6-16-2025

Challenges Identified by Educators Who Teach Students with Disabilities

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This is to certify that the doctoral study by

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has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
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Walden University
2025

Abstract

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MA, Rider University, 2009

BS, Rider University, 2005

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

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August 2025

Abstract

The problem that was addressed through this study is that educators are challenged to meet the needs of students with disabilities (SWDs) in the inclusion classrooms at a northeastern school district in New Jersey (NSD, a pseudonym). The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore educator's experiences with the system of inclusion as well as resources needed to overcome any issues or barriers at NSD. The conceptual framework was von Bertalanffy's systems theory. For this basic qualitative design, semistructured interviews with 13 educators that were recruited through purposeful sampling from NSD through an email sent by the director of special services. The data analysis included open coding, descriptive coding, and axial coding which resulted in the following five themes: (a) collaboration amongst educators; (b) prepare differentiated instruction; (c) professional development and training; (d) engagement with parents; and (e) evaluate progress through a flexible curriculum. The implications for positive social change are that offering educators suggestions and support when teaching SWDs in the inclusion classroom. Educators are a bit less challenged, have more energy and clarity to focus on their teaching which ultimately benefits not only their own well-being but also supports administrators through smoother operations and creates a more positive, engaging learning environment for students.

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Dedication

To mother and stepfather, the wind beneath my wings, whose love, guidance, and encouragement have been my greatest sources of strength You always said, “Education is something no one can take away from you. Keep going and do not give up.” Those words have echoed in my heart throughout this journey. Your unwavering support and inspiration continue to guide me, and I know you are smiling down from Heaven. To my father, whose love and belief in me have been the foundation of strength and inspiration throughout this journey. To my family and friends for their love, encouragement, and support which have been a constant source of motivation. To Dr. Kamens, thank you for pushing me out of my comfort zone, I would never say no to you, and I wouldn’t be who I am today if it wasn’t for your mentorship and belief in my potential. To Dr. Casale-Giannola and Paulette DiNardo, thank you for ensuring that I reach my fullest potential and for being unwavering sources of guidance and encouragement. Finally, to all those who strive for inclusion in the face of adversity. Your resilience and determination remind us of the importance of fostering spaces where every voice is heard, valued, and respected. Thank you all for making this journey both possible and meaningful.

Acknowledgments

This dissertation is the culmination of an incredible journey of exploration, learning, and growth, and it would not have been possible without the support, guidance, and inspiration of many individuals and organizations.

First and foremost, I extended my deepest gratitude to my committee chair, Dr. McCart, whose insightful guidance, constructive feedback, and unwavering encouragement have been invaluable throughout this process. Your belief in my ability to tackle such a complex and meaningful subject has been a source of strength and motivation.

To my committee member, Dr. Pearce, thank you for your thoughtful advice, probing questions, and invaluable perspectives, which have helped me refine and deepen my understanding of the challenges of inclusion.

I am profoundly grateful to the participants and organizations, especially Paulette DiNardo, Dr. Casale-Giannola, and Dr. Kamens, who shared their time, experiences and insights with me. Your willingness to contribute candidly to this research was essential to its depth and authenticity.

I owe a special debt of gratitude to my family and friends, especially Crystal and Stacy, for their constant support and encouragement. Thank you for your patience, understanding, and unconditional belief in me, even during the most challenging moments.

To my colleagues and peers, your camaraderie and shared passion for creating a more inclusive world have been both inspiring and empowering. The conversations

we’ve shared have profoundly influenced by work and continue to fuel my hope for the future.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

An inclusion classroom is a general education classroom where students with and without disabilities learn together. Inclusion classrooms support the diverse academic, social, emotional, and communication needs of all students (Goodall et al., 2022). According to Kohrs (2022), "the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act is the primary federal statue governing the provision of education to children with disabilities" (p.1022). The Individuals with Disability Education Act (IDEA) is a law that requires school districts to provide eligible children with a free appropriate public education (FAPE) to eligible children with disabilities throughout the nation and ensures special education and related services to those children (Kors, 2022).

The role of the educators has changed over time; they presently have students with a wider assortment of capacities and more responsibility for participating in developing and implementing individualized education plans (IEPs). There has been an increase in students with disabilities (SWDs) entering the general education classroom at the educators' level (Duncan et al., 2020). By understanding how best to teach learners of all types and levels, educators can understand how to reach a wide range of students (Boitumel et al., 2020). To address having SWDs in the classroom educators must be equipped with the time, support, and training to provide high-quality education based on a wide range of diverse learning needs (Yakoveva et al., 2021). Yakoveva et al. (2021) noted including all students in education is becoming more common in schools around the world and also shared that more and more children with special needs are attending

regular schools within their local district. Yakoveva et al. felt that educators need to be properly prepared to teach these students.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore educator's experiences with the system of inclusion as well as other resources needed to overcome any issues or barriers at a northeastern school district in New Jersey The gap was that educators are unable to meet the special education needs of SWDs in the inclusion classroom (see, for example, Al Jaffal, 2022; Boitumelo et al., 2020; Ferriday & Cantali, 2022). The outcome of this study enclosed the gap within the literature and provided educators the necessary information to close a gap towards inclusion practice based on educators' challenges. Complicating the situation was the fact that many educators are not receptive to inclusion due to the lack of understanding of how to provide the appropriate support for SWDs (Basckin et al., 2021).

In Chapter 1, background information for the study includes a brief overview of the Public Law 94-142 (P.L.94-142), which later was renamed IDEA, is provided. Challenges identified by the literature on educators who taught SWDs in the inclusion classroom are explored. Chapter 1 also includes the problem statement, specifics that pertain to challenges when teaching SWDs in the inclusion classroom, the purpose and nature of the study, research questions, and the conceptual framework. Finally, this chapter contains definitions of importance, a summary of the assumptions, and the limitations and delimitations of the study.

Background

The placement of SWDs in the general education classroom has been the primary objective for the Regular Education Initiative (Peltier, 1993) and the full inclusion movement (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1994). The IDEA is a federal law that stipulates per the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) clause trumped by FAPE clause is to provide the SWDs maximum extent appropriate (Finkelstein et al., 2019). Finkelstein et al. (2019) shared that it is the right for a child's education per the IEP, that some of their time at school should be spent with peers in the general education classes. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a civil rights law that prohibits discrimination based on a disability (Murphy, 2021). To meet the diverse needs of SWDs under IDEA, schools are to provide a continuum of placements, ranging from LRE in the general education classroom to the most restrictive placements, such as out-of-district placements.

As SWDs transition to the general education setting, inclusion has become the status quo or expectation regardless of the student's preset level of performance as established by the comprehensive evaluation for eligibility determination and by the nature of the goals and related services found in the IEP. Needless to say, the radical inclusion movement has impacted the role of general and special education teachers (Finkelstein et al., 2019). The gap in practice is that educators are unable to meet the special education needs of SWDs in the inclusion classroom (Al Jaffal, 2022; Boitumelo et al, 2020; Ferriday & Cantali, 2022). Teaching by both the general and special education teachers is an essential component to the overall academic and social success for both general and special education students (Dieker & Muraski, 2003).

Educators are challenged regularly by feeling ill-equipped to work with SWDs, as well as not receiving support from school administration which has created negative mindsets towards SWDs in the inclusive classroom (Crispel & Kasperski, 2021; Fuchs, 2010; Gibbs & Bozaid, 2021; Simske & Kilcon, 2019). Dieker and Murawski (2003) discovered that educators felt inclusion was being implemented, yet a challenge was they were unaware of their roles and responsibilities towards SWDs in the inclusion classrooms.

Teacher's attitudes affect the academic successes of students in inclusion classroom settings (Mouchritsa et al., 2022). The study of teacher perspectives of inclusion is imperative as teachers' attitudes and beliefs on inclusion were both positive and negative. (Boitumelo et al., 2020). There are few studies about the efficacy of inclusion (Erwin & Tornton, 2022; Sweeney et al., 2022). Studies that do exist are generally qualitative in nature and conducted at the elementary level with a focus on students with severe disabilities along with the benefits of an increase level of socialization (Erwin & Thornton, 2022; Gebhardt et al, 2015; Kayna, 2020; Solane et al., 2020; Sweeney et al., 2022). Most of the research conducted on inclusive education enhances social interaction and inclusion among SWDs, and thus, it minimizes negative stereotypes on SWDs (Ramberg & Watkins, 2020).

Various studies have been conducted about teachers' perspectives on inclusion, but few have been conducted solely focusing on educators (see, for example, Mouchritsa et al., 2022; Page et al., 2020; Sood et al, 2020). Even though there is a lot of research about including SWDs in schools, there is not much research on what the educators and

staff need to support SWDs in the inclusion classroom (Ferriday & Cantali, 2020). The proposed study has been needed to improve the abilities of educators so they can meet the needs of SWDs in the inclusion classroom. A complete review of the challenges educators face when including SWDs in the inclusion classroom is provided in the literature review.

Problem Statement

The problem is that educators are challenged to meet the needs of SWDs in the inclusion classrooms at a northeastern school district in New Jersey (Basckin et al., 2021; Byrd & Alexander 2020; Khaleel et al., 20210; Li et al., 2022; Woodcock & Jones, 2020). Educators become aware of inclusion based on attitudes, knowledge, and skills needed to meet SWDs needs on a daily basis (Boitumelo, et al., 2020). A majority of educators have ambivalent attitudes towards inclusive education, particularly when teaching SWDs (Mouchrista et al., 2022).

In elementary schools, inclusive practices have been implemented successfully from the perspective of general education teachers; however, there are several problems with teamwork in the educators' schools (Gegenfutner et al., 2015). It is crucial for educators and school policy makers to carefully implement IEPs. The ongoing rise towards inclusion that began in the 1980s has led to SWDs entering the general education classroom instead of a setting where their educational needs can be more met (Dieker & Muraski, 2003). Educators who have both the content knowledge and the ability to serve both populations are presented with a challenge by the lack of time and conflicting assumptions in meeting the needs of SWDs in the inclusion classroom (Mofield, 2019).

Basckin et al. (2021) found that teachers are not using evidenced-based practices and lack skills that are used in special education. The lack of understanding of inclusive education may impact the implementation of services for SWDs in the inclusion classroom. There is a challenge with inadequate training opportunities for general education teachers to gain skills needed to integrate SWDs (Yakovleva & Khitryuk, 2021). Special education teachers are mandated to take part in training sessions, while general education teachers are excluded from applicable training sessions (School X ninth-grade teacher, personal communication, July 18, 2022). There is a need for educator training and expanding professional development programs towards meeting the needs of all diverse learners (Byrd & Alexander, 2020), because there is insufficient knowledge that affects how general education teachers design instruction for SWDs in the inclusion environment (Basckin et al., 2021).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore educator's experiences with the system of inclusion as well as resources needed to overcome any issues or barriers at a northeastern school district in New Jersey. Most educators receive little or no training to address challenges (Al Jaffal, 2022). Based on FAPE and supported by educational laws, such as IDEA and Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), school districts across the United States have placement options for SWDs. Currently, the number of SWDs placed in inclusive classrooms continues to increase (Anderson & Shawbitz, 2022).

Educators' views towards inclusion are impacting teaching practices by making educators feel that they are ill-prepared when it comes to teaching SWDs in the inclusion classroom (Kaczorowski & Kline, 2021). Ricci et al. (2021) noted that teacher practices must be adaptive regarding students' social and language background, grade level, achievement level, and class size. According to Ainscow and Sandill (2010), teacher expectations are based on student characteristics such as race, ethnicity, and family income level, or indicators of past performance. Kaczorowski and Kline (2021) found a significant relationship between the type of teacher (special education teacher or general education teacher) and their preparation for practicing inclusion. They found that special education teachers are more likely to report practices of individualizing instruction, pacing instruction, and adapting to the content standards for SWDs to meet the goals and objectives in the students' IEPs. The findings of the study provided information to school leaders about educators' experience in the inclusion classroom and addressed any challenges while providing recommendations for overcoming those challenges.

Research Questions

This research has been guided by the following research questions to better understand the challenges that educators face, when including SWDs in the inclusion classroom.

RQ1: What are the challenges educators experience within the system of inclusion?

RQ2: What do educators need to overcome the issues/barriers within the system of inclusion?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework that grounds this basic qualitative study is systems theory. The system theory is a way of studying how things are organized, without focusing on what they are made of, what type they are, or where or when they exist (Rapp & Corral-Grandados, 2021). The systems theory is viewed as an organization as a collection of parts that are connected and rely on each other (O'Connor, 2019). The four elements of the systems theory consist of input (e.g. physical, human), process (e.g. workers, activity, administration system, control system), output (e.g. product and services, financial, human results) and feedback (e.g. growth, decline; Von Bertalannffy,1972). The systems theory focuses on understanding the organization as an open system that transforms inputs into outputs (Von Bertalannffy, 1972). Von Bertalannffy (1972) implemented the concept of systems theory using biological systems to understand the world at large. Within any system there are components which are interrelated with one another, making the whole system more than just the sum of its element. Systems theory focuses on the organization as a whole, its interaction within the environment and the need to achieve equilibrium (Rapp & Corral-Grandados, 2021).

Von Bertalannffy's (1972) system theory focuses on the challenges, overcomes the issues/barriers that educators are faced within the system of inclusion. The main goal of the educational system is to operate an integrational institution in society, and inclusive education is viewed as a way to reach the objective (Rapp & Corral-Grandados, 2021). The systems theory explains how educators such as (administrators, general education teachers, special education teachers, and educational specialists) are made up

of various component subsystems that must work together in concordance for inclusion to succeed (Rapp & Corral-Grandados, 2021). Systems theory states that organizational success depends on cooperative energy, interrelationships, and interdependency between diverse subsystems (Rapp & Corral-Grandados, 2021). Organizations which are comprised of educators in the event that they work together would achieve the goal of inclusion in schools (Clark et al., 1999).

Through the lens of an inclusive educational classroom, systems theory plays a great role in making the whole system function in an interdependent way. This implies that everyone who belongs to the system plays a certain role. Ainscow and Sandil (2010) stress the significance of leaders gathering and analyzing data within a school to promote a positive attitude towards SWDs in the inclusive classroom. The significance is being put in working together as an organization and not as a single individual (O'Connor, 2019). Educators ought to be clear in their role and know when and what is to be taught, and the administrator should ensure the goals are being within the system of inclusion (Woodcock & Jones, 2020).

Von Bertalannffy's (1972) system theory helped to develop the research questions, the interview questions, and the interview protocol for the study. The systems theory served as the guide for data collection and analysis in this study. The assumptions of self-identity, learning experiences, and willingness to learn were used when establishing the interview questions. Throughout the interviews the challenges identified by educators, and the exploration of the issues/barriers described by educators that

prevent them from working with SWDs within the system of inclusion was collected and analyzed.

Nature of the Study

This study used the basic qualitative method and was guided by systems theory (Von Bertalannffy, 1972). Interview data from educators about their challenges and what educators need to overcome the issues/barriers to successfully teach in the inclusion classroom within their school district has been collected. The rationale for the basic qualitative study focused on the perspectives of the participants (Ravitch & Carl, 2019). Educators provided their perspectives regarding their experiences with the phenomenon.

In this basic qualitative study, a small sample size was used to identify educators' challenges while exploring the issues/barriers that prevent educators from working with SWDs in the inclusion classroom. Semistructured interviews were conducted in this study. Twelve to 15 educators from a suburban school district were interviewed. The school district is in northeast, New Jersey. Conducting semistructured interviews allowed for the identification of challenges that educators face from a variety of viewpoints.

The purposeful sampling was used to tell people about the study and provide them with information about the study. Data were collected through one-on-one-interviews. A systematic data analysis was conducted using the NVivo analysis software tool, and interview transcript open coding with thematic analysis that is aligned with both research questions. All the data were analyzed based on Von Bertalanffy's (1972) conceptual framework with respect to practices towards inclusion, the challenges educators, and the exploration of the issues/barriers that prevent educators from working

with SWDs in the inclusion classroom within their school district. The data were analyzed for common themes and contrast themes to interpret the data from the analysis.

Definitions

To clarify the significant works of the qualitative study, the subsequent definitions of the terms are included.

Disability: A student who meets the eligibility requirements in the following areas determined by evaluations for autism, deaf-blindness, developmental delay, hearing impairment hearing intellectual disability, multiple disabilities, orthopedic impairment, or other health impairment, serious emotional disability, specific learning disability, speech or language impairment, traumatic brain injury, or visual impairment (including blindness; Sood et al.,2020).

Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE): Every student ages 3 through 21 is ensured a free and appropriate public education, including SWDs (Finkelstein et al., 2019).

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA): A law that establishes a FAPE to eligible children with disabilities throughout the nation and ensures special education and related services to those children (Byrd & Alexander, 2020).

Individual Education Plan (IEP): This is a plan or program developed to ensure that a child with an identified disability who is attending an educational institution receives specialized instruction and related services (Beck & DeSutter, 2019).

Inclusion: The practice or policy of providing equal access to opportunities and resources for people who might otherwise be excluded or marginalized, such as those

who have physical or mental disabilities and members of other minority groups (Finkelstein et al.,2019).

Least Restrictive Environment (LRE): LRE means that a SWD must be educated in the same classroom as typical mainstreamed non-disabled peers to the fullest extent possible to ensure that a disabled child is receiving a FAPE (Finkelstein et al., 2019).

Assumptions

The recognition of assumptions within research synthesis can be made up of conjectures (Wolgemuth et al., 2017). Rather, it braces the position that methodological choices about what the research design includes, develops a research synthesis, and develops radiate choices that can be subjected to evaluation (Kulshreshtha et al., 2021). Qualitative research loans itself to the subjective perspectives of each participant within the study (Sebele-Mpofu, 2020). For example, when conducting the semistructured interviews, it is assumed that the participants would respond to each question openly and honestly about the challenges of SWDs in the inclusion classroom and identify the resources and supports they need to overcome the challenges. I was not influential in the responses provided by the educators. Only educators who met the eligibility inclusion criteria were included. These subjective viewpoints are implied to the basic qualitative study that centered on the purpose of exploring educator's experiences with the system of inclusion as well as resources needed to overcome any issues or barriers at a northeastern district in New Jersey.

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of the study refers to the factors of the study (Coker, 2022). The delimitations are within the control of the study and illuminate the study's research factors. This study highlighted the challenges that educators face to include SWDs in the inclusion classroom, along with the resources and support those educators needed to be successful. This study was limited to educators who are involved in the inclusion classroom. The educators for the study were in the suburbs located in northeastern New Jersey. The location allowed for ample time to conduct face-to-face interviews, while obtaining responses that would answer both research questions. A delimitation conducted a basic qualitative study, which can constrain the number of educators within the study and limit the collection of in-depth data.

Limitations

Qualitative research includes numerous limitations which consist of small sample sizes, potential researcher bias in responses, self-section bias, and poor research questions from those who conduct the research (Keserlioglu et al., 2019). The transferability of the data collected could be influenced due to the small sample size that was chosen for the study. Being that the proposed study consisted of a small sample size, this presented limitations to the basic qualitative study. The small sample size affects the transferability towards larger populations, as well as a variety of school districts.

Generalizations should not be applicable to the scope of the study. Another limitation is research bias, where the researcher would be subjective and can cause distorted results and wrong conclusions. To address the limitations of the study,

participants were asked how and why they feel the way they do to receive the most accurate responses. To establish transferability, the study should be replicated in multiple locations, such as out of state, as well as including a more diverse population from the pool of participants.

Significance

The number of SWDs who receive instruction in the general education classroom continues to increase (Basckin et al., 2021; Batool & Khawaja, 2021). Taking this into account, it is critical for educators located in New Jersey to increase their understanding of the components that impact teachers' attitudes and encounters toward the field of inclusion practices. According to Basckin et al. (2021) educators had reservations about meeting the needs of SWDs in the general education classroom while working to meet the needs of all students. The significance of the study was to identify the challenges of educators' face, when including SWDs. This study was significant because it contributes to the literature from the perspectives of teachers and their experiences with SWDs. There is a wealth of research on the benefits of inclusion which include: evidence-based practices, visionary leadership, collaboration among educators, training for the teachers, advocacy, and diversity (Ainscow, 2020; Batool & Khawaja, 2021; Crispel & Kasperski, 2021; Friend et al., 2010; Gale et al., 2022; Juvonen et al., 2019; Kurniawati, 2021; Liu et al., 2022). However, there is a gap in the literature pertaining to the challenges educators face when implementing inclusion in the general education classroom.

This study contributed to the literature by identifying the challenges of inclusion from the unexplored group of educators and their perspectives of what kinds of resources

and support they need to overcome the challenges in an inclusion classroom. Educators are challenged with SWDs within the inclusion classroom, since they are unaware of how to provide SWDs with the appropriate level of support and resources (Woodcock & Jones, 2020). The rationale for the study began a need to improve the experiences of educators when teaching SWDs in the inclusion classroom. Data collected from this study provided valuable insight for numerous educators in the area of education. For instance, implementing evidence-based practices, acknowledging the essential components of inclusion, are just some of the variables that would in turn improve the outlook of SWDs in the inclusion classroom.

Social Change

Acknowledging the increase of in the inclusion classroom can lead to an increase in acceptance and appreciation of differences. In 1997, the reauthorizations of IDEA, along with the regulation of LRE held school districts responsible for the implementation of FAPE (Dieker & Murawski, 2003). This sets the foundation for SWDs and general education students to be educated together to the greatest extent possible given their abilities. Inclusion provides opportunities and eliminates barriers for all students to be active participants in the classroom (Gibbs & Bozaid, 2021). Society benefits from an environment that acknowledges acceptance and promotes an inclusion environment that fosters belonging.

To promote inclusion, the implementation of best practices would increase the level of social interaction among peers within the inclusion classroom, whereas inclusive experience may not be accessible in a segregated setting. SWDs can improve their social

skills, while their non-disabled peers learn about resilience toward people with disabilities (Juvonen et al., 2019). This not only benefits the students but the community by accepting individuals who work together for a common good, regardless of differences.

Both general and special education teachers may benefit from this study by being receptive to evidence-based practices, which would allow their working environment to improve (Harding, 20099). When educators' attitudes are improved, there is evidence that it leads to a high rate of learning in the classroom, along with positive student outcomes (Batool & Khawaja, 2021). Successful support put in place for teachers can establish an environment that is more likely to create an inclusion program (Batool & Khawaja, 2021).

Summary

In the past, SWDs were educated in separate classrooms, or at times another school (Aktan, 2020). As time progressed, SWDs have been mandated to be included in general education classrooms to the greatest extent possible. This basic qualitative study focused on educators who are challenged to include SWDs in the inclusion classroom. The study explored the challenges identified by the educators who teach SWDs in the inclusion classroom. The study was performed in a suburban district in the northeast New Jersey. The two research questions aligned with study's purpose. The systems theory was the conceptual framework that grounded the study. Data were collected for this study from one-one interviews with 13 educators. The study contributed to positive social

change by supporting educators with recommendations to improve challenges, along with evidence-based practices to use with SWDs.

In Chapter 2, the literature review will discuss the literature search strategy along with the conceptual framework. A literature review related to key variables and concepts from current, peer-reviewed resources may reveal the challenges of inclusion. The chapter will end with a summary along with the conclusions.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Inclusion is a concept that is not fully recognized by educators across the nation (Entrich, 2021). The passing of Public Law 94-142 (P.L.94-142), referred to as the Education for All Handicapped (EAHCA) Children Act (1975), established the entryway for SWDs to be included in general education classrooms, known at the time as mainstreaming (Francisco et al., 2020). Under Public Law 94-142 all children were entitled to a FAPE within the LRE (Finkelstein et al., 2019).

In 1990, the EAHCA was revised and was renamed the IDEA (Francisco et al., 2020). The intent of LRE is for SWDs to have meaningful access to same age peers without disabilities, when appropriate (Francisco et al., 2020). A critical nuance to the LRE requirement under IDEA that often gets overlooked or misunderstood. The phrase "to the maximum extent appropriate" is key, as it frames the LRE mandate in a way that ensures that educational placements are not a one-size fits- all approach (Yell & Bradley, 2024). What is "appropriate" for one student may not be appropriate for another, and IDEA requires that the placement decision aligns with the individual needs, goals, and capacities outlined in the student's IEP. Similarly, schools must consider providing specially designed instruction towards SWDs in the LRE if possible. The goal of FAPE under the IDEA is to provide SWDs with an individualized educational program that meets his or her unique needs and prepares them for education, employment, and independent living (McKenna et al., 2019). FAPE ensures that the education is free and appropriate (McKenna et al., 2019).

This chapter addressed how educators are being faced with challenges on how to include SWDs in the inclusion classroom. Inclusion has altered the distinctive roles of general and special education teachers (Alabdallat et al., 2021). Prior to inclusion most instruction took place in either resource or special education rooms, which were located away from the general education classroom and instruction was delivered by the special education teacher. Within inclusion classrooms, the role has changed into the responsibility mainly of the general education teacher. General education teachers are required to provide differentiated instruction to students at all levels (Byrd & Alexander, 2020), while the special educator provides the necessary specially designed instruction, modifications or adaptations to content and encourages access to the general education curriculum (Alabdallat et al., 2021).

The role of general education classes is a general education classroom where students with and without learning differences learn together (Rodriguez, 2021). Equally important, in a general education classroom, general education teachers and special education teachers work together to meet the needs of the students. The problem is that educators are challenged to meet the needs of SWDs in the inclusion classrooms at a northeastern school district in New Jersey The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore educator's experiences with the system of inclusion as well as resources needed to overcome any issues or barriers at the northeastern school district in New Jersey. Inclusion classrooms have students across the educational and developmental spectrums, ranging from typical developing students to students with multiple disabilities. For this reason, it becomes challenging for the general educator to support all students (Ghedin &

Aquario, 2020). Problems that teachers may have with inclusion consist of lacking knowledge about inclusion, lack of support, perception towards inclusion, the need for professional development training, communication amongst co-teachers, and being receptive towards change (Boitumelo et al., 2020; Byrd & Alexander, 2020; Crispel & Kasperski, 2021). The purpose of the literature review was to provide background information on the challenges, while recognizing the issues with resources and support faced by educators who teach SWDs in the inclusion classroom, as well as the topics that are relevant to the problem.

The concept of the inclusion classroom is an environment where all students feel supported both intellectually and academically while having accessibility to the general education curriculum (Mihajlovic, 2020). When SWDs are provided with the appropriate adaptations and accommodations, along with specially designed instruction they are recognized and respected for their contributions to the inclusion classroom environment (Lovett, 2021). Inclusion programs are advantageous for SWDs, regardless of the skills or limitations that an individual student may have (McCrudden et al., 2019). However, it is challenging for educators to provide specially designed instruction, adapt core instruction and provide accommodations for SWDs (McKenna et al., 2019). This, along with the lack of training for educators may create issues in an inclusion classroom environment that need to be addressed (Simsek & Kilcan, 2019).

Literature Search Strategy

To conduct the study and address the research problem, a thorough literature search was completed through the Walden University Library. The search engines were

accessed from various Walden University Library databases. These databases and search engines were *Education Source, ERIC, SAGE Journals, Google Scholar, SCOPUS, Walden University Dissertations, EBSCOhost, ScienceDirect,* and *ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.* The key terms used to search for journals in the databases were *educators, education, Least Restrictive Environment, general education, inclusive education, specially designed for instruction, standards of learning, students with disabilities teachers' perspectives,* and *attitudes towards inclusion.* The articles that qualified for review in Chapter 2 were published in English and were peer reviewed. The studies had information related to educators' education and included SWDs. Information from the articles also revealed the results of prior studies on teachers' attitudes of inclusion towards SWDs. Articles that focused on details like classroom management, best practices and instructional models did not qualify for review.

A search in *EBSCOhost* with the key words "educators" and "inclusion or inclusive education or mainstreaming" and "students with disabilities" resulted in 362 peer-reviewed articles. Four articles were research studies related to this proposed research study's conceptual framework. A search for dissertations and thesis was done to look for potential studies in their references. The search produced seventeen non-Walden current dissertations related to this study. Two dissertations focused on the perspectives of inclusion occurring at the middle school, while the other fifteen dissertations occurred at the high school level.

A search for dissertations associated with this proposed study in the Walden Dissertations & Theses database resulted in 28 dissertations published between 2000 and

2021 related to the dissertation's topic/problem. These dissertations had sources on their references that helped provide information on other parts of this proposed study, such as barriers to inclusion, the level of differentiated instruction towards inclusion, and teacher perspectives about inclusion for SWDs. The journals in this literature review were published within the previous five years. The criteria for including journal articles for review in this chapter were that the articles must have specific research information about SWDs within the inclusion setting. These dissertations had sources on their references that helped provide information on other parts of this study, such as barriers of inclusion, facilitators of inclusion, and teacher perspectives about SWDs.

Conceptual Framework

In this research study, exploration of the challenges identified by educators who engage with SWDs within the system of inclusion classroom have been explored. The conceptual framework grounding the study was the systems theory. Von Bertalanffy (1972) argued that everything is connected, and we should study interconnectedness as a means of understanding the world. As such, the framework of interaction and the way we influence each other over time allows the continuity of a larger whole. Kinsella (2020) suggested that since inclusive education is a complex process to study, the concept of the systems theory is applied to schools to analyze the potential of establishing a learning organization. In alignment, Rapp and Corral-Granados's (2021) intention was to advance the theoretical understanding of inclusion by examining how communication at all levels of society develops inclusion and exclusion as an ongoing process. Rapp and Coral-Granados advised the use of the systems theory and the idea of inclusion and exclusion to

how SWDs might be included and excluded by various types of communication throughout the school day, since inclusive education is a challenging process. The framework views inclusion as the opposite of exclusion, which is a continuous process built through communication at various organizations which results in gaps, policies and practices towards inclusion. This results in educators being faced with challenges when including SWDs in the inclusion system which aligns with the problem statement for the study.

The systems theory explains to guardians, educators, and school administrators how the system of inclusion can work with the variety of components and considerations when implementing inclusion programming (O'Connor, 2019). Such direction would encourage and expand alternatives for SWDs in the inclusion classroom. Having a superior understanding of the systems theory supports in building the capacity and competency required to viably execute and direct the advancement of a quality of instructional design for SWDs in the inclusion classroom (Kinsella, 2020). In fact, policies such as the IDEA and the LRE have made it precedence on how educators ponder and act on instructional design, while implementing the development of curriculum. Implementation of the IDEA and the LRE inclusion requires all leaders that are strategic in developing an environment in which SWDs are valued and are seen as part of the school community (O'Connor, 2019). This implies that SWDs have access to the educational curriculum. For this, the emphasis on cultivating inclusive best practices allows educators to meet the needs of SWDs in the inclusion classroom.

The best practices that are used in a business corporation are in fact, utilized and applied in an inclusion classroom system (Trent, 2020). For inclusion to work, each person involved must invest in the sense of belonging and being valued. O'Connor (2019) discovered it may be simpler to embed present contemporary thoughts in schools presently now that more students have academic or behavioral difficulties and are now being integrated. The systems theory framework is explained in detail in this chapter. Its direction would encourage and expand the current endeavors of educators, in trusts of developing opportunities for SWDs in the inclusion classroom (O'Connor, 2019). Equally important, this system would prepare educators with a stronger perception of inclusion and how to handle the challenges of inclusion.

In the inclusion classroom, the systems theory plays a pivotal role in establishing the system in an interconnected way. This implies everyone who is involved in the system displays responsibility and accountability in their role. Ainscow and Sandil (2010) stress the significance of educators' gathering, generating, and deciphering data in a school to make an analytical attitude towards executing inclusive education. The emphasis is being put on working together as an organization and not as a single individual. General education teachers should be clear about what is being taught and when it is being instructed, while administration ensures that the goals and objectives are being met (Francisco et al., 2020).

In the field of education, systems theory plays a major component in understanding how school as a social system functions. The central objective of general education teachers in schools is to implement inclusive education and make sure all

students receive a quality education (Woodcock & Jones, 2020). Most of the schools view the general educator as the main implementer of inclusive instruction because most of the burden is left to the general education teacher (Boitumelo, et al., 2020). The inadequacy in the systems theory of education makes the implementation of inclusion a challenge.

SWDs arrive with a set of challenges that must be considered for an inclusion classroom setting. Those SWDs who consist of having complicated behavioral, social, and educational needs, can lead to have a difficult time being included in the inclusion classroom (Gilmour & Wehby, 2020). Byrd and Alexander (2020) contended that for an inclusion classroom system to run, time needs to be invested in training and resources. All educators benefit from alterations that need to be made to teaching and learning methods because of working with SWDs. Everyone benefits when instructive interests and innovations collaborate. The challenge of implementing the use of best practices can be difficult for educators (Woodcock & Jones, 2020). Thus, numerous educators do not accept SWDs in the inclusion classroom since they do not know how to provide the SWDs the appropriate tools (Woodcock & Jones, 2020).

In this study, the basic qualitative method was used to elicit perspectives of educators about the challenges of teaching in the inclusion classroom. The results of a study by Woodcock and Jones (2020) revealed challenges in inclusion classrooms that have been examined in this study. The systems theory guided the study by identifying the challenges of educators and recognized resources, and supports that educators need to teach in an inclusion classroom.

IDEA and LRE

Parents, educators, and community members have spent numerous years to ensure SWDs are taught in the LRE. Markelz et al. (2021) examined national and state laws that support this goal and suggest that the IDEA and the ESSA are two of the laws that require SWDs to be provided with an education in the LRE. A students' placement is determined at the students IEP meeting and is based up a team decision (Yell & Katsiyannis, 2004). The IEP team must place the student in the LRE that would allow for the Specially Designed Instruction (SDI) to be delivered. The IDEA is a law that makes available a FAPE to eligible SWDs throughout the nation and ensures special education and related services to those children (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2022). Miyauchi (2020) endorsed that SWDs are capable of reaching their fullest potential while benefiting from an environment that is empowering yet accommodating.

According to IDEA in Section 300.321, the following individuals make up the IEP team:

> The public agency must ensure that the IEP team for each child with a disability includes (1) the parents of the child; (2) Not less than one regular education teacher of the child (if the child is, or may be, participating the regular education environment); (3) Not less than one special education teacher of the child, or where appropriate, not less than one special education provider of the child; (4) A representative of the public agency who (i) Is qualified to provide, or supervise the provision of, specially designed instruction to meet the unique needs of children with disabilities; (ii) Is knowledgeable about the general education

> curriculum; and (iii)Is knowledgeable about the availability of resources of the public agency; (5) An individual who can interpret the instructional implications of evaluation results, who may be a member of the team described in paragraphs (a) (2) through (a) (6) of this section; (6) At the discretion of the parent or the agency, other individuals who have knowledge or special expertise regarding the child, including related services personnel as appropriate; and (7) Whenever appropriate, the child with a disability. (Individuals Disabilities Education Act, 2017)

To meet the needs of SWDs under IDEA, it is mandated that schools offer a continuum of placements that allow for students to gain access to specially designed instruction and make adequate progress toward their IEP goals. Murawski (2020) suggested one of the most common instructional approaches schools have adapted to support SWDs is co-teaching. Dieker and Murawski (2003) defined co-teaching as a partnership between the general education teacher and the special education teacher. In order for co-teaching to be work, SWDs need to be able to access the general education curriculum and the specialized instruction the special education teacher brings to the inclusion classroom (Dieker & Murawski, 2003). The general education teacher and the special education teacher need to have a positive demeanor towards SWDs in the inclusion classroom setting (Yaraya et al., 2018). However, educators general and special education teachers do not feel they can support SWDs in the inclusion classroom, even when applying instructional approaches, such as co-teaching, when it comes to providing specially designed instruction (Cook &McDuffie-Landrum, 2019). There is limited

evidence that supports co-teaching as for increasing outcomes for SWDs. In fact, there is a large body of research that does not support co-teaching. (Friend, 2008; Mastropieri et al., 2005; Salend et al., 1999).

Evidence-Based Practices

Gale et al. (2022) found that for an inclusion classroom to be inclusive, the inclusive practices require coordination and at times sensitive support from administration. When schools experience organizational changes to support increasingly diverse student populations, they may have difficulty implementing best practices (Basckin et al., 2021). In agreement, Batool and Khawaja (2021) showed more work needs to be done to ensure that inclusive practices are obtainable to students in the inclusion classroom.

Visionary Leadership

To address educators' challenges inclusion, there must be visionary leadership as one who encourages innovation and collaboration by building a vision inspired by a common goal (Liu et al, 2022). According to Liu et al. (2022) visionary leadership is an imperative attribute which allows followers to take charge, which can provide followers the opportunity to obtain a common vision for all. Khaleel et al. (2021) found that a principal's vision of inclusion is a notable component in establishing inclusive schools. Similarly, DeMatthews et al. (2021) proposed that principals must consider a variety of variables when creating inclusion classrooms and must draw upon a wide range of resistance and challenge towards steps of change. In fact, they recommended that the entire school staff be trained towards the concept of inclusion. According to Friend

(2010), a visionary leader is one who promotes a proactive approach in their workforce while encouraging diversity and acceptance (Harding, 2009). Staff must be provided with systems, along with transparent operational definitions that are comprehensible and assets to meet the diverse needs of students in the inclusion classroom.

Preparedness of the General Educator Stakeholder

Educators must encompass a growth mindset for the practice of inclusion to be successful, as well as be prepared and trained. To support inclusion, educators must resign their traditional roles and embrace the professional without thinking or reasoning. Only then can inclusion be endorsed (Boitumelo et al., 2020). Gale et al. (2022) pointed out administration at the schools should seek to advance and build a system that promotes full inclusion, and the most inclusive practices that all students would benefit from. To assist with the reframing of this function, several educational institutions have created a standard job description that applies to all professional educators. This job description makes it clear what the obligations are, and the importance of working together and taking on a shared duty for educating the children in the community (Woodcock & Jones, 2020). It is necessary that general educators be prepared to engage with their special education colleagues to cultivate an inclusion learning environment in which the duties are shared rather than assigned.

Collaboration Amongst Educators

Teachers and administrators need to view collaboration has a positive component when providing services to SWDs in the inclusion classroom. Solone et al. (2019) considered collaboration to be a basic characteristic when providing services to SWDs. In

fact, Crispel and Kasperski (2021) focused on collaboration as the action that can bolster their colleagues by providing direction and strength which would overcome the challenges of SWDs in the inclusion classroom. Similarly, Desombre et al. (2019) identified there must be designated times for both the general and special education teachers to set up and engage with one another to meet the needs of SWDs in the inclusion classroom. Most notably, Ghedin and Aquario (2020) examined the roles amongst general and special education teachers and noticed more collaboration than in previous years when meeting the needs of the SWDs. A teacher's attitude towards inclusion is the self-efficacy that contributes to teaching SWDs in the inclusion classroom (Page et al., 2020). Schools ought to stress collaboration as means of addressing the student with disabilities and developing solutions for boosting the student's participation. The staff needs to be provided with regular hours during the day in which they may collaborate with their colleague to make the process of inclusion for all (Ainscow, 2020).

On the contrary, Harding (2009) explained that administrators should be prepared to engage in collaborative team meetings and highlight the roles and responsibilities that special education teachers perform each day to raise awareness amongst colleagues about the need for collaboration. Harding noted those individuals who want to succeed in an inclusion classroom must improve their collaborative skills. To bridge the gap between general education and special education teachers, it is critical that all staff members be familiar with the instructional methodologies and be provided accessibility to the resources (Harding, 2009). To make strides in collaboration, there needs to be motivated

employees that provide visionary leadership and support that reflects the vision of inclusion in the inclusion classroom environment (Rapanta et al., 2021).

Teacher Training

It is critical to prepare general education teachers to be viable educators in the inclusion classroom. Inclusion classrooms are becoming a prevalent method of instructing SWDs, and general education teachers need to be mindful of strategies, procedures, and sources that would assist all students in the inclusion classroom (Yakovleva et al., 2021). In agreement, Smale-Jacobse (2019) specified it is not sufficient for general educators to simply know their academic content, but general educators should be prepared to apply differentiation with SWDs from a variety of capacities. Training with an expert can improve the attributes of a general education teacher (Aktan, 2020). General education teachers can become empowered to increase their knowledge and confidence by enrolling in training courses or attending professional development sessions to meet the needs of the SWDs in the inclusion classroom (Kurniawati, 2021).

In the case of Lancaster and Bain (2020) a positive mindset needs to be implemented to work with SWDs in the inclusion classroom. For that reason, Ansari Ricci et al. (2021) proved to meet the diverse needs of students of SWDs by bringing together both the general education teacher and special education teacher in the inclusion classrooms. For example, Ansari Ricci showed there are a variety of co-teaching models that differentiated instruction, such as parallel teaching, alternative teaching, and team teaching which have been proven to benefit SWDs in the inclusion classroom. Despite the training initiatives for both the general and special educators, Gibbs and Bozaid

(2021) noted there are still existing barriers to overcome, such as professional learning in the form of mentoring programs, preparing special education teachers to link theories with applications, and how the shortage of classroom resources hinder the quality of instruction for SWDs in the inclusion classroom.

Advocacy

Advocacy is important when it comes to challenging barriers towards inclusion and to improve policy so that SWDs and educators can be supported, empowered, and be able to participate in an inclusion classroom environment. When there is advocacy towards inclusion, there is an increase in social interactions and relationships amongst students, staff, and families. Juvonen et al. (2019) agreed that social inclusion can take a positive approach when facilitating peer engagements across an inclusion classroom setting. Even more important is the understanding of diversity and progress in communication skills as students and staffs learn to become receptive towards others' differences. Francisco et al. (2020) pointed out when it comes to school and classroom exercises, and instructional objectives, SWDs should be provided with the same opportunities as their classmates. Similarly, Kaczorowski and Kline (2021) implied the primary step in tackling the barrier of inclusion in a school district is establishing a well-defined vision of what inclusion involves and how SWDs may be viewed as part of the classroom and the school community. All students benefited from an assortment of curriculum, guidelines, and practices that would contribute to the achievement of inclusion in the classroom. Yoro et al. (2020) examined strategies and philosophies that general education teachers can implement, which include: cooperative learning, peer

learning, access to technology, individualized instruction, and visuals aids are just some examples of approaches that can be used in the inclusion classroom, not just for SWDs but for all students. Despite results (Kaczorowksi & Kline, 2021; Yoro, 2020), McCrudden et al. (2019) argued there are numerous barriers to its implementation in the educational system such as administration, support, and professional growth. These recent studies suggest that more work needs to be done when addressing the challenges of inclusion.

Diversity

When general education teachers in the inclusion classroom setting, refer to "our students" rather than "your students", they cultivate a positive environment that is more likely to accomplish exceptional results for all students in the inclusion classroom. Super et al. (2020) determined significant philosophical commitment to the diversity of the students and being conscious of the fact that individual differences in the process of learning are both healthy and natural. Ainscow (2020) explained it is responsibility of the teachers to cultivate the way of thinking and to appreciate the variety amongst the student body by focusing on the diverse interests and talents of each individual student. In the context of an inclusion classroom, it is the obligation of each staff member to receive knowledge and how to accept differences in a manner that is educationally acceptable and successful. Consideration should be provided to the inclusion of SWDs, in the inclusion classroom. In alignment, Kazanopoulos et al. (2022) shared when a student's abilities in an inclusion setting do not reach the standards; educators need to able to make adaptations to fit the student's requirements to maintain the inclusion model.

General and special education teachers need to cooperate with one another to ensure the success of all children in the inclusion classroom (Kroesch & Peeples, 2021). Teachers in general education require administrative support, tactics, and the capacity to tolerate differences in their students' learning styles to attain this goal (Kroesch & Peeples, 2021). Kuntz and Carter (2021) reclaimed the ideas of inclusion and calls on teachers to rethink their roles, collaborate on ventures, and utilize the foremost successful approaches available to meet the diverse needs of SWDs in the inclusion classroom. The notion from (Kroesch & Peeples, 2021; Kuntz & Carter, 2021) served to bridge a gap between what is being done well with inclusion and what is not being done well in terms of inclusion in the literature.

Challenges to Inclusion

Before implementing best practices into action, it is important to determine what is preventing inclusion from taking place. The achievements of an inclusion program may be attributed to a wide range of variables, such as challenges involving cooperation and administration, the provision of sufficient help, a transparent definition of inclusion, teacher attitudes, and the responsibilities carried out by staff. According to Byrd and Alexander (2020), the IDEA has made it possible for SWDs to participate actively in inclusion classrooms. The Regular Education Initiative showed that SWDs increased gains academically and socially, while the non-disabled students gained acceptance of human differences (Peltier, 1993). The ESSA aimed to provide an equal opportunity for disadvantaged students, including those who receive special education services, while holding schools accountable for how students learn and achieve (Plaid et al., 2023).

However, it is still conceivable for general education teachers to feel ill-equipped to meet the requirements of SWDs that come from a variety of backgrounds and abilities. General education teachers have found it difficult to accommodate SWDs even when they held a positive attitude, due to the fact they were not adequately trained (Boitumelo et al., 2020). As with Moore et al. (2020), the term inclusion is not fully understood and leads to confusion. It is necessary for an inclusive classroom to be an environment where all students, regardless of their talents or disabilities, are valued and included to the greatest extent possible (Crispel & Kasperski, 2021). These studies demonstrate the commitment that general educators need to carry out the implementation of services in the inclusion classroom.

Resolving Challenges

Whether to include SWDs in classes is beneficial is the subject of several studies, the vast majority of which have focused on the elementary level. There is still a gap found across practices and across literature at the educator's level which pertains to the different stages of formal education, and the number of years a person spends in school. Educators who interact with SWDs often need support to understand and manage the students they educate. Rodriguez et al. (2020) found that for educational institutions to be more responsive to inclusion practices, general educators need to have a proactive approach to improve the inclusion practices that are already put in place. Somma and Bennett (2020) showed that a school community has to have solid leadership if an inclusion approach is going have any chance of being in the classroom.

Similarly, Rodriguez et al. (2020) asserted to achieve success with inclusion, it is crucial to reexamine the teaching responsibilities of both general education and special education teachers. Crispel and Kasperski (2021) stated that there needs to be allotted time for trainings that provide educators with the abilities to teach SWDs in the inclusion classroom. For example, the initial step towards successful inclusion is to advocate for resources and training for teachers. Desombre et al. (2019) proclaimed that elements of this effort should include engaging in a creative planning and teamwork, building an environment of acceptance among students and their families, and establishing individualized lesson plans for SWDs. For inclusion classrooms to be there must be strong leadership from individuals who are able to set high standards, not just for themselves but for their colleagues that they collaborate with.

Summary

Throughout this literature review, research was synthesized on the challenges of inclusion that elementary general education teachers face in the inclusion classroom. Few studies have explored the challenges educators face (Erwin & Tornton, 2022 & Sweeney et al., 2022). This literature review demonstrated that many general education teachers feel inclusion can beneficial; however, they are reluctant to teach in the inclusive classroom due to insufficient training and knowledge of SWDs (Crispel & Kasperski; 2021, Kroesch & Peeples, 2021). Numerous studies found that the challenges for general education teachers were lack of knowledge about inclusion, lack of support, negative perception towards inclusion, the need for more professional development, co-teaching challenges, and need for change (Basckin et al., 2021; Boitumelo et al., 2020; Khaleel et

al., 2021). To overcome the challenges of inclusion, general education teachers need to be provided with equitable opportunities for general education teachers, as well as making general education teachers feel valued, respected, and more than likely a better sense of well-being (Boitumelo et al., 2020).

In this study, the purpose was to explore educator's experiences with the system of inclusion as well as resources needed to overcome any issues or barriers at a northeastern school district in New Jersey. I addressed a gap in practice on the possible challenges educators face to include SWDs in the inclusion classroom. Kinsella (2020) constructed a conceptual model of inclusion based on the systems theory of framework, which is fundamental towards the improvement inclusion of services for SWDs. Trent (2020) concluded that for inclusion to be carried out, each general education and special education teachers must be a part of the inclusion service to SWDs. Gilmour and Wehby (2020) recognized that SWDs require more attention than non-disabled students, to ensure they are making adequate progress, so general education teachers are susceptible to being pulled in many directions. Even though these research studies resulted in identifying some of the challenges that general education teachers are challenged when including SWDs in the inclusion classroom, there is more research that is needed to support educators in the challenges they face in the inclusion classroom.

Chapter 2 included the literature search strategies, the conceptual framework, and a thorough review of the literature. Key concepts found in the literature review consist of: IDEA and LRE, evidence-based practices, visionary leadership, preparedness of the general educator stakeholder, collaboration amongst teacher training, advocacy, diversity,

challenges to inclusion, and resolving challenges. There continues to be a gap in literature when general education teachers are challenged to include SWDs in the inclusion classroom. Chapter 3 will describe the qualitative research methodology, the research design and rationale, the role of the researcher, the data analysis plan, limitations and weaknesses, and ethical considerations for this proposed study.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore educator's experiences with the system of inclusion as well as resources needed to overcome any issues or barriers at a northeastern school in district in New Jersey. A basic qualitative design was used that utilized semistructured interviews to answer the research questions. The research method is how data is collected, organized, and analyzed. The qualitative study's methodology and procedures was the foundation for exploring and examining educators' challenges with SWDs in the inclusion classroom. As special education continues to move towards fully integrating SWDs into general education classrooms, this research is crucial for understanding the phenomenon and promoting social change. Increasing awareness of what impedes instruction for SWDs may contribute to improvements in educators' ability to help these students be more successful in school and life (Stankovska et al., 2015).

Chapter 3 presents the method and design used to complete this research study. The applicability of the systems theory for this study are discussed in-depth in this chapter. First the research design is explained. Then, the role of the research is described. Next, the methodology, trustworthiness, and ethical procedure are explained in detail. Last, a summary of Chapter 3 is provided.

Research Design and Rationale

The study used a qualitative research methodology with a basic design. The main characteristics of qualitative research are a naturalistic setting, narratives over numbers in the data collection method, concern with processes rather than outcomes, inductive reasoning, and introspection (Ergunay & Adiguzel, 2019). It is important to understand

what participants are needed to collect relevant data to answer the study's research questions (Busetto et al., 2020). Using a basic qualitative design will allow for the collection of perspectives about the challenges that educators face when teaching SWDs in the inclusion classroom (Gregory, 2018). Researchers often use qualitative research methods to identify the perspectives of participants (Levitt et al., 2021). For this study, collecting participants' perceived challenges of teaching SWDs in the inclusive classroom would lead to improvements in the education of SWDs. Semi structured interviews were used to collect data on perspectives on the challenges that educators face in their district and explored the issues/barriers described by educators that prevent them from working with SWDs in the inclusion classroom in their school district. The following research questions guided this study:

RQ1: What are the challenges that educators experience within the system of inclusion?

RQ2: What do educators need to overcome the issues/barriers within the system of inclusion?

A basic qualitative study is selected when it is important to understand the individual meaning of the phenomenological experiences from the perspective of the participants (Yurtseven, 2021). The basic qualitative approach collects data from the participants to answer the research questions to gain an in-depth understanding of the current problem (Allsop et al., 2022). The experiences or descriptions gathered from participants and focus were on making meaning of the information gathered (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Qualitative methodology was selected for this proposed study because it

allowed for the gaining of individual insight to the participants' experiences and perspectives about a phenomenon (Jamil & Muhammad, 2019). Basic qualitative research provides a true foundation of human thoughts, actions, opinions, and interactions (Lindlof & Taylor, 2017).

The focal point of this qualitative research explored the challenges by educators who teach SWDs in the inclusion classroom, while exploring the issues/barriers described by educators that prevent them from working with SWDs in the inclusion classroom in their school district. Since so much is already known about inclusion, a basic qualitative design was used to gain new perspectives and to understand the world as others experiences it (Rupp, 2016). An evolving inclusion education ought to continually change and adjust to the needs of students and SWDs based on student data and needs (Popovska Nalevska et al., 2022).

Role of the Researcher

The role of the researcher during the study was to conduct semistructured interviews. I incorporated open-ended questions throughout the interview while analyzing data for themes. It is important to recognize if there are any personal or professional relationships with the participants, along with any bias that might be present (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). If the imperative study was not conducted then, my biases could have affected the analysis or interpretation of the participants' during the interviews. Potential participants who had a relationship with me, whether personal or professional, were not recruited and were excluded from the study.

The role of the researcher is to take a neutral stance on responding to participants while being receptive to their responses. To help ensure that bias does not affect the trustworthiness of the study, semistructured interviews were composed of open-ended questions (Leung, 2015). During the interview process and analyzing data, I used a professional source to convert the audio files into written text. This helped to reduce mistakes and ensures honesty in reporting by including all the report results limitations (Patton, 2014). An open mind requires a disposition to learn, to clarify, and to revise one's earlier understanding from the experience with what first may seem unusual and unsettling (Sandel, 2018).

Methodology

The methodology for this study was qualitative semistructured interviews. The semistructured interviews (see Appendix A) focused on the challenges that educators face in the inclusion classroom, and what types of resources and supports do educators need to overcome the challenges in the inclusion classroom.

Participant Selection

For this study, the participants were educators from a suburban school district located in northeast New Jersey who are teaching SWDs in the inclusion classroom. This context assisted in transferability. Participants were recruited using the purposeful sampling technique. The target sample for this study consisted of 12-15 educators who taught in the inclusion classroom environment. The 12-15 educators were recruited out of 96 prospective participants. The following criteria was used to select the sample: (a) must be 18 years old or old; (b) Participants that represent the entire system such as:

administrators, general education teachers, special education teachers, specialists, etc.; (c) must be involved in the inclusion classroom where SWDs spend all or part of their day; and (d) Be located in a suburban school district in Northeastern, New Jersey (see Appendix C).

Recruitment and data collection did not occur until the study was approved by the research sites and the university IRB. Maximum variation sampling was used to recruit participants. Participants were located by locating educators' emails by going to the schools' websites. Potential participants could reach out via email to inquire about additional information about the study and their interest in the study. The study consisted of 12-15 participants, who received the recruitment invitations asking them to volunteer for the study. Participants were recruited from one school district and included the following: administrators, general education teachers, special education teachers, and educational specialists.

Once there were additional prospective participants, research information was retrieved in the recruitment email. Prospective participants contacted me directly if they were interested in the study. There are no set of rules for selecting a sample size for a straightforward qualitative study (Guest al., 2020). Saturation should be achieved with a sample size of 12-15 participants. Participants were represented in the following categories: administrators, general education teachers, special education teachers, and educational specialists. Individual in-depth interviews with each of the participants was be used to obtain quality data.

Instrumentation

Data were collected using semi structured interviews to solicit responses from participants and answer the research questions. Interviews are the most used way of collecting information in qualitative research (Natow, 2019). Interviewing people who teach SWDs in the inclusion classroom can help us learn more about the way humans see and interact with them. For this study, open-ended, semi structured interview questions were used to reveal the complexities of the inclusion classroom environment, which included not altering the participants' perception of the inclusion process. During the semi structured interviews, the interview questions for participants (see Appendix A) and the interview protocol guide (see Appendix B) were used. During each semistructured interview, there were probing questions that were used when clarification was needed or would ask for examples. Semi structured interviews consist of formal interviews between the participants and the researcher during which the researcher would use a guide that contains questions that focus on the topic of the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Content validity is a way to check if an instrument is measuring what it is supposed to measure (Hartell & Strimel, 2018). To establish content validity, I asked two non-participating educators to review the interview questions to ensure that the design of the interview questions would answer the research questions. I also conducted a mock interview with one of the educators who filled the study's criteria to become familiar with the design of the interview protocol guide and the audio recording platform.

For the study, the interview questions were created based upon the systems theory to answer the research questions. The ultimate objective of the educational system is to

bring educators from diverse backgrounds and equip them with knowledge and skills (Rapp & Corral-Grandados, 2021). When using systems theory, it is necessary to make changes or adaptations to something to improve it or make it more suitable for a specific situation or purpose. The interview questions for this basic qualitative study explored the issues/barriers described by educators that prevent them from working with SWDs in the inclusion classroom in their school district. The interviews (see Appendix A) consisted of 30 - 60 minutes. Interview questions 1, 2, 6, 9, and 10 were used to answer RQ1, while interview questions 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, and 10 were used to answer RQ2. I created follow up questions to use throughout the interview process. The interview protocol guide was used as an instrument to collect data. The interview protocol guide (see Appendix B) was used to gather demographic information and explained to the participants the expectations for the study, as well as list the questions for the interview.

Data were collected using the recording feature on Zoom along with field notes to capture nonverbal and observational data. The recording of the audio file was transcribed, sorted, and categorized using thematic analysis using NVivo (Coker, 2022). In case there were technical issues with the audio equipment, additional notes were taken to keep track of any extra information that might be important to the study. Before the start of interview, a location was determined, and the participants were asked if they have any questions about the consent letter or the study (see Appendix D). During the interviews, participants were encouraged to elaborate on their responses (Finkelstein et al., 2019). Once data were collected, transcribed, and coded, detailed explanations of the findings and themes were provided.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

To address the problem of the study as well as the responses to the interview questions, permission was obtained from the suburban school district located in the northeast of New Jersey and from the university IRB. Once the criteria were set, recruitment invitations were sent out to teacher's work email addresses from my Walden student email account. For those individuals that responded to the invitation, they were screened to ensure they would meet the eligibility criteria. If the individual qualifies, they were asked to reply to email invitation with the words "I consent." Individuals would contact me if they were interested in participating.

One supervisor from the district was approached for their approval to conduct the study in their district. The justification and the reasoning behind the research were provided and turned into the supervisor. As the interview was conducted, participants were asked to sign an informed consent form after receiving the information about the study in an email. Walden's University Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was obtained before enlisting the participants or collecting data. IRB approval ensures the potential benefits of this study outweigh any risks or burdens being placed on the participants.

As soon as approval was granted, all educators were emailed. Participants were chosen from those that met the required criteria and expressed an interest in the study. The study consisted of 30-to-60-minute semistructured interviews that were audio recorded and transcribed. The data were collected by asking educators to respond to the 10 interview questions (see Appendix A) as well as probing questions to encourage

participants to share additional information. Participants were offered one of two options for interviews. Option 1 is interview by Zoom. Option 2 is face-to face interview in a school conference room after school hours. Meetings were held in the school in between one scheduled interview to the next. The semistructured interviews were held in a conference room for privacy purposes. The Zoom option was offered if a participant would like participant in this format.

Data Analysis Plan

Data analysis involves collecting, understanding, and drawing conclusions from interviews to gain a better understanding of a topic (Burkholder et al., 2019). The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore educator's experiences with the system of inclusion as well as resources needed to overcome any issues or barriers at a northeastern school district in New Jersey. The data for this study was collected through semistructured interviews of 13 educators from the suburban high school. The semistructured interviews were conducted during after- school hours at a prearranged time and location that was convenient for the participant. This basic qualitative study may contribute to a better understanding of the challenges educators reflect in their self-awareness and self-reflection as they may have diverse beliefs on how to support and include SWDs in the inclusion classroom (Basckin et al., 2021). I transcribed the audio recorded participant interviews and used AI transcription (AI) software/apps available on the internet. The thematic analysis provided an in-depth interpretation of the individual semistructured transcribed interviews.

The data were analyzed to answer the research questions that were created using the systems theory. The interviews consisted of a list of pre-determined questions that were delivered in semistructured interviews. This type of format allowed the opportunity to seek clarification if needed. The data collected from this study may contribute to existing research regarding educators' challenges and the exploration of the issues/barriers described by educators that prevent them from working with SWDs in the inclusion classroom in their school district.

During the data analysis process, I used inductive and deductive reasoning. I applied deductive reasoning by reviewing a priori codes created from the framework, research questions, and purpose (Saldaña, 2016). A priori codes for this study included (a) inclusive classroom challenges; (b) issues/barriers; (c) evidence-based strategies; (d) professional development. I included the codes after looking at the data to find any open codes. The first step in the data analysis was to complete the transcribing process. The interview data for this study was transcribed, coded, and developed into themes using thematic analysis. The data management program NVivo 14 was used. Even short interviews may yield lengthy transcriptions making organizations crucial for comprehension (Oliver et al., 2005). Field notes were taken, and conversations were recorded during interviews, uploading audio files to NVivo for transcription (Allsop et al., 2022). Themes and patterns were analyzed to address the research questions.

During open coding, I carefully examined the data line by line. I looked for keywords or phrases (Saldaña, 2016). Throughout the process, I examined, identified, classified, and compared codes (Burkholder et al., 2019). After creating open codes, I

applied axial coding to group similar coded data from open codes to re-label them into categories (Saldaña, 2016). I examined the categories and found emerging themes. I examined the initial themes and combined themes that overlapped.

Data saturation occurred when I did not see or hear any new information. General studies with small scope and more modest claims can reach saturation faster than studies with broader claims across disciplines (Patton, 2014). Fusch and Ness (2015) recommended that the sample size ought to ensure data saturation and that a large sample does not necessarily determine saturation. A smaller sample size of 13 educators would help in reaching saturation. Data were collected until saturation occurred to establish the relationship amongst the problem, research questions, and the conceptual framework. I reviewed my themes along with my interpretations from the data.

Synthesized member checking addressed the nature of content by providing participants the opportunity to engage with, add to, and translate information, by sharing the transcription with the participant right after the interview (Birt et al., 2016). I provided the participants a summary of their findings and requested them to send their feedback via email. I reviewed participants' feedback and reached out if further clarification was needed. Merriam and Tisdell (2015) recommend that researchers deliberately look for data that goes against their initial findings, to challenge and strengthen their research. I identified and discussed any negative discrepant findings in detail. I included quotes from participants' interviews in the results to provide information from their experiences.

Trustworthiness

A crucial component of the research process, trustworthiness increases the merit or value of the research study (Buckley et al., 2021). In this study, credibility and transferability were obtained using detailed explanations of participant responses and the results of the study (Cope, 2013). The data quality and accuracy were confirmed by-using member checking (Birt et al., 2016). Transferability, dependability, and confirmability were met by providing a thorough description of the research steps.

Credibility

Credibility occurs when a study's findings are consistent with the participants' initial responses, along with the data's interpretation (Clark et al., 1999). To ensure credibility, detailed descriptions were used to provide a full explanation of the participants and the reoccurring themes to establish credibility. Interview data analysis may contain gaps or data that is unclear (Patton, 2014). I checked for credibility to ensure that the interview responses matched the research questions (Burkholder et al., 2019). I used written transcripts from the interviews as a form of credibility and established credibility by examining what participants are experiencing versus what the evidence says.

Member checking occurs when participants are given the chance to review the transcripts, and the researcher would ask for corrections (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The participants should consider if the facts and themes discussed make sense, whether there is sufficient evidence to support the themes and whether the information is accurate (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Member checking can be used to aid in the research by

confirming interpretations of the data or to deepen participant responses to get a more detailed description of the experiences. Member checking was accomplished by emailing the participants an overview of the study's goals and justifications, the transcript of their interview and giving them the opportunity to confirm the content and add or delete content that does not accurately reflect their thoughts (Birt et al., 2016). The participants had 2 weeks to respond with any questions or additional feedback. By using member checking, participants were given the opportunity to make corrections or provide additional details as needed and allowing them to respond to the data and the outcomes reported while establishing a higher level of credibility.

Transferability

Transferability is the degree to which the readers can distinguish that the results of the study can be transferred or connected to other settings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The results of this study were written with thick descriptions utilizing concise elements so that the reader can decide if the concepts are transferable to a distinctive setting (Kelly & Snowden, 2020). It becomes the reader's role to study the wealth of depictions the researcher provides to make their own decision in deciding whether the study can be transferred to a setting. Throughout this study, participants shared their experiences and perspectives about inclusion, allowing the findings from the study to apply to other people outside of their districts to show transferability.

For readers to assess whether the ideas are applicable or transferrable to another situation, it is necessary to provide a rich comprehensive description that makes them feel as though they are experiencing the events that are being discussed throughout the study.

Participants were provided detailed descriptions of the challenges that educators face as well as and the supports that were identified to overcome these challenges when including SWDs in the inclusion classroom. A thorough description of the emotions as well as the experiences provided by the educators were described to me during the duration of the semistructured interview which included reoccurring themes

Dependability

Dependability is apparent when the study can be replicated in a similar setting with similar participants so that the results would display consistency (Janis, 2022). To address dependability, a detailed description of how the data were collected and analyzed was provided. Data were collected through the semistructured interview process along with the recording of the audio, and the detailed notes data were analyzed using NVivo 14. The audit trail provided specific details to the data collected, data analysis, and the interpretation of the data while guaranteeing that the findings are the participant's ideas while eliminate the research bias (Gale et al., 2022).

The data analysis l consisted of codes, themes, and theme statements. Data analysis was reported while describing the themes and the theme statements while utilizing the quotes provided by the participants that supported each underlying theme. The component of neutrality found in data collection, data analysis, addresses the need of displaying dependability in the study.

Confirmability

Confirmability relates to the researcher being impartial in which the results of the study are influenced by the participants' responses and experiences rather than the

researchers (Yunanto et al., 2021). To supply dependability and consistency, an audit trail was performed. An audit trial describes each step of the research process by including records from the start of the study to the conclusion. The data included a detailed description of the notes and the reflections of each step throughout the research process, which included participation selection, sampling procedure, data collection methods, and the data analysis process.

Ethical Procedures

Prior to beginning the study approval was received from the Walden IRB (Approval # 02-22-24-0996578) and the research sites. After IRB and site approval were received, administrators, general education teachers, special education teachers, specialists, etc. were emailed from the Walden University student email account. The email explained the purpose of the study which was to explore educator's experiences with the system of inclusion as well as resources needed to overcome any issues or barriers at a northeastern school district in New Jersey. After recruitment emails were sent out and participants expressed an interested in the study, they were screened for criteria.

Once screened and met the criteria, the participants were sent an informed consent form to read and replied with the words "I consent." If they were interested in participating in the study, the participant would send it back to the researcher. The informed consent clarified the participants' right to privacy, the right to discontinue the interview at any time, the right to deny answering any question that they are not comfortable addressing, and the right withdraw from the study. The participants were

informed that their participation in the study is voluntary, would not include compensation and that the data collected would be confidential. Each participant was provided a copy of the informed consent. To guarantee confidentiality, the names of the participants were not included on any of the documents in the results section. Each participant was provided with a number in place of their names and school district. When participants replied "I consent" the interviews were scheduled. Participants were provided the option to ask any questions they might have about the study before and after concurring to take an interest in the study. I informed participants that all information would be kept confidential and safely stored in a locked safe at my residence for 5 years, and then would be destroyed as per Walden University policy.

Summary

This basic qualitative study may address an important gap in current literature. The gap would address educators' challenges when involving SWDs in the inclusion classroom. Data collection consisted of semi structured interviews. All interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed. Purposeful sampling was used to identify participants for this study. The four key criteria included (a) 18 years or older; (b) participants that represent the entire system such as: administrators, general education teachers, special education teachers, specialists, etc.; (c) must be involved in the inclusion classroom where SWDs spend all or part of their day; (d) be located within a suburban school district in Northeastern New Jersey. The study included 13 participants. A recruitment study invitation was sent out. If someone expressed an interest in the study, they would be screened using the inclusion criteria. Once they pass and want to

volunteer, they would receive an informed consent form to read and reply with the words "I consent." The requirements for participation in the study and the ethical consideration involving protection and confidentiality were explained to the participants. In Chapter 4, a description of the data analysis and the results of the study were presented.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this study was to explore educator's experiences with the system of inclusion as well as resources needed to overcome any issues or barriers at a northeastern school district in New Jersey. Nine semistructured interview questions along with probing questions provided the data for answering RQ1 and RQ2. Question 10 was a follow-up question asking if they wanted to contribute any additional information towards the study. The data collected may inform educators about their challenges and what was needed to overcome issues and barriers to successfully teach SWDs in the inclusion classroom. The study was needed to potentially improve the abilities of educators, so they can meet the needs of SWDs in the inclusion classroom. This chapter focuses on the results obtained from the data collection and describes the setting of the interviews, the data collection process, data analysis, results, and evidence of trustworthiness.

The research questions for this study were:

RQ 1: What are the challenges educators experience within the system of inclusion?

RQ 2: What do educators need to overcome the issues/barriers within the system of inclusion?

Setting

The setting for this study was one suburban district located in Northeastern New Jersey. The semistructured interviews occurred in an office or classroom on the premises of one of the district's elementary schools or the high school. The semistructured

interviews took place either during an educator's prep period or after school to ensure confidentiality and to avoid possible interruptions.

There were 13 educators who responded to the email for recruitment of participants (see Appendix C). These 13 participants were from the Northeastern New Jersey suburban school district. Four participants came from the elementary school, one participant from the middle school, and 8 participants from the high school. Participants were individuals who were (a) 18 years old or older; (b) general education teachers (2); special education teachers (6); educational specialists; or administrators (5); (c) were involved in the inclusion classroom where SWDs spend all or part of their day; and (d) located in a suburban school district in Northeastern New Jersey.

Data Collection

Following the receipt of IRB approval from Walden University, contact was established with a school administrator from the Northeastern New Jersey suburban school district. A request was sent to the administrator for approval to conduct the semistructured interviews in the school district. The administrator then sent out the recruitment email. (see Appendix C). The email was sent to educators across the Northeastern New Jersey suburban school district. Sending the email to more than the target participant sample ensured that there would be enough educators to participate in the study. The responses from the participants were screened based on the inclusion criteria and were then selected for the study. The participants were then emailed the consent form for the study. If the participant was interested in participating in the study,

they would reply to the email, by stating “I consent.” A follow up email was then sent to schedule an interview.

The semistructured interviews for this study took place from July 1st - July 23rd, 2024. During the semistructured interviews, the Zoom recording feature, as well as an AI transcription software/ app were used to record the semistructured interviews. Participants were notified whenever the software/app was turned on and off. The average duration of each semistructured interview was 23 minutes in length. The lowest amount of minutes was 18, and the highest was 37.

Once all 13 interviews were completed, the Zoom recordings were used by actively listening to the data. The recording feature on Zoom, in combination with the AI transcription software/ app was used to acquire a transcript. The data were analyzed multiple times to ensure the transcript was reflected accurately. Rereading the data multiple times occurred to become more familiar with the data. The process of rereading field notes ensured connections were being met. The act of cleaning up the transcribed data, as well as ensuring the sentence breaks were integrated.

After each transcript was cleaned up, a copy of each individual transcript was sent via email to the educators to ensure member checking was conducted. Participants had the opportunity to review their responses, while giving them the chance to make any necessary changes to their transcript. Participants were given 2 weeks to review and return the transcript with any changes. Participants were told if they did not respond in two weeks it meant that their transcript was final, and the analysis process would begin.

Data Analysis

The study consisted of completing an audio-record interview using Zoom's recording feature, in addition to using the AI transcription software/app. Once the interviews were completed, the interviews were downloaded to my desktop, which is password-protected A folder was then created on a secured, password protected laptop that stored the 13 Word documents. Each word document is numbered P1, P2, etc. and contains the transcript from the semistructured interview. The data were uploaded to NVivo 14 (Allsop et al., 2022). At the time of this study, there were no discrepant cases that disagreed with the results of the study.

First Cycle Coding and Open Coding

Throughout the data analysis process, both inductive and deductive reasoning were applied. Deductive reasoning was applied by reviewing a priori codes established from the framework, research questions, and purpose (Saldaña, 2016). A priori codes for this study included "inclusive classroom challenges," "issues/barriers," "evidence-based strategies," and "professional development." (see Table 1) The codes were included after looking at the data to find any open codes. Initiating the first cycle of coding was by reading line-by- line of each of the 13 interviews which used descriptive open coding (see Table 2). While coding, the emerging themes, similarities, and differences throughout the participants' responses were developed to ensure sure data saturation occurred, before moving towards a second coding cycle known for the use of inductive coding.

Table 1

Examples of First Cycle a Priori Codes

Raw data	a priori code
"It's very hard to work with somebody who is very rigid and non-bending, especially with kids with special needs, because not everything is always going to be the same."	Inclusive classroom challenges
"Sometimes I think, as administrators it can be challenging to provide feedback that the teachers can use right away and make it immediately meaningful something we could probably work on."	Professional development
"That joint planning time is just so crucial to having a really nice flow and being able to work with that teacher."	Issues and barriers
"I think at the high school level specifically; all students are starting to become independent. So, you kind of teach them all to advocate for themselves."	Evidence-based strategies

Table 2

Examples of Open Coding

Raw data	Open code
"I believe in the effectiveness of that type of environment for all students and that it can benefit not only children with disabilities in a very impactful way but also students without disabilities."	Belief
"They need time to work together"	Planning time
"We could probably do a better job of providing constructive immediately, applicable feedback"	Feedback
"I think you know feedback from the parents as well, not only through the annual review process, but through those conferences, or just you know, in general interactions."	Parents
"We created lists of what we thought an inclusive classroom should be and what we thought our role should be within that inclusive classroom should be and what we though those things and then I think moving forward it helped so I think that like if you are trying to re-establish any goal not even just inclusion you kind of just have to like self-reflect and see like what's going right and what's not going well."	Modify

Descriptive Coding

In combination with the first cycle coding methods, the NVivo 14 program was used. This qualitative data analysis software helped to analyze the data being collected.

Each participant's interview was converted to a Microsoft Word document once in NVivo 14. Each word document was also labeled P1, P2, etc. to protect the participants' confidentiality. Using NVivo 14, patterns were analyzed and noted. There were 21 descriptive codes and five categories (See Table 3).

Table 3

Descriptive Coding

RQ	Descriptive codes	Categories
1	Certifications Belief Expensive	Collaboration and teamwork
1	Work Planning time Relationship Strategies Training Professional development	Time and workload
2	Support Feedback IEP Behaviors Communication	Professional development and training
2	Planning time Personality Parents	Parental involvement
2	Modify Become independent Advocate	Flexible curriculum and assessment

Second Cycle of Coding: Axial

The second coding cycle consisted of developing axial codes. Axial codes are inductive codes from the data (Ravitch & Carl, 2019). The process of the second cycle consisted of taking the broader open codes and developing them into more confined axial codes. Establishing axial codes, displayed how the broader chunks of information came together as clusters to form findings. The axial codes were placed on a spreadsheet in Microsoft Excel which had columns with already established a priori codes that were aligned with Von Bertalanffy's (1972) systems theory. A separate spreadsheet allowed for the data to be accessible during the data analysis by providing a dedicated space to manipulate and analyze the raw data without accidentally altering the original source information. During the process of developing axial codes, notes were collected on the codes that were repeated. Having the Excel spreadsheet was helpful in taking notes, in addition to any additional notations while performing the coding process. Once all the axial codes were placed in association with the a priori codes, it was vital to ensure that the codes were aligned to the correct category and theme (See Table 4).

Table 4

Categories and Themes

RQ #	Categories	Themes
1	Collaboration and teamwork	Inclusion often requires collaboration among general education teachers, special education teachers, therapists, and other educational specialists. Educators describe coordinating efforts and maintaining clear communication can be challenging.
1	Time and workload	Teachers often face challenges in finding time to plan and prepare differentiated instruction.
2	Professional development and training	Educators need ongoing training to implement inclusive practices. Professional development should be practical and tailored to the specific needs of the educators and the students.
2	Parental involvement	Educators should engage with parents and caregivers in the educational process which can provide additional support and insights into the needs of the students. Schools should establish avenues for daily communications with families.
2	Flexible curriculum and assessment	Educators should monitor and evaluate progress made through a flexible

curriculum and assessment. This means integrating evidence-based strategies and varied assessment methods to accommodate different learning styles and abilities.

Results

This study identified the challenges while recognizing the issues with resources and support that educators have when teaching SWDs in the inclusion classroom. The results displayed success over inclusion, while others indicated there are issues and barriers in the system of inclusion. The application of Von Bertalanffy's (1972) systems theory was applied to view how each real systems are open to, and interact with environments, and that they can acquire qualitatively new properties through emergence, resulting in continual evolution towards the system of inclusion. The data analysis of this study revealed the following results to the research questions.

Research Question 1: What Are the Challenges Educators Experience Within the System of Inclusion?

During the semistructured interview, participants shared their personal challenges in the inclusion system. Von Bertalanffy's (1972) systems theory aims to understand how all parts of the inclusion system depend on each other so that the system can function. A priori code was assigned to Research question 1. The a priori code for Research question 1 was inclusive classroom challenges. The category of collaboration and teamwork developed while the theme of inclusion often requires collaboration among general

education teachers, special education therapists, and other educational specialists can be challenging.

Inclusion Requires Collaboration

The theme of finding time to plan and prepare differentiated instruction emerged from the theme of collaboration. A common theme from five of the participants was that developing a relationship relies on collaboration with the general education teacher and the special education teacher. Participant 13 stated, “An inclusion classroom really relies on collaboration with the general education teacher and a special education teacher.” Some educators admit it’s hard to work with somebody who is rigid and non-bending, especially with kids with special needs. Participant 8 shared, “It takes strong collaboration whether it’s 2 teachers who are co-teaching all day or a special education teacher who’s pushing into a general education class.”

Beliefs

Nine research participants expressed the belief of inclusion can be challenging. Participant 11 stated, “There needs to be willingness to communicate.” Participant 5 said, “One of the challenges again is having like staff that you work with that is open to different ideas.” Participant 13 stated, “Both of the teachers are equally comfortable with understanding the needs of the students and the curriculum goes a long way to having only the special education teacher familiar with the needs of the students and only the general education teacher familiar with the content.” Another participant felt it was quite challenging to run the system of inclusion, especially when there are different philosophies.

Certifications

Two participants felt that certifications can be challenging when overcoming system of inclusion. Participant 5 stated, “I don’t think we can just have any general education teacher anymore.” Participant 5 also said, “So I think our teachers need that type of training and understanding of differentiation and accommodations from our learners.” Participant 9 stated, “I think just being able to be well educated on, like what inclusion really means to these students.” Another participant felt that the process of getting dual certifications can be quite time consuming and academically challenging.

Expensive

One participant expressed that inclusion is overly expensive. Participant 5 stated, “The money, the funding that they provide not our school, not all school districts are equal across America, right?” Another participant felt that classroom sizes have been larger than the last 15-20 years. The participant suggested that more training needs to be done, even if it was costly.

Time and Workload

In an inclusive classroom, educators require time for planning and teamwork. Educators often need to adapt their lesson plans, employ differentiated instruction strategies, and utilize collaborative learning techniques to engage all students. The participants of the study expressed a need for more time. Participant 1 stated that, “Joint planning time is crucial to have a really nice flow and being able to work with that teacher. Participant 13 stated, “I think one thing that is sometimes underestimated in terms of establishing inclusion is the importance of time, and whether it’s common

planning time or providing time to build a relationship is really important." Participant 5 stated that when providing an opportunity to plan according, allows for a quality inclusive experience for our students." Participant 3 expressed that time is crucial for collaboration to occur. Participant 8 expressed, "We try to find the time to discuss what we're going to do and have a game plan." Participant 9 stated that "having time promotes strong instruction."

Work

Educators play a crucial role in meeting the individualized education program (IEP) goals and objectives, as these are tailed to address the unique needs of SWDs. By implementing specified modifications and accommodations, educators can create an inclusive learning environment that supports academic and personal growth of the students, ensuring they have equitable access to the curriculum and the opportunity to reach their full potential. Participant 10 stated, "You have to make sure you're accounting for the needs of your general ed students and maybe those who are even above average, or you know, they might need to go at a quicker pace, so it can be hard to meet everyone's needs." Participant 3 stated, "You have to have a good understanding of what your students' strengths and needs are." Participant 2 stated, "Both teachers are responsible for the teaching portion and are both responsible for helping the students as they're working."

Relationship

Building a strong relationship with your co-teacher in an inclusion classroom is crucial for meeting IEP goals and objectives, but it can indeed present challenges.

Participant 13 shared, “An inclusion classroom really relies on collaboration with the general education teacher and the special education teacher. Participant 7 stated, “It is important to make sure you’re both on the same page.” Participant 9, shared, “I think just having a strong bond between the collaborative pairings is very strong for the students to know, and that can just lead up to a classroom.” When asked about additional comments about inclusion for Question 10, Participant 9 shared, “You just have to be ready to navigate at all times.” Participant 5 expressed, “This is a relationship field, I think it starts with building a relationship whether you’re a teacher in classroom or a teacher working on building a relationship with your co-teacher.” Participant 12 shared, “It’s very hard to work with somebody who is very rigid and non-bending, especially with kids with special needs, because not everything is always going to be the same.”

Research Question 2: What Do Educators Need to Overcome the Issues/Barriers Within the System of Inclusion?

Educators teaching in the inclusive classrooms often face significant barriers that can hinder their ability to support all students. One major challenge is the lack of adequate training and resources to address the diverse needs of SWDs (Woodcock & Jones, 2020). Many teachers may feel unprepared to implement individualized instruction or adapt curriculum materials, which can lead to frustration and decreased confidence.

Professional Development Should Be Practical and Tailored to the Specific Needs of the Educators and the Students

All 13 participants felt practical professional development was barrier when supporting SWDs in the inclusion classroom. Professional development plays a crucial

role in fostering an inclusive classroom environment, especially for SWDs, and professional development is essential for equipping them with the necessary skills and strategies (Boitumelo et al., 2020.) Professional development should focus on differentiated instruction, behavioral management techniques, and collaborative practices.

Support

Educators require robust support in inclusion classrooms to teach SWDs, as these demographic presents unique challenges that can impact on the overall learning environment. Participant 10 shared, “You know, I’m brought into a lot of meetings, just as someone to help support the teachers and listen to what they’re doing and what’s going well and what’s not going well.” Participant 5 expressed, “Accommodating and providing the supports for our teachers so that they can provide quality education and then giving them opportunities.” Participant 9 expressed, “I think self-reflection is one, but I also think just being able to talk to your admin to talk to the people that you want to have support from because I know me personally, that helps me understand, like okay, they know you had a really tough day.” Participant 11 shared, “Being able to communication their needs and expectations for one another and really being able to establish some norms and some boundaries that work for that collaborative relationship.”

Feedback

Feedback is crucial for educators’ professional growth, helping them to recognize areas for improvement and engage in lifelong learning to better serve SWDs in the inclusion classroom. Participant 13 expressed “Sometimes I think, as administrators it can be challenging to provide feedback that the teachers can use right away and make it

immediately meaningful, which is something we could probably work on." Participant 10 shared, "Feedback is helpful because it's back and forth kind of not just you should do this.' Participant 6 shared, "Giving that feedback immediately, I think is the best way to do it." Participant 12 stated, "Feedback from the colleagues is the most helpful."

IEP

An IEP provides a detailed understanding of a student's specific learning needs, strengths, and areas of difficulty (Beck & DeSutter, 2019). This knowledge allows educators to tail their teaching approaches to better support each student's unique requirements. Participant 10 shared, "I think we have data that shows success for our students in these classrooms. We have students who are meeting their goals and objectives." Participant 9 felt, "I do feel that having two teachers in the room really makes a difference, because we are able to you know, provide the modifications and accommodations." Participant 6 expressed, "The boundaries are the IEP really because the teacher doesn't have the ability to make that specific judgment based on where they are today. You know, the IEP is written often, you know, when we see this much time of inclusion or this much time."

Parental Involvement

Parental involvement can become a barrier in an inclusive setting for educators when parents have negative attitudes towards inclusion, lack understanding of their child's disability, have unrealistic expectations, are overly protective, or when communication between the school and parents is non-communicative , leading to misunderstandings and hindering collaboration needed to support the SWDs (Markelz et

al. 2021). This implies that while parental engagement is generally seen as beneficial for student success, there are instances where it may hinder the educational process. Finding a balance where parents support their children without overstepping can enhance the educational experience.

Parents

Participant 2 saw parental involvement as a barrier. Participant 2 shared, “That most feedback comes from the parents and what they think is going on in the classroom versus what’s actually going on in the classroom.” Participant 4 expressed,

> Believe it or not it’s the parents. It’s the students been in resource for like, oh, just make something up. They’ve been in resource science for 5 straight years. All of a sudden were going to put him in in-class resource. They’re not going to be ready for this. They’re not going to be able to handle it like they’re the ones that are stopping it, and I think most of the time it’s out of comfort.

Participant 8 expressed, “Parents you know this is part of the being a teacher, you’re going get feedback from parents whether you like it or not.”

Planning Time

In many contexts, such as education, community projects, or workplace initiatives, planning is crucial for ensuring that all voices and perspectives are considered (Kuntz & Carter, 2021). Participant 11 shared, “It’s important that there is time set aside that the teachers, the co-teachers will have some kind of planning and I think it’s open communication, where if something is not working or someone’s not comfortable with the way things are going that they they’re willing to talk, but also listen and kind of make

those adjustments." Participant 13 stated, "I think one thing that sometimes is underestimated in terms of establishing and inclusion is the most importance of time, and whether that's common planning time, whether that is the time that it takes to build a relationship between the teachers." Participant 5 stated, "The other second biggest thing that we are constantly trying to fix is providing quality planning time with our collaborate partner. So that our co-teaching, teams have time to really talk through things, to plan, to accommodate to modify."

Personality

Inclusion refers to the practice of ensuring that all students, regardless of their backgrounds or abilities, have equal access to education. If educators have rigid or negative personalities, they may struggle to create an inclusive environment that welcomes diverse learners (Gregory, 2018). Participant 12 expressed, "If you guys aren't working on the same page and aren't able to collaborate and work together. I think that makes the ICR model does not work so well." Participant 4 stated, "All of the barriers of ego and no, trust, and like you have to trust that person." Participant 11 shared, "People that are working together. Like they would kind of set their own boundaries what they're comfortable with."

Flexible Curriculum and Assessment

The topic of flexible curriculum and assessment barriers refers to the challenges faced in adapting educational programs and evaluation methods to meet diverse student needs. To overcome the barrier of flexible curriculum and assessment, educators can use differentiated instructional strategies, for example regularly assessing student progress

through varied methods (Goodall et al, 2022). However, barriers can arise, such as rigid educational standards, lack of resources, or insufficient training for educators. These obstacles can hinder the implementation of a flexible approach, making it difficult for all students to succeed.

Modify

Modifications can become a barrier to educators when they complicate lesson planning and delivery, requiring additional time and resources to implement (Alabdallat et al., 2021). This can lead to frustration and overwhelmingness, especially if educators feel unprepared or lack support in adapting their teaching strategies to meet diverse student needs. Participant 12 shared, “If it’s a curriculum-based course, like, there are skills that are expected.” Participant 7 stated, “The understanding of how we can fix it and that’s the aspect of like the inclusion teaching.” Participant 1 expressed, “People would like modify what they were doing.”

Become an Advocate

In various contexts, such as education or social settings, prioritizing independence might lead to the exclusion of people who need help to participate fully (Batool & Khawaja, 2021). This can be particularly relevant to SWDs or those who rely on community support. Participant 2 shared, “I think at the high school level specifically; all students are starting to become independent. So, you kind of teach them all to advocate for themselves.”

Synopsis of Challenges in Inclusion

Educators face multiple challenges in inclusive classrooms, particularly in collaboration, beliefs, certifications, funding, time management, and workload. Inclusion relies on teamwork between general and special education teachers, although differences in teaching styles or rigid personalities can hinder cooperation. Educators need sufficient training to address students' diverse needs and obtaining dual certifications is often time-consuming. Limited funding affects class sizes and available resources, while time constraints make joint planning difficult. Educators also struggle to balance the needs of SWDs alongside those of general education students.

Synopsis of System Barriers

Parental involvement, time for planning, and personality conflicts among co-teachers can impact inclusion efforts. Some parents resist inclusion due to misconceptions or overprotection, which can hinder collaboration. Educators also emphasized the importance of having scheduled planning time for communication and classroom management. Flexibility in curriculum and assessments is also a challenge, as rigid standards limit adaptive teaching practices.

Educators' Needs for Overcoming Barriers

To address the challenges, educators identified key needs. Professional development that is tailored to inclusive education is essential (Boitumelo et al., 2020). Educators benefit from practical guidance on differentiated instruction, behavioral management, and collaborative practices (Byrd & Alexander, 2020). Regular administrative support and constructive feedback are vital to improve teaching methods

and foster a supportive environment. Educators appreciate the framework established by IEPs to address specific objectives; however, they require the flexibility to modify these plans according to the daily needs of their students (Crispel & Kasperski, 2021). Encouraging students to advocate for themselves and promoting independence enhance engagement and classroom dynamics. The findings suggest that while inclusion holds potential benefits, addressing the systemic and practical challenges can help create a more supportive environment for all students.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Qualitative research necessitates proof that the study's conclusions are reliable (Leung, 2015). Being trustworthy is essential to the research process (Buckley et al., 2021). Researchers use the data's confirmability, reliability, trustworthiness, and transferability to demonstrate the validity of the findings. It was necessary for the participants to feel at ease that transparency was implemented right away. To obtain data from the participants about the research issues, I needed to develop a trustworthy rapport with them. It was crucial that the participants felt secure knowing that all information obtained including their identity would be kept confidential.

Credibility

In qualitative research, credibility refers to trusting the data along with the instruments used to collect the data (Ravitch & Carl, 2019). Credibility is a key factor in assessing the reliability of the data. In this study member checking served as a gauge for credibility. Following the data collection process, a transcript was emailed to each of the participants of the recorded interview. The transcript provided the participant an

opportunity to thoroughly go over the information and make sure the information was captivated the information as planned. Member checking established credibility by allowing the participants to review and confirm the accuracy of the transcript (Clark et al., 1999). Triangulation was not employed in the study, due to the diverse meanings and experiences which can sometimes contradict each other while trying to triangulate them (Hanson-DeFusco, 2023). The transcript also allowed an opportunity for the participants to make any necessary changes or ask additional questions. By establishing member checking, the channels of communication remained open, which strengthened the level of trust.

Transferability

Conducting research and sharing the descriptive data along with the inclusion criteria, transferability was verified. This study can be replicated by other researchers (Ravitch & Carl, 2019). The study could be applied in other educational settings. The results of this study may give educators an insight into the opinions of educators regarding the challenges of teaching SWDs in the inclusion classroom. This research may offer educators high-quality, evidence-based research that recognizes and supports educators in the inclusion classroom resulting in positive social change.

Dependability

Data consistency is referred to as dependability (Gale et al., 2022). Maintaining consistency in data collection ensures reliability. Anyone wishing to audit the study in the future to confirm can access all research notes, materials, data management, and sampling. In the study, data saturation was influenced consistently. Consistent techniques

were applied to obtain data from each participant. The questions asked were the same for each semistructured qualitative interview. The protection of the participants was consistent and maintained to ensure the viability of the data collected.

Confirmability

The last approach in confirming trustworthiness is confirmability. The demonstration that the conclusion and the results were directly obtained from the data (Yunanto et al., 2021). Direct quotes from the interviews were incorporated to enhance the neutrality of the study (Birth et al, 2016). Neutrality is the degree of fairness, which is free from bias. Verifying confirmability involves double checking the data collection and the analysis of the data. Confirmability was validated through the process of verifying and re-verifying the collection and analysis of the data.

Summary

This basic qualitative study aimed to explore challenges, while recognizing the issues with resources and support that educators have when teaching SWDs in the inclusion classroom. Chapter 4 described the setting, data collection process, data process, data analysis, the results, and concluded with evidence of trustworthiness. From the two research questions, four themes emerged from the data collected from the interviews.

For RQ1, the two themes that emerged were inclusion required collaboration among educators and teachers often face challenges in finding time to plan and prepare differentiated instruction. Most of the participants indicated that common planning time

can be challenging when educating SWDs in the inclusion classroom. Participants felt that collaboration can be challenging and that it often takes time to develop relationships.

For RQ2, the three themes that emerged from the data were professional development should be practical and tailored to the specific needs of the students, educators should engage with parents in the educational process which can provide support and insights into the needs of SWDs, and educators should monitor and evaluate progress made through a flexible curriculum and assessment. Majority of the participants indicated that professional development was a barrier when it comes to educating SWDs in the inclusion classroom.

Von Bertalannffy's system theory was used to answer both research questions (Von Bertalanffy, 1972). Using Von Bertalannffy's system theory addressed both the challenges and issues/barriers that educators need to overcome in the system of inclusion. In Chapter 5, the final chapter of the study, discusses and describes the limitations of trustworthiness, recommendations for further research, the potential impact of social change, and methodological implications.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore educator's experiences with the system of inclusion as well as resources needed to overcome any issues or barriers at a northeastern school district in New Jersey. A basic qualitative descriptive study was used that utilized semistructured interviews to answer the research questions. The study was conducted in a suburban school district located in northeast New Jersey. Conducting semistructured interviews allowed for the identification of challenges that educators face from a variety of viewpoints.

The analysis of the study data for RQ1 highlighted the challenges faced by educators in the inclusive classroom focusing on collaboration, training, resources, and time management. General and special education educators must work together, but differences in teaching styles or personalities can hinder collaboration. Educators often lack sufficient training to meet diverse needs, and obtaining dual certifications is demanding. Limited funding exacerbates issues by increasing class sizes and reducing resources. Time constraints make joint planning difficult, and balancing the needs of SWDs and general education students remains a challenge.

For RQ2, the analysis of the study data indicated that participants expressed several challenges, including parental misconceptions, limited planning time for co-teachers and conflicts in teaching styles. Rigid curriculum standards also hinder adaptive practices, making flexibility difficult. To overcome these barriers, educators highlight the need for tailored professional development on inclusive practices such as differentiated instruction and behavior management, as well as consistent administrative support and

constructive feedback. Educators value the structure of IEPs but need the freedom to adapt to daily student needs. Promoting student self-advocacy and independence is also key to improving engagement and classroom dynamics. Addressing these issues can foster a more supportive learning environment.

Interpretation of the Findings

I asked 13 educators 10 interview questions regarding their challenges in the system of inclusion and what they believe that educators need to overcome the issues/barriers in the system of inclusion. A systematic data analysis was conducted using the NVivo analysis software, alongside open coding of the interview transcripts and thematic analysis that corresponds with the research questions. The analysis focused on identifying common themes and contrasting themes to facilitate the interpretation of the data derived from the analysis. The findings suggested that inclusion necessitates collaboration among educators; however, educators frequently encounter difficulties in allocating time for planning and preparing differentiated instruction. Educators expressed that fostering collaboration can be a complex process, often requiring significant time to build strong professional relationships. Finally, educators shared that professional development should be more applicable and specific to SWDs in the inclusion setting.

The findings for this study confirmed those of the literature reviewed in Chapter 2. I evaluated and interpreted findings using the research literature review from 2019 through 2024 and the conceptual framework systems theory (Von Bertalanffy, 1972). The principle of the systems theory is based on the idea that a system is more than the sum of its parts, while acknowledging that the behavior of a system cannot be fully understood

by examining its individual elements in isolation. By applying Von Bertalanffy's (1972). systems theory, educators can better understand the importance and interdependency and collaboration in achieving the goal of inclusion for SWDs. Success is not the result of isolated efforts but of a well-coordinated system where all subsystems administrators', teachers. specialists, and policies work in a coherent manner (Rapp & Corral-Grandados, 2021). When this harmony is achieved, inclusive education becomes a powerful tool for promoting equity and integration in society. I conducted 13 semistructured interviews with educators to explore the challenges, while recognizing the issues with resources and support faced by educators who teach SWDs in the inclusion classroom. Interview responses indicated that even though educators communicated that cultivating successful collaboration continues to be challenging. Educators shared that proficient improvement ought to be more appropriate to SWDs in within the inclusion setting. My interpretation of the findings aligns with the conceptual framework and the literature review.

Theme 1: Inclusion Requires Collaboration Amongst Educators

The participants shared their perspectives on how collaboration ensures all students are supported in diverse classrooms. Participants expanded on how their shared responsibility, open communication, and teamwork perform in the inclusion classroom. Participants expressed how they work together to adapt teaching methods, create inclusive lesson plans, and provide tailored support to all students. Participants provided how professional development and engagement in families enhance the inclusive environment, enabling all students to thrive academically and socially.

Collaboration Amongst Educators

When educators engage in collaborative efforts, their instructional methodologies are significantly impacted (Ainscow, 2020). Through collective collaboration, educators can recognize areas requiring enhancement and adapt their practices accordingly (Khaleel et al., 2021). The collaboration among educators is essential for their professional growth. In educational communities, such collaboration facilitates professional development activities that enable educators to connect with their peers and ascertain the improvements necessary for their practice. Educators can share and learn from each other's insights and experiences (Friend, 2010). Continuous improvement in schools is heavily reliant on educator collaboration. There is a necessity for investigation into the systems framework that facilitate collaboration in teacher training programs, serving as a foundation for recognizing opportunities to incorporate authentic experiences in co-teaching (Kamens, 2007). This collaboration is linked to job satisfaction among educators and is vital for the academic success of students (Page et al., 2020).

In the context of the systems theory, educators are pivotal to the successful implementation of inclusive practices (Harding, 2009). Participant 10 shared, "It's important that any of the adults in the room are working together to the needs of the students in the room." Increased professional learning opportunities in inclusive education led to the development of essential skills necessary for becoming proficient inclusive educators. Co-teaching represents a collaborative educational strategy where general and special education teachers work together in the same environment, addressing diverse student groups and executing educational activities (Cook &

McDuffie-Landrum, 2019). To foster a learning environment for SWDs, it is imperative that general and special education teachers collaborate to establish course objectives, thereby showcasing their expertise in their respective fields for the benefit of all students (Mofield, 2019).

Theme 2: Finding Time to Plan and Prepare Differentiated Instruction

Participants expressed a significant challenge in finding time to plan and prepare differentiated instruction due to the demands of understanding diverse student needs, designing, varied activities, sourcing appropriate materials, and managing administrative tasks. Many educators expressed felt overwhelmed by the time-intensive nature of differentiation, particularly in classrooms with SWDs. Finding time to plan and prepare differentiated instruction require substantial effort and time, which is often limited by their daily workload.

Time and Workload

Educators often feel a mix of fulfillment and challenge when planning for an inclusion classroom (Basckin et al., 2021). While many find it rewarding to create an equitable learning environment and build connections with diverse students, they can also feel overwhelmed by the workload (DeMatthews et al., 2021). Participant 1 shared, shared “Joint planning time is just so crucial to have a nice flow and be able to work with that teacher.” Teachers may experience stress due to time constraints, inadequate sources, and a lack of training to meet varied needs (Liu et al., 2022). Collaboration with support staff and access to professional development and ready-made resources can help alleviate some of these challenges.

Systems theory relates to the time and workload for educators in inclusion settings by highlighting the interconnectedness of various components in the educational environment (Rapp & Corral-Grandados, 2021). Teachers, students, administrators, support staff, policies, and available resources all function as parts of a larger system with each element influencing the others. When support systems, such as collaboration with educators or access to resources are strong, educators can manage their workload (Clark et al, 1999). Systems theory emphasizes that a well-functioning inclusion environment depends on balancing these components, ensuring educators have the support and tools needed to meet diverse student needs while maintaining a manageable workload.

Theme 3: Professional Development and Training

Participants in this study shared how professional development and training are essential for overcoming the issues and barriers faced by educators in the inclusion classroom. Training equips educators in the knowledge and strategies to address diverse learning needs, implement differentiated instruction, and foster an inclusive environment (Ainscow, 2020; Batool & Khawaja, 2021; Crispel & Kasperski, 2021; Friend et al., 2010; Gale et al., 2022; Juvonen et al., 2019; Kurniawati, 2021; Liu et al., 2022). Workshops, certifications, and ongoing professional learning opportunities can enhance educator's skills in areas such as Universal Design for Learning (UDL), behavior management, and collaborative practices with support staff (Khawaja, 2021). Participants expressed how professional development helps them build conference, reduce feelings of being underprepared, and create practical solutions to challenges accommodating IEPs or managing complex classroom dynamics. By investing in targeted and ongoing training,

schools empower educators to break down barriers and ensure equitable opportunities for all students.

Professional Development and Training

The topic of professional development emerged as a recurring theme throughout the semistructured interviews. Numerous participants expressed a personal necessity for professional growth, particularly in relation to their colleagues, when addressing the needs of students with IEPs. Participant 1 shared, “professional development should be consistent throughout the school year.” Professional development is vital in creating an inclusive classroom atmosphere, particularly for SWDs. It is imperative that professional development equips educators with the essential skills and strategies needed to support students (Boitumelo et al., 2020). Educators receive minimal training in working with SWDs or implementing inclusive practices. Without adequate preparation, they may struggle to differentiate instruction, manage behavioral challenges, or adapt curriculum to meet individual needs (Boitumelo et al., 2020). Participant 11 expressed that, “I think teachers that are in the inclusion setting need to have some kind of training or professional development.” To overcome the challenges schools and districts must foster a culture of collaboration, where general and special educators work together as a team (Gale et al., 2022). According to Kurniawati (2021), training ensures educators understand these legal obligations and can implement accommodations and modifications to provide equitable learning opportunities. Training educators not only empowers educators to meet legal and ethical obligations but also ensures that SWDs have access to a high-quality education that supports their academic, social, and emotional development

(Aktan, 2020). Preparing educators for inclusion is a foundational step toward creating an equitable system for all learners

Professional development and training play a vital role in helping educators teach SWD in the inclusion classroom, as seen through the lens of the systems theory. This theory emphasizes the interconnectedness of various components in the educational system including teachers, students, resources, policies, and support staff (Von Bertalannffy, 1972). High quality training equips educators with strategies for differentiated instruction behavior management, and collaborative practices, enabling them to address the diverse needs of their students (Casale-Giannola, et al., 2023). These professional learning opportunities also strengthen the feedback loops in the system, improving communication and collaboration between general education teachers, special education staff, and administrators. By enhancing teachers' capacity and confidence, professional development optimizes the functionality of the inclusion system, ensuring that all parts work together to support SWDs and promote equitable learning outcomes.

Theme 4: Educators Should Engage with Parents and Caregivers

All participants shared the need for engaging with parents and caregivers of SWDs in an inclusive classroom is essential for fostering a holistic learning environment. These families provide valuable insights into the child's strengths, challenges and preferences, which can inform individualized teaching strategies. Collaborating with parents ensures consistency between home and school, promoting reinforcement of skills and behaviors (Markelz et al., 2021). Involving caregivers helps build trust, increases

understanding, and enables educators to address any concerns to the child's academic, social, and emotional growth, creating a more supportive inclusion experience.

Parental and Caregiver Involvement

Parental involvement may pose challenges in an inclusive educational environment when parents exhibit negative perceptions of inclusion, lack comprehension of their child's disability, hold unrealistic expectations, display excessive protectiveness, or when there is non-communicative between the school and parents. Such circumstances can result in misunderstandings and impeded the necessary collaboration to adequately support SWDs (Markelz et al., 2021). This suggests that although parental engagement is typically regarded as advantageous for student achievement, there are situations where it can obstruct the educational process (Rapanta et al., 2021). Striking a balance that allows parents to support their children without overreaching can significantly improve the educational experience. Participant 7 shared, "If you don't have a relationship with the kid or a parent you can't really be involved because they don't really know you."

Educators should actively engage with parents and caregivers in the educational process, as they are essential in understanding and supporting the unique needs of all students. The participants in the study shared how families can offer invaluable insights into a child's learning style, challenges, and strengths, which can help tailor instructional approaches and provide additional support where needed. By establishing avenues for daily communication, such as newsletters, emails, or parent-teacher meetings, schools create a relationship which ensures both educators and families are aligned in their efforts (Alsulami & Ault, 2024). Participants indicated this ongoing dialogue foster

collaboration, builds trust, and helps address concerns promptly, ultimately benefiting the student's' academic success and overall well-being.

The systems theory emphasizes the interconnectedness of various components in a system and their impact on one another, making it particularly relevant to parental and caregiver involvement in the education of SWDS in an inclusion classroom. According to this theory, a child's development is influenced by interactions between their family, school, and broader community systems (Von Bertalannffy, 1972). Engaging parents and care givers in the educational process fosters a collaborative environment where all stakeholders contribute to the child's success (Rapp & Corral-Grandados, 2021). Participants shared by working together, educators and families can share insights, strategies, and resources, ensuring consistency, and reinforcement across home and school settings. This integrated approach supports the student's academic, social, and emotional development, demonstrating how the systems theory facilitates a comprehensive and inclusive educational experience.

Theme 5: Educators Should Monitor and Evaluate Progress Through a Flexible Curriculum and Assessment and Evidence-Based Strategies

Participants expressed that a flexible curriculum and assessment approach is essential for accommodating the diverse learning styles and abilities of students, particularly in inclusive classrooms. By integrating evidence-based strategies, educators can provide targeted support that enhances learning outcomes for all students. For instance, incorporating multimodal teaching methods such as visual aids, hands-on activities, and technology ensures accessibility for a range of learners (Kaczorowski &

Kline, 2021; Yoro, 2020). Similarly, varied assessment methods, including formative assessments, project-based evaluations, and performance tasks allow students to demonstrate their knowledge and skills in ways that align with their strengths (Buckley et al., 2022). This adaptability fosters an equitable learning environment where every student can thrive, meeting individual needs while maintaining high educational standards.

Flexible Curriculum and Assessment

Educators can overcome the issues and barriers of implementing evidence-based practices for SWDs in the inclusion classroom by adopting strategic approaches that address common challenges. These challenges often include a lack of training, time constraints, limited resources, and resistance to change. Schools and districts should provide regular, high-quality training on EBPs, focusing on strategies such as differentiated instruction, universal design for learning and Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (Khawaja, 2021). Recognizing the strengths of students and formulating strategies to achieve instructional objectives is essential (Casale-Giannola, et al., 2023). It is crucial to disseminate evidence-based practices that can assist educators and their students with intellectual disabilities in thriving with an inclusive environment. Educators can seek out workshops, webinars, and online resources to stay updated on practices. Educators should participate in professional learning communities to share experiences and trouble shoot challenges with colleagues (Ainscow, 2020). Participant 6 shared, “We have strategies, but it’s important to keep in mind, that not one size fits all.” Enhanced teamwork leads to better support for SWDs and improved implementation of

EBPs (Basckin et al., 2021). By addressing these barriers with intentional strategies, educators can implement evidence-based practices in inclusive classrooms, ensuring that all students including those with disabilities have access to high-quality equitable education.

By applying the Von Bertalanffy's (1972) systems theory, educators can better understand the importance of interdependency and collaboration in achieving the goal of inclusion. Success is not the result of isolated efforts but of a well-coordinated system where all subsystems administrators' teachers, specialists, and policies work in concert. When this harmony is achieved, inclusive education becomes a powerful tool for promoting equity and integration in society. System theory emphasizes the interconnectedness of various components in an educational system, highlighting how individual student needs influence and are influenced by the broader context of teaching and learning (Yoro,2020). In the context of evidence-based strategies for SWDs, system theory supports the implementation of tailored interventions that are rooted in research and best practices (Kurniawati, 2021). By recognizing the unique challenges faced by these students, educators can use flexible curricula that adapt to individual learning styles and needs, promoting engagement (Yakovleva et al., 2021). Assessment methods can be aligned with this flexible approach, allowing for ongoing adjustments based on real-time feedback and student progress. This holistic view fosters an inclusive environment where all students can thrive through collaborative, systematic efforts in their education.

Limitations of the Study

One limitation of the study was the issue of social desirability (Carian et al., 2021). The educators were posed questions pertaining to a sensitive subject matter. Consequently, the participants might have provided answers aimed at presenting themselves in a favorable light, thereby obscuring their genuine experiences and viewpoints. Nevertheless, the interviewees were required to sign a consent form that assured them of the confidentiality of their responses, as well as their right to decline to answer any interview question or withdraw from the study at any point without facing any repercussions.

Another limitation for the study was timing. The study was conducted during the summer. The results might not be generalizable to other seasons because seasonal factors could influence the outcome, potentially leading to skewed data that doesn't accurately represent the overall population throughout the year. It would be best to conduct the semistructured interviews during the school year after school hours.

Additional information, such as the duration of participants' teaching experience, the timing and locating of their teaching credentials, the grade levels they have taught throughout their careers, any experience in educational settings beyond public schools, and any books or articles that have significantly shaped their teaching practices, would have provided a richer context for the responses and insights shared during the semistructured interviews. Nevertheless, various strategies were employed to enhance the study's external validity and reliability. These included multiple data sources such as relevant literature and interviews with participants, to corroborate the emerging findings;

member checking, which entailed sharing interview transcripts with participants to gather their feedback on the collected data; and ensuring that a point of saturation was achieved (Fusch & Ness, 2015).

Recommendations

After a thorough review of the research, the study has highlighted a significant demand for enhanced teacher preparation programs and continuous professional learning support in the educational system (Kurniawati, 2021). The anticipated effect on social change suggests that improving the social climate of educational settings could lead to beneficial transformations in the surrounding educational system (DeMatthews & Serafini, 2021). Integrating ongoing professional development that fosters inquiry and collaboration is essential for supporting educators in their professional roles (Friend et al., 2010). This approach not only enhances the learning experiences of students but also reinforces teachers' confidence in managing the daily challenges they face. By providing relevant and purposeful professional learning opportunities, educators can cultivate a sense of community as they collectively address challenges and acquire new knowledge necessary for promoting positive student learning outcomes.

Future research may focus on tailoring professional development aligned with specific school grade levels – elementary, middle, and high school. It is crucial to consider the unique characteristics of each educational stage when designing and implementing professional learning initiatives (Gibbs & 2021). Given that various grade levels encounter distinct challenge related to teacher availability, scheduling, resources,

and institutional frameworks, future studies could address the diverse needs associated with supportive inclusive education across different school levels.

A deeper investigation into educators' perceptions of inclusion would provide researchers with valuable insights into practical application (Anderson et al., 2022). While the responses from participants appeared to reach a saturation point, it is evident that the data derived from these semistructured interviews may not fully encapsulate the sentiments of all educators.

Future investigations into teacher perceptions of inclusion would greatly benefit from an examination of the curricula employed in educational programs designed to instruct educators and administrators about SWDs. A thorough analysis of the frameworks and curricula utilized in teacher preparation and administrative programs could enhance understanding of the challenges and barriers that prevent SWDs from being recognized as integral members of the inclusive classroom, rather than exceptions. This analysis could also illuminate potential areas for improvement with future curricula and credentialing programs.

Implications

Inclusive education offers numerous advantages for both SWDs and their peers without disabilities. As the concept of inclusive education gains traction, it becomes essential to ensure that adequate resources and supports are available for implementation across various school districts (Coker, 2022). The role of educators in inclusive classrooms is crucial, as they significantly influence the success of inclusion efforts (Dieker & Murawski, 2003). It is imperative that educators receive continuous training

and support in diverse strategies and best practices tailored to meet the varied needs of the students.

The study may serve as a framework for designing future professional learning opportunities in the field of education. The primary objective should be to enhance student learning outcomes for SWDs in the inclusive classroom by equipping educators with the necessary time, training, resources, and sustaining support through ongoing professional development (Byrd & Alexander, 2020). Such continuous learning opportunities can assist educators in stay current with both evidence-based best practices and strategies, addressing the ever-evolving demands of the educational profession (Yoro, 2020). The study may serve as a valuable resource for states, educational institutions, and school districts. By using the data, these entities can identify the specific needs of their educators and students, subsequently developing professional development programs tailored to address those identified areas. The design and assessment of these programs can be implemented to continuously meet the professional learning requirements of educators and enhance the outcomes for SWDs in the inclusion classroom setting.

Conclusion

The successful implementation of inclusion requires that educators are provided with collaborative planning time, continuous professional development opportunities, and strong administrative support. The intricacies of inclusion interweave with federal requirements with procedural frameworks, available resources, and collaborative efforts

among educators. The readiness and confidence of educators significantly influence the educational outcomes for SWDs and diverse learners in the inclusion classroom setting.

It is essential that SWDs, along with other learners in the inclusive classrooms, receive instruction from proficient and capable educators. These educators must be adequately prepared, supported, and confident in handling their responsibilities. As the demand for inclusive practice grows, school districts should prioritize training focused on the implementation of inclusion models for administrators' teachers, and support staff working in inclusive settings.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions

1. What are the facts of an effective inclusion classroom? **RQ1**

   a. Why do you think that is?

2. What does the inclusion process look like when instructing students? **RQ1**

   a. As an educator, what are you doing during the process?

3. In your experience, what have been the results for SWD's in the inclusive classroom? **RQ2**

   a. What makes you say that?

4. How do educators obtain feedback towards inclusion? **RQ2**

   a. Is the feedback helpful?

5. What are some boundaries for inclusion to work effectively? **RQ2**

   a. Why is that?

6. How do changes to the inclusion system impact the rest of the school? **RQ1**

   a. Can you provide some examples?

7. How is positive feedback delivered to educators? **RQ2**

   a. How does positive feedback enhance the process?

8. How is negative feedback delivered to educators? **RQ2**

   a. How do educators seek to reestablish the goals of inclusion?

9. How do educators find fulfillment during the process of inclusion? **RQ1**

a. Can you provide an example?

10. Add: Do you have any additional comments? **RQ1** and **RQ2**

Appendix B: Interview Protocol Guide

Interviewee: _____ School District: _____

Date: _____ Time: _____

Grade level: _____ Teaching Certification(s) _____

The purpose of this interview is to further my understanding of the challenges, while recognizing the issues with resources and support that educators faced by educators who teach SWDs in the inclusion classroom. Responses will contribute to my study to help understand how educators feel when teaching SWDs in the inclusion classroom. The results of this study may contain information that could benefit s educators. I aim to understand the challenges and resources/supports that educators need for SWDs to promote growth in the inclusion classroom.

Interview Instructions and Details

Participation for the interview is voluntary. If you decide to participate now, you can change your mind later. You may stop at any time during the interview. The interview will be conducted at your school of employment. Each interview should last approximately 30-60 minutes. The researcher will record each audio recorded interview, which consists of the questions below. Furthermore, follow-up questions may be asked to obtain more detailed information.

All information collected during the interview, will remain confidential. Your identity will remain confidential. Each participant will be assigned a fake name to protect your identity.

Interview Questions

1. What are the facts of an effective inclusion classroom? **RQ1**

    a. Why do you think that is?

2. What does the inclusion process look like when instructing students? **RQ1**

    a. As an educator, what are you doing during the process?

3. In your experience, what have been the results for SWD's in the inclusive classroom? **RQ2**

    a. What makes you say that?

4. How do educators obtain feedback towards inclusion? **RQ2**

    a. Is the feedback helpful?

5. What are some boundaries for inclusion to work effectively? **RQ2**

    a. Why is that?

6. How do changes to the inclusion system impact the rest of the school? **RQ1**

        a. Can you provide some examples?

7. How is positive feedback delivered to educators? **RQ2**

    a. How does positive feedback enhance the process?

8. How is negative feedback delivered to educators? **RQ2**

b. How do educators seek to reestablish the goals of inclusion?

9. How do educators find fulfillment during the process of inclusion? **RQ1**

a. Can you provide an example?

10. Add: Do you have any additional comments? **RQ1** and **RQ2**

Appendix C: Email for Recruitment of Participants

Subject line:

Interviewing educators in April ($20 thank you gift)

Email message:

There is a new study about the challenges and support that general education teachers, special education teachers, education specialists, or administrators experience when it comes to teaching students with disabilities in the inclusion classroom. This study could help to better understand teaching students with disabilities in the inclusion classroom. You are invited to describe your challenges as an educational specialist.

About the study:

- One 30-60 minute semistructured interview that will be audio recorded (no video recording)
- You will receive a $20 Visa gift card as a thank you
- To protect your privacy, the published study will not share any names or details that identify you

Volunteers must meet these requirements:

- 18 years old or older
- General education teachers, special education teachers, education specialists, or administrators.
    - Must be involved in the inclusion classroom where students with disabilities spend all or part of their day.

- Be located in a suburban school district within Northeastern New Jersey.

This interview is part of the doctoral study for Christine Fityere, Ed.D. student at Walden University.

Please email [redacted] to let the researcher know of your interest.