with success in the inclusion classroom and factors that are a significant area of need. Ely's (1990) conditions of change were used as themes that emerged from the data. Additionally, relatable subthemes were created.

Interpretation of the Findings

Interpretation of the findings is based on the theoretical framework of Ely's (1990) conditions of change. The conditions benefit the study by providing essential elements that collectively could produce effective change in how teachers instruct students with disabilities. Ely's conditions of change were used to respond to the study's two research questions. Some factors responded to both research questions, and some only applied to one question. Additionally, it was noted that some of the barriers presented in the data crossed over

and addressed the participant's perceived needs. The data collected from the interviews revealed that Ely's (1990) conditions of change are needed to create successful outcomes for students participating in the inclusive setting. In this section, I present my findings organized by research question. For each question, I briefly summarize my data analysis and relate my findings to the literature and the theoretical framework.

Interpretation of Research Question 1

Based on the participant's perspectives, dissatisfaction with the status quo appeared to be a barrier for inclusion teachers. During the data analysis, additional subthemes emerged, including dissatisfaction with inconsistency in the program. Insufficient knowledge was identified as a barrier and contained the subthemes of lack of professional development and student behavior. Other conditions that respond to research question #1 include lack of resources, time availability and time for meaningful collaboration as a subtheme, teacher rewards and incentives, and leadership.

Dissatisfaction of Status Quo

While discussing the participant's dissatisfaction with the program, the participants admitted they were willing to make necessary changes but needed to know where to begin. Guan et al. (2021) support the data by suggesting that dissatisfaction with the status quo is a good place to start in the change process. Ely (1990) states, "For the implementation of innovation to be successful, people must be unhappy with the current statuses." While participants are dissatisfied with the functionality of the program, they seek a solution to this growing problem. In alignment with the data, Gaubatz and Ensminger (2107) noted that members dissatisfied with the current situation are more than willing to participate in the change process actively. Data analysis

revealed that while participants were dissatisfied with the overall status quo, they also shared

dissatisfaction with inconsistency in the program as a subtheme.

Inconsistency in Program

Inconsistency in the program was a second subtheme I derived from the data. Several

expressed dissatisfaction with numerous changes in the program, which has created a barrier.

Data from the participants indicate dissatisfaction that too many variations to the program create

inconsistency. There are also times when the administration will change how much time the

students are included in general education classes. Additional changes that the participants

discussed included changing the location where the students with disabilities will be educated.

Participant 1 mentioned, "Some students are pulled for ELA but not supported in other general

education classes. It looks like we do not know what we are doing." One participant shared that

lack of consistency has left her figuring out things independently to gain consistency in the

classroom. I did not find support for this subtheme in the literature, but several research

participants mentioned the presence of inconsistency in the program.

Insufficient Knowledge and Skills

Lack of knowledge regarding teaching students with disabilities in the inclusion setting is

a significant barrier for inclusion teachers. Ely's (1990) second condition of change stresses the

importance of sufficient knowledge and skills to do the job effectively. A review of the data

collected revealed that all participants expressed concern regarding the barrier that a lack of

knowledge presents in the inclusion classroom. Kirkpatrick et al. (2020) support the data by

sharing, "There is a growing concern over the capacity of teachers to deliver instruction without

sufficient knowledge and skills."

Findings in the data were consistent with prior research that considered sufficient

knowledge and skills as an essential element that creates effective implementation of

inclusion. Unfortunately, according to Participant 1, limited knowledge of delivering effective evidence-based strategies for inclusion students is a barrier that, as long as it exists, the students will continue to fall behind. Ferriday and Cantali (2020) support the data by noting that teachers do a disservice to inclusion students with insufficient training on inclusion strategies. This lack of knowledge and skills in the inclusion classroom negatively impacts the student's behavior.

Lack of Professional Development

Increasing student achievement begins with teachers' knowledge and skills. Through professional development training, teachers can increase and develop teaching strategies. Participants in this study expressed concern that they have not been provided sufficient professional development to assist them in the inclusion classroom. The data is supported in the literature by (Gaines & Barnes (2017) and Rojo-Ramos et al. (2021), stating, "Professional development is an essential element that aids in supporting teachers with increased knowledge and self-confidence." Without proper professional development, teachers are unsure how to provide instruction to meet the needs of students with disabilities. According to the participants, professional development is needed to teach successful inclusive practices, including lesson accommodations. During the interview with Participant 2, it was discussed that reaching a highly effective teacher rating is difficult when we are not given the training.

 Behavior Challenges

The participants also expressed concerns about handling behavior challenges in the inclusion classroom. During the data analysis, insufficient knowledge of addressing behaviors appeared as the subtheme. Several participants commented that they have inadequate knowledge in dealing with students who present an Emotional Impairment. Lubke et al. (2018) concluded that inclusion teachers found that students with emotional behavior disorders were more challenging in the inclusion classroom than those with other categories of disabilities.

Students who present a challenge with externalizing behaviors can be difficult to support in the inclusion setting. In the district, seven middle school inclusion students present emotional impairments. Participant 5 reflected on an incident where an emotionally impaired student threw a desk across the classroom angrily when given a seat change for talking during instruction. Lubke et al. (2018) confirm that behavior challenges are a barrier by stating, "Student's emotional behavior disorders can disrupt the learning environment with attention-getting behavior that can be severe enough to warrant removal from the inclusion classroom." The participants indicate that limited knowledge of de-escalation techniques and strategies to avoid triggers is a barrier in the inclusion classroom.

Lack of Resources

According to Ely (1990), teachers must have proper resources to implement an initiative successfully. The data revealed that several participants emphasized that they did not have sufficient resource materials available in their classrooms to support students with disabilities. An examination of the literature indicated that adequate materials are imperative for successful educational change (Gaubatz & Ensminger, 2017; Onyishi & Sefotho, 2020). Ferriday and Cantelli (2020) noted that a lack of resources could be one of the most significant barriers to the implementation process.

The district has purchased a new curriculum for all core subjects. Teachers are concerned that the program content is too far above the reading comprehension level for some special education students. Other sentiments shared by teachers include that it is nice to have a new curriculum. Participant 3 stated, "It is unfair that we have not received training on implementing the curriculum with students with disabilities." The unfairness in lack of resources is also shared in a study conducted by Chu et al. (2020) that states, "When teachers lack professional training, they tend to require even more resources and supports to assist them in the inclusion classrooms."

Based on the interview data, the participants may have some materials, but without direction and guidance, they are not able to appropriately apply the materials in their classrooms. Teachers believe they are doing a disservice and are greatly concerned about the lack of proper resources.

Classroom Setting

Dissatisfaction with the classroom setting is a subtheme that emerged from the data when discussing resources with the participants. Several participants discussed how dissatisfied they are with the larger class size and the impact that teachers are experiencing with the larger class size. Some classes with special education students may have thirty-two students assigned to one class. Participants share that the barrier in the classroom setting is that it can be challenging to be effective while simultaneously meeting the demands of several students who need the teacher's guidance.

Lack of Time

Ely's (1990) fourth condition of change is the lack of time. The discussion of time during the interviews was a current barrier that participants constantly battled. According to Ely (1990), participants need time to learn, adapt, integrate, and reflect on what they are doing to succeed. Participant 11 noted, "A teacher's workday is often jam-packed and leaves no room for flexibility." When adding students with disabilities and the need for differentiated instruction and accommodated lessons, time becomes increasingly tight. This lack of time can lead to loss of learning, behavior issues, and teacher burnout.

Inclusion teachers often find themselves pressed for time, whether preparation or lesson delivery. Onyishi and Sefotho (2020) confirmed this by stating, "Time to prepare has been indicated by teachers as a barrier when implementing differentiated instruction in the inclusion classroom." Participant 6 mentioned that the teachers do have grade-level weekly team meetings. One of the issues from the participants' perspectives is that the meeting is only thirty minutes.

During the meetings, there is never enough time to strategize ways to assist the students with disabilities in the inclusion setting.

Lack of Time for Meaningful Collaboration

During the interviewing process and data analysis, the subtheme of lack of time for meaningful collaboration was developed when considering lack of time as a barrier. The interview participants want time to be folded into their planning time to collaborate with the special education teachers. Collaboration helps school families grow and improve; without this available, inclusion teachers are faced with a barrier to understanding the student's academic needs. "Lack of collaboration is a huge issue and a contributor to the dysfunction of the program," stated Participant 10. Richter et al. (2022) say, "Teacher collaboration is essential when implementing professional changes." Many participants want this time to learn from the special education teacher colleague's best practices and recommendations. Interview participants shared how the lack of time for collaboration with special education teachers is a significant barrier impacting their ability to be successful in the inclusion setting.

Teacher Rewards and Incentives

For the participants in this study, rewards and incentives are lacking and present a barrier to the successful implementation of inclusion. Robert Ely's (1990) Conditions of Change requires rewards and incentives for teachers in place to accomplish successful implantation. An analysis of the data indicated that teachers lack the motivation to increase their performance without rewards and incentives. Kozlowski and Lauren (2019) stated, "Incentives can ensure maximal teacher effort."

Teachers have developed feelings of being undervalued and unappreciated without incentive and motivation. The participants in this study indicate that the administration often ignores their efforts and hard work. "It would be nice to receive a pat on the back," stated

Participant 4. Literature by Yasmeen et al. (2019) proved that teachers can be motivated to perform zealously when an extrinsic reward or incentive is attached. The lack of recognition from the administration makes the participants perform the bare minimum.

Commitment

During the interview process, when gathering data regarding the participant's commitment to the inclusion process, they all admitted to having a high level of commitment. Participant 4 stated, "The goal is always to give the students my best." This commitment is demonstrated in their ability to provide the best instruction for all students. This barrier is evidenced in the literature where Demirok (2018) notes, "Job satisfaction leads to more significant commitment and teacher retention." For most teachers in the profession, job satisfaction increases job commitment.

On a larger scale, commitment as a factor relates to the school leadership ensuring that all other conditions are met, including, knowledge, resources, time, support, participation, incentives, and leadership. Collectively, all factors lead to job satisfaction which leads to commitment. When successfully implemented, these factors create success, feeling good, positive self-efficacy, happiness, and job satisfaction. Not addressing these conditions to make work a satisfactory environment leads to lack of teacher commitment and ultimately higher teacher turn-over rates.

Leadership

Leadership is influencing others to follow. In education, teachers look to their leaders for guidance toward achieving a goal. Ely (1990) states, "Leadership is crucially important in the educational setting." Ely (1990) further states that effective leadership is needed to encourage others and to avoid them aborting the initiative. Without support from the administration, these

teachers are left feeling defeated. Many participants shared disappointment that the lack of support from the administration provoked them to pull back on some of their efforts.

In this study, all twelve participants expressed concern regarding support from their administration relating to inclusion. Participant 2 stated, "I think the administration does not understand how difficult this is. Everything we must juggle in class at one time makes teaching difficult." Participants also mentioned that the barrier is feeling ignored, not taken seriously, and feeling alone because of challenges with administration. The impact of limited administrative support is shared in the literature. Bondi et al. (2019) mentioned that the administration could present a barrier to implementing many special education programs when teachers do not feel supported (Bondi et al., 2019). The lack of support from the administration has some wanting to seek other teaching opportunities.

Interpretation of Research Question #2: What are inclusion teachers perceived needs to better meet the needs of students with disabilities?

This study also seeks to understand the inclusion teacher's perception of what needs to occur for a successful inclusion classroom. Like Research Question #1, Ely's (1990) conditions of change were applied to understand teachers' perceptions. Some conditions used to respond to Research Question#1, where the data presented the teacher's perception of barriers, are also used to discuss the teacher's perspectives of needs that will promote success in the inclusion classroom. The following themes emerged from the collected data: Teacher knowledge and skills, with the subtheme professional development, availability of resources, with classroom setting and co-teaching as subthemes, availability of time with time for meaningful collaboration as the subtheme, rewards and incentives, participation, and leadership.

Dissatisfaction with the Status Quo

Interview participants mentioned dissatisfaction with how the inclusion program is currently being conducted. This dissatisfaction has called for the participant's request to the administration for change. According to the participants, the problem is that there has not been a clear direction on what needs to occur. Literature obtained from Gaubatz and Ensminger (2017) indicates that dissatisfaction with the status quo typically occurs when teachers are convinced that the change will make their job easier. Based on the tone of the participants, I was able to determine that the participants know what they need, and for the teachers in this district, they need change. The participants also do not have the proper knowledge and support to make the changes.

These participants believe that with proper support and knowledge, they would see the academic progress of students with disabilities. Considering teachers' dissatisfaction, the data reveals that the teachers need knowledge from Professional Development and guidance and support from the administration. The participants mentioned adjusting their classroom environment to accommodate students with disabilities. One method that teachers believe could be beneficial is having smaller class sizes and a co-taught classroom environment.

Teacher Knowledge and Skills

All interview participants echoed the need for knowledge in special education strategies and pedagogy. The findings from the data indicate a great need to increase teachers' knowledge and skills. A few participants shared that they had obtained some knowledge from college courses, while others admitted they had yet to participate in any training that supports inclusion strategies. A study conducted by Ferriday and Cantali (2020) concluded that teachers need support and sufficient training on inclusion strategies. According to Ely (1990), one must possess knowledge and skills to teach in an inclusive setting. Participant 10 shared the following comment:

Many times, they could have given us professional development, but they did not. My colleagues and I wish they would have. I want to be more knowledgeable about what I am doing. I want to know what exactly are the research-based strategies that will allow these students to succeed.

Professional Development

One way to increase teachers' knowledge of inclusion strategies is to ensure they receive professional development. The need for professional development was expressed numerous times throughout the interview process. Participants expressing their need for Professional development is critical for teachers to expand their skills and knowledge (Ferriday & Cantali, 2020). This need for Professional Development is paramount and needed to strengthen teachers' pedagogical knowledge (Sasson & Malikson, 2021). Some interview participants shared that they have only had a limited amount of district-provided professional development.

To be effective, there is a need for appropriate Professional Development to teach the inclusion teachers best practices. Teachers indicated the need for follow-up sessions to continue building teacher confidence in using the necessary strategies. They want to learn the necessary strategies and implement them with fidelity in the classroom. This data is supported in the literature by Gaines and Barnes (2010), who stated that opportunities for professional development should be an ongoing endeavor, as things in our education system seem to change periodically. Participant 6 shared the following:

> I need more training. For the past few years, I have felt all over the place teaching students with disabilities. I am still trying to figure out what I am doing. The students are only making limited progress, and it is my fault because I need professional training that will allow me to teach effectively. Every year since we began inclusion, I have had a lot of special education students fail my class.

In a review of the data and the tone of the participants, there is much tension between the teachers and the administration due to limited training. Chu et al. (2020) argued that inclusion teachers need the administration to provide professional development that supports teachers in meeting inclusion demands.

Availability of Resources

Ely's (1990) third condition of change is the availability of resources. In the classroom, necessary resources are paramount in contributing to students' educational success. Nothing occurs in a learning environment if resources are not available. Ely (1990) states, "The unavailability of needed resources will significantly impact learning." Adequate resources will allow these students to experience more success with state assessments. According to Participant 5, much of the assigned curriculum reading material is too difficult for students who need help comprehending at their current grade level. Some interview participants mentioned having the availability of text-to-speech as a resource for special education students below grade level in reading. Interviewed teachers expressed that even though they have this valuable resource, it does not address the student's reading comprehension deficit. This also shows that teachers have some knowledge of how to differentiate instruction but not necessarily adequate resources.

Participant 3 noted the need for support from those skilled in special education. Chu et al. (2020) supported the data by noting that help needed in implementing inclusion may benefit from the support of specialized consultants such as resource teachers or teacher consultants. As a result, inclusion teachers often find themselves scrambling for resources to meet the needs of their special education students. Participant 4 shared:

> Sometimes, I use online teacher sites for assignments. I look for hands-on activities as those are more manageable for some special education students. The hands-on activities

seem to hold their attention longer. At times, it is difficult to find appropriate and

relatable topics.

The teacher's heavy workload adds to the need for adequate resources and limited time to search

for materials. Teachers are overwhelmed but willing to do what it takes to educate students.

Classroom Setting

When considering fulfilling the needs of teachers in the inclusion classroom, one place to

begin is the classroom setting. The participants were adamant that the classroom size was too

large to accommodate students with disabilities. The participants in this study indicated the need

for smaller class sizes that will allow them time to give attention to students with learning

challenges and produce an effective learning environment. When asked, "What size would be

appropriate?" the response was no more than 20 is manageable.

For some of the teachers interviewed, their class sizes are as large as thirty-two students,

including six to eight students with learning disabilities, making it difficult to meet the demands

of the student's educational, social, and emotional needs. In the literature, Konstantopoulos and

Ting (2023) argue that smaller class sizes give teachers more time to individualize lessons and

increase student participation. With the variance in student abilities, there is a need to reevaluate

the class size to meet the student population's needs. It is a common fact that teachers can feel

overwhelmed with the larger class sizes with mixed levels of abilities. It is also evident that to

meet their needs, students need an environment conducive to their learning.

Participant 3 reported needing a block schedule for English and Math classes for students

with English and Math IEP goals and objectives. The participant shared that she has seen this

format in other districts, and it is successful. The rationale for this format is to allow the students

more time to work on assignments and allow the teacher to create small groups, including

working in stations and collaborating with peers.

Co-Taught Classrooms

Another area of need, according to the participants, is the lack of support in the classroom. They seek support by having a special education teacher in the classroom. A co-taught classroom is a model that many districts are currently using. A review of the literature supports the co-taught model and the success that districts are experiencing with their inclusion students (Jackson et al. 2017; King-Sears et al. 2021; & Lochner et al., 2019. This model simultaneously has the general and special education teachers in the classroom.

The students need the proper support to avoid falling through the cracks. Participant 5 shared that there are times when some students are sitting in class doing nothing because they cannot keep up with the classroom pace." This lack of progress in the classroom has some students not engaging in classroom lessons. The active disengagement of students is noted in the literature as those that are likely to fail (Lochner, 2019). Based on a literature review, co-taught classes could be a service model to increase academic success for inclusion students.

Availability of Time

Ely's (1990) fourth condition of change is the availability of time, in which he states that "there must be time allowed to learn, adapt, integrate, and reflect on the change." The participants in this study often have a limited amount of time to complete necessary planning. Two research participants shared that there needs more time to plan lessons and ensure that assignments are differentiated and accommodated appropriately for special education students. To support the data, Wilson et al. (2018) state that teachers need leadership to create time for teachers to make essential classroom adaptations, such as modifying the curriculum or adjusting how content is delivered based on students' needs. Participant 4 shared that she has had to cut some curriculum elements due to running out of time to complete an entire lesson. Onyishi and Sefotho (2020) conveyed that time is needed to allow teachers to cover curriculum content over a time set by the

administration. Additional time to prepare lessons would eliminate decreasing lesson content. Also, eliminating curriculum content due to lack of preparation time can leave the students unprepared for upcoming learning objectives.

Time for Meaningful Collaboration

With Ely's (1990) availability of time, the subtheme of time for meaningful collaboration was developed based on the collected data. The research data shows that several participants argued for the need to have time to collaborate with colleagues. As inclusion teachers express their need for support, collaboration can satisfy it. Many of the inclusion teachers of this Midwest district expressed a great need for additional time to meet with the special education teacher to discuss strategies and concerns regarding the special education students.

Research by Kozlowski and Lauren (2019) confirmed that time for collaboration between teachers and sharing resources and lesson plans is one of the best practices for student learning. Additionally, Kart and Kart (2021) noted that time to collaborate with other teachers can assist in developing lessons for students with disabilities. It only makes sense to create time to collaborate with teachers, allowing them to learn from the special education teachers.

Teacher Rewards and Incentives

Teachers are extremely hard workers and have one of the most challenging jobs. When their efforts go unnoticed by administrators, some teachers need more encouragement to go the extra mile. The fifth component of Ely's (1990) conditions of change is the need for rewards and incentives. There are several ways to institute rewards and incentives for hard-working teachers that show their efforts are recognized and appreciated. With all the challenges teachers deal with daily, including behavior challenges and delivering lessons, teachers need encouragement to let them know that their efforts are noticed and appreciated. Participant 1 stated, "Some teachers need the push to do well." Gaubatz and Ensminger support the data by stating, "Feelings of

appreciation may lead to teachers becoming more motivated to discover what needs to occur to create a successful inclusion classroom." Participant 2 stated, "Rewards for our efforts make us happier." A study by Benito and Scott-Milligan (2018) supports the data by stating, "Employees respond positively to motivators that come from rewards and incentives."

Only two participants mentioned money as an incentive to go the extra mile. Based on the responses during the interviews, most participants were looking for something other than money to entice them to do better. The administration must recognize this district's need for rewards and incentives for their hard work. Based on the data, positive accolades will speak volumes for these teachers.

Participation

Ely's (1990) sixth condition of change is participation in the change process. According to Ely (1990), participation involves all stakeholders having the opportunity to participate in the decision-making process. Teachers in this Midwest school district have expressed the need to be included in the new initiative's decision-making process. Participant 6 stated, "Teachers are not included in the planning process. We are just told here you go!" Participant 2 indicated, "Teachers need to be included in the change process to assist with teachers' buy-in and getting everyone on board." Ellsworth (2000) states support the data, "Participation is essential to encourage teachers to "buy in" to the change process."

Commitment

Ely's (1990) seventh condition of change is commitment. Ely states that commitment in the change process involves all stakeholders committing their efforts and time. Based on the data collected from the participants, their perception is that they are fully committed to doing the best they can in their inclusion classrooms. Participant 8 stated, "All teachers want to see the special education students benefit from inclusion." While the teachers' perception is that they are doing

the best with what they have, teachers express the need for support from the administration to further their commitment.

The need for administrative support relates to the teacher's job satisfaction. A teacher's strong commitment signifies job satisfaction. Teachers with high commitment levels spend time developing their competencies and are not quick to leave their teaching careers (Demirok, 2018). Commitment is a factor that serves as a perceived barrier and need. Factors that meet the need for job satisfaction are based on Ely's (1990) conditions of change. Teacher commitment to inclusion is attributed to the school leadership ensuring that all other conditions are met, including knowledge, resources, time, support, participation, incentives, and leadership. These factors not only. produce job satisfaction, but teacher self-efficacy and happiness.

Leadership

Several participants shared that effective leadership was necessary for a successful inclusion program. `Ely (1990) states, "School leaders are seen as role models, mentors, or advisors that provide inspiration and encouragement." Participants of this study expressed a great need for supportive leadership they can depend on when needed. Martin (2019) supports the need for effective leadership by stating, "School leadership is responsible for creating the tone of how teachers will create a successful and positive learning environment.

Participant 12 spoke about the need for proper guidance and specific directions to be effective in the inclusion classroom. The findings align with the literature as Ellsworth (2010) reported that teachers depend on leadership to guide and direct them through the change process. Some participants mentioned that they had lost much enthusiasm regarding classroom teaching due to the lack of support from the administration. While reviewing the data, inclusion teachers' primary need is compelling leadership that guides teachers towards leading students to academic achievement.

Limitations of the Study

The primary limitation of this study was the sample size, and all the participants were from one school district. An additional restriction that arose because of the sample size was transferability. The smaller sample size and using only one school district for my sample size limits the transferability of my study's findings to other school districts. Results might have differed even if multiple middle schools from surrounding communities were included. A larger sample size may have provided more apparent conclusions to the research questions.

Recommendations for Further Research

The participation of students with disabilities in the general education setting is a topic that has been heavily researched. Much of the existing research discusses the positive aspects of inclusion that students are experiencing. This study differs as collected data explored the perspective of inclusion teachers regarding the barriers and needs to meet the academic demands of inclusion students. Based on the responses, the administration should develop a team to implement a change process effectively by applying Ely's (1990) conditions of change. All eight factors may not need to be applied, but they can serve as a checklist for the administration to discover missing factors in their organization and make necessary corrections.

This research study focused on one school district's barriers and needs. Future studies may include duplicating this study in a neighboring school district experiencing equivalent inclusion challenges. The goal would be to examine the districts' teachers' perspectives and needs using Ely's (1990) conditions of change. As recommended in this study, data should be analyzed, and necessary changes made to the program that will promote success. Additionally, obtaining the perspective of the administration would be helpful as they address the feedback from this study. The input of the administration would be valued as they share what they feel needs to

occur. These school districts teachers and leaders could collaborate on their findings to enhance inclusion programs. By spending time sharing progress, teachers and leaders would have the opportunity to share ideas, obtain assistance, and make suggestions.

Implications

Positive Social Change

This basic qualitative study contributed to research regarding inclusion teachers' perceived barriers and needs that impact their ability to meet the demands of inclusion students successfully. School administrators can use the findings of this study to address solutions to the challenges that general education inclusion teachers experience. By administrators addressing inclusion challenges with teachers regarding which factors need to be implemented, the district could ultimately increase student achievement. As mentioned in the literature, in this school district, students with disabilities have performed poorly on state assessments.

The recommendations presented in this study can provide the school district with what general education inclusion teachers need to make improvement to instructional delivery. The findings in this study can promote social change for the individual student, the school district, and society. Students with disabilities can experience positive social change through academic success through the improved changes to their inclusion program. As identified in the research, these changes may include additional resources and teachers equipped to meet the students' academic needs. They can also develop positive social and emotional skills that builds their self-confidence. Positive social change in the school district can be displayed in the academic achievement that the school district can experience from the changes and the improvements being made. As a result of the changes, society and the community can experience growth as the district is recognized for improvements and academic achievement, as evidenced by the growth in

standardized testing. As the community sees a change in a positive direction, student enrollment could begin to increase and make the positive social change the community needs.

Theoretical Implications

Ely's conditions of change (1990) describe a plan to create successful educational change. When considering the changes that may need to occur to promote successful inclusion practices, Ely's (1990) conditions can serve as a guide to leaders as to what needs to occur. I recommend that leadership review all eight factors of Ely's (1990) conditions of change with general education teachers and create an improvement plan. This improvement plan can be broken into phases and include a timeline for evaluating progress with meeting goals.

Recommendations for Practice

Ely's conditions of change (1990) has recommended all eight conditions are included for successful adoption and implementation. In the study's school district, inclusion has been active for over a decade. The concern is there are still changes needed to make it more effective and to move forward. Based on the data collected from the study, I recommend the district focus on the factors that need the most attention first while still paying attention and giving consideration to the other conditions. These conditions needing immediate attention include increasing teachers' knowledge and skills through professional development, providing adequate teacher resources, co-teaching, availability of time, and time for meaningful collaboration.

While analyzing the data, it was noted that some of Ely's (1990) factors overlap. This makes it critical for school leaders to look at all the key themes and develop a research plan to address all the conditions and needs expressed as concerns by the participants in this study. Also noted was addressing one condition could create new concerns, such as providing more resources, could require more professional learning time to understand how to use those resources. It is

recommended that school leaders carefully and consistently observe progress in the inclusion classroom. Leadership should take time and talk to the inclusion teachers to determine if the plan for change is working or if the inclusion teachers have concerns that may impact success.

Professional Development

The data collected from the interviews reveal that many inclusion teachers lack knowledge of implementing inclusion strategies in the classroom. One method to increase teachers' knowledge and skills is through professional development opportunities focusing on inclusion. Teachers' beliefs, skills, and qualifications influence the need for professional development (Cooc, 2018). Leadership should examine the needs of the teachers in their schools and develop a professional development plan that will lead to success. Professional development often leads teachers to reflect on their teaching methods and think about areas that need improvement. Upon reflection, teachers may become more apt to change their instructional practices and personal beliefs over time (Martin, et al., 2020).

During the school year, teachers are given ten full days of assigned professional development. I suggest one day that should occur during the first two months of the school year is reserved for one full six-hour professional development. Additioanlly, at least three two-hour follow-up sessions to occur virtually that focus on implementing inclusion strategies. I suggest virtual sessions as they can be recorded and made available for teachers to reference as needed. Also, if a teacher is unable to attend the professional development session, they can view the recording as time permits. Teachers should be given a professional development binder that contains resources and strategies to use in the classroom. This binder can be used to add materials from follow-up sessions and make notes to assist with inclusion.

Teachers will need follow-up sessions and support in the classroom following the professional development sessions until the teachers are secure in their inclusion skills. To create this follow-up, teachers will need support from the special education teacher consultant. The role of the teacher consultant is to assist with classroom setup, adapt curriculum, provide sample lessons, model lessons, follow up on data, and any additional areas of need. The teacher consultant understands the teachers need for professional development and under which context is needed for improving the teachers' knowledge and skills (Cooc, 2018). The teacher consultant should schedule follow-up meeting times with the teacher at least monthly or as needed. The consultant will visit the classroom and address any concerns that the teacher may have. Professional development needs vary from teacher to teacher (Martin et al., 2019). The teacher consultant can create a schedule to work specifically with one teacher at a time in assisting with improving the teachers' skills and knowledge. During these meetings, the teacher and the consultant can review progress monitoring data, discuss growth and areas of deficits, and make informed decisions based on assessment data and next steps.

A special education teacher consultant will have access to the goals and objectives of the students with disabilities. Using data, these meetings provide an opportunity to report progress. Additionally, the teacher consultant can recommend professional development opportunities and resources to assist the teacher in increasing skills as necessary.

Availability of Resources

A lack of availability of resources can create an obstacle to effective teaching in the inclusion classroom. To produce effective teaching practices, teachers need adequate resources to meet the needs of the students. Classrooms are no longer a one size fits all therefore teachers need

classroom materials to meet the needs of all students with varying abilities. Classroom teaching materials should be evidenced-based aligned with common core state standards.

The data indicated that schools have new reading and math instruction. The concern of teachers is the programs include intervention components, but not all teachers have access to these materials, and teachers have not been trained on how to use the intervention components. I recommend that leadership ensure the intervention materials are available and training is provided. Inclusion teachers have been advised to accommodate lessons for Tier 3 students and students with disabilities. The intervention components have been reserved for the special education teachers to use in their classrooms. For students that perform low, the intervention program can assist in closing the achievement gaps and reteach the learning objective.

The district has reserved one full day monthly for District Professional Development. Teachers should be mandated to participate in one 3-hour Professional Development session on the intervention components. The Professional Development portion mentions that the training should be completed virtually and recorded. This will allow teachers to have access to the training as needed. The teachers must also reference a hard copy of the training PowerPoint. I recommend that teachers receive the PowerPoint before the training date. This will allow the teachers to record notes directly onto their copy of the PowerPoint. Many teachers have commented on the need for having tangible materials to access; therefore, having a hard copy is very helpful.

Another suggestion I have for the availability of resources is that older materials that are not evidence-based should be removed from the classroom. I recommend that leadership remove older, outdated materials from the classrooms. The older materials could be sent home with the students for additional practice or sent to a local community center with an afterschool program. Most reading and math materials teachers hold onto are usually in good or excellent condition. I

am recommending the removal of the older materials to allow for a focus on current resource materials.

Teachers also need assistive technology in their classrooms. With the larger classroom size, classrooms should have speakers on the ceiling to assist those students who are hearing impaired and to gain the attention of students when the volume increases. The teachers can also have headphones to speak into. This does only help the students that are hearing impaired, but all students.

Cotaught Classrooms

Cotaught classrooms served as a subtheme to knowledge and skills in this study. One of the participants mentioned that other surrounding districts have moved towards a co-taught inclusive setting, and they are positively impacting the students. A study by Lochner et al. (2019) indicates that students with disabilities who participate in co-taught classrooms experience greater achievement levels than those who participate in single-teacher-taught classrooms. A classroom with two teachers greatly benefits all students, not just students with disabilities. An additional benefit is that co-taught classrooms reduce the student-to-teacher ratio.

Considering the critical shortage of special education teachers, not all classes will incorporate co-teaching. To make co-teaching work, there should be at minimum two co-taught classrooms for each grade level 6-8. One co-teacher for Reading and Math classes. Students with disabilities who need support in these subjects should be scheduled into these classes.

To introduce coteaching to staff, I recommend that leadership make it mandatory that teachers attend professional development training to ensure that teachers are adequately prepared. The training should include three sessions with six hours of professional development. This training should be delivered by someone who is out of the district and has experience training

teachers in co-teaching. During the first introduction, teachers should have an overview of co-teaching. There are five co-teaching models that teachers should be introduced to:

1. One teach, one assist: In this model, the classroom teacher takes the leading role, and the other teacher assists other students while circulating the classroom to make sure all students are on task.

2. Station teaching: In this model, two teachers divide the instructional content.

3. Parallel teaching: The two teachers divide the class into heterogeneous groups and teach the same content in different parts.

4. Alternative teaching: One teacher works with a small group to the side for specialized instruction.

5. Team teaching: Where the two teachers share instructional responsibility equally, such as modeling or turn-taking in instructional delivery (Kirkpatrick et al., 2020).

Following the first session, teachers should consider which model they'd feel more comfortable implementing. The leadership team can begin to make some suggestions for paired teams. Leadership may also allow teachers to select their own teammates. These possible teams should be allowed meeting time to collaborate and discuss teaching philosophies and styles to determine the model they think would work best.

For the teacher's second session, I recommend time made available for teachers to visit a neighboring school district that has successfully implemented co-teaching. During this visit, teachers should be encouraged to take notes regarding their observations. Upon return to their respective locations, the teachers should share their observations and create questions for the professional development leader.

The final six-hour session should consist of the teachers breaking into groups and trying all five models. This allows the teachers to exhibit what they have learned. This also allows the

teachers to learn from each other. Once a decision has been made as to when teachers will join as a team, follow-up sessions should occur to answer any questions teachers may have and an opportunity to share successes.

Teacher Planning Time

With the demanding workload of inclusion teachers, additional planning time is necessary. In just one school day, teachers complete several tasks in a short amount of time. Some teach several subjects and several students in one school day. In my own teaching experience, lack of planning time interfered with me delivering high quality instruction that may have included adding manipulatives or integrate technology. A few recommendations will allow this additional time where teachers can spend time on creating and accommodating lessons, planning for projects, grading assignments, creating and grading assessments, and catching up on paperwork.

There are different ways to embed additional planning time into the teacher's schedule. One suggestion that would benefit the teachers' schedule is to offer a weekday for a delayed start for students. This would include starting the school day one hour later than the regular start time. Teachers should not be expected to be in meetings during this time but should be given one solid hour to plan and prepare. Considering that the late start may be inconvenient for some parents, the school could offer enrichment for the students, where they can engage in computer activities, arts and crafts, or book clubs hosted by the paraprofessionals.

Time for Meaningful Collaboration

The data shows that inclusion teachers are stretched for time in their busy schedules to collaborate with the special education resource room teachers. Collaboration between teachers is important for adopting professional changes. Teacher collaboration is associated with continuous school improvements and contributes to teacher professional learning (Richter et al., 2022). Time

allowed for collaboration between inclusion and special education teachers to share authority and responsibility to work towards student achievement. Collaboration time is necessary to track student data, share strategies, and address concerns.

When working with students with disabilities, effective communication and planning are imperative. According to the data, teachers have limited time to collaborate with the special education teacher. The middle school schedule has common planning time for teachers included in their schedule for thirty minutes daily. The issue with collaborating with the special education teachers is that this meeting time does not occur when the special education teacher is available.

To allow general and special education teachers time to collaborate, I recommend an hour planning time made available for staff every Friday afternoon following the student's lunch. This time should be made available for teachers who have students with disabilities in their classroom, including other core subjects such as Science and History. Meeting on a Friday afternoon allows teachers to plan for the upcoming week. Teachers can collaborate on the best ways to deliver instruction and review and input progress monitoring data. This time allows the inclusion teacher to inquire about the best evidence-based practices and resources that should be implemented. They will also have time to create incentives and address challenging behaviors. One of the teachers mentioned during the interview that she had a student who was visually impaired and was not sure if she was applying the correct accommodations. This time will allow the teachers to discuss best practices for students with unique challenges. Additionally, this time will allow the inclusion and special education teachers to discuss upcoming IEPs and update data.

While teachers are planning, Paraprofessionals should host enrichment in the library, where students can quietly read and work on assignments. Another option would be to have movie Fridays where the students can watch a movie after lunch on a Friday hosted by the paraprofessionals. To excite the students, they can have popcorn and a drink available during this

time. This time works as it increases the planning time for the teachers, and the students get downtime with peers.

Conclusion

Inclusion was created to break down the conditions that kept students with disabilities separated from their non-disabled peers. It aims to address the academic deficits and socialization aspects of students with disabilities. The inclusive environment focuses on all learners, including those with disabilities, being educated with peers to the maximum extent possible (Barth et al., 2019). Although most teachers embrace inclusive education programs, just as many struggle with the implementation phase (Eaglite, 2019). The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore the perspectives of twelve southeast Michigan inclusion teachers' barriers and needs to implement inclusion successfully.

Ely's conditions of change (1990) were used as the conceptual framework for this study. Based on the data collected from the participants, teachers perceived barriers and needs could be addressed by incorporating Ely's conditions of change (1990). The barriers to be addressed for this district are inconsistency, classroom setting, student behaviors, limited professional development, lack of resources, lack of time, lack of communication, lack of rewards and incentives, commitment, and leadership. Data from the study also included the perspectives of teachers' needs, which include classroom setting, professional development, resources, collaboration time, rewards and incentives, and effective leadership.

Students deserve the absolute best from their teachers. The mindset of most teachers is that they are committed to giving their best to contribute to the education of all students. Students' progress academically when teachers are prepared and knowledgeable about what needs to occur in the inclusion classroom. Teachers confident in their preparedness and expertise are more effective and produce positive results (Woodcock et al., 2019), which is the goal of

inclusion. In the pursuit of increasing academic achievement for students with disabilities, acknowledgment of the findings in this study can serve as a guide to improve the educational outcomes for all students in the district.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

I.   Greeting

II.   Review of Consent Form

III. Opening Questions (to build rapport and obtain basic information)

IV.   Main Interview Questions (Research Questions) taken from the framework

  1.)   Describe your perceived barriers to meeting students with

  disability's educational needs.

    a. Follow-up Question – Can you elaborate on that?

  2.)   Describe the perceived needs that will allow you to better meet the

academic needs of students with disabilities.

  Robert Ely's (1990) Eight Conditions of Change Theory contains

  factors that may affect inclusion teachers' effective implementation of

  inclusion strategies. These factors collectively are used to create a

  successful implementation of educational change.

  1.) How satisfied are you with the district's implementation of the

  inclusion of special education students?

    a. In what ways does the administration need to improve the

    implementation of inclusion?

    b. What aspects of the implementation of inclusion from the

    administration are you dissatisfied with?

  2.) What knowledge and skills have you obtained relating to teaching

  evidence-based strategies to students with disabilities?

a. What professional development training opportunities have you been provided?

b. What does differentiated instruction look like in your classroom?

c. Has the district provided a mentor or coach to assist with learning inclusion strategies?

d. Have you completed college-level coursework in special education?

3.) What kind of resources has the district given you to assist you with teaching students with disabilities?

a. For example, Resource books and assistive technology.

b. How comfortable are you with using these resources?

4.) How much time are you given to collaborate with colleagues and special education teachers on inclusion strategies?

a. How much time do you feel is sufficient?

b. Are you given time to collaborate with the special education teachers on lesson plans and strategies?

5.) What kind of rewards and incentives has the administration offered to teachers for providing effective instructional strategies?

a. What motivation strategies or rewards and incentives should teachers be offered to successfully implement inclusion?

6.) How much participation and input have you been allowed to have in the implementation process?

    a. When it comes to your input on what teachers need, do you feel as if your voice is heard, and your opinion is valued?

7.) What is your commitment level to ensuring inclusion students succeed in your classroom?

    a. What do you do to show you are committed to ensuring the success of special education students?

    b. What is working well?

8.) What type of support has the administration provided to help you with the implementation of inclusion?

    a. How does the administration support you with the behavior challenges of special education students?

    b. How does the administration support you with special education students that are not making adequate academic progress?