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Communication Characteristics Between Secondary Special and General Education Teachers on Implementation of Individualized Education Plans

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This is to certify that the doctoral dissertation by

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Abstract

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MA, Walden University, (2023).

BS, University of Phoenix, 2014.

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

As more students consistently access the general education classroom as their least restrictive environment (LRE), the responsibility of Individual Education Plan implementation (IEP) is up to the general and special education teachers. Previous studies indicated that communication characteristics between general and special education teachers lead to miscommunication and inadequate IEP implementation in inclusion classrooms. Systems and ecological theory identified barriers between communication systems. Secondary general and special education teachers described the communication characteristics that lead to inadequate IEP implementation in inclusion classrooms. A basic qualitative research design provided in-depth descriptions of communication characteristics from 31 participants. The study's purpose was to explore (a) how secondary general and special education teachers described communication characteristics in the Fort Worth Independent School District in Fort Worth, Texas, (b) how secondary general education and special education teachers describe their ability to implement Individual Education Plans in the Fort Worth Independent School District in Fort Worth, Texas. Data analysis was performed utilizing the ATLAS.ti software program to develop codes and resultant themes. The results identified mostly positive communication characteristics when there is time; however, communication is mostly non-existent or through email, causing miscommunication of responsibilities and inadequate IEP implementation in inclusion classrooms. Education administrators may use findings for positive social changes to better serve students and faculty.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

The least restrictive environments (LREs) determine where students with disabilities will spend most of their time in education. LREs are determined independently for each student by a team of professionals, the student's parents, and the student when they are of age. The least restrictive environment is when a student with disabilities is learning alongside peers without disabilities as much as possible (IRIS Center, 2019). Students with disabilities increasingly utilize the general education classroom as their least restrictive environment. Because of this, general and special education teachers are responsible for implementing their Individual Education Plans (IEPs).

The issue that has prompted the research is the unsuccessful implementation of Individual Education Plans for students with disabilities within the inclusion classroom in secondary education (Alnassar, 2021). Receiving adequate implementation has proven to be a complicated process for general educators (Allen & Barnett, 2020). General and special education teachers must communicate through collaboration opportunities to increase services provided to students with disabilities in inclusion classrooms, leading to this study on communication characteristics. Communication characteristics described how communication is happening, the strengths, and the weaknesses leading to essential changes and increased adequate IEP implementation. Knowing how general and special education teachers described their communication characteristics increased the knowledge of how to make changes that lead to adequate IEP implementation in

inclusion classrooms and social change within the education system. The research described the problem, purpose, nature, and limitations.

Inclusion classrooms tend to be the LRE for many students with disabilities. According to Al Jaffal (2022), collaboration time and inadequate resources cause general education teachers' inability to implement IEPs. Self-efficacy also plays a role in inadequate implementation. According to Allen and Barnett (2020), general education teachers lack the self-efficacy to implement IEPs, leading to inadequacy. Teachers' attitude toward students with disabilities has been an ongoing issue posing inadequate IEP implementation (Werner et al., 2020). According to Chitiyo and Brinda (2018), general education teachers' self-efficacy relates to non-existent communication with special educators. General education teachers state that their inability to implement IEPs is a communication issue leading to misunderstanding their responsibilities (Berry, 2021). Communication and collaboration between general and special educators are necessary to increase the services to students with disabilities in inclusion classrooms. According to Nilsen (2020), teachers do not have the opportunity to collaborate to increase strategies for students with disabilities. Not collaborating decreases the communication skills needed between teachers to facilitate a positive relationship (Hopkins et al., 2019). Alnassar (2021), Hopkins et al. (2019), and Sundqvist (2019), state that communication characteristics are unknown. Currently, 7,953 students, or 10.7% of 74,326 students in the Fort Worth Independent School District, receive services through IEPs (Fort et al., 2022). As the number of students on IEPs increases, communication between general and special educators is essential to render adequate services. If special and general education

teachers increase their communication through understanding communication characteristics, academics and positive behaviors of students with disabilities in general education classrooms will also increase by providing adequate IEP implementation.

Problem Statement

The research problem addressed through this study was describing communication characteristics between secondary general and special education teachers in the Fort Worth Independent School District in Fort Worth, Texas. Currently, the LRE for students with disabilities is in the general education classroom. The responsibility of implementing IEPs in the general education classroom lies with the general and special educators. Previous studies have focused on the why behind needing help to implement IEPs adequately; however, the root problem is communication between the general and special educators (Walker, et al., 2023). Many teachers have reported a lack of collaboration time, self-efficacy, attitudes towards students with disabilities, inadequate resources, and a lack of professional development as reasons behind their inability to implement IEPs adequately. These issues led to unknown communication characteristics, decreasing understanding of responsibilities, and inadequate services for students on IEPs in inclusion classrooms.

According to Sundqvist (2019), communication skills are essential for effective collaboration between general and special education teachers to facilitate successful services for students with disabilities. Teachers have stated in previous studies that the administration provides a lack of collaboration time, leading to a decreased understanding of responsibilities in rendering services to students with disabilities (Nilsen, 2020). Not

only is time an issue but Kozikoglu and Albayrak (2022) found that teachers' attitudes must be revised to provide services adequately in inclusion classrooms. According to Alnassar (2021), Sundqvist (2019), and Hopkins, et al., (2019), the administration is not providing planning time between general and special education teachers to discuss responsibilities, increase understanding of responsibilities and self-efficacy to implement successful IEP services to students with disabilities. Because communication characteristics are unknown between general and special educators, responsibilities are not understood in providing services to students with disabilities, leading to unmet legalities and teachers leaving due to a lack of support and collaboration (Hopkins et al., 2019).

Purpose of the Study

Self-efficacy, teachers' attitudes, collaboration time, and lack of communication skills have led to the inadequate implementation of IEP services within inclusion classrooms. The communication characteristics leading to miscommunication and known responsibilities in inclusion classrooms must be understood, which decreases adequate IEP implementation. Understanding communication characteristics will increase adequate IEP implementation, leading to the academic success of students with disabilities utilizing the general education classroom as their least restrictive environment. This qualitative study aimed to discover communication characteristics between secondary general and special education teachers to understand the decreased ability to implement IEPs in the Fort Worth Independent School District in Fort Worth, Texas.

Research Questions

This qualitative study answered the following questions:

1. How do secondary general and special education teachers describe communication characteristics in the Fort Worth Independent School District in Fort Worth, Texas?

2. How do secondary general education and special education teachers describe their ability to implement Individual Education Plans in the Fort Worth Independent School District in Fort Worth, Texas?

Conceptual Framework

One theory explored that grounds this study includes systems theory. Systems theory explores communication within differing systems. Systems theory explains and describes positive and misunderstood communication characteristics within the education system. Luhmann described systems implementing boundaries and establishing restrictions within communication systems (Valeo & Underwood, 2015). Each system, including the education system, has boundaries that restrict the type of communication within the system (Qvortrup & Qvortrup, 2018). Problems begin between two systems when the systems have to communicate, creating conflict with the understanding of responsibilities. The boundaries and restrictions on each system explain the disconnection between general and special educators. Knowing communication characteristics helps understand miscommunication and misunderstandings (Valeo & Underwood, 2015). The boundaries between the two systems can be bridged with the interaction of

communication between general and special educators, increasing the collaboration and appropriate and timely inclusion services provided to students with disabilities.

Understanding the communication system of inclusion versus exclusion will increase the awareness of what students with disabilities need within inclusion classrooms, leading to increased successful communication. According to Kamenopoulou (2016), Ecological systems theory, generated from general systems theory, identifies interactions between different systems, including education. Systems theory and Ecological systems theory describe communication characteristics determining the disconnect between communication leading to unity between general and special educators, increasing adequate implementation of IEPs in Fort Worth Independent School District in Fort Worth, Texas. The study was driven with these theories and increased the description of communication characteristics for improvement and increase teachers' ability for adequate IEP implementation with a more detailed explanation in Chapter 2. Describing communication characteristics between general and special education teachers will identify miscommunication leading to changes needed to adequately increase understanding and ability to implement IEPs in inclusion classrooms. The social and ecological systems theory identifies miscommunication happening through barriers of communication characteristics. With the questions in mind and the derivative from social and ecological systems theory, one better understands communication characteristics leading to social change with a more detailed description in Chapter 2 throughout the qualitative study.

Nature of the Study

A basic qualitative study and analysis with first and secondary coding strategies addressed the research questions in this qualitative study. I collected responses via open-ended questions to honor teachers' time constraints. The recruiting process included both secondary general and special education teachers as participants. Individual email surveys were sent with survey protocols to address the problem and purpose of the student. Interviews of 30 to 50 participants from the Fort Worth Independent School District in Fort Worth, Texas, were conducted. The sample consisted of a purposive stratified sampling of general and special education teachers teaching in secondary schools in the Fort Worth Independent School District. According to Mthuli et al. (2022), the sample size should be between 30 and 50 participants. This number of responses about communication characteristics highlighted the misunderstandings between general and special education teachers regarding their lived experiences (Patton, 2015).

A basic qualitative approach to the study increased the understanding of how general and special education teachers experience, interpret, construct, or make meaning from their world and communication experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2009). The basic qualitative data analysis included the who, what, and where of communication characteristics describing what is unknown about the phenomenon between general and special education teachers (Understanding Pragmatic Research, n.d.). According to Yazioglu and Aktepe (2022), content analysis through an inductive approach is appropriate for the study. The steps of analysis for the research study were as follows:

1. The researcher transcribed each participant's responses in the study.

2. At this time, categories were developed into similar codes, named, put into groups, and coded for the existence of a concept.

3. The researcher searched for patterns of existence within the codes by reviewing the data repeatedly to identify the consistency of the patterns.

I used statistical software like ATLAS.ti to search for common characteristics within the themes of the participants' responses. I interpreted the data, analyze it, and record the findings. Merriam and Tisdell (2009, p. 215) found that the previous study stage involves interpretation, model development, and theory creation. Data analysis revealed communication characteristics, leading to social change and adequate IEP implementation in inclusion classrooms.

Definitions

Multiple terms throughout the analysis included Individual Education Plan (IEP), Least Restrictive Environment (LRE), inclusion classrooms, educator, accommodations, annual IEP goals, and services. The goal for all students with disabilities is to provide them with the LRE to learn successfully to the best of their abilities.

- A general educator educates students regardless of disability and is certified in the specific subject area (Definition of educator, n.d.).

- A special educator provides specific instruction based on the students' needs as outlined in an IEP (Definition of special education, 2020).

- An accommodation is a term that describes an "alteration of the environment, curriculum format, or equipment an individual with a

disability has access to" (What is the difference between accommodation and modification for a student with a disability?, 2022, para. 1).

- An annual IEP goal describes the academic or behavioral goals a student is expected to achieve at the end of the IEP year (IEP Goals: Core concepts and best practices, n.d.).

- Services outlined in the IEP pertain to what a student receives based on their disability and needs, such as inclusion classroom, speech, and transportation (PROGRESS Center at the American Insitutes for Research, n.d.).

- According to Rosen (2022), the LRE is the "most appropriate for a student with disabilities based on the student's needs" (p. 4). Depending on what a student's IEP states will determine their LRE based on what their needs are to be successful in an education setting.

- A student's IEP is a written legal document outlining their diagnosis, special education services, present levels of performance, accommodations, measurable annual goals, goal progress, modifications, and other related services to meet the student's needs for academic and behavioral success (Rosen, 2022).

- Inclusion classrooms provide students with disabilities the opportunity to work side-by-side with general education peers as outlined in their IEP, and the extent of inclusion time is based on the students' needs (Rosen, 2022). Inclusion classrooms consist of a general education teacher and a

special education teacher providing services consistently. Both teachers are certified to teach the subject area of study, and the special education teacher is certified to teach students with disabilities. Regardless of certification, both teachers are responsible for adequately implementing IEPs for students with disabilities within the classroom (Lopez-Azuaga & Suarez Riveiro, 2020). These responsibilities include providing accommodations modifications, adhering to measurable annual goals, and providing goal progress. Misunderstanding these responsibilities could lead to miscommunication and assumptions.

Assumptions

Assumptions are aspects of a study that the researcher believes to be accurate and cannot prove (Stadtlander, 2018). For this study, the assumptions were: (a) The participants will voluntarily participate in the study; (b) all responses will be honest and truthful; (c) all participants met inclusion criteria with honesty and represent the population; (d) my biases, beliefs, and opinions did not interfere with data collection process or analysis; and (e) I presented all data without manipulation or alteration.

Scope and Delimitations

Specific aspects of the research problem included miscommunication between general and special educators, leading to inadequate implementation of IEPs within inclusion classrooms. Communication characteristics between general and special education teachers were yet to be described. The unknown characteristics decreased understanding of why IEPs are not adequately implemented within inclusion classrooms.

Inadequate implementation of IEPs decreases the academic and behavioral success of students with disabilities placed in inclusion classrooms as their LRE. Understanding communication characteristics between general and special education teachers in secondary inclusion classrooms can increase communication skills and academic and behavioral success of students with disabilities with adequate IEP implementation.

Secondary general and special education teachers who work or have worked within inclusion classrooms are the population in the study. More inclusion classrooms exist within secondary education due to the number of students maturing and accessing the general education classroom as their LRE to include their schedule of services change to eight class periods per day (Silva, et al., 2022). Elementary teachers were excluded from the study; however, I initially proposed that they could be included if not enough secondary teachers responded to the email survey provided. Exclusions and other theories related to the study were not investigated.

Systems and ecological systems theory identify potential barriers in communication between general and special education teachers or systems. A pertinent theory that could provide details on communication issues between general and special education teachers is the social learning theory of communication; however, this was not investigated further because the study focuses on unknown communication characteristics. The social learning theory of communication focuses on communication skills and individuals' behaviors during communication instead of how differing systems communicate, causing miscommunication (Kalil & Grant, 2021). Cognitive dissonance theory explains the disconnect between general and special education teachers, including

disagreements, differing thoughts, and beliefs causing tension (Thompson, et al., 2012). Understanding miscommunication based on the barriers identified with systems and ecological systems theory increases the need to study unknown communication characteristics between general and special educators to increase adequate IEP implementation. Understanding communication characteristics between general and special educators will lead to positive changes within other departments—for example, content areas such as math between different grade levels leading to transferability between the education system. However, this led to some limitations within the study.

Limitations

Limitations included collecting primary data with partnership agreements, recruiting participants to provide exceptional data to open-ended questions via online surveys, accurate data collection, and putting personal biases aside. Because the study included general and special education teachers, time is crucial. Online surveys provided flexibility, limit costs, and provide convenience for teachers to answer the questions appropriately at their own pace (Hawkins, 2018). Teachers involved were voluntary participants of 30-50, limiting representation of the entire community; however, providing a detailed description of communication characteristics will enhance the future adequacy of IEP implementation.

Summary

Students with disabilities continuously access the general education classroom as their LRE, as their IEP describes. When students with IEPs learn within the general education classroom, it creates an inclusion classroom with the collaboration of two

general and special educators. Inclusion processes are complicated due to a need for more understanding of responsibilities and communication. According to Berry (2021), Chitiyo and Brinda (2018), Allen and Barnett (2020), Al Jaffal (2022), Nilsen (2020), and Werner et al. (2020), self-efficacy, communication issues, collaboration time, professional development, attitudes, lack of resources, and administration support has caused issues with adequate IEP implementation in inclusion classrooms. General education teachers need to understand their responsibility when implementing IEP services within their classrooms due to a lack of collaboration with the special education teacher. For adequate IEP implementation, general and special education teachers must communicate and collaborate to create strategies for student success (Nilsen, 2020).

When general and special education teachers have the time, collaboration and preservation of relationships and responsibilities leads to adequate IEP implementation. What needs to be known is the communication characteristics between general and special education teachers causing miscommunication. According to Alnassar (2021), Hopkins et al. (2019), and Sundqvist (2019), communication characteristics are unknown because general and special education teachers are not allowed to collaborate to provide successful IEP implementation in IEP classrooms in Fort Worth Independent School District in Fort Worth, Texas. The number of students on IEPs continues to increase, directly correlating with the need for communication between general and special education teachers. If general and special education teachers increase their communication, students with disabilities in inclusion classrooms will increase their academic success with adequate IEP services provided. This study will describe

communication characteristics between general and special education teachers, causing miscommunication and inadequate IEP implementation in inclusion classrooms. Understanding communication characteristics will provide what is needed to change general and special education collaboration, increase adequate IEP implementation and overall academic success of students with disabilities in inclusion classrooms, and create social change within the education system.

Systems and ecological systems theory identifies barriers to the communication of different systems. The two systems with communication issues in the study are general and special education teachers, causing a disconnect and inadequate IEP implementation in inclusion classrooms. Teachers have identified issues with collaboration times, communication, self-efficacy, and lack of professional development and resources, leading to their inability to adequately implement IEPs in inclusion classrooms. Within the literature, communication characteristics are unknown. The study included voluntary secondary general and special education teachers via emailed open-ended survey questions from the Fort Worth Independent School District in Fort Worth, Texas. The participants provied descriptions of their communication characteristics leading to miscommunication and inadequate IEP implementation in inclusion classrooms. The study reviewed the current literature on education communication, the methodology, data collection, and analysis to better understand communication characteristics between general and special education teachers. The study led to enhanced collaboration and increased adequacy in IEP implementation.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This study aims to discover communication characteristics between secondary general and special education teachers to understand the decreased ability to implement Individual Education Plans in the Fort Worth Independent School District (ISD) in Fort Worth, Texas. History indicates unsuccessful implementation of IEPs in inclusion classrooms for students with disabilities. Because students with disabilities continuously access the general education classroom as their least restrictive environment, it has become complicated for teachers to implement IEPs successfully due to a lack of professional development, collaboration time, and miscommunication (Al Jaffal, 2022). When IEPs are not followed within inclusion classrooms, this becomes a legal issue and causes declining student progress. Current literature identifies teachers' reasoning behind inadequate implementation leading to the underlying communication issue. Communication has been an ongoing issue; however, the research does not state the communication characteristics causing this miscommunication. This study will fill a gap by describing communication characteristics leading to a deeper understanding of miscommunication and inadequate implementation of IEPs for students with disabilities.

This section explains the barriers to adequately implementing IEPs within inclusion classrooms, identifying unknown communication characteristics. I discuss the conceptual framework for communication characteristics and the historical background of insufficient communication leading to decreased abilities to implement Individual Education Plans (IEP) in secondary inclusion classrooms. I explore the descriptions of

communication characteristics between secondary general and special education teachers. Because communication is essential to effective IEP implementation in inclusion classrooms, this section emphasizes the importance of understanding the characteristics that optimize students' ability to succeed in their least restrictive environment.

The literature review in this section used resources from communication issues between general and special education teachers. The following databases were resources: ERIC, Directors of Open Access Journals and Education Source, PsycInfo, PsycExtra, PsycArticles, EBSCOhost, Psychology Databases Combined Search, ProQuest Central, and Educator Sources. Key terms included *education, general, special education educators/teachers, individual education plans, inclusion, communication, challenges, social theory, and issues.* With the above-listed items put in place, the research led to unknown communication characteristics between general and special educators.

Conceptual Framework

Many researchers have identified challenges when implementing IEPs within inclusion classrooms with minimal knowledge of communication characteristics. Al Jaffal (2022) described general educators' lack of professional development, collaboration time, and resources not being provided as barriers to their ability to implement Individual Education Plans for students with Autism. Alnassar (2021) took his study further and identified a need for more communication between teachers, the administration not providing planning time, untrusting relationships, and negative attitudes as challenges to implementation. Communication characteristics have yet to be defined. This study intends to describe communication characteristics between general and special educators

causing inadequate implementation of IEPs for students with disabilities. When reviewing the literature, it was prevalent that general systems theory could explain the phenomenon of interest and communication characteristics.

General Systems theory explores communication within different systems and applies it to education (Grothe-Hammer, 2020). It explains and describes positive and misunderstood communication characteristics between the systems. According to Valeo and Underwood (2015), Luhmann described systems creating boundaries and establishing some restrictions within their communication. Each system has boundaries restricting what type of communication within their system is warranted (Qvortrup & Qvortrup, 2018). The problems between the two systems happen when they must communicate, causing conflict with understanding their responsibilities. These boundaries and restrictions within each system may explain the disconnect between general education and special educators. Communication characteristics will help understand miscommunication and misunderstandings (Valeo & Underwood, 2015, p. 7). Boundaries connect at times, and the interaction of communication between general and special education teachers will help increase collaboration and appropriate and timely inclusion services for students with disabilities.

Luhmann (2020), describes a system as substances, in this case, people who are connected by relationships forming the parts of a whole. General and special education teachers are the two parts of the whole system of inclusion classrooms working successfully. When two systems communicate, issues can arise, especially in social systems such as education. Within these systems are behavior expectations, roles for each

participant, and boundaries for all to understand (Luhmann, 2020). The issues arise when these responsibilities or barriers are not understood, creating miscommunication between systems, specifically for this study, the general and special educators.

According to Grothe-Hammer (2020), communication makes social reality between individuals possible. General Systems theory identifies different communities within education, for example, inclusion and exclusion or being a community member. Understanding the communication system of inclusion versus exclusion can increase the awareness of what students need within general education classrooms, leading to more appropriate communication. According to Kamenopoulou (2016), ecological systems theory is generated from general systems theory and deepens the understanding of interactions between systems, including within education. Utilizing both systems theories, general and ecological, to describe the characteristics can determine the disconnect between communication and how to create unity between general and special educators, increasing implementation of IEPs in Fort Worth ISD in Fort Worth, Texas.

Systems and ecological systems theory identify potential barriers in communication between general and special education teachers or systems. Social learning communication theory could provide details on the communication issues between general and special education teachers. This theory was not investigated further because the study describes unknown communication characteristics. The social learning theory of communication focuses on communication skills and individuals' behaviors during communication instead of how differing systems communicate, causing miscommunication (Kalil & Grant, 2021). Cognitive dissonance theory explains the

disconnect between general and special education teachers, including disagreements, differing thoughts, and beliefs causing tension (Thompson, et al., 2012). Systems and ecological systems theory determine the barriers between differing communication systems, causing the need to determine unknown communication characteristics between general and special education teachers to increase adequate IEP implementation. Understanding communication characteristics between general and special educators can also lead to positive social changes within other departments.

Literature Review Related to Key Concepts

Inclusion Classrooms

In 1837, Henry Barnard and Horace Mann were prominent leaders where students with disabilities were separated from public schools. They were housed in institutions for educational purposes, teaching them independence (Francisco et al., 2020). As the years continued, people's perceptions of students with disabilities changed. By the 1900s, students with disabilities were being integrated into public schools due to a change in perceptions of students with disabilities (Francisco et al., 2020). However, during the Great Depression, this perception changed, and students with disabilities were viewed as unable to succeed in public schools even with smaller student-to-teacher ratios, leading to decreased support and resources for special education (Francisco et al., 2020). By the 1950s and 1960s, the government began to increase its funding for special education, leading to many changes for students with disabilities.

In 1975, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) became law. It defined special education "as instruction designed specifically to respond to the learning

needs of an individual with disabilities regardless of the environment" (Francisco et al., 2020, p. 1). With this new law in place, it prompted the education department to identify the special needs of students with disabilities and where their least restrictive environment is for successful learning. IDEA led to the ability of all children to receive appropriate public education (FAPE) in their least restrictive environment according to their needs. According to Francisco et al., (2020), the National Center in Educational Restructuring and Inclusion (NCERI) defined inclusion as providing equal opportunities for all students in general education classes regardless of accommodations, aids, or support services needed. In 2015, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) paved the way for students with disabilities not to rely solely on standardized test scores. However, considering the child's individual learning needs led to increased access to the general education classroom based on their Individual Education Plans (IEPs) (Francisco et. al., 2020).

Inclusion classrooms have become the best model of teaching for students with disabilities. In a study conducted in Finland, 63% of teachers prefer inclusive teaching, where special education teachers are there for support in the general education setting (Salovita, 2018). Bjornsrud and Nilsen (2019), state that the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization describes "inclusion in education as a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all pupils, through increasing participation in learning, cultures, and communities, and reducing and eliminating exclusion within and from education" (p. 159). These classrooms consist of students on Individual Education Plans (IEP) and 504, accommodations given for medical issues

amongst general education students on the same curriculum. Both general and special education teachers are responsible for implementing accommodations and working together to create academic and behavioral success. According to Alnassar (2021), co-teaching needs to be improved due to the lack of communication between teachers, the administration's failure to provide planning time, untrusting relationships, and negative attitudes from general educators. It is essential to understand communication characteristics to increase function between general and special education teachers.

Multiple types of inclusion classrooms include co-teach, general education with inclusion services, and general education without inclusion services. According to Talas et al. (2022), inclusion classrooms are the least restrictive environment for students with an IEP based on their diagnosis, academic requirements, and behavioral needs. The benefits consist of having two teachers within the classroom to meet the needs and demands of the IEP, teachers learning from each other, increasing student outcomes, shared responsibilities, and the ability for students with disabilities to access the same curriculum as their same-aged peers. Challenges to inclusion classrooms also exist, including communication, no time to collaborate, differences between the two teachers, and no training (Talas et al., 2022). Because communication characteristics are unknown between general and special education teachers, it creates challenges when implementing IEPs.

According to Byrd and Alexander (2020), the least restrictive environment for students with disabilities tends to be in the general education classroom, leaving the responsibility to both general and special educators. The special education teachers

determined that communication, facilitating proper decisions, and increased attitudes toward students with disabilities will empower general education teachers to create success in their inclusive classrooms. Casey (2019) describes trust, vision, commitment to staff development, everyday language, routines, learning targets, and remediation as essential for accurate communication and adequate inclusion services.

Weiss and Lloyd, (2002), describe inclusion classrooms as co-teaching between the general and special educator wherein the special educator is responsible for providing the general education teacher support with planning and instruction. An issue that arises within inclusion classrooms because there needs to be more communication is understanding responsibilities and differing responsibilities in each classroom (Weiss & Lloyd, 2002). Inclusion classrooms continue to be the least restrictive environment for many students with disabilities, creating the need for communication between general and special educators. Understanding communication characteristics will enhance the efficacy of the above recommendations for inclusion services.

IEP Description/Rationale Resources Available versus Needed

Individual Education Plans (IEPs) are legal documentation identifying different supports, accommodations, and services needed for the student to access the general education classroom amongst their peers effectively (Jachova et al., 2018). An IEP is given to a student with a known diagnosis, such as Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder or Specific Learning Disability, among many other diagnoses. Writing an IEP is a collaboration between parents, special and general education teachers, diagnosticians, licensed school psychologists, and the administration. A higher-district individual,

lawyers, and advocates might attend as a resource of information providing support. Communication must be happening between all individuals to provide services identified on the IEP.

Teachers attend specific training on implementing IEPs within their classrooms; however, responsibilities still need to be clarified due to their lack of communication. According to Al Jaffal (2022), general educators have expressed that their lack of professional development, collaboration time, and resources is causing barriers to their ability to implement IEPs for students with Autism and other disabilities. Al Jaffal (2022) concluded that districts should provide more training for teachers in university education programs and resources and allow for planning time between special and general educators. With more training and resources in place for general education teachers, it would increase their ability to implement IEPs in inclusion classrooms. However, communication characteristics are necessary to understand the disconnect in IEP implementation.

According to Leonard and Smyth (2022), when teachers do not have adequate resources available to facilitate inclusion practices within their classrooms, it increases their negative attitudes toward students with disabilities. Tiwari (2023) described the issues behind inadequate IEP implementation in inclusion classrooms as under-resourced, leading to decreased knowledge of teaching students with disabilities. Providing teachers with adequate resources is an ongoing problem, causing inadequate IEP implementation. Teachers believe their inability to implement IEPs and their attitudes are attributed to the resources and support they have within inclusion classrooms (Leonard & Smyth, 2022).

Teachers have identified resources, communication, and collaboration problems in public schools, causing inadequate IEP implementation and unsuccessful inclusion classrooms (Leonard & Smyth, 2022).

Allen and Barnett (2020) found the need to provide ongoing professional development and administration support. Professional development provided to general and special educators increases communication opportunities and collaboration for a successful inclusion classroom. When districts for general education teachers are not enforcing professional development, it decreases their effectiveness in implementing IEPs. Allen and Barnett (2020) described the need for professional development to include both general and special educators, increasing the collaboration and understanding of shared responsibilities. Having both general and special education teachers involved in training will increase their communication characteristics, directly correlating to academic success for students with disabilities.

Roles and Responsibilities of Teachers in IEPs Role of Special Education Teacher and Role of the General Education Teacher in IEPs

Chitiyo and Brinda (2018) describe responsibilities in inclusion classrooms as general educators are the ones who provide the content, while special education teachers are the ones who provide accommodations, goals, modifications, and other education tools as determined by the student's IEP. According to the U.S. Department of Education (2019), all individuals who come in contact with a student on an IEP are responsible for all aspects, including goals, accommodations, modifications, and educational tools to provide student success within their classroom. According to Nilsen's study (2020), a

lack of collaboration between special and general education teachers led to general educators not providing adequate services to students with disabilities in inclusion classrooms. Nilsen (2020) also found that teachers needed more time to provide the necessary services or collaboration, leading to unknown communication characteristics.

According to Berry (2021), general education teachers thought they shared responsibility with special educators at a higher percentage (80%). There are differences in the responsibilities of assisting students with disabilities in inclusion classrooms. Special educators stated they are solely responsible for this task, while general educators teach new content (Berry, 2021). Jachova et al. (2018), stated that when general education teachers do not accept students with disabilities as part of their responsibilities, they leave the responsibility up to the special educator, causing communication issues.

Weiss and Lloyd (2002) described the role of special educators in inclusion classrooms as providing support to general educators, team teaching, or teaching students with disabilities outside the general education classroom. Taking on various roles as a general or special education teacher can be challenging, causing issues in inclusion classrooms, including miscommunication and inadequate IEP implementation. Although both teachers feel each is a valuable resource, they also described the need for professional development for inclusion classrooms and adequate time for collaboration in modifying assignments for students with disabilities. These differing views of shared responsibility decreased communication, student success, and satisfaction.

Communication Between Special and General Education Teachers

Collaboration is vital between general and special education teachers, which enhances the need for communication. According to Sundqvist et al. (2023), challenges and inability to communicate lead to unequal roles and inadequate IEP implementation. For collaboration to be effective, communication must also be effective. Sundqvist (2019) found that for the services of students with disabilities to be successful, communication skills and problem-solving strategies are essential for effective collaboration. Increasing communication skills will directly correlate to collaboration for the successful implementation of IEPs; however, communication characteristics are unknown, decreasing communication skills.

There are many aspects to effective communication in the educational field. Communication is exchanging words, feelings, or thoughts between two living individuals (Yavuz & Guzel, 2020). It is essential to have effective communication to enhance the message being stated. Effective communication provides positive interpersonal relationships and increases professional abilities (Yavuz & Guzel, 2020). Communicating between individuals can seem challenging; however, there are skills an individual can encompass to become an effective communicator. These communication skills include providing ideas thoughtfully and organizing for the participant to understand better the overall agenda of what is being said, including non-verbal language (Broeckelman-Post, et al., 2023). Practical communication skills include listening, working together, appropriate language, ethical, meaningful discussions, critical thinking, organization, and shared goals (Broeckelman-Post, et al., 2023). Communication skills

are critical between general and special education teachers to adequately implement strategies and IEPs within inclusion classrooms.

Effective teacher communication includes active listening, understanding, paying attention, and responding (Sundqvist et al., 2023). Communicating effectively between general and special education teachers creates a positive community and culture. Bowen and Shume (2020) found that teachers identify communication as one of education's most critical skill sets. With practical communication skills, teachers create trust, respect, and positive collaboration (Feller et al., 2022). When teachers have effective communication, they can collaborate positively, enhancing their teaching practices.

Practical communication skills are vital as teachers come together in inclusion classrooms. Safran (1991) described a working relationship between general and special educators as "communicative, collaborative, and a shared responsibility" (p. 373). According to Feller et.al., (2022), when teachers facilitated practical communication skills during collaboration, conflicts were minimized, and trusting relationships and strategies for the classroom were created. The most important aspects to focus on for effective communication during collaboration are "listening to understand, paraphrasing, and different dialogue when emotions are high" (Feller et al., 2022, p. 27). Through effective communication, teachers can create positive relationships between them to facilitate better collaboration and efficient teaching strategies for adequate IEP implementation.

Lemons et al., (2018) provided evidence of insufficient inclusion services for students with disabilities in the inclusion classroom due to inadequate intensive

interventions. Communication between general and special education teachers is not happening, causing students to be unable to access intensive interventions. With a continuum of services of intensive interventions established with the input of special education teachers, the implementation of the IEP can be successful. For general education teachers to efficiently implement intensive interventions, communication characteristics need to be known and happening between them and the special educator.

Challenges Related to the Delivery of IEPs

According to Leonard and Smyth (2022), 54% of teachers in inclusion classrooms of students with autism have negative attitudes towards students with disabilities. Retention of special education teachers has become increasingly difficult due to the abundance of required tasks, the social climate in school systems, and the lack of support and collaboration among colleagues (Hopkins et al., 2019). Hopkins et al. (2019) described special educators' high turnover rate as needing more support, an adverse school climate, and a lack of trusting relationships. These issues arise when teachers must communicate, decreasing their ability to work effectively in an inclusive classroom.

Kozikoglu and Albayrak (2022) identified teachers' attitudes toward teaching students with disabilities to create challenges. Many teachers described their challenges as not having enough information, no material support, not knowing where to receive support, not knowing their responsibilities, not having enough knowledge, not knowing how to determine goals for the IEP, and not knowing what activities to utilize (Kozikoglu & Albayrak, 2022). Special educators found it challenging to find the time to prepare to write an IEP, collaborate with colleagues, and receive administrative support. Challenges

include not understanding how to measure, evaluate, implement, and plan time to accurately service all students with a disability (Kozikoglu & Albayrak, 2022). Kozikoglu and Albayrak (2022) described other implementation challenges, including crowded classrooms, insufficient material, lack of parent support, insufficient information about IEPs, and a complex physical environment. Many challenges listed result in poor communication, leading to the current study describing communication characteristics to improve communication between general and special educators. Allen and Barnett (2020) indicate that general education teachers need increased self-efficacy in implementing IEPs in the classroom. Self-efficacy has been an ongoing problem causing decreased teachers' attitudes toward students with disabilities, posing issues for them to implement IEPs successfully (Werner et al., 2020).

According to Berry (2021), general education teachers attribute their inability to implement IEPs to communication issues and a lack of understanding of their responsibilities. General and special educators must communicate to increase services given to students with disabilities in inclusion opportunities. Teachers have reported needing more opportunities to facilitate positive communication and collaborate to create strategies to provide adequate student services (Nilsen, 2020). The lack of time to collaborate decreases the communication skills to facilitate positive teacher relationships (Hopkins et al., 2019). According to Alnassar (2021), Hopkins et al. (2019), and Sundqvist (2019), communication characteristics are unknown because the administration is not providing planning time for collaboration between teachers to be successful in inclusion classrooms implementing IEPs in Fort Worth ISD. This includes a lack of

knowledge of students with disabilities and what strategies to utilize for adequate IEP implementation.

Roberts and Webster (2022), describe the lack of knowledge of students with disabilities as a challenge. The lack of knowledge can be attributed to miscommunication or lack of communication. Without appropriate professional development on strategies to teach students with disabilities, teachers do not have the knowledge to implement IEPs in inclusion classrooms adequately. Roberts and Webster (2022) found that a comprehensive approach to inclusion classrooms will increase the implementation of evidence-based practices. Increasing knowledge from professional development will increase the teachers' ability to adequately implement IEPs in inclusion classrooms and decrease their stress levels.

Nimante and Kokare (2022) identified five competencies teachers described as needing more robustness to implement IEPs accurately in their classrooms. The five competencies are differentiating the curriculum for students with disabilities, timely identifying students with disabilities, learning new techniques, understanding the role of providing recommendations for an IEP, and having enough support for students with disabilities (Nimante & Kokare, 2022). It was also found that age and experience in inclusion classrooms cause challenges with teaching students with disabilities. Overall, the study supports that general education teachers need appropriate professional development and support to feel more confident teaching in inclusion classrooms.

Klibthong and Agbenyega, (2022) describe that challenges related to IEP implementation led to workplace stress. Teachers have identified insufficient support

from administration, time to create educational lessons for students with disabilities, and special education services as challenges hindering their ability to adequately implement IEPs within their classrooms. The study concluded that teachers need more support to adequately implement IEPs within their inclusive classrooms (Klibthong & Agbenyega, 2022). Providing more support would help general and special educators communicate effectively, increase their understanding of responsibilities, and teach them how to adequately implement IEPs in inclusion classrooms.

Summary and Conclusions

Most students with disabilities utilize the general education classroom as their least restrictive environment. Previous studies have shown that general educators describe multiple issues with special education, such as a lack of collaboration time, professional development, and an inability to understand responsibilities, resources, attitudes, and relationships. General and special educators must communicate through collaboration to better understand their responsibilities and IEP implementation; however, they do not have opportunities to increase self-efficacy through professional development or collaboration (Chitiyo & Brinda, 2018). This inability to collaborate decreases successful communication skills and relationships between general and special educators (Hopkins, et al., 2019). General educators are responsible for collaborating with special educators to understand their responsibilities to implement IEPs within the general curriculum, creating student success. To facilitate student success, knowing what is causing miscommunication is essential.

What needs to be discovered in special education inclusion settings, perhaps causing a decrease in the adequate implementation of IEPs, is the communication characteristics between secondary general and special educators in Fort Worth ISD in Fort Worth, Texas. A lack of understanding of communication characteristics decreases the understanding of communication and the ability to implement IEPs adequately. This study will describe the communication characteristics between general and special educators in Fort Worth, Texas. These descriptions of communication characteristics will increase the potential implementation of IEPs in general education classrooms and the overall success of students with disabilities in their least restrictive environment.

The next chapter will describe the methodology, participant recruitment criteria, characteristics, data collection instruments and procedures, credibility, dependability, confirmability, and ethical procedures. All aspects of the study identify and describe steps and procedures for deepening the understanding of communication characteristics between secondary general and special education teachers.

Chapter 3: Research Method

This study aimed to discover communication characteristics between secondary general and special education teachers understanding the inadequate ability to implement Individual Education Plans in Fort Worth ISD in Fort Worth, Texas. The number of students with disabilities accessing the general education curriculum for their least restrictive environment by following their IEPs continues to increase (Brock, 2018). Students with disabilities who access the general education classroom create a necessary relationship between general and special educators. This relationship is vital for adequately implementing IEPs from general educators in their classrooms, creating academic success for students. According to Berry (2021), general education teachers state that their inability to implement IEPs is due to communication issues causing a misunderstanding of their responsibilities in inclusion classrooms. Communication is at the forefront of the issue behind the inadequate implementation of IEPs in inclusion classrooms, resulting in decreased student services. This qualitative study discovered communication characteristics between secondary general and special education teachers to help improve communication to implement IEPs in secondary inclusion classrooms in Fort Worth ISD in Fort Worth, Texas.

Research Design and Rationale

The research questions of this study are: (1) How do secondary general and special education teachers describe communication characteristics in Fort Worth ISD in Fort Worth, Texas? (2) How do secondary general and special education teachers describe their ability to implement Individual Education Plans in the Fort Worth

Independent School District in Fort Worth, Texas? Most research has identified issues

with adequately implementing IEPs in inclusion classrooms. These issues include no

collaboration time between general and special education teachers, negative attitudes

towards students with disabilities, lack of resources, miscommunication, not

understanding responsibilities, and no professional development opportunities. Because

communication is at the forefront of the issues behind general educators' inadequate

implementation of IEPs, the study discovered communication characteristics so that

practitioners can understand the challenges in communication for IEP implementation in

inclusion classrooms. The research design included a basic qualitative study and analysis

with first and secondary coding strategies.

A qualitative study was appropriate for this study because understanding

communication characteristics is not measurable as in a quantitative study. A qualitative

study increased how general and special education teachers describe communication

characteristics. A basic qualitative approach to the study deepened the understanding of

how general and special education teachers interpret, construct, or make meaning from

their world and communication experiences identifying characteristics (Merriam &

Tisdell, 2009). The basic qualitative approach described communication characteristics

between general and special education teachers as opposed to understanding a

phenomenon or narrative. A basic qualitative approach described communication

characteristics that deepen the understanding of miscommunication leading to inadequate

IEP implementation. Thus, the research questions were best answered by qualitatively

exploring communication characteristics between general and special educators. When

analyzing the data, the intent was to discover and describe communication characteristics to help improve IEP implementation. Yazioglu and Aktepe (2022) used content analysis through the inductive approach, which this study will follow. ATLAS.ti searched for common characteristics within the themes of the participants' responses. The researcher interpreted the data, analyze it, and record the findings. Merriam and Tisdell (2009, p. 215) found that the previous study stage involves interpretation, model development, and theory creation. Within this research tradition, the role of the researcher was to receive adequate information from participants.

<div align="center">**Role of the Researcher**</div>

Qualitative researchers explore and describe phenomena unknown to society, creating social change. My role as the researcher was to conduct an ethical qualitative study with 30 to 50 participants as an observer (Mthuli et al., 2022). My role was a collector of the data, creating an instrument, reviewing the survey, and analyzing it. I began my study with a problem, formulated a question(s), gathered and analyzed data from the participants, and summarized what was presented in the answers (Creswell & Creswell Baez, 2020). As the researcher, I contacted the Fort Worth ISD Research Review Board to determine who will send the flyer to general and special educators of inclusion classrooms to participate in the research study. As the researcher, I needed to consider who the participants are, their relationship with me, and their biases.

The researcher observed the participants' answers to open-ended questions, creating patterns showing unknown communication characteristics. Participants were from Fort Worth ISD, having no relationship with the researcher, decreasing biases.

Some potential biases included my active teaching role of special education students in another Texas school district, working with general educators, and having students with disabilities who access the general education classroom as their least restrictive environment. As the researcher, I kept an open mind, understood these biases, and navigated around them by actively exploring all participants' responses. I composed a list of emails from public databases in the Fort Worth Independent School District of teachers' emails. I sent flyers for participation in the research study that was initiated with permission from the Research Review Board from Fort Worth ISD to mitigate the biases of individual opinions and remain ethical. I sent two follow-up reminder emails to complete the flyer. With approval, the research retrieved responses for an adequate sample size. If the data collected was inadequate, follow-up questions will be sent to provide increased specific data relating to communication characteristics. Validation strategies such as peer reviews, bracketing, and detailed descriptions were implemented, refraining from opinions. As the researcher, I described the methodology for other researchers to replicate or continue the study.

Methodology

A basic qualitative study and analysis was the design behind this study. To align with this design and the purpose of answering the research questions, the population included secondary general and special education educators teaching in an inclusion classroom. The participants are from Fort Worth ISD in Fort Worth, Texas. The sampling strategy was purposive sampling. I had a specific group of participants in mind; however, I provided the survey to all Fort Worth School district teachers. Only data from specific

secondary general and special education participants in inclusion classrooms will be utilized (Shaheen et al., 2019). The criteria required for participants included being a secondary general or special education teacher providing IEP services in an inclusion classroom. Participants were known to meet the criteria through an emailed survey asking if they are secondary general or special educators in an inclusion classroom. The number of participants in the study was between 30 and 50. According to Mthuli et al. (2022), interview or observation qualitative sample sizes should provide an "understanding of complex human issues" and be between 30 and 50 participants (p. 817).

Recruitment of Participants

The specific procedures for how participants were identified, contacted, and recruited include multiple steps. First, the Research Review Board was contacted for permission to conduct a research study. I composed a list of emails from public databases for Fort Worth ISD secondary schools and sent out a flyer about the research to all of the secondary teachers employed in Fort Worth ISD. Participants received an emailed flyer in which they will select if they were interested in the study and clicked on the link to the survey. I sent two reminder emails within two weeks. If they chose yes on the link, the first page was the informed consent, followed by the open-ended questions to the survey. After completing the survey, they received a confirmation stating they have completed it and thanking them for their help. Data was collected and analyzed from the survey answers.

Sampling and Data Collection

The primary aim during sampling was to reach saturation (Kuklewicz & King, 2018). The proper way of knowing that one has reached saturation is when the responses become repetitive. Creswell and Creswell Baez (2020) suggest discontinuing data collection is acceptable when categories or responses become saturated. The relationship between saturation and sample size is as follows: The goal was to get enough responses until the categories, codes, and themes become repetitive. For research purposes, the lowest number of participants was recruited in the study, 30 to 50, to collect appropriate data and meet saturation (Mthuli et al., 2022).

The data collection instruments included never before-used open-ended survey questions created by me, the researcher. Open-ended survey questions allowed the participant to provide their opinions, experiences, and more detailed descriptions of communication characteristics, leading to comprehensive data to adequately answer the research questions (Albudaiwi, 2017). A pilot study of general and special educators was implemented within Keller ISD to determine the adequacy of questions. To recruit participants, I invited them to my research study and identified what was to be expected and what the data was being collected for. The data was not utilized for a final study; asked for consent. The open-ended survey link was sent via email after receiving consent. The data was collected via survey responses and analyzed for comprehensive data collection and to determine if questions on the survey need to be revised. The pilot study provided me with the data needed to make changes to the open-ended survey questions to ensure my research questions were adequately answered with the questions provided.

The open-ended questions were online surveys provided to all pilot participants and were generated for final study participants. Questions were self-explanatory, easy for the participant to understand and answer, and appealing to the reader's eye (Sue & Ritter, 2007). When the research questions were answered by participant feedback, the open-ended survey questions became valid. As the research questions were answered, a connection or relationship was created between the question and the purpose of the measurement (Sue & Ritter, 2007). Validity was measured by this connection and the ability to measure what was being asked of the participants. Open-ended questions allowed participants to provide their opinions in their own words, offering information about communication characteristics leading to the sufficiency of data collection. According to Sue and Ritter (2007), participants prefer to answer open-ended questions in an email survey rather than other options giving various answers. A pilot study was conducted to increase validity and reliability, leading to possible changes to questions, delivery, and a deeper understanding of communication characteristics. For the pilot study, friends and co-workers were provided with questions to provide their feedback, leading to an increased understanding of appropriate questions or needs for changes. Recruitment, participation, and data collection were necessary for pilot and final studies.

The data collection included recruiting secondary general and special education teachers as participants for individual email surveys. A survey protocol was developed to address the problem and purpose of the study. Interviews with 30 to 50 general and special education teachers from the Fort Worth Independent School District in Fort Worth, Texas, were collected (Mthuli et al., 2022). A basic qualitative study and analysis

were utilized with first and secondary coding strategies. Open-ended question responses were collected via emailed surveys, including a purposive stratified sampling of general and special education teachers teaching in secondary schools in the Fort Worth Independent School District in Fort Worth, Texas.

If data was insufficient and there were too few participants, recruiting other general and special education teachers from outside sources via research websites would have been helpful. The study includes a debrief provided to participants who completed and stopped the study mid-way. A debriefing would have informed the participants of the study title, my name, and contact information, thanked them, and explained the purpose and aim for social change as an educational tool (University of Massachusetts Amherst, 2019). If a participant chose to leave the study, they could contact me and be reminded of their informed consent and confidentiality. It was also possible for participants to receive follow-up questions for clarity issues, which would also have been conducted via open-ended questions via email.

Data Analysis

The basic qualitative approach describes communication characteristics between general and special education teachers. The analysis of the data included descriptions of communication characteristics. Yazioglu and Aktepe (2022) used content analysis through the inductive approach, which this study followed. The steps of analysis for the research study were as follows:

1. The researcher transcribed the responses of each participant in the study.

2. At this time, categories were developed into similar codes, named, put into groups, and coded for the existence of a concept.

3. The researcher also searched for patterns of existence within the codes by reviewing the data repeatedly to identify the consistency of the patterns.

I used statistical software like ATLAS.ti to search for common characteristics within the themes of the participants' responses. At this point, the researcher interpreted the data, analyzed it, and recorded the findings. Merriam and Tisdell (2009, p. 215) found that the previous study stage involves interpretation, model development, and theory creation. All research involves trustworthiness, including credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Issues of Trustworthiness

The participants provided first-hand observations and interpretations to establish credibility within the research. Dependability was established through specific recruitment parameters, including experience, location, education, and career title (The Farnsworth group, 2022). Transferability was assessed through these responses, including similarities and identifying themes throughout. Transferability was seen through thick descriptions, which provided intense descriptions from the participants to collect accurate data throughout the study for other situations (The Farnsworth group, 2022). The participants were directly integrated into the research, providing accurate observations and creating accurate data, findings, and recommendations leading to confirmability. Confirmability was established by minimizing bias, similar or overlapping themes, and descriptive details directly from the participants. Overlapping themes, triangulation, and

peer reviews led to credibility within the research (The Farnsworth group, 2022).

Trustworthiness led to meaningful research to create social change; however, ethical

procedures were also essential to maintain throughout the research process.

Ethical procedures started with the Walden University Institutional Review Board

(IRB) from whom approval was granted to conduct the research (IRB Approval No. 12-

07-23-1120755). During this process, agreements were created to recruit participants.

The first step included providing a Form A (Description of Data Sources and Partner

Sites). The research recruited participants from the Fort Worth Independent School

District in Fort Worth, Texas. The Research Review Board was contacted and provided

with research details. A flyer to participate in a research study for dissertation purposes

was initiated with permission via email. Participants provided informed consent via the

flyer and survey via email, asking each if they were willing to participate in a study for

dissertation purposes. For privacy, each participant remained anonymous throughout the

study. Data was stored confidentially and destroyed after the research had concluded.

Summary

To begin the study, research design and rationale, role of the researcher,

methodology, trustworthiness, and ethics were essential. The research design and

rationale outlined why basic qualitative research was the best choice to determine

communication characteristics between special and general education teachers. The

researcher explained biases, relationships, ethical issues, and what to expect from the

researcher. The methodology was a step-by-step understanding of the research, including

participant selection, instruments, data collection, and analysis plan. Trustworthiness and

ethical considerations gave an overview of the research's credibility while staying ethical in all procedures throughout the study. Chapter 3 was the frontmatter to begin the study, starting with the pilot study and beginning the actual research.

Chapter 4: Results

More students with disabilities are accessing the general education classroom as their least restrictive environment, creating a need for all teachers in inclusion classrooms to be responsible for implementing individual education plans (IEPs). This study describes communication characteristics between general and special education teachers, causing inadequate implementation of IEPs in inclusion classrooms. The research questions answered are,

1. How do secondary general and special education teachers describe communication characteristics in the Fort Worth Independent School District in Fort Worth, Texas?

2. How do secondary general education and special education teachers describe their ability to implement Individual Education Plans in the Fort Worth Independent School District in Fort Worth, Texas?

The participants were asked to provide informed consent by clicking continue within the online questionnaire. Each participant then completed the open-ended questionnaire created by the researcher describing communication characteristics between secondary special and general education teachers. This chapter will explain participant demographics, data collection and analysis, trustworthiness, and research study results.

Setting and Demographics

An informal pilot study was conducted during the beginning stages of the research. The pilot study tested the validity of the responses to the open-ended questions (Hassan et al., 2006). During this pilot study, colleagues and friends were recruited to

participate. An open-ended questionnaire was emailed to each of the 12 participants. Results were then collected via e-mail to determine the accuracy of question verbiage and responses. No changes were made to the question based on the accuracy of the responses. Participants' criteria for the main study remained the same: all respondents had to be secondary general or special education teachers.

All 31 participants were unknown to me before, during, or after their participation in the study, and they were from the Fort Worth Independent School district and worked in secondary schools. The participants did not attend the same school or work for the same company as me. No personal or organizational conditions influenced the participants. Due to the nature of their work, the participants' experience in secondary inclusion classrooms may influence the interpretation of the study results; however, these were not disclosed to me. According to Mosconi et al., 2023, an individual's experiences influence opinions on particular subjects. An individual's experience could impact the responses from the participants based on their experience or lack of experience in inclusion classrooms. The participants did not have a particular demographic requirement. When the questionnaire started, all participants indicated they were special or general education teachers.

Data Collection

Data was collected from 31 secondary general and special education teachers in inclusion settings. I emailed a flyer to recruit participation to all secondary teachers, whose emails were publicly displayed on Fort Worth ISD's school websites. Two reminder emails were sent within the next two weeks to increase participation and receive

the expected 30 to 50 participants. The flyer briefly described the research study and the link to participate. When the participant clicked the link, the first page consisted of the informed consent, which was implied once the participant clicked next to the first question of the researcher-created open-ended questionnaire.

The first round of emails was sent out to all high school teachers in Fort Worth ISD in increments of 50 participants, leading to 1,156 emails. Due to not receiving enough participants, a second round of emails was sent out to all middle school teachers in Fort Worth ISD in increments of 50 participants, leading to another 500 flyers being sent out. Each round of flyers received two reminder emails to increase participation in the research study. The data was recorded through a survey platform FreeOnlineSurveys (https://freesonlinesurveys.com). The responses remained anonymous, and no contact information was received from the participants. After 31 responses were collected, data analysis was performed utilizing ATLAS.ti software for coding. This data collection aligned with the plan presented in Chapter 3. I did not encounter any unusual circumstances during data collection.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was performed utilizing the ATLAS.ti software program. I went through each of the 31 responses, coded them according to the responses, and categorized them according to specifics from each of the eighteen questions on the questionnaire. I created 137 codes and 600 quotations. As I read the responses, certain words repeated and stood out to me, helping me create codes. After completing the coding, I used the

software program's AI (Artificial Intelligence) feature to create a secondary coding set. The code words were grouped based on the question set, which created themes.

There were multiple codes derived from the responses, such as no contact/communication, email/technology, in person, during/before/after school, phone, behavior concerns, student progress, professional, entire IEP, non-existent, informative/detailed, more time/set time, clear expectations, very confident/confident, highly adequate/adequate, not adequate among many others. Most participants stated their form of communication was email or some technology, in person, on the phone, during, before, or after school, which created this category. Participants 1 through 11 stated email was their primary source of communication. Participant 12 stated, "With specific program students, I only speak to those SPED teachers when needed…I talk with co-teachers every day we have class." Communication between general and special education teachers was mainly through email or technology, meetings during school, or no contact. Communication between special and general education teachers was before, after, or during school or without contact. Participant 21 stated, "There are little to no formalized channels, no communication opportunities." Not having communication opportunities leads to a misunderstanding of the responsibilities of implementing the IEP.

The responsibilities of IEP special educators included the code changes in IEP, modifications, accommodations, and writing the IEP. Participants 1, 2, 4, 5, and 6 stated specifics about the IEP they were responsible for, including "changes to the IEP, accommodations, modifications, behavior and academic needs, challenges and successes." General education teachers left this question blank or needed to know their

responsibilities. Participant 3 specifically stated, "I do not know" their responsibilities. Participant 12 stated, "Anything work-related," leaving a vague response. Time to communicate continues to be an issue.

The codes that made up the category time to communicate were before or after school, planning time, and no time. Participants 1, 2, and 3 stated they communicate "during school, meetings, and email." Behavior concerns, modifications/accommodations, student progress, and none created the category of communication expectations. Participants 7 and 8 stated that all that is recommended in the IEP is to follow exactly as written. Participants 1 through 3 stated, "IEP goals, accommodations, modifications." Participant 13 stated, "I am not sure." Participant 20 stated, "Student progress, accommodations, and modifications." Communication time and expectations led to the characteristics of communication.

The category characteristics of communication from special to general educators included cooperative codes, non-existent, brief and to the point, and informative or detailed. Participant 14 stated, "It is non-existent unless there is a problem, brief and to the point." Participant 15 stated, "Clear, cooperative, intentional, and relevant." Participant 22 stated that communication "Depends on the teacher, and some are more friendly and cooperative in sharing their phone number for texts and calls, while others are much harder to engage." Most of the responses were stated during the school day or via email when time allows. Even when time allows, participants had issues with detailed expectations of implementing the IEP.

Communication characteristics from general to special educators had similarities to special educators to general. The codes included professional, non-existent, brief, and to the point, as well as patient/friendly/reliable, from general to special education teachers. Participants 12 and 13 stated communication is "Helpful, efficient, and professional." Participant 15 stated, "There is no communication unless the student is having issues." Participant 17 stated, "It is minimal and insufficient; teachers in the U.S. are not afforded enough time to accomplish a quality education." Understanding the characteristics of communication led to knowing the needs of each teacher to increase communication.

The codes that created the category of needs from special to general educators are setting a time or making more time for communication and being more transparent on expectations. Participants 1-4, 6, 8, 10, 12, 13, 15, 20 through 29 all stated, more time is needed to communicate and collaborate. Participants 18, 26, and 28 stated, "Clearer expectations are needed." The needs of general and special educators include setting more time and better documentation. Participants 2-12 stated, "Meeting in person, more time communicate regularly, and set meetings." Participants 14-16 stated, "providing general educators instructions or exactly what needs to be done, sharing constant information, better training." The codes for needs were very similar to those for the category of weaknesses in IEP implementation.

The codes for the category weaknesses in IEP implementation were no time to communicate, insufficient data or documentation, and unknown responsibilities. Participant 3, 9, and 10 stated their biggest weakness was "time." Participants 15-18

stated, "I am not sure what my full responsibility is, not knowing all of the documentation, not having sufficient data and clarification," are their biggest weaknesses. The codes for the category strengths in IEP implementation were communication, IEP knowledge, and Special Education training. Participants 3, 5, 15, 17, and 18 stated that "their ability to communicate" is a strength. Participants 2, 7, 8, 10, 20, and 22 stated "their knowledge of special education is a strength" when implementing the IEP. Identifying strengths and weaknesses increases the understanding of the confidence in teachers to implement the IEP in inclusion classrooms.

The confidence category in IEP implementation was coded as very confident/confident and somewhat confident. Participants 1-10, 12, 14, 15, 18-20, and 22-30 all stated they feel "confident or somewhat confident" in IEP implementation. Participants 11, 13, 16, 17, and 21 all stated they "do not feel confident or know what their responsibilities are" when implementing the IEP. The codes that created the category of the rate of special and general education inclusion services were to be adequate and include more time in inclusion. Participants 1-4, 6-8, and 9-11 all stated special education teachers are "adequate, helpful, or very adequate" in implementing the IEP in inclusion classrooms. Participants 12-14, 17-20, 25, and 27 stated special education teachers are "inadequate, need more time in inclusion, only there to provide accommodations, and more staff is needed" to provide adequate IEP implementation. Participants 1-5, 7, 11, 13, 14, and 19 all stated general educators are "adequate" in implementing IEPs. Participants 8, 10, 12, 13, 16, 17, 19, 22, 23, and 25 stated general educators are "uneducated, rely on special education teachers, are inadequate, below

acceptable, lack the time, or have too many students" to provide adequate IEP

implementation. Identifying the codes into categories generated the themes.

These categories were then put into six themes: how general and special education

teachers communicate, teachers' responsibilities of IEPs, communication characteristics,

communication barriers, rate of inclusion services, and weaknesses and strengths in IEP

implementation. Throughout coding, creating categories and themes, repetition was

apparent, creating saturation within the responses. There was no evidence of discrepant

responses. Table 1 below provides information about the category, illustrating the types

of teacher communication.

Table 1

Forms of Communication Gen Ed to SPED and SPED to Gen Ed

Codes	Frequency	Themes
In-person	20	Majority of communication is email/technology or in-person
Email/technology	26	Majority of communication is email/technology or in-person
Annual meeting	2	Majority of communication is email/technology or in-person
No contact/communication	11	Majority of communication is email/technology or in-person
		Special education teachers and general education teachers have different responsibilities
Be available (at all times)	1	Majority of communication is email/technology or in-person
Phone calls	9	Majority of communication is email/technology or in-person
Behavior concerns	11	Special education teachers and general education teachers have different responsibilities

Table 2 below provides information about the category, illustrating the expectations regarding teacher communication.

Table 2

Communication Expectations

Codes	Frequency	Themes
No contact/communication	11	Special education teachers and general education teachers have different responsibilities
For an issue only	26	Majority of communication is email/technology or in-person
Annual meeting	2	Majority of communication is email/technology or in-person
Behavior concerns	11	Special education teachers and general education teachers have different responsibilities
Modifications/accommodations	4	Special education teachers and general education teachers have different responsibilities
Changes to IEP	3	Special education teachers and general education teachers have different responsibilities
Student progress	16	Special education teachers and general education teachers have different responsibilities
I don't know	1	Special education teachers and general education teachers have different responsibilities
Adequate IEP implementation	3	Special education teachers and general education teachers have different responsibilities
Lessons	4	Special education teachers and general education teachers have different responsibilities
Information on IEP	6	Special education teachers and general education teachers have different responsibilities
Teacher supports	2	Special education teachers and general education teachers have different responsibilities

Table 3 below reflects the codes under the category related to the perceived responsibilities of IEP.

Table 3

Responsibilities of IEP

Codes	Frequency	Themes
Documentation	6	Special education teachers and general education teachers have different responsibilities
Changes to IEP	1	Special education teachers and general education teachers have different responsibilities
Accommodations/modifications	11	Special education teachers and general education teachers have different responsibilities
For an issue only	3	Special education teachers and general education teachers have different responsibilities
IEP writing/entire IEP	12	Special education teachers and general education teachers have different responsibilities
Legal obligations	1	Special education teachers and general education teachers have different responsibilities
Read IEP only	1	Special education teachers and general education teachers have different responsibilities

Table 4 below illustrates the category of teachers having time to communicate, which is also associated with communication barriers.

Table 4

Time to Communicate

Codes	Frequency	Themes
Meetings/during school	18	Barriers to communication
Meetings before/after school	18	Barriers to communication
In passing/hallway	3	Barriers to communication
No time	12	Barriers to communication
During lunch	2	Barriers to communication

Tables 5 and 6 depict the codes related to the characteristics of the

communications flow category between teachers.

Table 5

Communication Characteristics and Type Gen Ed to SPED

Codes	Frequency	Themes
Positive/resourceful	18	Communication characteristics and expectations
Verbal/Written	4	Communication characteristics and expectations
Professional	19	Communication characteristics and expectations
Supportive/helpful	15	Communication characteristics and expectations
Cooperative	10	Communication characteristics and expectations
Negative	1	Communication characteristics and expectations
Nonexistent	19	Communication characteristics and expectations Barriers to communication
Brief/to the point	13	Communication characteristics and expectations Barriers to communication
Limited/minimal/insufficient/situational	5	Communication characteristics and expectations
Flexible	1	Communication characteristics and expectations
Rude/condescending/not supportive	3	Communication characteristics and expectations
Patient/reliable/friendly/respectful	12	Communication characteristics and expectations

Table 6

Communication Characteristics and Type SPED to Gen Ed

Codes	Frequency	Themes
Positive/resourceful	6	Communication characteristics and expectations
Verbal/Written	2	Communication characteristics and expectations
Professional	8	Communication characteristics and expectations

Supportive/helpful	9	Communication characteristics and expectations
Cooperative	10	Communication characteristics and expectations
Nonexistent	7	Communication characteristics and expectations Barriers to communication
Brief/to the point	10	Communication characteristics and expectations Barriers to communication
Limited/minimal/insufficient/situational	5	Communication characteristics and expectations
Misunderstood	1	Communication characteristics and expectations
Rude/condescending/not supportive	3	Communication characteristics and expectations
Informative/detailed	13	Communication characteristics and expectations
Patient/reliable/friendly/respectful	3	Communication characteristics and expectations

Table 7 describes the codes, themes, and frequency for the category communication needs as identified by special education teachers from general education teachers.

Table 7

Communication Needs from SPED to Gen Ed

Codes	Frequency	Themes
More open-minded/realistic	2	Teachers' needs to increase confidence in IEP implementation
More consistent	2	Teachers' needs to increase confidence in IEP implementation
Set time/more time	31	Teachers' needs to increase confidence in IEP implementation
More/better forms of communication	7	Teachers' needs to increase confidence in IEP implementation
Strategies for IEP implementation	8	Teachers' needs to increase confidence in IEP implementation
Good/efficient	8	Teachers' needs to increase confidence in IEP implementation
Better district training	5	Teachers' needs to increase confidence in IEP implementation
Limited/minimal/insufficient/ situational	5	Communication characteristics and expectations
No judgment	1	Teachers' needs to increase confidence in IEP implementation
Accessible copies of IEP/more detailed	2	Teachers' needs to increase confidence in IEP implementation

Table 8 depicts a shorter list of communication needs from general education teachers.

Table 8

Communication Needs Gen Ed to SPED

Codes	Frequency	Themes
Set time/more time	31	Teachers' needs to increase confidence in IEP implementation
More/better forms of communication	7	Teachers' needs to increase confidence in IEP implementation

Tables 9 and 10 below describe the categories of weaknesses and strengths identified by the teachers when implementing the IEPs.

Table 9

Weaknesses for Implementation

Codes	Frequency	Themes
Uneducated	5	Special education teachers are better equipped to implement IEPs
No time to communicate	16	Teachers' needs to increase confidence in IEP implementation
Understaffed	3	Special education teachers are better equipped to implement IEPs
Inadequate IEPs	2	Teachers' needs to increase confidence in IEP implementation
Too many demands	1	Teachers' needs to increase confidence in IEP implementation
Unknown responsibilities	4	Special education teachers are better equipped to implement IEPs
Not enough data/documentation no accessible	4	Teachers' needs to increase confidence in IEP implementation
Inadequate professional development	1	Teachers' needs to increase confidence in IEP implementation

Table 10

Strengths for Implementation

Codes	Frequency	Themes
Communication	25	Special education teachers are better equipped to implement IEPs
Relationships with staff	2	Teachers' needs to increase confidence in IEP implementation
Attention to details	2	Teachers' needs to increase confidence in IEP implementation
IEP knowledge/SPED educated	3	Teachers' needs to increase confidence in IEP implementation
Need SPED teachers' help	1	Special education teachers are better equipped to implement IEPs
Having empathy and flexibility	2	Special education teachers are better equipped to implement IEPs
Not enough data/documentation not accessible	4	Teachers' needs to increase confidence in IEP implementation
Inadequate professional development	1	Teachers' needs to increase confidence in IEP implementation

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness in qualitative research is established through credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability (Zia Ul Haq Kakar et al., 2023). The questionnaire addressed descriptions of experiences from the participants during their work as general or special education teachers in inclusion settings to ensure credibility. The pilot study first confirmed credibility, which provided actual descriptions of the participants' experiences. The participants could describe specific details of communication characteristics, forms of communication, and ability to communicate daily.

Transferability was established through the repetition of responses determining the applicability to similar settings or populations other than the context of the study (Ahmed, 2024). Transferability can also help other researchers reproduce the research design for different findings within the same or different settings. Dependability was obtained through consistency of data analysis and research procedures to ensure the questions targeted the descriptions of communication between general and special education teachers (Ahmed, 2024). Confirmability was established through validation, engaging with other experts and colleagues, minimizing my biases, and asking participants questions to represent their communication experiences and viewpoints (Ahmed, 2024).

Results

The results presented in this section answered the two research questions:

1: How do secondary general and special education teachers describe communication characteristics in the Fort Worth Independent School District in Fort Worth, Texas?

2: How do secondary general education and special education teachers describe their ability to implement Individual Education Plans in the Fort Worth Independent School District in Fort Worth, Texas?

This study described the communication characteristics between secondary general and special education teachers and their ability to implement IEPs. To achieve this goal, I sent a flyer to participate in my research study with a link to an open-ended questionnaire I created. I received 31 responses to my questionnaire. The questions

presented to the participants allowed them to recall descriptions of communication they had or do have between secondary general and special educators or vice versa, depending on their teacher type. These questions include the teacher's encompassing forms of communication, time for communication, responsibilities for IEP implementation in inclusion classrooms, characteristics of communication, abilities to implement the IEP, and strengths and weaknesses of implementing the IEP. Most participants stated, "email or technology, phone, no contact, before, during, or after school, no time for communication, needing a set time or more time for communication, a set time or more time for communication," among others. Each description was coded in ATLAS.ti, and I produced 137 codes, leading to six themes.

Themes

Theme 1: The Majority of Communication is email/technology or in person

Participants were asked about their work characteristics, including how they were expected to communicate between the two teachers, general and special education teachers, and what they were responsible for when implementing IEPs. Both secondary general and special education teachers stated they communicated through "email," "an app on the phone," or "in person." Most responses were via email. Of the 31 responses received, 25 participants stated that most of their communication was via email or face-to-face (80.6%). Other responses included no communication, annual meetings, and phone calls, resulting in six responses (19.4%).

Theme 2: General and Special Education Teachers have Different Responsibilities

The participants reported special education teachers are responsible for communicating "changes in the IEP," "writing the IEP," "entire IEP," and "modifications and accommodations." General education teachers are primarily responsible for "accommodations and modifications." Some participants reported they did not know their responsibilities when implementing IEPs in the classroom. Out of the 31 responses, some had more than one responsibility listed: 12 stated writing IEPs was their responsibility, 11 stated they were responsible for modifications and accommodations, 11 stated they were responsible for communicating changes in IEPs, six stated they were responsible for the entire IEP, and three did not know their responsibilities.

Theme 3: Communication Characteristics and Expectations

Most of the participants had positive statements about the characteristics of communication, including "cooperative," "professional," "efficient," and "patient, reliable, and friendly." However, some participants had negative responses to communication characteristics, including "non-existent," "brief and to the point," and "minimal and insufficient." Of the 31 participants, some had more than one description; 19 said the communication was professional, 12 said it was efficient, and seven said it was positive, reliable, or friendly. Nineteen participants stated it was non-existent, 13 said it was brief and to the point, and four said it was minimal or insufficient. When asked what the teacher was expected to communicate to each other, the responses varied between "student progress," "behaviors," and "modification, accommodations, and changes to the IEP." Most of the responses were about student progress, with 16

participants. Eleven participants stated behavior, and five stated modifications, accommodations, and changes to the IEP.

Theme 4: Barriers to Communication

Participants were asked about the time they had to communicate with either general or special education teachers, which caused issues and inadequate IEP implementation. The majority of the participants stated they had time "before or after school," "during school," or "no time." Remember that some had more than one answer for this question; however, 12 of the 31 participants stated they communicated before or after school, 17 stated it was during school either in the hallway, in passing, or planning time, and 12 stated they did not have time.

Theme 5: Teachers' Needs to Increase Confidence in IEP Implementation

When participants were asked what was needed to increase their confidence and ability to implement IEPs in inclusion classrooms, all 31 stated they "needed more time" with special education students. Of the 31 participants, 15 also stated they need "clearer expectations" on what they are responsible for. Although all participants stated they needed more time and clear expectations, 15 still felt confident in implementing the IEP, and 10 felt somewhat confident.

Theme 6: Special Education Teachers are Better Equipped to Implement IEPs

Although both teachers have responsibilities regarding IEP implementation in inclusion classrooms, it is apparent through the responses that special education teachers are better equipped to perform their legal obligations. Sixteen general education teachers stated they did not have enough time to communicate with special education teachers,

making them feel inadequate to implement the IEP. Of the special education teachers, 24 responded that they were highly competent in implementing the IEP in inclusion classrooms, and seven stated that they were competent. Seven general education teachers do not feel adequate, and nine stated they do not have enough time to implement the IEP. However, 15 stated they are highly adequate or adequate.

Summary

Both research questions, how do secondary general and special education teachers describe communication characteristics in Fort Worth Independent School District in Fort Worth, Texas? and How do secondary general education and special education teachers describe their ability to implement Individual Education Plans in Fort Worth Independent School District in Fort Worth, Texas were answered using a question set for the participants to describe their communication between secondary general and special education teachers. I created codes and categories through the responses and specific data analysis. I was able to provide distinct themes and better understand the descriptions of communication characteristics leading to inadequate IEP implementation in inclusion classrooms through their lived experiences.

In Chapter 5, I will discuss the interpretation of the findings, the study's limitations, recommendations because of the study, and the implications of social change.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The number of students with disabilities accessing the general education classroom as their least restrictive environment (LRE) continues to grow. An inclusive classroom has become the most sought-after LRE for students with disabilities to be amongst their same-aged peers (Rowe et al., 2023). The National Center for Education Statistics shows in the fall of 2021, 67% of students with disabilities spent 80% of their day in the general education classroom, 16% spent 40-79% in the general education classroom, and 13% spent less than 40% of their day in the general education classroom (National Center for Education Statistics, 2021). Compared to 2010, students who spend 80% or more of their day in general education classes increased from 61%, 40-79% in the general education classroom decreased to 16%, and 40% or less decreased to 13% (National Center for Education Statistics, 2021). This basic qualitative study aimed to describe the communication characteristics between secondary general and special education teachers that lead to inadequate implementation of Individual Education Plans (IEPs). Communication characteristics are essential to understand to increase IEP implementation and overall academic success of students with disabilities in inclusion classrooms.

Participants in this study described their work characteristics, communication characteristics, and IEP implementation on an open-ended questionnaire. As the repetition of responses began, themes began to emerge. Participants stated most of their communication was via email, technology, or in person. Their responsibilities lie within changes, writing, or the entire IEP, while others do not know their responsibilities. They

described their communication as cooperative, professional, efficient, patient, reliable, non-existent, brief, or to the point. There was a limited amount of time for general and special educators to communicate, resulting in before, after, or during school, or there was no time. These responses led to a realization that the teachers need more time and clear expectations to implement IEPs adequately. It is also evident that general education teachers are not confident in adequately implementing IEPs due to a lack of time, non-existent communication, unclear expectations, and not understanding their responsibilities. However, most special education teachers feel confident in adequate IEP implementation despite not having time to communicate with the general education teachers.

Interpretation of the Findings

As described by previous research, educators struggle to implement IEPs in inclusion classrooms due to a lack of professional development, collaboration time, resources, and communication barriers (Al Jaffal, 2022). Communication characteristics that guided the conceptual framework for this study had yet to be defined. It was evident that teachers lacked time to communicate, had negative attitudes towards students with disabilities, had poor relationships, and had no communication, which created challenges for them in implementing the IEP in inclusion classrooms (Alnassar 2021). Previous research has not been conducted on the communication characteristics between general and special education teachers, leading to inadequate IEP implementation.

For an effective inclusion classroom, the general and special education teachers must work with appropriate communication and relationships to provide the best quality

IEP implementation to students with disabilities (Ripley, 2021). After reviewing the responses, it was interesting to find that most teachers stated they needed more time or a set time to communicate, most communication was via email, communication was brief and to the point, and at times, it was non-existent; teachers still stated their biggest strength was communication between each other. The issue lies within the characteristics of communication. Nineteen respondents stated communication is non-existent; however, most stated communication is professional, patient, reliable, and friendly when communication does exist, from general to special educators. The characteristics of special to general educator participants stated it is cooperative, informative, and detailed, but brief and to the point. Again, non-existence was at the forefront of the responses. Systems theory, as identified above, describes communication barriers between the two systems, general and special educators, which can cause inadequate IEP implementation. The two systems have different expectations, goals, and demands, creating a disconnect between general and special educators (Buchanan, (2020). Having contact between differing systems can cause communication to be non-existent, but when it does happen, it is professional, patient, and friendly.

Adequate IEP implementation in inclusion classrooms includes effective co-teaching. Effective co-teaching includes collaboration and adequate communication on shared responsibilities between the general and special education teachers (Harbour et al., 2022). Both teachers stated that time is a communication issue, and they have to meet before or after school with minimal availability during school. These responses led to general educators having negative communication characteristics with special educators.

Some general educators stated that communication is "rude, negative, not helpful, does not exist, only when needed, minimal and insufficient." However, most general educators stated their communication was productive, positive, and supportive regardless of time constraints. The only negative response from special educators about communication characteristics from general educators was time constraints and lack of communication; however, communication was still friendly, professional, patient, and reliable. Even with time constraints and some negative responses, special educators still feel highly adequate when implementing the IEP in inclusion classrooms but did not have enough time to implement the IEP. Less general educators felt highly adequate, and more than half felt inadequate and did not understand their responsibilities when implementing the IEP. To increase the adequacy of IEP implementation, planning time together, effective collaboration, and communication is necessary (Ripley, 2021)

The responses from the participants to the overall communication characteristics are favorable; however, there are some cited negative characteristics causing inadequate implementation of IEPs in inclusion classrooms. Although most communication is professional, cooperative, or friendly, there is not enough time, leading to brief and to-the-point conversations, creating weaknesses in implementation. With limited communication time, half of the participants still feel confident in IEP implementation, and the other half feel somewhat confident.

Limitations of the Study

The most significant limitation of this study was recruiting participants due to teachers' time limitations. Participants were secondary general and special educators from

the Fort Worth Independent School District working in inclusion classrooms. I overcame this challenge by utilizing a second round of flyers and reminder emails sent to middle school teachers. An online open-ended questionnaire provided the teachers with the convenience of responding in their own time at their own pace (Hawkins, 2018). The participants consisted of 31 teachers from Fort Worth ISD in secondary schools, which did limit the representation of the entire community; however, the repetition and detailed description of communication characteristics identified the current adequacy of IEP implementation.

Another limitation of the study was that the study focused on the descriptions of the participants' lived experiences. This focus can cause results that are not credible; however, the responses provided repetition in responses, creating credibility but limiting "social and cultural constructions" (Rahman, 2017). The study did not consider any personal or school demographics. The study also did not focus on the number of students receiving special education inclusion services at each school, limiting teachers' experiences at school with fewer students utilizing inclusion as their Least Restrictive Environment (LRE).

Recommendations

Past studies have provided an understanding of what teachers lack when adequately implementing IEPs in inclusion classrooms. According to Alnassar (2021), further research should include co-teachers' experiences and perceptions of the barriers in inclusion classrooms, including relationships. Alnassar, among other studies, found lack of communication to be one of the most significant issues when asked to implement IEPs

in their classrooms. This study described communication characteristics between secondary general and special education teachers working together in inclusion classrooms, leading to inadequate IEP implementation. I would recommend future studies to consider primary school teachers' descriptions of communication characteristics and their ability to implement IEPs in inclusion classrooms, along with utilizing other districts to further the understanding of communication characteristics.

Al Jaffal, (2022), recommended deepening the understanding of what training teachers would benefit from to increase their knowledge and responsibilities of implementing IEPs in inclusion classrooms. This study increased the knowledge of communication, which remains a problem between general and special education teachers, by describing the communication characteristics leading to the inadequate implementation of IEPs in secondary inclusion classrooms. I would recommend that future studies deepen the study by including the training provided by the district to increase general and special educators' knowledge on IEP implementation in inclusion classrooms, including their communication.

Implications for Social Change

More than 7 million students (about twice the population of Oklahoma) receive special education services under The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (Graham, 2022). According to the National Center for Education Statistics, 67% of students with disabilities access the general education classroom 80% or more of the school day, which continues to rise (2021). In Texas's 2020-2021 school year, 11.3% of students were identified as students with disabilities, a 37.59% increase since 2013

(Porter, 2021). Knowing the rate of students with disabilities continues to rise, communication between general and special education teachers must become more effective. This study explored the communication characteristics between general and special education teachers that lead to inadequate IEP implementation. Understanding the communication characteristics led to knowing why inadequate IEP implementation occurs in inclusion classrooms. The positive social change that would exist through better communication between general and special education teachers would be increased adequate IEP implementation in inclusion classrooms, resulting in overall academic and behavioral success for students with disabilities.

Increased communication will result in academic and behavioral success and decrease the number of inadequate IEPs implemented, lessening legal mediations or trials. All individuals can file a complaint against the Texas Education Agency (TEA) based on a student not being provided sufficient services outlined on their IEP or violating a program required by federal law (TEA, 2021). Throughout the research, it came to my attention that parents are making many TEA complaints about special education students not being provided with their services. This study provided the knowledge that general education teachers did not understand their responsibilities, which led to services not being provided to students with disabilities as outlined on their IEP. It also determined that special education teachers do not have enough time in inclusion to provide adequate services per the student's IEP, leading to inadequate implementation as outlined as legal obligations by both teachers. Not having enough time to provide adequate services leads to parents initiating TEA complaints. The U.S.

Department of Education's annual report from 2022 revealed there were 1,856 complaints filed for different treatment/exclusion/denial of benefits (Office for Civil Rights, 2023). When communication is increased, and responsibilities can be understood between general and special education teachers, guidelines, rules, and legal obligations can be followed as written in the student's IEP, decreasing the number of TEA complaints from parents. When teachers can focus on communicating and understanding how to implement the IEP instead of complaints and miscommunication, they can increase behavioral and academic student success.

Conclusion

In this study, I found that the biggest problem with communication between general and special education teachers is having a set amount of time to communicate expectations and responsibilities for IEP implementation in secondary inclusion classrooms. Many general education teachers felt when communication existed, it was professional, informative, and detailed. However, there was insufficient time or did not exist, and communication was brief and to the point. However, general education teachers still felt confident in IEP implementation with adequate services. Special education teachers felt communication characteristics included professionalism, patience, reliability, and friendliness, but communication was non-existent. Most special education teachers feel confident in IEP implementation and provide highly adequate services.

Knowing that communication characteristics are mostly positive between general and special educators with minimal negative remarks, administrators can change how much time they have to communicate with each other. Setting times to communicate with

positive communication characteristics will increase general educators' understanding of their responsibilities and lessen the amount of IEP responsibilities for special education teachers. Sharing responsibilities between the two teachers will increase adequate IEP implementation and services rendered to students with disabilities. When adequate implementation of IEPs is provided, the overall behavioral and academic success of students with disabilities will increase when directed by positive communication characteristics and time.

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Appendix A: Open-Ended Questions

Research Questions

How do secondary general and special education teachers describe communication characteristics in the Fort Worth Independent School District in Fort Worth, Texas?

How do secondary general education and special education teachers describe their ability to implement Individual Education Plans in the Fort Worth Independent School District in Fort Worth, Texas?

Work Characteristics

How are you expected to communicate with general and special education teachers?

What are you expected to communicate to general and special education teachers?

What are you responsible for when implementing Individual Education Plans?

Communication

How do you communicate with Special Education Teachers? (i.e., phone, meetings, before school, after school, during school)

How do you communicate with General Education Teachers? (i.e., phone, meetings, before school, after school, during school)

When do you have time to communicate with Special Education Teachers?

When do you have time to communicate with General Education Teachers?

How would you describe the type of communication with Special Education teachers?

How would you describe the type of communication with General Education Teachers?

What characteristics describe your communication with the Special Education Teachers?

What characteristics describe your communication with General Education Teachers?

Based on your listed characteristics, how could you make communication between Special Education teachers more efficient for IEP implementation in inclusion classrooms?

Based on your listed characteristics, how could you make communication between General Education Teachers more efficient for IEP implementation in inclusion classrooms?

Individual Education Plan Implementation

How confident do you feel in providing students with disabilities their Individual Education Plans?

How adequate are the services in inclusion classrooms by Special Education teachers?

How adequate are the services in inclusion classrooms by General Education Teachers?

Based on your communication characteristics, is there an area of weakness limiting your ability to implement Individualized Education Plans adequately?

Based on your communication characteristics, is there an area of strength increasing your ability to implement Individualized Education Plans adequately?