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Teachers' Perceptions About Reading Instruction In Elementary Inclusion Classrooms

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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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Abstract

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MA, Texas Woman's University, 2000

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Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

Researchers argued that special education students should learn alongside regular

education students because involvement with peers affects special education students'

ability to assimilate information. However, inclusive elementary classroom teachers in a

local Texas school were struggling to meet the learning needs of their diverse student

populations in reading instruction. The purpose of this study was to explore teachers'

perceptions about reading instruction in an inclusion setting and to investigate what

teachers believe was needed to improve the effectiveness of their practice. King-Sears's

inclusion instructional model served as the conceptual framework to guide this study. The

research questions were focused on primary teachers' perceptions on using reading

strategies, the challenges teachers confront instructing reading with a diverse population,

and suggestions for professional development related to improving instructional reading

pedagogy in the inclusion classroom. A case study design provided the insights of 9

teachers in inclusion classrooms, through individual interviews, reflective journals, and

observational notes. Emergent themes were identified through an open coding process

and the findings were conceived and validated through participant examination. The

findings revealed that primary teachers struggle with identifying reading strategies when

instructing the diverse population of students in the inclusion classroom, and teachers are

challenged with multiple issues such as team teaching to effectively engage and instruct

all students. This study may lead to positive social change by supporting teachers' efforts

to improve their instructional practices, which have the potential to improve literacy for

all students and with that, will benefit the communities of these students.

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this work to my loving mother, Joanne Knight who inspired my lifelong learning. She encouraged me to follow my heart and enjoy the journey. She always provided the strength and guidance to keep writing and to reflect joy in all I do.

Acknowledgments

First and foremost, I would like to thank God for providing me with the inspiration to continue this project, reminding me that I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. I would also like to acknowledge my family; especially my son Alex and selfless friend Lana who gives me unsurpassed support, motivation, and kindness while I continue pursuing my passion of education. It is my family and faith that has allowed me to conquer the challenges and ride the waves to achieve this goal.

I would like to acknowledge my professor Dr. Timothy Lafferty, who has provided countless direction and patience in completing this study.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

There has been an increase in academic diversity of students in inclusionary classrooms for regular education and special education students, which means learning environments are becoming more complex for teachers to instruct literacy. In every classroom, each student is unique and has different learning styles and desires. But educators are expected to meet the needs of all learners and provide creative opportunities for each one. For example, teachers may focus on reading as a skill that is significant for the future success of students, as there are more occupations that require skills that involve the mastery of basic literacy skills (Levy & Murnane, 1998), making reading a pertinent goal for all students. New technologies are omitting many of the low skill jobs. For society to progress in technology and industries, it will be necessary for reading skills to be elevated to a level where the focus is to improve people's living and wages. For example, Stevens and Luthy (2011) stated that "Two-thirds of students who are not able to read proficiently by the end of the 4th grade will end up in jail or on welfare" (p. 1). Therefore, improving students' reading skills can improve students' futures.

As Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) in 2004 and No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) emerged, there was a significant amount of legislative activity that led to educational directives created to address the needs of underrepresented and disenfranchised students. The NCLB did not include the terms *mainstreaming* or

inclusion nor did it define them (Douvanis & Hulsey, 2002). However, words such as *inclusion*, *mainstreaming*, and *integration* were heard throughout the educational environment. These terms were created by educators to express different variations of least restrictive environments; however, this verbiage was not specified in federal or state statutes. Instead, IDEA created two basic requirements: (a) the child receives free appropriate public education and (b) education must be delivered in a least restrictive environment. In accordance with IDEA,

> LRE [least restrictive environments] is the requirement in federal law that students with disabilities receive their education, to the maximum extent appropriate, with nondisabled peers and that special education students are not removed from regular classes unless, even with supplemental aids and services, education in regular classes cannot be achieved satisfactorily. (34 Code of Federal Regulations Section 300.114)

IDEA led to learning environments encompassing high-stakes testing, accountability, and inclusion classrooms. Inclusion is the total integration of a student with disabilities in the regular education program; however, there is additional support for disability students. Implementation of inclusive programs has varied depending on interpretation of the least restrictive environment by various entities.

Legislative measures to help students were furthered by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), which was passed on December 10, 2015 by President Obama, and IDEA; both hold school personnel accountable for ensuring students with disabilities

achieve the same high standards as their nondisabled peers (Office of Special Education Programs, 2010). These standards are guided by the hope that instruction and opportunities will rise to meet the higher expectations advocated in current legislation (Crawford & Tindal, 2006; Hardman & Dawson, 2008). As a form of accountability, the schools are required to administer a state mandated assessment to all students.

Because of the accountability standards from legislation, teachers began trying to ensure every student demonstrated the best academic achievement. Further, teachers in the inclusion classroom have been challenged to adapt their lesson plans to provide a positive, inquisitive, challenging, and supportive classroom to ensure that each student's academic requirements are met. Beecher and Sweeney (2008) stated that the focus of education should be about helping students experience significant progress in reaching their learning potential. It has been the responsibility of the instructor to use all the tools, strategies, and creativity skills to encourage the students to achieve and go beyond their learning potential. For many teachers and administrators, ability has not been the issue but the ability of students with special needs to conform to traditional teaching methodologies. Teachers are expected to meet the diverse needs of all students in their classroom, but this expectation presents daily challenges (Villegas & Lucas, 2007). Teachers have varied on whether there is a way to have an effective instructional inclusion classroom, and it is not clear how positive these teachers are about teaching in an inclusion classroom. Thus, this study was directed at investigating teachers' perceptions toward instructing literacy in an inclusion classroom.

Though teachers may vary in their feelings, when special need students began integrating into school classrooms, teachers experienced frustration and feelings of being overwhelmed with the diversification of placed populations (Gore, 2004). Teachers have talked about inclusion as impractical in the current environment because many lack confidence in their own competence to deliver instruction with existing resources (Thomas & Vaughan, 2004). However, it is important that teachers show self-confidence during instruction because students acquire social values from classroom practices (Linn, 2011). Considering teachers' integral parts in the lives of students, instructors are expected to demonstrate practices of good character and thoughtful decisions to adhere to professional code of ethics (Lumpkin, 2008). As teachers present these qualities during instruction with their discipline, achievement, fairness and cooperation, they begin to shape the self-worth of students and their understanding of social norms (Linn, 2011). Additionally, teachers modeling morals and character traits while instructing lead students to acquire some of the attributes that encourage the individuals to make a positive contribution to society (Lumpkin, 2008).

Educational laws are now influencing the placement of many students with special needs into regular education classrooms. As a result, many educators who experience feelings of insecurity advocate for support or pullout services. These services provide an escape for teachers that are relegated to positions where they must educate students with special needs; however, pullout services can lead to feelings of insecurity and perceptions of abnormality in students with special needs who are placed in general

education environments for most of their school day. The result can be a loss in vital content required during subsequent instruction (Friend & Bursuck, 2014). Disintegration and uncertainty between what students learn in special and inclusive education classrooms continues to remain in question (Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2004). For teachers in an inclusive classroom, it can be advantageous to develop professional knowledge to maximize the educational opportunities for all students and retain students in the classroom without the need for external support services.

In this study, I explored the perceptions, opinions, ideas, and suggestions of teachers about teaching reading to diverse populations within an inclusion classroom. A qualitative case study design was appropriate for this study because the focus was to investigate and create a description of a phenomenon. It was also used to collect information concerning the status of occurrences to describe what exists with respect to conditions in a situation.

Problem Statement

The problem that prompted this study was that inclusive classroom teachers in a local school located in Texas are struggling to meet the learning needs of their diverse student populations in reading instruction. Inclusive classrooms are composed of general education students and students with disabilities who work together as a classroom unit. These diverse classrooms require teachers to incorporate varied teaching strategies as they develop lessons that meet the needs of all students. At the time of this study, the

elementary school population consisted of 800 students. Of these, approximately 60 qualified for special education services.

A review of state statistics presented by the United States Department of Education (2006) and the Office of Special Education Programs (2009) reflects that in Texas 403,492 students with disabilities received services under Part B of the IDEA This number indicates that 14.1% of Texas students were designated as students with special needs in 2009. In further research, the U.S. Department of Education and Office of Special Education Programs revealed that of the 403,492 students with special needs, 270,621 were placed in regular education classrooms for more than 80% of the school day. This indicates that, statewide, 67% of students with special needs were placed in classrooms with nondisabled students where they were presented with age appropriate peers and grade level curriculum.

Because inclusion is a social value and abstract principle, it can be defined in multiple ways (Norwich, 2005). The flexibility of this principle permits some students to remain in segregated learning environments if it is determined that inclusion is not able to meet their educational needs. According to Wolff (2003), most students with special needs are placed in regular classrooms without ensuring adequate teacher training or support. Prior to the inclusion model, pullout service delivery models were a well-liked approach for teaching students with special needs (Klingner, Vaughn, Schumm, Cohen, & Forgan, 1998); however, the assistant secretary in the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services conducted an analysis of national data and found that pulling

students with special needs out of integrated classrooms was not effectively satisfying the educational needs of these students (Santoli, Sachs, Romey, & McClurg, 2008).

Research in the past several years has not clarified the effectiveness of placing students with special needs in inclusive classrooms compared to using pullout programs. Jensen and Tuten (2007) conducted a case study including 28 experienced teachers earning master of science degrees in literacy for grades K-8 to determine the challenges when working with struggling readers. Participants struggled with the challenge of motivating students, modifying lessons to meet individual needs, implementing a reading program, and meeting guidelines outlined in the ESSA (Jensen & Tuten, 2007). The teachers also lacked flexibility in differentiating instruction in pullout programs (Jensen & Tuten, 2007). In contrast, Shaw and Davidson (2009) found that students who were taught in a pullout program with the Phono-Graphix reading program increased their literacy scores in the classroom; however, only 50% of the students increased their scores on state tests.

The challenge facing remedial programs is that instructors do not normally provide extensive individualized assistance to students, which is required for students to make significant progress in deficient reading skills. It is important to find successful strategies and differentiated techniques to instruct reading to the diversified population so the achievement gap between special needs students and nondisabled students begins to shrink. This study was conducted because of the need to increase understanding of teachers' experiences and perceptions of working in inclusive classrooms. This increased

understanding reflected the variation in practice that existed between the teachers'

knowledge and skills and the type of professional development that was provided to

increase their learning.

Nature of the Study

This study was established to provide teachers' perceptions and ideas of

instructing reading in an inclusion classroom with a diversified population to the

education spectrum, providing more insight for educators. The teachers' perspectives

may lead to improvement in pedagogy and student enhancement in reading skills. It was

important to present effective strategies that teachers use and promote to reach a varied

population of students. Knowledge, perceptions, and ideas from experienced classroom

teachers provided valuable data as they shared their teaching ideas, techniques, activities,

and communications with other educators. Sharing successful strategies and teaching

approaches expands educators' knowledge of differentiating instruction. Differentiating

instruction is important to use for students as they continue to develop in their academic

skills.

The research design was a qualitative case study with collected data from several

data collections approaches (see Creswell, 2013). The data were collected from face-to-

face interviews and observations. Qualitative case studies provide depth of a phenomenon

or experience within a restricted system (Isom, 2014). A case study is a focused system

that allows for a variety of qualitative paradigms (Hatch, 2002), and it can be used to

investigate a phenomenon in depth (Yin, 2014). To answer my research questions, a case

study approach was the best method because it allowed me to collect the reported perceptions and opinions of secondary preservice teachers about working in urban school settings and to record their ideas about the types of preparation that would best serve future preservice teachers to be more prepared to teach in urban school settings.

The emphasis of this study was teacher perceptions and practices about instructing reading to a diverse population in inclusion classrooms. This study provided comprehensive techniques, research questions, data collection and a data analysis within a real-world context of an elementary classroom. The setting of this study was an urban primary school located in Midwestern Texas. Since the introduction of inclusion in the educational environment, the reality of trying to teach multi-level readers in one classroom has created anxiety among inclusion classroom teachers. It was through this case study the inclusive teachers expressed their experiences and ideas to promote an improved learning environment for teachers and students. The choice to select Yin's (2014) model of the case study was appropriate based on the comprehensive data and the real-world setting of the inclusive classroom. This method allowed multiple sources to be collected providing multiple response data as evidence to be analyzed.

Guiding Research Questions

Research Question 1: What teaching strategies do educators use to instruct reading in their inclusion classrooms?

Research Question 2: What are the instructional challenges of inclusion teachers when teaching reading to multi-level ability readers?

Research Question 3: What are teachers' perceptions about professional development support to improve the success of teaching reading in inclusion classrooms?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore teacher perceptions about reading instruction in an inclusion setting and to investigate what teachers believe they need to improve the efficiency of their practice. The goal of the elementary school was to provide all students with a supportive education program in an inclusive classroom. The results of this study provide insights to administrators, teachers, and community stakeholders concerning the participants' experiences and perceptions of teaching reading in inclusive classrooms and ways to improve programs to benefit student performance.

Conceptual Framework

The term inclusion is not defined in legislative mandates; however, it was believed to be a service delivery option for students with special needs. Researchers have identified inclusion with varied designs that are often similar in many ways. Friend and Pope (2005) defined inclusion as students of varying abilities being welcomed into their learning communities. They went on to state that educational professionals should be held equally responsible for their academic achievement (Friend & Pope, 2005). Cooper and Sayeski (2005), on the other hand, argued that because students with disabilities are members of society, they must be included in all aspects of it, which includes educational settings. York, Doyle, and Kronberg (1992) advocated another viewpoint of inclusion as an ideology where individuals are valued and support each other to ensure they achieve

their potential regardless of the setting. In all literature that defines this term, the philosophical viewpoint maintains that generating standardization in students through general education classes requires an integrated approach as well as the elimination of labeling (Lerner, 2000).

Educators serving in an inclusive classroom realize that environments within the educational infrastructure are becoming more diverse. This diversity places the responsibility of organizing instruction in ways that benefit all students directly on teachers (Rogers, 1993). Incorporating students with disabilities in large scale assessments, such as state mandated tests aligned with the general education curriculum, generates both an opportunity and a challenge (King-Sears, 2008). One of the main benefits is that opportunities arise for students with special needs when they have access to, and are responsible for, the same content as their peers.

The total inclusion model results in discontent produced by prejudices concerning pullout models. These biases are often based on fear of disruption in classroom instruction (Wang, Reynolds, & Walberg, 1995); releasing classroom teachers from accountability for teaching low-performing students (Pugach & Lilly, 1984); attaching stereotypes to students pulled out of regular classrooms (Will, 1986); failing to correlate instructional pedagogies with classroom needs; unwillingness to increase academic learning time (Hayes & Jenkins, 1986); and ineffectiveness (Jenkins & Heinen, 1989). Challenges exist when instructional strategies are nonconforming in diversification as to focus, form, and delivery of the general education curriculum (King-Sears, 2008). In

many cases, this allows students with special needs to either remain behind or become further behind in their educational development. Kugelmass (2006) stated that to address each student's needs in inclusive classrooms, strategies conducive to optimizing educational outcomes must be developed. According to Picklo and Christensen (2005), "With the ESSA legislation's focus on improving student performance, especially in identified subgroups, it is essential that there is a variety of instructional options available and that there is greater use of these instructional options for struggling students" (p. 265). This means that teachers serving in inclusive classroom environments must employ effective instructional strategies consistently as well as find new ways to support struggling students.

Many research-based instructional strategies have been shown to be effective. It has been the responsibility of teachers to determine which strategies to use to address individual student needs (Marzano, 2007). This includes teaching students the techniques they can use to become more successful in the classroom. Although students can develop effective and efficient systems independently, for students with special needs, explicit training is often required (Rosenberg, Westling, & McLeskey, 2008). Strategies that work with all students is not feasible; therefore, teachers should be willing to acquire adequate training to determine which strategies will be most effective in each environment (Marzano, 2007). Effective teaching involves applying knowledge of various instructional strategies to address the understood needs of individual students (Marzano, 2007); however, this does not come easily to many educators. This is primarily because

inclusion is a philosophical construct that requires a paradigm shift rather than being the outcome of a specific structure. The result, as seen in Hammeken's (2007) study, is that teachers vary significantly not only in their ability to make adaptations but also in their willingness to change. Creating effective inclusion schools requires embracing diversity as well as a dedication to ensuring students' needs are met (Villa & Thousand, 2017). Achieving that goal within a single classroom, however, has been a challenge to new and veteran educators (Maanum, 2009).

Operational Definitions

The characteristics of this study require definitions of key terms to assist with clarifying concepts. Inclusive classroom, pullout model, supplementary aids and services, and support services are terms that are important concepts to this study. The following terms helped to guide this study. These terms are associated with the instruction of special needs students in inclusive classrooms. Although definitions may vary, I have provided definitions that are aligned with the problem within the local setting.

Inclusive classroom: Halvorsen and Neary (2008) stated that inclusive education is an educational setting where students with disabilities are placed and supported in an age-appropriate classroom located in their home schools and receive the specialized instruction described in their individualized education programs. Inclusion has been the preferred method of placement for students with special needs whenever possible. In IDEA, Section 504 (2004), and the Americans with Disabilities Act (2004), students with disabilities must be educated in regular education settings to the maximum extent

appropriate considering their needs. This would prohibit their exclusion unless education in that environment cannot be achieved satisfactorily even with appropriate supplementary aids and services.

Pullout model: A pullout model is a method of instruction in which students are removed from their regular classroom setting, usually for small group instruction (U.S. Department of Education, 1996). This instruction can be considered a support service and may be performed by a speech pathologist, instructional specialist, or behavior specialist.

Supplementary aids and services: Burns (2003) explained, "The term *supplementary aids and services* means aids, services, and other supports that are provided to enable children with disabilities to be educated with nondisabled children to the maximum extent possible" (p. 6). IDEA (2004) defined supplementary aids as "supports that are provided in regular education classes, other education-related settings, and in extracurricular and nonacademic settings to enable students with disabilities to be educated with nondisabled children to the maximum extent appropriate" (p. 23).

Support services: Mallett (2008) explained, "Student support services usually include multiple layers of supports for high and low incidence special needs student" (p. 8). They may include but are not limited to guidance and counseling, clinician services, inclusion and support specialists, and support for self-contained programs for students. IDEA (2004) defined support services as a means of aids and other supports that are provided in regular education classes, other education-related settings, and in

extracurricular and nonacademic settings to enable students with disabilities to be educated with nondisabled children.

Assumptions

For this research study, it was anticipated that participants would respond to questions accurately and honestly. It was also expected that interviewees would have unbiased attitudes toward the research topic and subjects. In addition, it was assumed that participants would have similar beliefs about including students with special needs into a broader subgroup in an inclusive classroom setting and will not identify students based on disabling conditions such as physical, mental, other health impairments, or one of the other conditions as outlined in IDEA (2001, 2004). For inclusive classrooms, students with special needs provide challenges to methods teachers use to organize, manage, and teach.

Fundamental to the results of this study was the assumption that teachers in inclusive classrooms utilized pedagogies and accommodations that are research-based and addressed the needs of individual students. It was also assumed that the school studied attempted to address the achievement gap of special needs students compared to general education students who are taught in inclusive classrooms and that they were willing to explore the effectiveness of teaching models to reduce this gap. Finally, it was assumed that all materials used during the study (i.e., interview and classroom observation protocols) would be review by peers and experts in the field knowledgeable about inclusion and case study design methodology.

Limitations

The study of a single school within a district as well as the case study design has limitations. Although descriptive and inferential details may have been found in this setting, they may not generalize to other settings even within the same district. Findings, therefore, were designed to reflect the true picture of the effectiveness of current practices at this school in the classrooms studied and may not be reflective of practices throughout the school or district.

A study of the effectiveness of inclusive classrooms compared to pullout programs may be limited by several factors. Some students were instructed in classrooms that provide in-class supplemental aids and services while other students were served through pullout services. Students with special needs placed in inclusion classrooms are labeled as "special" or "different." Separating these students from their nondisabled peers could be less of a motivation to learn. The study, therefore, was focused on aspects of these programs that are effective for both students with special needs as well as other students taught in the same environment. One factor that may significantly impact results is teacher honesty and integrity when answering interview questions as well as during observations. Some respondents may not have responded in complete and honest ways and may have altered teaching styles during observations due to fears of being viewed as unqualified or incompetent. Educators responses regarding students' exceptionalities required the teacher to reflect on their point of view based on their cultural context. As a result, differences in responses should be evident. An additional factor was the perception

that educators understood and could change students whose behavior was continuously problematic. Educators may have had an imperfect understanding of what to do and how to cope with students and their disabilities. Another limitation is that the study was built on a case study design using a postpositivist paradigm that could lead to varied results if other theoretical or conceptual frameworks were used.

Final issues that may have placed limitations on the results of the study involve current legislation that continues to increase demands for accountability while reducing school budgets. This results in continual changes in inclusive classroom settings both in composition and demographics. Although these settings will need to be adequately staffed by well-prepared educators willing to take up the challenge, this means that fewer teachers who specialize in working with at-risk populations may no longer be required. The district's response to the continuing evolution of educational mandates could have impacted results of this research study if staff changes became massive or were targeted at a specific group of teachers and/or students.

Scope of the Study

The scope of the study was designed to explore the effectiveness of teaching models that have the most impact on student literacy. To gain the richest, deepest, and broadest understanding of the issue, the research study was conducted in an elementary school (grades Prek-5) located in an urban town in Texas. Subjects involved in the study included teachers with tenure of 3 years or more instructing and teaching the core academic subject of reading. Their current placement was in an inclusive classroom

setting serving a multiability population that included students with and without special

needs. The students with special needs required a variety of accommodations based on

disabling conditions, which varied depending on the class composition for each teacher

participating in the study. This provided varied results due to the various

accommodations required to meet the individual needs of students. The analysis of the

study was focused on instructional methods as determined through observations of

instruction, analysis of lesson plans, and behaviors of students with special needs in

inclusive classroom settings that used either pullout services or were provided

supplemental aids and services in the classroom. Because teacher pedagogies varied

depending on teacher preferences and personalities, the study was focused on pedagogies

that were and were not used in the classroom; however, these methodologies varied

significantly between teacher participants.

The number of inclusive classrooms for this study was limited compared to the

number that exist within the district under study. Qualified interviewees were sufficient

to determine the effectiveness of programs for this school but did not adequately

represent the entire district. These factors made it more difficult to draw inferential or

descriptive conclusions from the sample that were reflective of the larger group.

Delimitations

Delimitations of the study may have also impacted results. Research was limited

in scope to teachers' perceptions and behaviors in the inclusive classroom setting.

Because only classroom situations were under study, outside factors that influence

learning but were not a part of the study, may limit the scope of the study. These might

include the loss of a loved one, lack of adequate food or health care, home language,

abuse, or other factors. These factors were not included in this study but were mentioned

as mitigating circumstances when drawing conclusions. Additionally, factors such as

migration, changing policies, and organizational structures along with delimitations as

previously mentioned, limitations, and scope of the study represented weaknesses in the

design that could pinpoint need for further study.

Significance of the Study

Limited research has been conducted that provides consistent results to teachers

on effective pedagogies when providing instruction in an inclusion classroom, especially

when it comes to reading literacy. There is confirmed research to substantiate the support

of social benefits of inclusive classrooms. Students in inclusive learning environments

can create more friendships and acquire a healthy self-image (Klingner, Vaughn,

Schumm, Cohen, & Forgan, 1989). Although there is substantial literature on inclusion,

there was little practical knowledge to support the effectiveness of academic achievement

of students in inclusive classrooms (Savage, 2015). There was a lack of research in the

competence of academic achievement in inclusive classrooms for students with learning

disabilities (Affleck, Madge, Adams, & Lowenbraun, 1988; Russ, Berttram, Billie, &

Bongers, 2001). Farrell, (2000) recommended additional studies should reflect actual

observations of teaching in an inclusive classroom instead of placement issues, such as

inclusive and special education classrooms. As a result, educators must draw from and

modify research-based strategies that focus on serving students with special needs in this unique setting (Boroson, 2017).

Additionally, instructors must derive instructional strategies from their own repertoire of beliefs, philosophical values, and personalities when adapting programs. All these aspects, belief, philosophical values, and personalities are involved in the teaching style of the instructor (Migyanka, 2006). When teachers are not clear about the positive aspects of inclusive instruction and when their beliefs are not aligned, the potential for successful student experiences is diminished. An effective teacher uses all repertoires of teaching to provide students with the best learning opportunities.

Applications to the Local Problem

The educational system reflects a flaw in its efforts to provide the necessary research and strategies for teachers to become independent in their use of instructional strategies when confronted with diversified populations in inclusive classrooms. Administrators at elementary schools in Texas need to be cognizant that teachers working with diverse populations need to be a top priority. It was critical that inclusive classrooms are provided with the proper tools and support staff required to ensure that students with special needs succeed. Although the statistics may not represent but 25 or 30% of the school's population, these students are required to be served appropriately in a school setting. The most significant factor is providing sufficient and effective strategies and resources to ensure students can remain in inclusive classrooms. There must be flexibility and diverse strategies available to ensure success. In this way, all students can learn the

necessary academic skills necessary to develop into valuable participating citizens in the community. When teachers become trained and have the knowledge and support to become successful in the classroom, they can also gain confidence.

The implications of this research can support colleagues, professional development presenters, curriculum designers, and policymakers in effective methods for serving students with special needs in inclusive classrooms. To initiate action, the critical components of the study, along with supportive documentation, may be presented in a PowerPoint format and through the development of a white paper as genres for transmitting results to the participating school administrators and stakeholders. The intended PowerPoint and white paper provided a summarization of key elements of the study, review findings, and present recommendations that could serve as a guide for change as well as future research. The information presented in a white paper supported legislative requirements implemented in the educational system as mandated by regulations in documents such as IDEA, Section 504, PL94-142 (2004), and ESSA (2015).

Potential for Positive Social Change

This study can demonstrate a need for change not only for the school involved but for other rural school districts throughout the nation. This study has the potential to inform others about the frustration educators are encountering with the current level of knowledge and skills related to inclusion classroom practices, ascertain teaching practices in the classroom that are most effective, and determine the ability of inclusive classrooms

to improve reading skills for students with special needs without using pullout services. As education evolves and student populations become more diverse, teachers should tackle challenges that confront learner inconsistencies in regular education classrooms (Jackson & Davis, 2000). Organizational arrangements of schools have often relieved classroom teachers of the primary responsibility of teaching to the needs of students that are more diverse than what are considered "average students." This study can also enlighten educators working in various educational environments about this issue.

Deficiencies in the educational achievement of students with special needs are prominent throughout literature when viewing educational reform on inclusion. To compensate, teachers are often requested to adjust curriculum, materials, and support to ensure that each student with special needs receives equity in education when it comes to high quality learning opportunities (Darling-Hammond., 1999; Gamoran & Weinstein, 1995; Schoenfeld, 1999; Sewell, & Shapiro, 1996). It is important that new research focus on strategies, curriculum adjustments, and supports needed in inclusive classrooms where the greatest inconsistencies exist, and many diverse learners are taught. As more learners with diverse abilities are taught in inclusive classrooms, their dignity increases as they feel part of an educational community. As a priority, schools should be preparing all students to become contributing members of their communities.

Summary

The research design was a descriptive case study to explore educator pedagogies when instructing diverse populations in inclusive classrooms on the development of

student reading skills. Research questions were created that informed the study's purpose and led to the development of the research design.

In the next section, a literature review will include aspects of the law that drive inclusion programs, characteristics and outcomes of inclusion, alternative inclusive practices, and evidence of the need for further study. Knowledge gained from reviewing the work of others helped to ensure the project was justified and met criteria for sound research as established in prior research. A summary will be included that provides an overview of current literature.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Under the terms of the NCLB (2001), teachers were required to provide appropriate instructional techniques to assist all students through their unique learning styles. In this modality of instructing, students with learning challenges could become fully engaged in quality education (United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2017). A more recent desire has been that education should not only be accessible to all but that it helps create more inclusive and fair societies (UNESCO, 2017).

This literature review includes legislation that currently drives changes in inclusive classroom settings as well as factors that impact student achievement when in inclusive classroom settings. These include (a) the importance of collaboration on teacher effectiveness and student learning, (b) the needs to provide efficiency to inclusion pedagogy, and (c) the impact of differentiated instruction on diverse populations. By exploring these concerns before designing the study, I ensured that the research addressed important issues. The review concludes with an exploration of research that provides evidence about the effectiveness of improving all students' reading ability in inclusive classrooms. It also justifies the descriptive case study design of the research study.

Review of Related Literature

Direction of State and Federal Mandates

For many school districts across the United States, student achievement as measured by state tests drive decision-making. ESSA (2015) no longer mandates special

education students to be administered the state mandated test required by nondisabled

students; however, state officials are required to create a test equally effective for the

special education students. The ESSA, an education law President Obama approved in

2015, was an action to reauthorize the 50-year-old Elementary and Secondary Education

Act, a national education law committed to equal opportunities for all students (U.S.

Department of Education, 2015). NCLB was a big step toward equalizing education for

all students, but as education continued to evolve, the NCLB did not sustain progress.

Therefore, legislation continued to change to address the needs of students, as

> Congress and the President . . . believed that to ensure that instruction and
>
> achievement for students with disabilities is improved, all students with
>
> disabilities must be assessed and the results of these assessments must be included
>
> in the data used to determine if a school and a school district make adequate
>
> yearly progress, (Yell, Kastisvannas, & Shinner, 2006, p. 34).

As a result of monitoring progress, each state created a state mandated assessment for all

students. The information on the modified state test for the special needs students were

the same with some format modifications.

The State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness (STAAR) is the state

assessment the federal law required to administer to students in Texas. The test is given

annually to students in grades 3 through 8, then again in grades 10 through 12. The

administration administers the STAAR to all students in public education. Reading is

inclusive in the STAAR assessments, which has challenged teachers when instructing

practical reading lessons to students with learning difficulties. Usually the teachers

approach these students in one of two ways: (a) the teacher will choose leveled readers to

provide different skill level materials and instruction to the multi-level students in

combination with the reading core curriculum or (b) provide rigorous activities to be sure

students receive teaching of the necessary skill targets to increase students' reading

performance (Vaughn et al., 2012). However, these instructional approaches do not work

with all students. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (2011) reported that

reading scores have been stagnant since 2007 and have only improved 3 points over the

last 10 years. Consequences of state mandated tests can compel a response from

administrators directing supplemental instructions that focus on the increase of students'

scores (King-Sears, 2008).

Many factors can promote or hinder inclusive and equitable practices within

education systems (UNESCO, 2017). In some classrooms, purposes and objectives are

teaching skills and attitudes, pedagogical strategies, and the curriculum. School systems

either control these variables directly or they can at least provide considerable influence

(UNESCO, 2017). Most district policies and current legislation are focused on two goals.

The first is to have students with special needs exposed to educational experiences that

focus on the instructional curriculum. The second is to allow students more educational

experiences that encourage them to associate with same-age peers in appropriate ways

(Hardman, Smith, & Wall, 2005). These two points ensure inclusion classrooms establish

well-prepared strategies, which allow educators to address the needs of both students

with and without disabilities learning in the same general education setting (Romi &

Leyser, 2006). Laws are imposed to ensure all students are guaranteed an education that

is free, appropriate, timely, meaningful and in the least restrictive setting (Boroson,

2017). In this decade more than 90% of all students with disabilities receive education in

mainstream schools and more than half are included in the general education classroom

for at least 80% of the day (National Centere for Education Statistics, 2016). But there is

still a concern that students with special needs will detract from the integrity of the

competitive classroom learning environment (Boroson, 2017).

Challenges can develop when students with special needs learn skills within

special education classrooms and then attempt to transfer those skills to inclusive

environments (Anderson, 2006). Students with special needs also demonstrate difficulty

with their knowledge on state mandated tests. For instance, even if they learn reading

comprehension strategies in small groups, they may not be able to use those skills in the

classroom (Anderson, 2006, p. 175). Many students with delayed reading skills do not

know what they read or exhibit comprehension (Farlax, 2011). Although researchers

agree that proficient readers use some cognitive strategies to make sense of a text when

they read (Daniels, 2011), readers who struggle may not be aware of when to apply a

strategy or what strategy to use. Often these students comprehend literally but fail to

provide support for their interpretations to make sound judgments. Instruction may be

more focused on teaching students about reading strategies rather than developing

comprehension (Harvey, 2011, p. 117), meaning that instruction should be more flexible

to address the comprehension process (Wilkinson & Son, 2011, p. 361). When it comes

to inclusion, the goal is to find methodologies that ensure the alignment of mandated

standards with student needs and level of skill development.

Teacher Collaboration and Influence on Learning

One of the greatest contributions to the inclusion discussion was uniqueness

between regular and special education systems that exist in today's districts and schools

(Wang et al., 1995). Successful inclusive practices are dependent on restructured schools

that allow flexibility in learning environments and use a flexible curriculum and

instructional ideology. The diversity of an educational environment should be the norm in

multiple intelligence, multicultural, and multilingual schools (Thousand, Villa, & Nevin,

2015). The educational system must be willing to merge special and regular education

than engage in practices with high expectations for all students, which negates the typical

teaching style that was counterproductive and leads to lower achievement (Guess &

Thompson, 1989). It is no longer the idea of where the special needs student is learning:

it is the question of what and how to teach students with special support needs in general

education (Morningstar, Shogren, Lee, & Born 2015).

The inclusive classroom has been a place for evidence-based strategies to enable

all students to learn and participate and to assist students with disabilities and view them

as competent and capable of learning general education curriculum (Turnbull,

Wehmeyer, & Shogren, 2013). Inclusive education benefits all students, but only when

teachers use quality and differentiated instruction, assessment, and progress monitoring

with curricular and instructional accommodations (Salend & Duhaney, 2011). U.S. schools display country, state, or community standards through the way students are educated such as inclusitvity standards (Villa & Thousand, 2017). Inclusive education requires schools to ensure all students have accessibility to obtain meaningful learning. There are no requirements or set of skills or abilities needed to belong in a classroom; inclusive classrooms are learning environments for all students to grow in character and become exposed to diversification.

Inclusion entails restructuring of the standard mode of instructing in which every school can accommodate every child, regardless of disability (Elias & Brahm, 2002). For example, students are accommodated with the necessary tools and strategies, whether it is room for a wheelchair or preferential seating for students who have a hard time with attention. As teachers reframe their thinking to diversity, differences and restructuring, they remove barriers that prevent all students from succeeding in reading. Student performance in schools has been directly correlated to interactions between the student and the instructional environment (Pisha & Coyne, 2001). What happens in the classroom can minimize or magnify the impact of students' special needs on learning and require adaptations for students to succeed. For instance, children's participation in school and class activities are important to their perceptions of themselves as being a part of that community (Janney & Snell, 2006). Inclusion requires children to be physically present within mainstream schools; this will transfer to values, attitudes, policies, and practices to ensure that students can be participants in the class (Polat, 2011).

The success of implementing inclusive education policy and practices is contingent upon the classroom teachers' beliefs regarding such initiatives (Chambers & Forlin, 2011). There must be a strong personal commitment toward inclusive practice for this intervention to be successful (Monsen, Ewing, & Kowa, 2014). Teachers' attitudes can affect both instructional strategies and learning environments (Grieve 2009; Ross-Hill 2009). Grieve (2009) identified three groups of teachers regarding ideology of inclusion: (a) teachers who are willing to implement inclusion with the added adequate support, (b) teachers who believe inclusion is detrimental to the students, and (c) teachers who believe students with social, emotional, and behavioral issues require more support than what an inclusion classroom offers. These three attitudes can significantly influence the success of students with disabilities in an inclusion classroom (Monsen et al., 2014). Teachers' beliefs have a significant impact on the classroom learning environment; teachers tend to focus on children with behavioral or multiple issues and see them as a concern due to the lack of success and disruptions in the inclusive classrooms (Swicegood & Miller, 2015).

Administration and the culture of the school must embrace the acceptance of students with disabilities for inclusion to be successful. Teachers' instruction in inclusive classrooms connects with how they understand disabilities. Boroson (2017) suggested that if educators can view the class through the lens of neurodiversity, it would be as if the diverse learners do not weaken the dignity and integrity of a uniformed classroom. Instead, educators should allow the various students to provide openness and vitality into

the classroom and curriculum. This openness and contribution can provide future

generations the view of diversity as mainstream and the respect of differences.

Collaboration and Coteaching

Collaboration and coteaching ensure success of the students placed in an inclusive

classroom. Coteaching is one option that teachers use to assist special needs students who

are integrated into the regular education classroom. Coteaching, according to Friend and

Cook (2010) is a way to provide educational services to students with special needs in

their general classrooms (p. 109). Coteaching has also been defined as a form of

collaboration and a service provided to the students with disabilities. Additionally,

coteaching can be the collaboration between general and special education teachers who

are responsible for the same classroom (Gately & Gately, 2001, p. 41). Teachers

collaborating in an inclusion classroom have the unique opportunity to blend professional

instructional expertise to enhance the teaching of students with disabilities in general

education classrooms (Muller, Friend, & Hurley-Chamberlain, 2009).

Researchers have implied that the important factor to successful coteaching is

when a team of professionals teach the general education curriculum with the needs of

the students with and without disabilities as a priority. The role each educator portrays is

a key to the success of the inclusive classroom (Lindeman & Magiera, 2014). A team of

coteaching involves the general educator representing the content specialists, while the

special education group members are the learning specialists. By merging these skills,

instruction in the general education classroom improves to a higher level, reaching all

students in a diverse population (Lindeman & Magiera, 2014). Professionals develop

relationships through stages, which eventually results in a meaningful and productive

partnership (Gately & Gately, 2001; Thousand et al., 2015). Teaching is about

relationships: one with the students encompassing a caring nature and commitment to

instruction and the other with fellow colleagues. In a coteacher inclusive classroom, the

relationship of the special educator and general educator requires attention to merge the

two professional's skills smoothly into one enhanced learning environment.

Several coteaching models and approaches may be used in the inclusion

environment. Team teaching was established to assist students with disabilities in

accessing a rigorous general education curriculum in the least restrictive environment

while obtaining support from teachers who are both certified (Conderman & Hedin,

2013). The collaboration process brings all the educational professionals together to

brainstorm the best strategies to instruct the special needs students. Once this approach is

determined, support from administration is imperative. Both teachers in the coteaching

position must be willing to share themselves, knowledge, ideas, pedagogy, and trust in

each other. Although the dynamics of the coteaching relationship gradually build during

the school year, students benefit from the large collaborative learning environment. The

integration process appears to work especially well when special education teachers work

side by side with regular educators (Barry, 1994).

Collaboration can also improve school climates and student achievement (

Flowers, Mertens, & Mulhall, 1999, p. 59). Collaboration, like coteaching, is a method to

address students' learning difficulties where teachers work together (Cola, Craig, Jones, & Mándala, 2008, p. 203). Friend and Cook (2010) defined *collaboration* as the interaction between two or more certified professionals applying contributing ideas regarding teaching, decision-making, goal setting, and accountability for a varied population of students. Though education instruction is traditionally in isolation, sharing vital information can enhance results (DuFour, 2008). Schmoker (2006) also found that by engaging in discussions with colleagues where assumptions, practices, and student work are under evaluation, a deeper understanding of the process can be clearer. Collaboration and coteaching are a subset of skills required to successfully and jointly teach students with disabilities in an inclusive classroom. Teachers share instructional responsibility and accountability for a group of students for whom they both have ownership.

Both large- and small-scale studies have provided evidence of collaboration's effectiveness. In smaller studies, it was found that high poverty schools could achieve beyond expectations through collaborative efforts and reorganization (Chance & Segura, 2009; Craig et al., 2005; Kannapel & Clements, 2005; Mindish, Sullivan, Stiklaltis, & Baireuther, 2008; Williams et al., 2007). For example, Fitch and Hulgin (2008) measured the effectiveness of the Collaborative Learning Assessment through Dialogue in an inclusive classroom from a school that historically performed low on state mandated test scores. The results reflected that in inclusive classrooms, whole class collaborative instructional strategies were better than other models because they fostered high levels of

learning through peer-led discussions (Fitch & Hulgin, 2008). Results indicated that students who traditionally adopt frustration or passivity in reading-based classroom activities or were pulled out for intervention have the same amount of gain because they see their peers as equal (Fitch & Hulgrin, 2008)

One of the problems is that collaboration remains a vague concept that is interpreted differently depending on the setting. When observing or evaluating a group interaction in one setting, grade, or subject, perceptions may be different from one setting to another. This difference in pedagogy can change from grade to grade or room to room; it is the same concept but teaching styles are different. Zeppieri and Taylor (2008) and Pearson (2004) identified different factors as part of the collaboration process. For example, a teacher's understanding of the collaborative process was much more important than just co-teaching. York-Barr, Ghere, and Sommerness (2007) found that collaborative models lead to increased inclusion. It was also found that some factors had a greater impact on student achievement than others. Coteaching requires general and special education teachers to interact in ways that meet the needs of a diverse population that work together for the success of all students in inclusive classroom settings (Jones et al., 1987). The learning environment became encouraging and beneficial to all participates.

The coteaching learning environment strived to achieve a mutual beneficial classroom for teachers and students. Teachers can promote an intrinsic learning atmosphere where students confront, examine, deconstruct, hope, respect, listen, and

engage with learning (Cassady, 2011). A students self worth promotes better choices,

they feel confident, and valued expecially when having a role model to interact

with,(Bandura, 2008). Coteaching provides two role models from two different

perspectives. Collaboration is a creative way of integrating two professional certified

teachers in one inclusive classroom with a diversified population. It was successful in

some classrooms and traumatic in other inclusive settings.

Inclusive programs require collaboration with other teachers and professionals;

role integration and role uncertainty appear to create a major obstacle to the inclusion

learning environment (Wood, 1998). These factors can also impact student achievement

in the effectiveness of inclusive classrooms. Teachers' self-efficacy towards inclusion

shapes students' achievement and behaviors as well as teachers' attitudes and classroom

management skills (Ahsan, Sharma & Deppeler, 2012). The success of the students in the

inclusive classroom results from the attitudes of the professionals portraying excitement,

motivation in reading or frustration, and confusion. Key factors for educators to be

implemented in an inclusive classroom was engaging all students to be successful in

pedagogy, knowledge of students, awareness of accommodations or modifications, and

styles of learning in the classroom. These issues were challenging and seen during the

data analysis portion of the study.

Acquisition of Literacy in Inclusive Classrooms

Learning to read was one of the most critical skills for children to master. Literacy

instruction in preschool was important to future growth and progress in academics for all

students; this was especially true for special needs students who enter school

developmentally behind (Green, Terry, & Gallagher, 2014). Most students with special

needs experience reading as a complex subject (Greenman, Rozendal, & Schmidt, 2010).

Delays in language and literacy provided obstacles to overcome prior to moving into the

emergent reading level.

Emergent literacy skills provide a basis for later reading success; as a result,

reading and literacy should be a focus in preschool instruction for all students (Green et

al., 2014). Critical early language and literacy skills, which assist in support of future

reading accomplishments, must be established during the early childhood years to

encourage growth in all students with and without disabilities (National Early Literacy

Panel, 2008). Reading is based on individuals, it is a developmental process, therefore

when disabilities are involved, the development can be more difficult.

Students with a variety of disabilities face challenges with learning emergent

literacy skills (Green et al., 2014). The nature of the disability will designate why in some

of the different areas of literacy skills it was hard for the student to understand essential

concepts of literacy competencies. Students with language disabilities will have trouble in

conventional and emergent literacy skills (National Early Literacy Panel, 2008). To

provide special needs students with the most beneficial learning environment, placement

in an inclusion classroom with developing peers, socialization and shared learning

environments, and the support and services necessary will provide an educational

environment that strives for success of literacy skills.

Few studies have explored how children with disabilities progress in explicit emergent literacy skills within inclusive settings (Green et al., 2014). Holahan and Costenbader (2000) realized that preschoolers that function at a higher level of social and emotional skills performed better on developmental outcomes in inclusive settings. A quality enriched language learning environment will allow all students to benefit from deeper language development. In this language learning environment, the instructional approaches consisted of whole group, small group, and one on one instruction in the inclusive classroom. Green et al. (2014) provided encouraging information and found that children with disabilities not only maintained their vocabulary skills but reflected some progress participating in whole-classroom language and literacy instruction. Quality reading instruction in preschool can be crucial to students' furture successes in education, initiating the love to read begins very young, (Green et al. 2014). They analyzed progress in emergent literacy skills of elementary children with disabilities by comparing their performance with their age appropriate peers in an inclusive setting. Inclusive language and literacy instruction during the early childhood years provided a good learning foundation for all students. (Green et al.2014). Interacting by communicating with age appropriate peers allowed students to use language and literacy which stimulates the brain creating a foundation of learning.

Vaughn et al. (2009) found that various factors influenced the success of inclusion programs including, but not limited to (a) a lack of resources, (b) increased class sizes, (c) increased responsibilities of both special and regular educators, and (d) administrative

decisions and policies that impacted curriculum delivery options. A lack of resources was

derived from the knowledge of instructing in multiple ways or manipulatives to satisfy

the multi-level reading which are encompassed by the diversification in the inclusion

classroom. When special needs students are integrated in the inclusive classroom the size

of the class increases in academic need and numbers. There was also a challenge with

two professionals working cooperatively to provide a consistent program for all students.

The inclusive classroom dynamics are different from the regular education classroom.

There are several professionals in the classroom, inclusive of the special

education teacher and the general education teacher which roles must be clarified.

Identification of functions within the area of co-teaching must have the ideology which

best meets the needs of students with disabilities and provides service to all students.

According to Allington (2006), this requires 'balance and coherence' between instructors

and administrators specifically in the core academics of literacy. As models of literacy in

the classroom the 'balance and coherence' is an integral part, particularly since literacy

was involved in all core subjects. The paraprofessionals and the professionals must

communicate to ensure the content being reviewed or taught was within the parameters of

the curriculum and IEP goals. An approach to balance instruction reflects merging the

content and the social dimensions together. Administrator's perception was seeing

students understand content and build character simultaneously.

Small group instruction such as, cooperative grouping, or reading level grouping,

homogenous grouping, can be effective when performed in the correct learning

environment. Evidence exists stating small group instruction can be effective (Helf, Cooke, & Flowers, 2009). The small group environment was found to provide students with more feedback from teachers and time to apply new skills (Helf et al., 2009).

Students often differ in language ability, background knowledge, and levels of achievement on state mandated tests (Al Otaiba & Fuchs, 2006; Kamps et. al.2008). These differences frequently make achieving shared goals in an inclusive classroom challenging. When planning for the inclusive classroom with multiple levels and styles of learning, the co-teachers must meet to ensure all the needs of the students have opportunities with the type of instruction provided. To provide the students with the appropriate teaching it may mean several different plans will be necessary to instruct one literacy skill. Allington (2012) stated:

> If we intend to accelerate reading development in struggling readers, intend to help them 'catch up' with their classmates who are developing typically as readers and writers, then we will have to ensure that the intervention design provides expanded opportunities to engage in successful reading practice (p. 130).

It was critical that students are engaged in reading interventions. Suggestions for interventions are, (a) choosing a topic of their interest, (b) information that was read was on students' levels, and (c) hands on activities. Interventions must focus on students' deficient reading skills. The idea of interventions was to interconnect the process with the content, so the student was motivated to do more because of the teachers' efforts.

Lederer (2000) noted that research analyzing reading comprehension has conceptualized the process of understanding as a constructive process, whereas readers strive to create mental representations of text. As a result, novice and experienced readers utilize their prior or existing knowledge, in addition to cues from the text and context to build meaning from what they are reading, (Dole, Duffy, Roehler, and Pearson, 1991). Reading comprehension was associated with prior knowledge in addition to metacognitive strategies to assure accurate understanding of the words or story. These two critical elements which elicit knowledge, in many instances, are excluded from students with learning disabilities or lacking language development. As a result, students with learning disabilities will struggle with understanding text. Observing readers that struggle, comprehension develops with the presence and interaction of peers; especially conversation promoting expansion and elucidate prior knowledge (Lederer, 2000). Reading instruction has various modes of presentation. Differentiating reading instruction, promotes encouragement for success.

Scaffolding Instruction

Research also implies that forms of scaffolding instruction which accentuates the communication of dialogue as in reciprocal teaching may be beneficial to students with learning disabilities (Garner, R, 1992; Rojewski & Schell, 1994). Lederer (2000) noted "the basis of reciprocal teaching is students by active discussion of text in a small group of their peers, can enhance their learning and improve their ability to comprehend text and monitor understanding of text. P. 95" Scaffolded instruction allows the students to

assimilate complex text with discussion of educators and peers promoting intrinsic motivation to understand. There was not one technique or strategy that was able by itself to instruct an inclusive classroom with students of varying abilities and learning styles to improve reading comprehension. However, scaffolding instruction, as in reciprocal teaching, can benefit the comprehension process for students of varying level of academic ability in an inclusive classroom.

The inclusive classroom has a diversity population with diverse learning styles, using scaffolding was one technique that worked with one group or student in the classroom. Focusing on lessons that are based on students' learning styles or creating lessons for a group that have a common interest in a topic or a common style of learning was differentiating instruction. The importance of differentiated instruction was that all students had the same objective but were learning based on their own style of learning. The following section will discuss additional data on differentiating instruction.

The Importance of Differentiating Instruction

The move toward equity in education for students with disabilities began with IDEA (1997). It was the intent of this law to require increased academic achievement for this sub-group through the reduction of incidences of exclusion by providing instruction within inclusive settings to the maximum extent possible (Yell, 2015); however, the law fell short of requiring the execution or defining the parameters of this type of program (Yell, 2012). NCLB (2001, 2004) served to promote this change by ensuring that public school students with disabilities met the same academic standards as nondisabled peers

while being served in classrooms led by well-prepared teachers (Yell, Drasgow, &

Lowrey, 2015). It further required that schools find means to reduce the achievement gap

between students from economically disadvantaged home as well as those from various

ethnic backgrounds and who had diverse ability levels. This Act changed the teaching

environment for students in public schools in America (Yell & Drasgrow, 2005).

The move toward inclusion required new pedagogical options for the inclusive

classroom. One that has gained popularity, where effectiveness has been proven, is

differentiated instruction (Tomlinson, 2003); however, the specific components vary

depending upon unique situations. Choate (2003) described how teachers utilizing

differentiated instruction while blending cooperative learning groups, individualized

instruction, and whole class presentations. In combination, they provided learning

activities that varied in degree of complexity, provided various levels of support when

and where needed, assigned tasks based on student ability level, and utilized a curriculum

continuum on which students could be placed based on performance; "thus, types and

combinations of differentiated instruction that are appropriate vary according to specific

student needs and to teacher expertise, willingness, and resources" (Choate, 2003, p. 37).

Heacox (2002) stated, "Differentiating instruction means changing the pace, level, or

kind of instruction you provide in response to individual learners' needs, styles or

interests" (p. 5). Tomlinson and Cooper (2006) described differentiated instruction as one

of many tools in a teacher's repertoire that allows them to address variance among

students while ensuring high standards continue. In all descriptions, commonalities center

around the fact that differentiated instruction is known as a philosophy of teaching rather than a strategy where the focus is on each student's ability to learn (Tomlinson, 2000, 2005). Tomlinson (2004) stated *differentiation* is about connecting with the students, establishing a relationship, and instructing the students with materials and coursework that align with students' interests and needs: it is a principle, not an approach. Differentation involves the entire learning envoirnment.

Carpenter and Dyal (2007) found that the two legislative mandates required accountability measures not only for student academic performance, but for instruction of students with disabilities as well. "The needs and abilities of students within the general education classroom are more diverse than ever before, making it essential that teachers know and understand the difference that exists among students so that all students may reach their greatest potential" (Rosenzweig, 2009, p. 6). Although these and other legislative mandates promote the use of the inclusion model, there are many barriers to change; some of which are teachers' perceptions and attitudes when it comes to inclusion as well as feelings of being forced to differentiate instruction (Migyanka, 2006). Roberts & Inman (2013) had the belief that as educators the goal for schools is for all children to develop into lifelong learners. As a result, differentiation allows the student to learn at their level, their choice of how to learn and then being assessed in the mode best for them. So, when educators begin to differentiate instruction it is matching the curriculum and learning experiences to the learners.

Inclusion created apprehension among the general education teachers. The thought of the responsibility to implement inclusion practices in their classrooms, generated uneasiness about more work, special needs students, and understanding individual evaluation plans. Most prominently impacting teacher perceptions were such variables as classroom management styles, legislative mandates, subjects taught, concerns for the well-being of students, and personal issues (Migyanka, 2006). Most teachers felt that certain structural changes needed to be in place before inclusion can view it as a viable option. These included: professional development training; supplemental instructional materials; sufficient time to collaborate and; support from administration (Hill, 2009). Information from a review of instructors more than three dozen nations and districts, including the United States, demonstrates that time spent educating goes down as the quantity of students with disabilities in a classroom goes up. But students with disabilities does not seem to be the main reason. Among the other contributing components that are showing time as a challenge, were classrooms that contained the highest number of students with disabilities placed in a classroom with teachers who have less training and less experience in educating the diversified population, (Samuels, 2017). Although students with disabilities have misbehaviors, it was the students without disabilities that could yield more time in re-directing, than teaching.

Special and general educators who may be insecure with their roles, deciding which techniques to use, the extent to which pedagogies vary, and the pace of curriculum

presentations often encounter frustration with pedagogical dilemmas (King-Sears, 2008).

Differentiated instruction was used to familiarize and better prepare students of all

various learning types and ability levels. So, the students can achieve to the best of their

competency in the student's classroom. The nucleus of differentiated instruction was

flexibility in content, process, in addition to interventions based on student's strengths,

needs and learning styles (Levy, 2008).

With the plethora of definitions and characteristics, it was little wonder that

differentiated instruction was an expansive term. In general, *differentiated instruction*

refers to "a variety of classroom practices that accommodate differences in students'

learning styles, interest, prior knowledge, socialization needs, and comfort zone"

(Benjamin, 2013, p. 1). Every student is unique and has his or her own learning style;

meaning there are no two alike. If the instructional approach was not together with

individual learning styles, students will be at a loss when information was presented

(Daniels, Hyde, & Zemelman, 2012). In fact, classrooms utilizing authentic

differentiation respond to the needs of all types of learners rather than only students with

disabilities.

Differentiated Instruction-Ideas

Tomlinson, (2005) stated with the principles of a differentiated instruction and

high-quality, prepared curriculum, there must be three specific and unified elements: (a)

content, (b) process, and (c) product. When content was specified it was connected to

what will be instructed by the school, district or state standards. The process connects to

the lessons and an activity that helps the student understand the content of what was taught. The product applies the result regarding the student understanding of the material as in assessments. Whether kinesthetic, auditory, cooperative learning groups, or direct instruction, the educator must acknowledge the learning style of each student in the classroom and incorporate it into instructional pedagogies that allow all students to learn (Daniels, Hyde, & Zemelman, 2012). As Miller (2002) noted, "Organizing the learning environment is a critical component of successful teaching and learning. Even the best content, taught with appropriate learning processes in mind, will be unsuccessful if the classroom environment is not conducive to learning" (p. 82). The fundamental reason to differentiate was that children differ (Roberts & Inman, 2013). Each child differs in their interest, reading abilities, experiences, background knowledge, and yet they may all be in the same grade or classroom.

Teachers in differentiated classrooms accept, support and plan for the purpose that learners come to the classroom with many common characteristics and key differences that makes each student unique (Tomlinson, 2014). Inclusive classrooms take these uniqueness characteristics and build on them instilling high expectations for student's growth. Levy (2008) asserted that differentiated instruction helps all students exceed state standards while meeting individual needs. It was described as "the way our students demonstrate what they have learned" (p. 162) and, therefore, was the product of learning. Tomlinson (2014) stated that in the 1990s, educators were using student's learning styles to instruct their lessons. However, teachers realize that when the same material was

taught in a variety of ways, the students remember more information. One style of learning was not sufficient for optimal learning. Tomlinson (2014) continued that the capacity to know when a student was ready to learn was a significant distinction.

It was important that teachers realize that students who usually appear to be less academically capable can be quite strong in some areas of the curriculum while students who are often considered to be quite capable can struggle with certain learning objectives. It would be foolish to assume all children in a class at the same grade level would be able to learn from a one-size-fits-all lesson which will permit them to make continuous progress (Roberts & Inman, 2013). There was a standard of excellence educators strive to convey with the students. This standard of excellence should be students who are successful at levels that are challenging for everyone, but not so hard that they are not attainable.

Differentiated instruction was a change in believing and thinking the teaching of a lesson. There are many barriers to change, but Callahan, Tomlinson, Moon, Brighton, & Hertzberg, (2003) found that several known restrictions were key indicators and teachers must be cognizant of what common barriers existed to be motivated to implement new practices or broadening their methods of instruction. They included: a) failure to consider students as individuals; b) lack of comprehensibility about the curriculum; c) an inadequate range of instructional methodologies; and d) classroom management that was inflexible. When educators think of students in a group or repreent them as a label rather than individuals, the tendency is to teach them as though they were basically alike,which

Tomlinson (2014) noted is rarely the case. A variation of instruction promoted excitement in learning.

When it comes to literacy, Lo (2006) used strategies to teach English in inclusive classrooms and found several factors that participants identified as barriers to change. Participants identified organizational features, such as class time, number of students, and preparation time as more important than instructional efficacy or knowledge and skills. Gray (2009) focused on the impact of inclusion on students with learning disabilities placed in inclusive classrooms. Teachers found it difficult to successfully implement differentiated instructional strategies due to low levels of collaboration with special education teachers, high levels of self-concern, and concerns over management. Teachers claimed that use of this approach prevents success by a lack of training, support, and resources. Student academic achievement on state mandated tests was negligible between students who were taught using differentiated instruction and those who were taught using traditional pedagogies. Newman (2007) found that effective schools usually use both commonality and differentiation but that these are not identified as a specific mix of common and differentiated experiences that work for the teaching of all subjects to all students. Every student is different in learning styles, and background knowledge, there is not one or two methods that work with all students.

Evidence of the Problem from the Professional Literature

Researchers have sought to prove the efficacy of inclusion for improving literacy achievement on state mandated tests for students with disabilities (Cleovoulou, 2008).

Unfortunately, little has been accomplished to identify relevant relationships among differentiated instruction targeted, the student's placement into inclusive classrooms, and enhancing reading development. Research by Hart and Risley in 1995 showed students entered school that were living in home environments below poverty obtained on average, 32 million fewer words, where parents were considered professionals. Burns, (2015) stated the United States educational classroom increased in diversity populations for several reasons. A few factors she specified were the United States census reflected 20% of students, did not have English as their primary language. In 2013, across the nation 33% of fourth graders still did not read proficiently. Inclusion created challenges for classroom teachers, who were not educated in teaching children with special needs that had language-disabilities. Educators have concerns relating to meeting the needs of all the students they serve since the inception of IDEA (1997, 2001, 2004). Tomlinson (2013) stated "A differentiated classroom provides different avenues to acquiring content, to processing or making sense of ideas, and to developing products so that each student can learn effectively" (p. 1). In differentiation, there was no requirement to create different lesson plans for individual students regarding the same unit (Sparks, 2015). It was about integrating the interests, ability level, comfort with technology, leadership qualities, personal interests and family dynamics of students into a design of teaching that connects the material with the students. Without intervention, children who begin school with poor vocabulary and less exposure to print are unlikely to read as well as their peers

(Francis, D., Shaywitx, S., Stuebing, K., Shaywitz, B., & Fletcher, J., 1996). Eventually, poor reading skills weaken academic success and future opportunities for employment.

Education revealed the typical child with a disability was about 9 years old, male, and spent most of the school day in a general education classroom. These students also read below grade level. The statistics reflected that 70% of students with special needs were reading 'below basic' in accordance with the results of the National Assessment of Educational Progress reading assessment test (USDOE, 2009). After reviewing effective reading instruction in inclusive settings for the 2009-2010 school year, 67% of the students with special needs nationwide were placed in regular education classrooms for more than 80% of the school day. Serious reading challenges began to emerge when the designation of disabilities was put on students (USDOE, 2010).

Identifying effective instructional practices for teaching reading in inclusive settings, were crucial to ensuring the success of students with special needs integrated into general education classrooms (Greenman, G., Rosendale, M., Schmidt, R., 2010). Furthermore, they acknowledged that poor reading ability was a strong predictor of school failure and that most students with disabilities had trouble with reading. Mattson and Roll-Peterson (2007) searched to describe perceptions of school by students who were qualified for special education support. The students were 15 years of age or older and had been served in inclusive classrooms for most of their school day. The one thing they had in common was their difficulties in reading and writing that failed to be recognized early in their educational careers. Teacher attitudes toward these students

showed in the way they treated each other and their peers who teased and bullied them in and out of the school setting. The student participants agreed that the pullout model was comparable to being labeled and that lack of teacher competence in the pullout setting as well as the composition of the group failed to assist them in developing needed skills. In this setting, they often found a "watch and see" policy in effect, which was indicative of a lack of knowledge of language acquisition and processes associated with reading and writing. Mattson and Roll-Peterson (2007) noted that inclusive classroom settings often have restrictions based on limited competence and a lack of coping skills in multi-ability classrooms. The ability to deal with the needs of the inclusive classroom required special educational skills placed within the learning environment of a ordianty class. Inclusive classrooms run the risk of what might be called 'silent' segregation, of individual qualities and needs that are not so easily hidden under terms like class, gender, and ethnicity, (Mattson & Roll-Peterson (2007). Research has proved students want assistance in reading and writing, but felt the pullout model made them isolated.

Research has revealed that expectations for students with special needs seem to be lower in the perspective of inclusive classroom teachers compared to expectations for nondisabled peers (Mader, 2017). Encouraging all students to be engaged and included within the high-skilled world of knowledge, information, and communication was the basic reason for classroom designs ,(Meyer, 2010). Engagement and inclusive involvement in learning promoted the self-efficacy for students to continue to learn, especially when they are struggling.

Lewis (1995) and Davis, J, Duffy, G., Roehler, L. & Pearson, P. (2008) confirmed that adults have a poor understanding of the characteristics of disabilities in children and their needs. This fact impacted teacher attitudes toward students with disabilities in inclusive classroom settings. As inclusion became a topic in the teacher's lounge, perceptions and attitudes were beginning to evolve from a negative to cooperating with the possibility of success. Teachers who had taken at least one course in special education and involved in professional development that focused on inclusion provided a positive attitude toward inclusion compared to instructors without any specialized training. Many teachers were very concerned that communication and instructing these unique learners would be difficult and unproductive. As a result, teachers responded to inclusion by complaining about their lack of knowledge and experience as well as requesting professional development (Pijl & Frisson, 2009). Thomas and Vaughan (2004) reported that teachers increasingly talk about inclusion as an impractical practice in the current educational environment (Hanko, 2005) found that educators often lack confidence in their own competence to deliver instruction with existing resources. Educators' feelings about being provided with inadequate training and education related to special populations placed in inclusive classrooms became a controlling factor in attitudes toward teaching, (Ross-Hill, 2009).

Grenier (2010) used case study methodology to analyze the shared philosophies and values of teachers and complex nature of schools in a study conducted in a northeastern city. The target school used the outcomes-based teaching model, which was

an accepted practice in inclusive classrooms. This model included a nonpull out model for instruction. While some teachers viewed inclusion through the lens of a medical model, others saw student learning influenced more by the social expectations associated with their disability. It was concluded that how students are socially situated has the greatest impact on achievement when it was "embedded within a system that associates competence with culturally specific practices" Grenier, 2010, (p. 398). As schools increase inclusive practices, they are required to recognize that teaching practices should include resources for promoting awareness of possibilities rather than holding onto beliefs that have limitations.

Studies researching cognitive approaches to teaching and learning revealed positive, though somewhat varied, results supporting the success of students with disabilities in inclusive classroom settings (Jones, Palincsar, Ogle, & Carr, 1987; Tralli, Colombo, Deshler, & Schumaker, 1996). Scanlon, Deshler, and Schumaker (1996) emphasized the need for efficacy studies in general education settings with strategies implemented by general education teachers. Schmidt, Rozendal, and Greenman (2002) stated that teachers must be dedicated to ensuring inclusive classrooms are unique from general education classrooms where special needs students are removed because they are no longer successful learners. Schmidt et al. also indicated that teachers must scrutinize instructional techniques and contextual elements which enable learning in these new settings. Differentiated instruction is an instructional philosophy where teachers adapt to the students' reading needs.

Separate classes with lower student to teacher ratios, controlled environments, and specialized staff would seem to offer benefits to children with disabilities; however, research has failed to demonstrate the effectiveness of such programs (Lipsky & Gartner, 1997; Sailor, 2003). Also, there was evidence that the negative impact of separating children with academic challenges from peers far outweigh any benefits derived from smaller special educational environments (Audette & Algozzine, 2007). There are advocates for inclusion who desire elimination of the present dual system of regular education with pull out special education alternatives in favor of a more unified, coordinated, and inclusive system (Greer & Greer, 1995). As an alternative to pullout services, problem-based learning could be a recommendation.

Belland, Glazewski, and Ertmet (2009) focused on the efficacy of problem-based learning on interaction and peer support in an inclusive science class. The results showed that problem-based learning had the potential to motivate students, increase self-confidence and effectively engage students; especially those with special needs. Greer and Greer (1995) emphasized that responsibilities exist for shared multi-disciplinary, school-based infrastructures to consider planning, delivery, and evaluation of every child's instructional needs.

As inclusion continues to be a priority in education, change was inevitable. The percentage of students (3 to 21 years old) served by federally supported special education programs increased from 8 percent to 13 percent between the years of 1976 and 2009 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2010). Schools already impacted with cultural

diversity, now must find effective ways to integrate students with special needs. The concerns of educators were providing a high level of education, changing attitudes toward special populations, and promoting a change of instruction for the future (Hull, 2005). Hull (2005) acknowledged that special and regular education teachers' attitudes changed when instructors were asked to consider inclusive education regarding student outcomes in the form of standardized test scores, grades, and Individual Education Plan (IEP) goals. As a result, advocates for a single system of inclusion, where responsibility for instructing all students regardless of their needs or level of functioning was shared, was now strongly encouraged (Greer & Greer, 1995). In special education classrooms, individualized instruction has long been a characteristic of diversified instruction for some time. This practice, when integrated into teaching in the inclusive classroom, results in more effective and socially appropriate education for all students (Hull, 2005).

Questions and concerns regarding inclusion are widespread. Although in England and Wales, the government education philosophy agrees with both inclusion and high educational standards (Savage, 2006); however, challenges with implementing inclusion into practice are as widespread across Europe as they are in the U.S. (Mitchell, 2006). Teachers are unsure of their role in the new model and are aware that the accountability responsibility was a primary concern.

Educating children with disabilities together with nondisabled peers exposes students with special needs to the general curriculum and creates an accepted forum in which they can navigate the educational system (Reindal, 2010). Students with multiple

disabilities in inclusive classrooms allow educators to expand their instructional abilities

to relate to the challenges students encounter in learning while providing the instructor an

intimate experience with differentiated instruction (Desimone, 2009); however, this does

little to resolve deeply embedded issues. For example, to explore the conflict between

teacher pedagogies and school policies that create barriers to full inclusion, an

ethnographic study was conducted by Zembylas (2010). The author concluded resistance

was primarily due to a lack of commitment to systemic structural change within the

educational infrastructure.

Implementing instructional practices paired with the needs of students with and

without disabilities can be a rigorous task. Much, however, depends on the style of

inclusion selected and teacher acceptance of diverse learners (Roeher Institute, 2004).

Frequently, students with special needs require additional individualized instruction due

to language delays, disabilities that impeded academic growth, and limited physical

abilities (Hess, 2009). These challenges, in turn, produce additional responsibilities and

alter the roles of teachers (Hess, 2009). The importance of exploring this issue in-depth

has far-reaching social implications.

Justification for the Case Study Design

A descriptive case study was selected for this study because it "offers a means of

investigating complex social units consisting of multiple variables of potential

importance in understanding the phenomenon" (Merriam, 2009, p. 41). Researchers such

as Creswell (2013), Tellis (1997), Hirsch (1996) and Yin (1984) agreed that the case

study was better in structured systems in that it emphasizes the use of detailed contextual

analysis. This analysis was limited in the number of conditions or events explored and

their relationship to each other. Myers (2000) explained that in-depth explorations could

make studies of this design superior to many other options. The written results can

provide sufficient details to ensure the idiosyncrasies of the situation considered are

easier for readers to grasp. Myers (2000) explained, the point of qualitative research was

to offer a viewpoint of a situation and present an elegantly composed research report that

reflects the researcher's ability to show or depict the matching experience. One of the

best qualities of the qualitative approach was the indulgence and depth of investigations

and descriptions (p.3). There are many strengths to qualitative research, and case studies

provide complex, textual descriptions of how a research issue was experienced from

personal point-of-views. This type of research can identify intangible factors, such as

social norms, as well as ensure that the research maintains a 'human side,' which was

often missing in many quantitative studies. The goal was to gain a rich and complex

understanding of the phenomenon considered. The case study design will be discussed in

further depth in Section 3.

Summary

This literature review indicated equity in education for all students. The factors of

collaboration, pullout programs, administration support and differentiated instruction are

elements which anticipate changes in inclusive classroom settings. The research data

provided evidence and concerns about the results of the inclusive classroom utilizing

supplementary aids and services versus pull out programs to educate students with special needs within the inclusive classroom. Supplemental aids such as basal readers, computer software, and benchmark tests assisted the teachers in providing them activities and passages to improve student's reading skills.

Standardized tests used in primary and secondary schools to assess students' attainment of reading, writing, math, science and social studies skills are measured by these state tests across the nation which drive decision making. Also, these test scores are integrated into AYP, which educators receive and perceive vast pressure to ensure high student's test scores. Most district policies and current legislation focus on two objectives for inclusion classrooms. One objective was for students with special needs to be exposed to educational experiences that focus on instructional curriculum taught to age appropriate nondisabled peers. The second objective was to promote additional experiences that motivate these students to associate with same-age peers in appropriate ways (Hardman, Smith, & Wall, 2005). Ultimately, the goal was to find methodologies to ensure alignment of mandated standards with student needs and level of skill development.

Teacher expertise was the most significant school-based influence on student learning (Darling-Hammond, 2000; McCaffrey, Lockwood, Koretz, & Hamilton, 2003). How teachers learn also influences what and how they teach; especially with what they have acquired about teaching and learning (Hawley & Rollie, 2007). As the integration process becomes robust in the public schools, success was acquired from the special

education teacher and the regular education teacher working side by side. This process allows the students to learn from a variety of instructional strategies. Explanations are vast when researching collaboration; however, Schmoker (2006) stated that when engaging in discussions with colleagues where assumptions, practices, and student work are examined, a deeper understanding of the process has the potential to be gained.

In general education, restructuring has occurred but failed to achieve the success expected by the educational infrastructure. Inadequate reading scores reflect failure for a school. As a remedy to improve scores pull out reading programs are an alternate intervention; however, these programs were often inconsistent reading programs that were not aligned with the reading program of the general education classroom. There were challenges with resource teachers and regular education teachers collaborating on instruction or content, which could result in inconsistency of teaching. Many teachers feel that differentiated methodologies, collaboration, and continuing professional development are necessities to implement change.

Several studies, as early as 1982, reflect collaboration impacting student achievement and improving state mandated test scores. When comparing collaborative instruction to the traditional pull out model, the question of effectiveness comes into question. The purpose of the pullout program was to have a specialist in various fields work with students who are experiencing challenges in academic subjects. The student traditionally, was pulled out of the regular education classroom to spend a limited time with the specialist in either a small group or one on one.

Brownlie, Feniak, & Schnellert, (2006) and Lieberman (1996) provided the

ideology that the major drawback of this methodology was student behavior and learning

problems are considered student motivated. Many regular educators prefer the pullout

model, due to their feeling of inadequacy in educating these types of students. These

educators have the idea pull out programs would satisfy their deficiency in their academic

subject; however, for most of the students, this method was less efficient.

As students are integrated into inclusive classrooms, it was essential to implement

effective instructional strategies to support academic achievement. When educators work

together and focus on student success, they learn to become advocates regarding what

they believe the students need most in their schools (Hord, 2004). ESSA (2015) requires

the integration of students with disabilities into general education classrooms. Its purpose

was to serve students with disabilities to ensure they met the same academic standards as

nondisabled peers. Although, this mandate promotes use of the inclusion model, there are

challenges to overcome, which are teachers' perceptions and attitudes when it comes to

inclusion as well as being forced to differentiate instruction (Migyanka, 2006).

Philosophically, teachers' performance should enhance a natural learning environment

that was accepting of students with special instructional needs who require

accommodations.

Inclusion requires new pedagogical thinking regarding inclusive classrooms. One

option that has become widely known and as efficient was differentiated instruction.

Differentiated instruction contains different elements dependent on the unique

educational situation. Tomlinson (2014) described differentiated instruction as a philosophy of teaching rather than a strategy where every students' ability to learn was addressed and exhausted. Bell, (2017) notes there was no magic" box" within the brain that helps a child become literate. Differentiated instruction has the possibility to create a network of connections that develop links into areas of the brain already existing that were not previously connected. Until those connections are linked, letters, and words do not have purpose. Classrooms that use differentiation respond to needs of all types of learners rather than only learners with special needs. Barriers can be overcome when implementing differentiation with instruction in the inclusive classroom. Lo's (2006) found educators tended to focus on the content rather than process and product. There are those teachers who find it difficult to successfully implement differentiated instructional strategies. The challenges teachers encountered relate to low levels of collaboration with special education teachers, high levels of self-concern and concerns over management.

Ultimately, educators have an incredible responsibility to develop new teaching strategies and increase their understanding of the individual needs and learning styles for each student they serve. In response, over the past few years, researchers have sought to prove the efficacy of inclusion for enhancing literacy scores on state mandated tests for students with special needs. Teachers' challenges are with barriers relating to meeting the needs of all students in their classroom since IDEA (1997, 2001, 2004). These challenges will enhance teacher's instructional pedagogy to instruct the diversification in the inclusion classroom

The results aligned cognitive abilities in students with disabilities, improving their reading aptitude to an acceptable level. It was imperative for inclusive classroom teachers to recognize effective instructional practices for teaching reading in inclusive communities, to ensure success of students with special needs integrated in general education classrooms (Greenman, Rosendale, & Schmidt, (2010). Greer & Greer (1995) stressed responsibilities exist for shared multi-disciplinary, school-based infrastructures to consider collaboration and evaluation of every child's instructional needs.

Expectations for students with special needs seem to be lower in the opinion of the inclusive classroom teacher compared to expectations for nondisabled peers. Research discloses adults have a poor understanding of the traits of children's disabilities and their needs. Many individuals assume that communicating and teaching these unique learners will be challenging and unproductive. Educator's feelings regarding this mentality may result from their own lack of confidence in their competence to deliver instruction and inadequate training related to special populations. As an inadequate educator, an alternative to teaching the special population was to use the pullout model. Pullout models are readily seen throughout our educational system; however, classrooms which have lower student teacher ratios, controlled environments and specialized staff, have the supports to benefit students with special needs; though research has failed to prove this theory.

There are advocates who support inclusion and encourage elimination of the dual system of regular education and pull out special education, favoring a more integrated

cohesive instructional environment. As inclusion continues to be a priority in education, change was inevitable. Our schools have a high quota of populations with cultural diversity and students with special needs. Often students with special needs require additional individualized teaching due to language delays, learning disabilities and limited physical disabilities. These opportunities create additional responsibilities and modify teacher's roles in the inclusive classroom. The role of a teacher was not only teaching but extends to modeling character, acceptance of diversity and assisting in helping with a student that was struggling physically. The significance of studying this topic has far reaching social implications.

To provide sufficient data that had a strong basis for this study, a qualitative study was chosen. There are many positive aspects to qualitative research, it provides complex, textual descriptions of how a research issue was experienced from a personal point of view. Merriam's (2009) view on qualitative case study was investigating complicated social areas integrated with variables of importance in understanding the purpose of the research study. This type of research can reflect variables that do not normally have exposure to many qualitative studies, such as the social norms and 'human side' of the phenomenon. The purpose was to acquire a rich and complex understanding of the comprehensive phenomenon.

Section 3 will introduce the problem and purpose for the study in addition to the premise and elements of the methodology that influenced this research. These features will include research design, research questions and objectives, context for the study,

ethical protection for participants, role of the researcher, criteria for selecting participants,

data collection procedures, data analysis procedures, discrepant cases, software program

and other analysis procedures, coding procedures, review procedures after coding,

validity and trustworthiness.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

This research study was designed to explore the efficacy of inclusive classrooms that use in-class supplementary aids and services as well as differentiated instruction pedagogies to improve academic achievement in reading for students with and without disabilities. This exploration was accomplished with a case study design that was built on a postpositivist paradigm. Qualitative research begins with suppositions, a worldview perspective, the use of a speculative analysis, and the study of research problems regarding the meaning of individuals or groups assigned to a social or human problem (Creswell, 2013). To study a problem, qualitative researchers collect data in a natural setting sensitive to the people and places under study and use data analysis that is inductive and includes the voices of participants (Creswell, 2013). Therefore, a case study was suitable for this research.

To understand the efficacy of educational pedagogies used both in and in conjunction with inclusive classroom settings as well as pulling students out of classrooms for literacy development, it is important to look at the factors that most influence student learning. The purpose of this study was to explore the teachers' perceptions about reading instruction in an inclusion setting and to investigate what teachers believe they need to improve the efficiency of their practice. The observed experiences of participants enhanced my understanding of their efforts.

Research Design

The design of a research study requires an approach that allows flexibility and generates rich, in-depth data that can be used to support conclusions. This can be accomplished in many ways using a qualitative design. Using descriptions of various qualitative approaches (see Gay 1996), I was able to choose which design was appropriate for this research. A case study approach was selected, which allows focus on a subject and real-world persepectives (Yin, 2014). By using a case study design, I examined the data to define the connection between the phenomenon and the local context.

Other designs were considered but not chosen. Although I sought to explain educators' perceptions about reading instruction in an inclusion setting, I did not choose a narrative design because there were more than one or two participants. Ethnographic research was also not chosen because it is focused on the interaction of a cultural group through firsthand experience, note taking, and observations in the classroom, and this study would not have been conveyed appropriately through analysis of a cultural group's shared pattern of behaviors and beliefs (see Creswell, 2012). Finally, grounded theory was not used for this study because its outcome requires the researcher to construct predictive statements about individual experiences (Creswell, 2012). After reviewing the characteristics of the research designs, I concluded that a case study best supported the qualitative design of the research study.

A case study involves detailed documenting to provide clarification of an event. This research is performed by analyzing one or several situations extensively whether it is a person, group, event, or institution. The case study design was suitable for this study regarding the perceptions of teaching reading to the inclusion classroom population. The study involved key variables such as interviews, observations, and research questions, which corresponds with this case study design. Using a case study helped to investigate the phenomenon of teachers' perspectives within a real-life context and use multiple sources of evidence (see Yin, 1984, p. 23). However, a lack of generalizability to other populations and geographical locations is one of the biggest drawbacks of the method. Another problem is that the closeness of the researcher to the topic and subjects can create bias. Researchers who have used this methodology, however, have found that when carefully structured it was useful to explore specific problems, issues, and real-life situations that are observable. Additionally, Foster (2002) stated, "Case-study analysis is the only appropriate educational research model for a limited range of research questions, specifically those in areas of education where foundational questions remain unanswered" (p. 1).

Research Questions and Objectives

I used a case study design to substantiate the relationship between educator pedagogies when instructing diversified populations in an inclusive classroom setting and student achievement in reading. The needs of diverse populations served in this environment often require support beyond the regular education students. Support can be

extra time, reteaching a concept in a different way, or visually showing how the concept was implemented.

The questions for this research study were designed to explore the experiences of teachers, the strategies they use, and their ideas on resources needed for effective teaching of literacy within inclusion classrooms. This was accomplished by seeking an in-depth understanding of the issues related to providing reading instruction to diverse populations in inclusive classrooms with and without the use of pullout services. I also sought to identify intangible factors that can influence the outcomes in each setting. The questions included the following:

Research Question 1: What teaching strategies do educators use to instruct reading in their inclusion classrooms?

Research Question 2: What are the instructional challenges of inclusion teachers when teaching reading to multilevel ability readers?

Research Question 3: What are teachers' perceptions about professional development support to improve the success of teaching reading in inclusion classrooms?

In this study, the interpretation of teacher responses required an understanding of the participants' perceptions and unique experiences that were examined through a qualitative perspective. Case study research is a qualitative approach where the researcher explores a bounded system over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of data that present a case description and case-based themes (Creswell, 2013). Studying the improvement of literacy skills of general population students and

students with special needs in an inclusive classroom required exploring a bounded system that satisfied the parameters of this design.

The purpose of this study was to explore teachers' perceptions about reading instruction in an inclusion setting and to investigate what teachers believe they need to improve the efficiency of their practice. This data provided an opportunity for teachers to express their views of the inclusion classroom as well as to reflect on the best instructional environment for challenging students. Determining the impact of this environment on student learning as opposed to learning acquired in pullout programs may ensure that students receive the best education possible and that educational resources are used effectively.

Context for the Study

Rising numbers of students with special needs in inclusion classrooms means an increase of students with special needs who are expected to show academic progress. It is expected that districts in the United States display growth in academic areas for these students, or they will face penalties from the government (Kaufman & Blewett, 2012). Planning and integrating students with disabilities to the greatest extent is a focus of the inclusion teachers. As a result, increasing numbers of students are receiving consultant teacher services within the general education classroom (National Center for Education Statistics, 2005). Inclusive classroom teachers believe handling the diverse needs of multiability classrooms is challenging (Mader, 2017). Educators may feel frustrated or inadequate from their lack of skills and lack of experience. These are some of the reasons

teachers resist change and develop negative attitudes (Bradshaw & Mundia, 2006; Brown et al., 2003; Hines & Johnson, 1997; Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2017).

To ensure positive projections in reading progress and to ensure that students with disabilities are eventually college ready, the learning environment for the inclusion classroom must be conducive for improving reading skills of all students. The setting of this study was an elementary school located in the North Central Plains of Texas. This location contains much diversity that is reflected within the public education school system. The participants in this study consisted of kindergarten through fifth grade primary school instructors who were selected on a volunteer basis. The elementary school population consists of approximately 800 students, one-third of who are identified as special needs learners. This study was focused on the reading inclusion classrooms; there are nine classrooms (or class periods/sections) dedicated to this program.

The chosen participants for this study were from volunteers of the primary school reading teachers who instruct inclusion classrooms and have a minimum of 3 years' experience in this learning environment. Sample size for qualitative research is driven by concerns about data saturation (Creswell, 2013). Data saturation occurs when there are no more significant additions by participants (Creswell, 2013, p. 126). Ten to 12 participants are typically sufficient to reach the point of data saturation (Creswell, 2013). A purposeful sampling approach was used to identify participants. The shared characteristics are the focus in choosing the purposeful sample (Patton, 2014). The

common characteristics of the participants is the knowledge of having to differentiate due to a diversified population and experience in the inclusion classroom.

There are 12 certified elementary teachers who instruct reading in inclusion classrooms. There were only nine responses from the 12 submittals for the study. The invitation to participate was sent via e-mail, providing an outline of the study and the informed consent. Potential participants self-selected to volunteer to participate in the study by acknowledging the following criteria: (a) teachers were to have at least 3 years of teaching experience in the local school study site and (b) teachers were to be currently working within an inclusion classroom. The criteria of teacher experience instructing in the inclusive classroom of 3 years was because this is a topic that has created controversy in the educational community. The experienced teachers were able to draw from their own experience and knowledge to provide data worthy of collecting. To support the data, the participants were expected to teach in an inclusive environment. I ensured participants reviewed the consent form to make a complete decision before indicating their willingness to participate in the study. In addition, I asked that participants print and keep a copy of the informed consent form then return the consent form to me with an electronic signature.

If potential participants wished to phone me, to clarify any aspect of the study, they could have done so because the outreach e-mail included my e-mail and phone number. Interested participants were then asked to send me an e-mail that included their contact information. After nine individuals were signed up, I had a purposeful group of

participants for this study because the intent was not to generalize but gain an in-depth

understanding of a phenomenon (Creswell, 2013), which was best achieved by using

purposeful sampling strategies.

Ethical Protection of Participants

It is the responsibility of the researcher to keep all data confidential. There is an

obligation to respect the rights, needs, values, and desires of the participants (Creswell,

2013). In this study, I selected the final participant pool and became the person

responsible for collecting data. It is critical when performing an observation where

possible sensitive information is revealed that confidentiality is guaranteed. The

following safeguards protected participants' rights: a) permission for the study secured

from the Walden University Internal Review Board (IRB) and the district participating in

the study; b) the research objectives were explained to participants both verbally and in

writing so involvement was clearly understood; c) written permission to proceed with the

study was requested from the participants (this may have occurred through the use of

technology); d) an informed consent form for participation was collected prior to the

beginning of the study; e) the participants were made aware of all data collection

procedures; f) verbatim transcriptions and written interpretations and reports were made

available to the participants; and g) the final decision regarding informant anonymity was

rest with the participants (see Creswell, 2013).

There were limited if any, disruptions, during the observations and interview

sessions. As a courtesy to the participants, I allowed the participants to determine a

convenient time for collecting data. When interacting with participants, I shared information and results of the study to allow reciprocity between stakeholders. Legal aspects of the laws and statutes were discussed with participants to ensure the protection of privacy and to communicate the protection of all individuals involved in the study. Any identifiable information associated with this study, such as proper names, school, and district, were substituted with fictitious names and a code was substituted to elicit complete confidentiality to the participants. These latter aspects are discussed in detail in the following sections.

Role of the Researcher

Qualitative research involves the researcher as an instrument wherein the researcher becomes the primary tool for the collection of data. Establishing a report with the participant is vital to collecting good solid data for the study. Report of the researcher–participant relationship was established due to a working involvement previously encountered during my tenure with them. This relationship assisted me in obtaining the respect and trust of the participants through mutual communication on educational issues in an inclusion classroom. When discussing the study, this relationship allowed participants to discuss the research questions honestly about their perceptions of instructing such a diverse population. I am a teacher in an inclusion classroom at the research school selected. This role had its pros and cons to the study. The benefit of being an experienced inclusion teacher was my ability to relate to the topics of concerns in the inclusive classroom. Teachers were comfortable discussing their opinions, and they were

honest answering the interview questions. I did not provide nor provoke any response of the participants. I believe their responses were honest, and I maintained a neutral position and voice throughout the data collection process.

I was cautious not impose my personal thoughts, bias, and preconceived ideas on the interviewees. The probing questions allowed the participants to share thoughts during the interview. I remained focused during the interview conversation, and I maintained a relaxed tone. As recommended by Costa and Garston (2002), it was important to remain relaxed, use few nonverbal cues, and keep eye contact to focus a conversation. I used a personal reflection log to record my personal answers to the interview questions before I started collecting data from the participants. This allowed me to record my own thinking, feelings, and perceptions throughout the research process. I also used this reflection log to respond to the interview questions before I started collecting data; this allowed me to disclose fully my responses and opinions.

When it comes to a case study design, acknowledgement must be given to the importance of ethics. Ethical concerns should be addressed throughout the research process, and the researcher is responsible for maintaining professionality (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000, p. 49). A case study should provide an objective reality to the maximum extent possible. One way to accomplish this goal was to identify personal perspectives as part of the research process then address these concerns by establishing protocols and procedures that ensured reliability.

Case studies give a voice to insiders in a study; therefore, knowledge should

emerge from the local context. Researchers also need to take into consideration what was said and observed during data collection; in addition, I recorded field notes during data collection to comment on facial expressions, gestures, and body language that could not be recorded but provided some insight into the participants' messages. These individuals are important in determining the outcome of the research and should, therefore, provide the basis for data collection procedures. Although questions and protocols may be predesigned, if patterns, trends, and themes emerge that take the research in a new direction, it is the researcher's responsibility to follow where it leads despite preconceived notions. Ultimately, however, it is the researcher who determines what is important and what is not, but results should reflect the respondent's view of what knowledge is. Evered and Louis (1981) called this "inquiry from the inside" (p. 385). The reflection of the respondent's view is a significant aspect of the study, putting the researcher in complete control of the data.

In a case study, the researcher served an important role during the interview process. The interview served as a catalyst for the study where the researcher serves as a facilitator. Kvale, (1996) provides an explanation of the qualitative research interview stating this type of collecting data seeks to describe and provide meanings of central themes in the life environment of the subjects. The main goal in an interview is to understand the meaning of what the interviewees are saying. McNamara (1999) expands on the interview process declaring the interviewer had the ability to probe deeply to acquire information about the topic.

There are many ways to conduct an interview; however, in case studies, although there may be initial guiding questions or core concepts that will be discussed, the researcher may elect to move the conversation in directions where patterns, themes, or categories emerge. Although slightly more difficult to analyze, this type of study allowed the unknown to be explored generating rich, in-depth knowledge from a range of perspectives. Questions were designed to acquire information which responded to the research questions of the study. The questions were created to identify teachers' behaviors, opinions, and knowledge of their pedagogy regarding teaching reading to a diversified population in inclusive classrooms. A common method of data collection in case studies is observation. This can be accomplished through participant or direct observation. In the case of this study, direct observation had been selected to increase neutrality and reduce bias. To accomplish this goal, the researcher did not serve as a participant and remained as unobtrusive as possible. Of most concern in a classroom setting were ethical considerations for the protection of participants as well as extraneous persons who were in the vicinity, such as students, but not the focus of the investigation. Protecting the anonymity of students in the classroom was of primary concern. This required determining the explanation provided for the researcher's presence in the classroom as well as how to record the classroom environment and atmosphere without individuals becoming specific subjects of the study.

The final consideration was data collection and analysis. In a case study it is important to utilize structured, overlapping, multiple data sources to generate a

triangulation of the results. The two most common forms are interviews, and observations which were used during this study (Creswell, 2013). Hall (1999) explained that qualitative studies include a constant process of collecting data, analyzing it, examining and reorganizing the data, synthesizing the data, and interpreting the synthesis. Mitchell (2006) went on to explain that the usefulness of case studies is that they demonstrate "how general principles derived from some theoretical orientation manifest themselves in some given set of particular circumstances" (p. 239).

As the sole researcher, the responsibility of ensuring accurate recordings, transcriptions, and interpretation of all observations and interviews were of paramount importance to the outcome of the study. These were included in a final report to the district outlining findings and recommendations as well as the completion of a dissertation that were reflected in all aspects of the study.

Data Collection Procedures

Moustakas (1990) stated that "there is no exclusive list of tasks and procedures that would be appropriate for every heuristic investigation, but rather each research process unfolds in its own way" (p. 43). This research study was designed to investigate the educational practices and perceptions of elementary inclusion reading teachers about their experiences in inclusion classrooms. Creswell (2013) stated "selecting the case requires that the researcher establish a rationale for his or her purposeful sampling strategy for selecting the case and gathering information about the case" (p.76).

To achieve this goal the post positivist paradigm helped expose as many connections and meanings as possible. Raw data for the proposed study was acquired through interviews and observations which were supported by the post positivist paradigm (Hatch 2002). Raw data was recorded in field notes, observation notes, and interview notes that are verbatim as gathered during the data collection processes. It was important for me to record the words and actions of each participant as they were revealed. = Data was collected in an authentic educational environment. This process highlights the discovery that "something objective is observed, but what it means will need to be discovered" (Morris, 2006, p. 72).

In this study, data collection related to the characteristics and effects of an academic setting on student reading achievement using these foundational and conceptual frameworks needs to be carefully designed and implemented. Although post positivism is most commonly associated with experimental designs, new research using this paradigm in conjunction with quasi-experimental and case study designs has demonstrated that interviews, and observations, can generate results that are significantly impacting the way researchers and the educational community think about the world (Morris, 2006). When applied to educational research, this paradigm can provide the structure needed to ensure valid and reliable results.

Data collection began during the 2016-2017 school year after receipt received of approval by the IRB committee and school district office. This collection was performed using the post positivist paradigm. Prior to implementation of any aspect of the study,

participants received a detailed explanation of the guidelines for the study and goals along with the informed consent document. During the data collection phase of the study, I used a reflection journal to gather specific notes of my reflections and thoughts during the interviews and observations. Details relating to observations were provided in a reflective journal that recorded personal insights, feelings, experiences, and perceptions throughout the research process.

Interviews

My main task in interviewing was to understand the meaning of what the interviewees stated (Kvale, 1996). The interviews were recorded and transcribed. It was anticipated they would last a minimum of 45 minutes. Seidman (2006) stressed that the use of tape recordings was important to ensure accuracy when transcribing the participants' responses; therefore, audio recordings were created at these sessions. Interviews were conducted one-on-one with educators assigned to inclusive classrooms which have diverse populations utilizing a semi-structured format with open-ended questions. The questions were open-ended because post positivists contend that there was much that happens in the world that eludes the conscious mind yet is stored in the subconscious. The interview questions allowed the educators to express their own strategies, pedagogy and ideas on instructing in an inclusion classroom. The interview questions were composed to align with the research questions. The interview questions (see Appendix C) were derived from the inclusion model that served as the conceptual framework and the current literature of best practices of inclusion teachers. As interviews

progressed, probing questions were asked to pursue a deeper understanding as well as to explore explanations and disagreements. Each respondent was given the chance to provide additional information which was uncontaminated by interpretations or personal bias.

Post positivists espouse that expanding consciousness leads to greater understanding and innovation (Morris, 2006). As a result, these interviews were conducted to determine participants' delivery of instruction, comfort with diversification of students in the classroom, and issues with students that have special needs that are pulled out for additional instruction as well as those who require in-class support. Seidman (2006) reinforces, "The participants' thoughts become embodied in their words. To substitute the researcher's paraphrasing or summaries of what participants say is to substitute the researcher's consciousness for that of the participant" (p. 114).

Observations

The purpose of an observation was to focus on human actions and gain more evidence about the person or subject being studied (Merriam, 2009). This is a period of in-depth communication between the researcher and the subjects. Yin (2012) suggested that observations were invaluable aids for understanding the importance of why the problem is occurring. The classroom observations allowed me to gain insight into contexts and teaching behaviors within the classroom. The observations provided me with data which responds to the first research question regarding teaching strategies currently being used.

Conducting observations allowed me to identify different teaching strategies that were used within classrooms. The observations also provided a rich source of data that were compared to participants' interview responses. Participants who teach primary school reading in an inclusion classroom were observed teaching during one 30 minute regularly scheduled classes without any disruption of their normal activities. I collaborated with the teachers through phone or e-mail to schedule the observations. Prior to the observations, I discussed with the participants what I would be looking, and I assured them that they were not being judged or evaluated. Hill, Charalambous, and Kraft (2012) suggested that it is vital for researchers to share important criteria with the participants regarding observations. I scripted the observed lessons with notes recorded on a classroom observation form. Note taking was supported by the Janesick (2004) format and utilized to record data required to address the research questions. I recorded my observations, reflections, and thoughts. I specifically collected examples of teachers using differentiated teaching approaches within the same classroom to address the diversity of learner styles and prior knowledge. This form helped me to focus on those strategies which seem to be preferable to teachers. Observations are a naturalistic form of inquiry that allow investigation of a phenomenon in the setting where it occurs. When conducting observations, the process was performed one teacher and classroom at a time. The inclusive classrooms selected for the study were observed over a two-week period without the use of recording instruments to protect students. In this form of inquiry, behavior and interactions were seen through the researcher's eyes without the intention of

participating. This was a way to collect in-depth information on specified situations of interest and provided detailed, rich insights into the effects of the topic of interest. In this way, access was often found to the insider's world of meaning. It was important to observe and gather data which included the notation of nonverbal communications and actions (Hatch, 2002). The advantage of this strategy was that information was discovered might have been missed otherwise.

Data Analysis

Rubin & Rubin (2005) stated, "Data analysis is the process of moving from raw interviews to evidence-based interpretations that are the foundation for published reports" (p. 201). Analyzing the collected raw data involved classifying, comparing, and combining information from interviews, observations, archival data, and field notes to generate an interpretation for the meaning and implication of results. In this way patterns, themes, categories, or sequences of events were used to enhance understanding when creating a detailed narrative.

Data analysis was performed to provide rich, vivid descriptions of inclusive classrooms, instructional strategies for teaching reading, and conversations with instructors about teaching reading in an inclusive classroom. The anticipated order of analyzing data required a multi-phase configuration and a recurring process that allows for continual reanalysis as new patterns and themes emerge.

In accordance with Merriam (2002), data collection and data analysis must be a simultaneous process in qualitative research. Interview recordings were transcribed, and

all data were assembled. Data reflected several categories identifying themes and patterns acquired through observations and interviews. This method of data collection assisted in attempting to understand and explain the patterns and themes which were established. While analyzing the data, organizing data into categories and chronological order was important. The responses to interview questions were read repeatedly to ensure the data were placed in the correct category. My focus was on obtaining data for the research questions. I highlighted the ideas, statements and words that aligned with each research question: (a) data for research question 1 were highlighted in green; (b) data for research question 2 were highlighted in orange; and (c) data for research question 3 were highlighted in red. Coding was on-going during the data collection process; data were repeatedly and continually coded as information was collected. According to Merriam (2009), the essential objective of coding data is to obtain emerging themes that are consistent throughout the collected data to provide a detailed description of the data.

Once, the coding was completed, I assembled ideas, statements, and words and listed them with each research question. This allowed me to see the whole picture of categories, topics, and patterns that would be involved in my analysis. As I continued to re-read the responses, I eliminated some information as being off topic or the information just did not correlate with the study. I then used the research questions to guide my analysis. Once each data source was coded, I looked for similarities and reduced the list to a minimal number. I searched for repeated words, then color coded with highlights all data according to associated research questions. I was condensing the data toward the

core of the study. This core would be incorporated into the study. Field notes and journal entries were regularly reviewed.

One of the most important steps was coding responses into meaningful categories. Saldana (2014) stated that during the coding process, themes consisting of one word to a full sentence may be developed; there may also be a reconfiguration of the codes. I approached this process by examining the notes from the transcribed interviews and highlighting words or phrases that are related to each of the research questions, and I began grouping these by concepts. I repeated this process with my notes from the classroom observations (Creswell, 2013). The large amounts of data were reorganized into meaningful categories that allowed patterns to emerge. My categories were coded by highlighting colors in the data to distinguish content and topics. Responses related to research question 1 were highlighted in green responses related to research question 2 were highlighted in orange; responses related to research question 3 were highlighted in red. The data were read, analyzed, and categorized into content, topic or research question. Bogdan and Biklin (1998) suggested that initial coding should be created that includes numerous categories. This was followed by focused coding that allowed categories to be combined, eliminated, or divided even further as themes begin to emerge. The initial phase included one-on-one interviews where general information about the phenomenon and attitudes were determined. An accurate interpretation of information shared by respondents was critical to the success of the study. One way to manage essential elements that occur in the interview was to keep a case-based interpretive

analysis report on each interview which is a summary, interpretation, and reflection of information generated immediately after each session. Accuracy was important when reflecting on collected data. As a result, I carried a spiral notebook to each interview and observation which provided me a place to record my reflections. For example, there was one participant who was frustrated because on the day of her interview, a student did not follow directions properly after they were repeated several times. This information was not correlated to my study but influenced some of her responses. I made note of that in my spiral notebook. If I found an external element which may have affected responses, I noted it in my notebook. This is important because interview data can be 'fragile' because, as time passes, it becomes more difficult to reconstruct (Creswell, 2013).

Careful data analysis allowed me to create a picture of the professional experiences of inclusion reading teachers by capturing their voices and the deep and diverse contexts of their classroom experiences. Patterns and relationships evolved as the data was coded by themes, based on the frequency of appearance in the transcriptions, recordings and notes. I continued to check for credibility, transferability, and trustworthiness in my findings. Merriam (2009) explained that the procedure known as member checking can be used to help maximize the trustworthiness of the findings. A member checking process will be utilized to verify the information gained from the participants' interviews. I implemented a member checking process by sending an e-mail copy of my projected findings to each participant in the study. I asked each participant to review the findings to ensure that I captured their perceptions and thoughts accurately

(Creswell, 2013). Each participant was given an opportunity to discuss the findings with me. Creswell (2013) stated that member checks may involve sharing all the findings with the participants and allowing them to critically analyze the findings and provide comments on the findings. This assists in decreasing the chance of incorrect data and the incorrect interpretation of data (Creswell, 2013). Member checking allowed me to ask participants for feedback on "emerging findings" (Merriam, 2009, p. 217). Checking to make sure that data was not misinterpreted was essential to ensure that participants "recognize themselves" in the researcher's analysis (Merriam, 2009, p. 217).

I also used triangulation to cross verify the data by checking the data sources against one another. According to Yin (2014), the principal of triangulation relates to the purpose of trying to find ways of verifying an event, description, or fact being reported in a study. The proposed data collection methods are individual interviews and classroom observations. The data collected was triangulated by comparing the three sets of research question data to provide evidence and to substantiate the perceptions of primary school reading teachers about teaching in inclusion classrooms. The interviews provided individual teacher perceptions about the problem, about how they worked with students, and about the classroom observations.

Discrepant Cases

Patton (2014) discussed how to improve the accuracy of qualitative research findings. He stated that a "systematic search for alternative themes, divergent patterns, and rival explanations enhances credibility" (p. 553). To address this issue, Patton

suggested looking for other ways to interpret the data that might elicit alternative categories. Instead of neglecting these seemingly discrepant cases, the author suggested looking for data to support the new categories. However, if there is no strong evidence to support the new findings then it is likely that the original findings are accurate (Patton 2014). As such, discrepant cases were sought according to the procedures outlined above but none were found. All data were included in this study's findings and categorized to provide a complete description of participants' perceptions. For dependability purposes the transcripts then were reviewed a final time and re-coded.

In this qualitative case study, the data collected from one-on-one interviews and observations were used to explore, examine, and identify elementary inclusion teachers' attitudes, beliefs, perceptions, and experiences about teaching reading in inclusion classrooms. All data were aligned with the research questions and the emerged themes; therefore, there were no discrepant cases.

Summary

Qualitative research is advantageous in that changes which need to be made during post hoc analysis are the norm. During this process subtleties and contingencies that could not have been anticipated prior to implementation of the study or through deductive reasoning can be addressed. Whether this results in changes in the research questions, procedures, or analysis portion of the study is less important than the opportunities provided in the discovery of the truth.

The main points in this section is for the researcher to be constantly aware of the data collection procedures. One of the most important points was to ensure the participants stay anonymous and protected when collecting data, and then analyzing the information. The researcher must know that if there was a change in participants or in collecting data, documentation must occur and be approved from the IRB. There were no changes that occurred with the participants or in collecting data. All aspects of this section are critical to accumulating accurate data. In Section 4, results from the interviews and observations are discussed after evaluating the collected data.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

In this study, I explored the attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions of teachers instructing reading in elementary inclusion classrooms located in an urban school setting. I also examined elementary teachers' attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions about instructing the student populations within inclusion classrooms and reviewed suggestions made by inclusion teachers about performing successfully to full potential in an urban school inclusion setting. In this chapter, I describe the procedures used for collecting and analyzing the data. I present the relationships, patterns, and themes from the data and derive conclusions. Finally, I provide evidence of the study's quality.

Process for Collecting and Analyzing Data

Prior to collecting data, I received permission from Walden University's IRB and the public school's district administrator. The Walden University IRB granted permission on December 20, 2017 (IRB approval no. 12-20-2016-0142335) for me to begin collecting data. I received a letter of permission from the school district's administrator on November 11, 2016. To begin the data collection process, I sent an e-mail and made a telephone call to each potential participant to explain the purpose of this study and to schedule a time and place to engage participants. I e-mailed two kindergarten teachers, two first-grade teachers, two second-grade teachers, two third-grade teachers, two fourth-grade teachers, and one fifth-grade teacher an invitation to participants in the study (see Appendix B). The focus of my study was on building the foundation for reading. The

superintendent of this district stated the district goal is for all students in third grade to be reading on third grade level by the year 2025.

Teachers who agreed to take part in the study returned a response by e-mail. The participants electronically signed and returned the necessary consent form required by Walden University. Prior to the interview process and data collection, I made sure all consent forms were signed. Nine elementary inclusion teachers volunteered to join the study, and they participated in the one-on-one interviews and observations. E-mails were sent to the participants to schedule interview times that were most convenient to them. Plans were made based on the participants' preferences. An interview topic guide was provided in advance to the individuals in this study. This allowed the participants to organize their thoughts and perceptions of the topics they would see in the interview. Each participant was guaranteed confidentiality. Participants were assigned an identification number that was used during the interviews for data collection.

The second phase of this study included observations, which did not require identification numbers and was limited to my observations of elementary inclusion teachers. The collection of data was performed by using two different sources to gather evidence of the attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions of elementary inclusion teachers' preparation to teach in urban inclusion school settings. The sources used to gather information to answer the research questions were the following: one-on-one interviews with nine elementary inclusion teachers and nine field observations recorded on Jane Sick format (Appendix A). The data collection process is described in the following section.

Interviews

I began the data collection process with Phase 1: Semistructured interviews. I used an interview protocol (Appendix C) and notified participants of the time and location for the interviews via e-mail. The face-to-face interviews consisted of 14 open-ended questions with follow-up and probe questions (see Seidman, 2012) to gain knowledge about the participants' experiences. The interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes. The interviews were held in a confidential room that was convenient for the participants. All participants were asked all questions in the same order. Each interview was tape recorded and notes were taken to record body language and tone of voice of the participants. All audio tapes, notes, and transcripts of participant responses were saved in a password-protected file on my personal computer and on a password-protected external portable hard drive that was stored in a home safe for 5 years. I am the only person with access to the data collected. I interviewed nine elementary inclusion teachers to explore their attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions about instructing in urban schools. Anytime those participants' responses were not clear, I followed up by asking the participants for clarification.

Observations

In the second phase of the data collection, I observed participants instructing in their assigned inclusion classrooms. Prior to the observations, I reaffirmed my purpose for observing with each participant, and I assured each that my notes and observations would remain confidential. My observation notes were used solely to inform my study

and to help me answer my research questions. My objective for conducting observations was to collect data regarding how teachers were working in reading instruction with whole groups, small groups, and individual students in inclusion classrooms. Participants provided lesson plans, so I could observe instruction with the plans. I observed discussions between coteachers and regular education teachers to capture their attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions as they went about their daily work in inclusion classrooms. As an observer, I watched, listened, and took notes during 30 minutes of inclusion classroom instruction. I used the Jane Sick format observation protocol (Appendix A) to write descriptive and detailed reflection notes that included my observations, impressions, and ideas. The purpose of the observations was to complement, support, and build upon the interviews by collecting more data on instructing reading in an inclusion classroom located in an urban school.

Process for Recording Data

In recording the responses of participants during the interviews, I used a digital recording device. Each of the audio taped interviews and observations of the classroom were approximately 45 minutes. When the interviews and observations were completed, I transcribed the data from the digital recording to a transcript. The digital recording and transcripts will be stored in a home safe for 5 years. I will be the only individual who will have access to the data collected.

System for Keeping Track of Data

A digital recorder was used for all interviews. After each interview was completed, I transcribed the interview data verbatim into a password-protected file on my personal computer. When the transcribing was completed, my notes were saved as a separate file. There were no names used in the transcripts or recordings. Upon completion of the transcriptions, I affirmed each transcript while listening to the recordings to ensure that all responses were authentic and transcribed in the words of the participants. I began the coding process by looking for relevant data that related to the problem statement and research questions guiding this study. Relevant data were identified as words or statements that were consistent across the interviews and as information that informed research questions. A color-coded process was initiated to easily identify similar words or phrases related to research questions. I used the same colors to highlight words from the transcript that related to each research question. I looked for similar wording from the different participants and placed a box around them to form codes and themes, which I recorded in the margins using an organizational structure suggested by Creswell (2012).

I reviewed the relevant data for repeated ideas among the participants. I then structured the groups of repeated ideas into common themes by aggregating the data into thematic groupings. During data analysis, the researcher's purpose is to analyze the data by identifying the general themes (Stake, 2013). Using the interview questions, I searched for general categories of ideas related to the research questions. Upon completion of repetitive reviews for duplicate ideas, I concluded with several themes

related to the research questions. After I coded the data and identified my findings, I provided copies of my initial findings and an individual transcript to each participant for review and verification. I used a member checking process to verify the credibility of the findings.

Through member checking, I eliminated the possibility of misunderstanding or misinterpreting the participants' experiences; this is a critical component of the analysis process. I contacted each participant via e-mail to schedule a date, time, and location for individual meetings to complete the member checking process. There were only two participants willing to meet to review their transcript. The other participants elected not to respond, or they did not have time. I provided an option for them to review my initial findings and to provide thoughts or concerns via e-mail. A time frame of 1 week was given for participants to respond. There were no additional responses.

Findings

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the teachers' perceptions about reading instruction in an inclusion setting and to investigate what teachers believe they need to improve the efficiency of their practice. The results of this study may provide insights to administrators, teachers, and community stakeholders concerning the teachers' experiences and perceptions of teaching reading in inclusive classrooms and offer suggestions for improving instruction to benefit student performance. The collected data provided evidence to support each of the themes. All participants believed instructing reading to diverse populations within inclusion classrooms were challenging.

In addition, all participants agreed that they need additional training, effective strategies, and new suggestions on how to improve diversified reading instruction in the inclusion classroom. Likewise, they concurred the academic course of reading is a vital skill in life and school. Furthermore, participants agreed that expectations are high for students, and student success in reading is dependent on the knowledge and skills of teachers. Lastly, the participants agreed that additional professional development about reading instruction could provide more opportunities for success for the teachers and the students. Establishing competent readers as well as creating individuals who will become contributing citizens to their communities are aspirations for the instructors.

In the following sections, I offer and discuss themes and conclusions from the collected data. The collected data were retrieved from one-on-one interviews and classroom observations. The problem that prompted this study was that inclusive classroom teachers in an urban school were struggling to meet the learning needs of their diverse student populations in reading. The following research questions guided this study:

Research Question 1: What teaching strategies do educators use to instruct reading in their inclusion classroom?

Research Question 2: What are the instructional challenges of inclusion teachers when teaching reading to multi-level ability readers?

Research Question 3: What are teachers' perceptions about professional

development support to improve the success of teaching reading in inclusion

classrooms?

These three research questions were designed to gain information about the attitudes,

beliefs, and perceptions of primary inclusion teachers regarding their experiences of

teaching reading to diversified student populations. These research questions provided

the structure for one-on-one interview questions (Appendix C) and observations.

I explored teachers' perceptions and practices regarding reading improvement

with the diverse population in inclusion classrooms. The following themes were

discovered through the analysis of all data sources, and each theme aligns with a research

question. The first theme revealed that teachers rely on basal instructional strategies to

introduce and reinforce reading skills, but they recognize the importance of engaging

students in more individualized learning strategies. The second theme revealed that

teachers acknowledge the challenges of instructing students with diverse ability levels

and collaborating with coteachers, yet they have not mastered the skills to work

confidently. The final theme revealed that teachers are interested in professional

development that provides differentiated teaching approaches, direct learning instruction,

scaffold learning strategies, and coteaching approaches.

Theme 1

The first theme regarded teachers' reliance on basal instructional strategies to

introduce and reinforce reading skills and acknowledgment that it is important to have

more individualized learning strategies. Two categories of data emerged from the interviews and observations to support this theme: (a) assessment strategies for students in a diversified classroom and (b) reading strategies used in the inclusion classroom.

Assessment strategies for students in a diversified classroom. Most teachers agreed that identifying the reading levels of students is priority. All the teachers found reading levels pertinent due to correctly assigning the students into cooperative teaching groups and aligning the students into reading groups. All teachers indicated that on the first day of school, they initiate action to identify the reading levels of students. Although all teachers agreed that assessing students' reading levels is important, they expressed personal preferences for using various assessment tools. The assessment tools selected by the participants included formal, informal, teacher-created, and observational assessments. The teachers expressed their autonomy about the selection of assessment instruments. Respondents found it important to use an appropriate assessment that coincided with the students learning style to acquire an accurate baseline. Six out of the nine teachers stated that there is not a standard assessment for establishing reading levels for the students. Several participants were apprehensive of using only one assessment to determine students' reading levels. One of the participants commented, "I will test the student twice at the beginning of the year, because I am a believer the one-time test is not a true picture of what the student actually capable of. It might not be a good day for the student." One teacher stated,

Using the student test of accelerated readers (STAR), the state mandated benchmark tests, informal reading with the student, and a computer reading program that levels their reading ability, I assess students to make a solid decision about their reading levels.

Teachers also affirmed a concern regarding consistency in base-lining students' reading abilities throughout the grade levels. All the participants agreed with a need for a standard test in all grade levels that aligns with the grade-level guidelines. They suggested that by gaining information about students' reading deficiencies, they would be better prepared to instruct. One participant stated, "Every assessment cannot be identical; however, we can create student involved activities for the students who are not able to read the assessments. There was a recommendation to create a form for teachers to measure or make notes of activities that reflect the engagement of the student and response to the activity; this could be beneficial when reflecting on the lesson. Striving for an assessment that was suitable for different levels was a goal, so students can be successful on their individual levels.

Responses from the participants were unanimous in acknowledging the importance of teachers knowing their students' reading levels; they indicated how critical it was providing appropriate reading strategies and instruction. Participants 2, 4, 5 strongly agreed that "Regardless of the type of assessment, this information needs to be in the student's file. This assists the next grade level teacher to understand how the student was assessed and the improvement made in the previous grade." As I observed an

inclusion classroom on reading instruction, the teacher had a small group at her table reading a short story, taking turns reading, and answering comprehension questions as they read. The other students were working in two groups: one group was working on defining story settings, characters, and what happened in the story, while the other group was predicting how a story might end and creating their own ending to the story. It appeared that this teacher had used her information from assessments to group the students into homogenous groups that were working successfully. One participant stated, "It doesn't matter if the tools are informal or formal, what is important is to find that level where the student will be successful, engaged and can build on what the student already knows." Two other teachers made similar observations. Another teacher remarked, "The assessments provide an approximation, not the real picture. What was needed was to have assessments that are measured on the same population that was being tested, to accumulate a strong baseline for students in relation to peers who are like them."

Four out of the nine participants noted a concern regarding feeling limited on time and boundaries incurred. All participants acknowledged that instructional reading level activities need to be provided for each student. While observing the classroom of one participant, the students were given a choice of activities as they rotated among reading centers. There were several activities presented at each station, with the intention of the same concept being learned at different levels. Students were engaged, and they completed activities as required. Some students were performing more difficult tasks than others, but they were all engaged and working together. I saw several students off-task;

however, they quickly resumed their assigned work as they noticed other students were

working. One participant made the statement, "I would say meeting the needs of all

students on their individual levels, not on the expected grade level norms, is vital to the

students' reading improvement." One participant claimed that because of the varied

reading levels in an inclusion classroom, "I am required to spend an extensive amount of

time finding resources and scaffolding work in a short amount of time." All the

participants agreed that they did not anticipate the amount of time to plan and perform the

activities for multilevel reading classrooms. As educators prepare their instruction

activities, it is important to plan and verify instructional strategies were used to address

all different levels of reading.

Reading strategies used in the inclusion setting. The inclusion classrooms are

settings where the lessons are created with learning differences and learning needs are in

mind. Over half of the teachers believed that the diversity of population tends to hinder

instruction of reading because they try to satisfy students of different reading levels. All

the teachers agreed with a participant who stated, "The current pace of instruction does

not allow enough time to satisfy all students reading needs. The students' needs are too

great, and the objectives take extra time to meet." Classrooms that I observed were well

organized with materials ready for reading rotations. Activities for the reading rotations

were prepared, and instructions had already been explained, so each student knew the

task to be completed. However, I noticed when the teacher had students at her table, there

were more students working on independent work who were off-task.

One participant noted, "It is important to pull resources from outside of your standard curriculum to help the kids and give them support, so they can develop their language and understand the concepts which will link to reading." Several participants made the comment,

> Assessments are good, but sometimes I just have to walk around and observe the student reading and then answer questions. At other times I have to sit down with the student and have the student read to me to see if he knows decoding skills or any comprehension skills.

One participant said, "It is sometimes a guess what level the student is reading because of the instability in his life or the disability. I have to do my best and then adjust as time progresses." All participants specified that assessments have a place in the instructional setting to check improvement on reading skills and base lining. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (2011) recognized a critical time in students' academic growth was the time beyond third grade. By third grade, reading has been integrated into all subject areas and the instructional focus shifts to reading to learn. The National Assessment of Educational Progress noted that 67% of fourth graders read below the proficient level. Participants agreed that students need guidance and engagement to learn reading strategies as a basis for understanding what they have read and how to apply the learned information to comprehension.

Participants indicated comparable reading strategies were initiated to teach reading: a) monitoring comprehension, b) using graphic and semantic organizers, c)

answering questions, d) recognizing story structure, e) predicting and f) re-reading the text. Many of the participants recognized the diversity in all classrooms, however because the inclusion classrooms include general education and special needs students, the teachers stressed their concerns with the inclusion classroom situation. As one participant stated, "Teaching within an inclusion classroom is a daunting task. I must find strategies to work with students who have a wide range of learning problems including language deficits, language delays, and dyslexia. "

Despite the participants' concerns for the diverse individual needs of students, they maintained a position that the curriculum takes precedence over the needs of the students, due to the mandate of state assessments and the alignment of the state tests with the curriculum. Participants 4 and 6 claimed, "Sometimes the curriculum is beneficial at least to the extent the students are following the concept. However, if a student is two three years behind grade level, it is very difficult to motivate students who are working with materials from lower grades."

When focusing on the various reading levels in the interviews, participants agreed that they integrate content and delivery by teaching what the curriculum requires; this is followed by small group instruction for added support and one on one assistance. Participants stated, in various ways, that they were willing to meet the students where they are, yet with the diverse population and restricted time for instruction of reading, the instruction process becomes challenged. This was evident in my observations of the

inclusion classrooms. All classroom teachers appeared to be rushed trying to get all the information taught within the appropriated time.

When observing one classroom during a whole group instruction lesson, the pace of presenting new information was rapid. Timberlake (2014) found that for many teachers, the most significant factor in their decisions of how and when to integrate the general education curriculum was the use of instructional time. Teachers extended lessons, as groups participated in rotation activities to provide the necessary follow-up for all students. The activities included independent, silent reading from student chosen books of different reading levels, answering comprehension questions, and sequencing story events.

All participants seemed to realize the complexity of instructing reading with a diverse population, and they acknowledged the variables they contend with to instruct all students: flexibility, ability levels, creativity, time blocks and grade level curricula. All participants noted the extensive amount of time required to find resources and differentiate work in a short amount of time. Participants 3 and 4 commented, "Realizing that the needs of my students are so diverse, it may take 4 days to locate all the materials to instruct my students. Even after locating the necessary materials, some of my students may only be able to understand 10%-20% of the story." This puts the burdens and concerns on the teacher to try and teach the students that time and resources allow..

Teachers shared concerns about utilizing the strategies of scaffolding and modifying instructional materials to follow the curriculum. One of the participants was

willing to share a strategy she felt was very successful in the inclusion classroom. Her idea consisted of planning a lesson with her team and creating rigorous activities for the students to be successful. After brainstorming, the teacher designed an activity to simplify the concept of the main idea of a story or paragraph. The activity was composed of sentence strips to manipulate the information. Students used the sentence strips as a tool to insert the strips in the correct sections which were then inserted into a graphic organizer. The teacher believed this activity allowed the students greater understanding to assimilate the information. The main idea became easier to locate.

Another teacher provided her techniques of using the concept of syllables and breaking them down into morphemes. One of the activities was color coding the vowels and consonants, then clapping out the sounds. The teacher stated, "It was differentiated for higher groups. We clapped the word out to identify the morpheme breaks in a word. We, then, used a song to break words into sound parts. A student's success comes from teachers identifying where students are reading and the learning styles of students." It is beneficial if teachers understand and assimilate this useful information about their students. During an observation, one instructor presented the concept of predicting. In the whole group instruction portion of the lesson, a general idea of a person traveling was provided to assimilate the concept. Students predicted items that were in a traveling bag. Using the story of *The Three Bears,* the teacher asked the students to predict Goldilocks' actions. The teachers scaffolded the questions, so everyone had an opportunity to respond. Participant 1 made the following remark, "The misunderstood concept of using

one strategy to instruct, with the thought of all students understanding a reading concept the same way, was an erroneous thought. We must identify the individual needs of each of our students." Another participant commented regarding strategies used in the inclusion classroom:

> Students are so diversified in the inclusion classroom; it was so difficult to use only one strategy for the class. Some days there were three strategies used on one concept. Differentiation is the best method, but I am unsure if I do it correctly. As an inclusion teacher, we just need different ways of instructing.

> Teachers in the upper elementary grades were unified in the thought that one participant vocalized,

> We see a deficit in classrooms with students not knowing the alphabet and letter sounds, having limited experiences to relate to a story's message, and having very little background knowledge to access. These deficits create a challenge for inclusion teachers. Time must be taken to teach mini lessons that help students learn missed concepts quickly. This stopping and teaching a mini lesson creates a critical time misalignment for the originally planned lesson.

One participant was firm and determined during a discussion of how teachers try to balance the instruction to all reading and skill levels in the inclusion classroom. The teachers that had good time management skills were able to address all the levels of reading. It becomes a balancing situation.

The teacher stated, "When the students do not understand what is being taught, teachers must take the time up front, frontloading to ensure they have the background knowledge. Then, you can take the time to teach skills deficient and how to incorporate them when reading." I observed an example of frontloading in a classroom. In the inclusion classroom, the teacher was explaining the setting of a story. The setting of this story was the porch of a house. As I looked around, one student asked the question, "What is a porch?" As I scanned the room during this observation, it was clear there were approximately seven students who were unaware of the meaning of a porch. The teachers had frontloaded with pictures, examples, books and videos from the internet for the students to understand the meaning of porch and the setting. When the students understood the vocabulary and the meaning of the setting, student participation increased.

Scaffolding questions is an effective strategy that one of the participants used to engage a class. This strategy consisted of reading aloud a designated story and differentiating questions. During one of my observations I saw a strategy which appeared to be successful. As the instructor asked comprehension questions, more than half of the class raised their hands to respond. The instructor would rephrase the question using lower vocabulary words so other students who were struggling were able to respond. This strategy worked well in that classroom. Some strategies worked with inclusion students, and others were not successful. Teachers of inclusion classrooms indicated that they ensure several strategies are readily available to use. This is one of the many challenges inclusion teachers encounter while instructing reading in an inclusion setting.

Theme 2

The second theme revealed that teachers acknowledge the challenges of instructing students with diverse ability levels and collaborating with co-teachers, yet they have not mastered the skills to work confidently. Several participants expressed entering the inclusion classroom with open minds, with feelings of excitement, and with positive philosophies regarding teaching reading to diverse groups of students. Participants reported that challenges occurred when they reviewed baseline testing; their responses revealed large deficits in reading comprehension. One participant stated,

> I try to always have my goal in mind, and I try to meet the students' needs any way possible by providing reading on their level but keeping in mind the individual goals which needs to be met. Students with different reading abilities can learn the same skills, but I must use different grade level texts.

In accordance with participants' responses regarding challenges in the inclusion setting, opportunities that arise in an inclusion classroom, which present challenges are the following: collaboration with a co-teacher, looking for resources, time management, and creating a cohesive team for instruction. It was evident an inclusion teacher must be able to work extensively to meet the needs of all students in the classroom. A teacher stated, "In the inclusion classroom, students work on their own levels. Everybody is working on individually specific skills."

Team teaching in inclusion classrooms. Team teaching exists in the inclusion classrooms and involves two certified teachers. I observed classrooms in which teams

worked cohesively, and I visited other classrooms in which the teachers were challenged

by trying to work together. I observed two participants who are certified co-teachers and

are part of a team teaching duo in the inclusion setting. This team included a special

education instructor and a regular education instructor. Although each teacher has

certification in a separate field of teaching, they were interacting as a team in the

inclusion classrooms. As I sat and observed while the team was instructing reading, the

interactions between the special and regular education teachers were good which

provided an inviting educational setting for everyone in the classroom. For whole group

instruction, the regular education teacher took the lead with the special education teacher

watching and redirecting off-task behaviors and helping struggling students individually.

The teacher was providing clues for them to look for to try to find the meaning of the

unknown word. When behavior became an issue during whole group, the special

education teacher would remove the student from whole group, provide a chair and have

the teaching assistant sit next to the student. Teaching continued, and it was a nice

learning environment where the students were engaged. Both teachers were interjecting

their knowledge, and the rapport between the professionals was respectful. When whole

group was completed, the students went to their rotations. Teachers would rotate with

having an instructional group at their table and walking around to see if any student

needed additional assistance. This was successful team teaching. However, I performed

another observation in an inclusion classroom where the team teachers were not cohesive.

When I arrived in the room, it was obvious there were tensions. Students were sitting at

their tables preparing for instruction, and the regular education teacher was getting her teacher's edition and quickly reading over the concept and lesson to be taught. The special education teacher had a small group of students at a back table working on flash cards of sight words. Teachers did not work together; they were working in the same classroom, but separate work centers. They were working independently. Students were looking back at the students with the special education teacher, with little attention on instruction from the regular education teacher.

I observed six classrooms, and half of them had successful team teaching duos and half were challenged with the co-teaching environment. One of the participants commented when asked about how they worked with their team teacher, the response was: "In order to create a cohesive classroom, there must be sharing, communicating, working out the nonnegotiable subjects, and becoming familiar with the other teacher you are teaching with in the classroom." Another participant interjected, "A communication must be initiated discussing each other's idea of what is expected from the classroom, the layout, behavior expectations and what was acceptable from the students with work and behavior in the classroom." Another participant made the remark, "If you both come to work having the same mindset, we are here to teach, we are here for the best interest of the kids. Then you both are willing to share the same space, there was a common goal which can be worked with, however if you come to the job with a negative attitude, then the other teacher feels they have to compensate for the lack of providing instruction." It takes time and practice, and the willing to share of oneself and resources. A co-teacher

participant made the statement, "There are benefits when you have a good working relationship, it is a give and take, and you can pull together and help each other." Friend (2015) discussed co-teaching and her in depth research on this method and has concluded, "Educators are most effective at meeting their instructional goals and more professionally fulfilled when they use the co-teaching methods of partnering." All the participants felt the hindrance to this method is having the time during school hours to plan and acquire the necessary resources and tools to perform the lesson successfully.

Instructing students with diverse learning abilities. Creating a learning environment where all students are thriving to read takes creativity, resources, and knowledge of the different levels in the inclusion classroom. Most of the participants agreed differentiating instruction in reading must be performed and modified to the student's individual reading level for the student to be able to be successful. The participants shared in the interviews that pulling resources from outside the standard curriculum to help the kids and support their vocabulary is very time consuming. One of the participants stated, "I meet with my grade level team, then I meet with my co-teacher and then I have to search for resources to support the variety of reading levels in the classroom." Then the teachers must be sure they follow 504 requirements and special education requirements." One participant provided a remark about her experiences in the fourth grade, "If there are students reading on a first to second grade level and instruction is fourth grade level, I'm pulling from a massive amount of resources to be able to have the students understand what is being instructed." Another participant stated, "I have

taken some of the stories in the textbook and chunked them, rewritten, then summarized the information so the student had something available to read which had classroom content." Several teachers I observed in the classroom would use visuals as a resource or create an activity such as a foldable for the kinesthetic learner. During the interviews and observations there are very creative teachers who took an extensive length of time to have activities for the students who were not able to read as well as the other students in the classroom. There were two classrooms I observed which were rushed by the clock and did not have sufficient time to provide additional supports for the students in need.

All participants agreed time management was a necessary aspect when instructing reading and all its facets to multiple reading levels in one classroom. Participants' opinions to create a balance of instruction time with whole group, small groups and one on one were challenging when one group needs more assistance than the other. A participant said, "Instruction time is balanced on the focus of the success of the students. Inclusion promotes success." Another participant stated, "I'm not sure that it is possible to balance time, because you're constantly juggling. Time is tough! It's hard to get all the necessary essential elements in addition to the curriculum requirements in the 120-minute time block." In discussing time and schedule, one of the participants claimed,

> the way our schedule is set up this year has made it very difficult to give small
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> groups the amount of time they need…if there is a day to have whole group
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> lesson and I devote the correct amount of time, the small groups become limited

for interaction. I preferred having 25-30 minutes with each group and engage

them; the high group provides many opportunities for growth.

All participants felt there was not enough time to provide lessons adequately with

multiple strategies to meet the reading needs of all the students. Timberlake (2014)

supported this thought from the participants by stating that if teachers did not see the

long-term benefit of the academic content, they may consider it wasting valuable

instructional time. There will be some students with limited instruction time. In

observing two classrooms, a timer was placed on the board for the students and teacher to

achieve as much as possible out of the lesson and to stay within a time block. A

participant stated, "There is not enough time in the day. I have to think how much time I

will use for this core subject, so I can give and take in another core subject." When

observing one of the inclusion classrooms, a participant noted, "a crucial aspect is

incorporating all the necessary modifications or accommodations into the lesson plan for

daily learning to ensure all of the student's requirements are getting met."

Although differentiating is occurring in the inclusion classroom, the teachers

agree that there is not enough time to satisfy all the needs of the students. A participant

made the statement, "Several years ago we only had a few to focus on, now there is

approximately a quarter to a half of the classroom." Most of these students require one on

one teaching strategy. As most of the participants stated, "We just have to be flexible and

do the best we can." A special education participant stated,

I teach whole group for science and math modifying concepts down by using

hands on tactile, they have touch math charts on their desks, so everyone has the

same opportunity, it helps some more than others. In science I diversify what they

are doing, because some need more help than others with the project and labs

based on their ability.

Another teacher stated, "When we talk about rhyming, sometimes you can see the

letters the same as, /b/a/t/ and /c/a/t/ and sometimes you can't and if you are working with

a profoundly deaf child who is different than a normal child, how can I make it work for

them and get them excited about learning it?" These inclusion classes consisted not only

of dyslexia, speech, and learning disability students, but auditory impairments and vision

impairments. This participant continued with the statement, "That's a really big

challenge; we have that core curriculum, so how do I do it differently to get them all to

understand?" When a classroom contains between 20 and 30 students, it is beneficial for

the instructor to collaborate with colleagues creating constructive ideas and activities,

utilizing training and knowledge to instruct the diversified group in the inclusion

classroom.

The themes revealed limited involvement with administrators in the inclusion

classrooms. Participants agreed the reading scores are important to administrators;

however, due to the minimal numbers of special education involved in the inclusion

classroom, the priority of inclusion reading was not regarded by administrators with the

same degree of concern as they regard the regular education students. It was encouraged

by the participants that administrators become familiar with the different models and the necessary support that teachers provide in the inclusion classrooms. Participants shared a concern that when it was challenging, and they are seeking assistance or advice, there was not a person to acquire new or different ideas for instructing reading to the diversified population. The educators must research to create modalities in teaching that would not ordinarily use. There is a need to expand the knowledge and skills of all educators to educating diverse groups of students. Participants believed that professional development on inclusion strategies would improve the reading skills in the population of all classrooms.

All participants are willing to see other successful operating inclusion classrooms in other schools. One participant shared,

> If training is not consecutive throughout the grades, there may be a teacher in first grade doing an amazing job and working close to grade level then they move into second grade and the teacher may not be as skilled or sure of how to go about teaching or maybe the teacher doesn't have high enough expectations. The student begins to stagnate. The students may not recover because they became frustrated and discouraged in the previous grades; we must be sure there is a vertical alignment for special education.

Professional development improves teachers' abilities to perform effectively in classrooms.

Theme 3

Teachers are interested in professional development that provides differentiated teaching approaches, direct learning instruction, scaffold learning strategies, and co-teaching approaches. Participants preparing plans to execute with various reading levels stated that it was time consuming and challenging, particularly trying to locate ideas, activities, resources, and hands on tools to get reading objectives met. It was clear from the responses of the interviews and the observations that preparation is one of the most difficult parts of instruction in the inclusion classroom. This contributed to the unknown pertaining to how much information was retained, assimilated and applied. In addition, how much re-teaching, redirecting, or repeating will take place in the classroom to consume instruction time? Teachers are willing to look at how inclusion programs in other schools instruct reading with the diversity of students. They are willing to learn and see different strategies that are successful in the inclusion classroom and if the applications would fit the diverse population in their classroom. One participant said, I would like to see a video because we are not able to go and observe a classroom; let me see or show me an actual video from a classroom of what it would look like, show me what they did, let me see it, now let's break it down, they did this activity, this is how they got there.

"Let me see the plain classroom that has 20 kids, 2 adults, a dyslexia student looking like they don't understand, a behavior student acting up, a door opening for speech pull out. Let me see how others accommodate all the movement, then I can say I

like how that teacher did that!" stated a participant. Several participants expressed the desire to attend professional development that teaches educators how to modify reading levels would be the most beneficial to their efficacy of instructing reading. The opportunity in instructing reading in an inclusion classroom is meeting the students where they are and providing a better learning result. This is the consensus of all the teachers. But, when asked if they attended any professional development trainings to instruct reading to diverse populations, the responses were "no." The participants did acknowledge exposure to the models of inclusion; however, there has been no training related to instructing reading to various levels. What professional development could enhance the success of inclusion classrooms? Professional development provides ways to enhance the success of inclusion instruction. The question addressed to the teachers was, "what kind of professional development would be most helpful?" Four out of nine participants responded that the best professional development to assist instructing in an inclusion classroom would be relationship training. A participant stated, "When it comes to co-teaching, it should be an interpersonal relationship; it doesn't matter religion, politics or even gender. The relationship should stem from doing what professionals can do that is the best for the students." Another participant responded, "There needs to be training regarding the successful programs with performing versatile instruction promoting improvement in reading, striving to have students' closer to grade level reading." Participants are interested in learning how to collaborate with a co-teacher. A participant commented, "What does a successful team partnership look like, is there a

model on how instructors can cover all the diverse populations simultaneously?" An experienced participant commented, "If training is not provided to every grade level with an idea of how the teachers are expected to instruct the diversified population, there could be negative consequences for students." There may be a teacher in first grade doing an amazing job, escalating the students close to grade level, then the students move into a second-grade classroom where the students were not expected to perform to high expectations. The student becomes stagnate.

It then becomes difficult to recover from the time lost in second grade. There needs to be training on vertical alignment where all grades are aware of the expectations of teaching diversified students." There is a need for more professional development around learning disabilities (O'Gorman E & Sheelagh D., 2011). It was the consensus of the participants that training in techniques and collaboration with other professionals would improve the comfort level of instructing in an inclusion classroom. One participant commented, "it is the uncertainty of knowing if what you are doing in the inclusive classroom is the best for the students and if there is a better way of instructing to accommodate all the different levels of reading." Professional development can relieve some of the insecurities occurring in the inclusive classroom. Training leads to knowledge, and knowledge leads to empowerment of competence regarding instructing the diversity population in the inclusion classroom. All the participant's responses focus around the insecurities of knowing if there is a better way to instruct various reading levels at one time. Professional development improves teacher's ability to provide

additional tools to perform to the best possible ability in the classroom. One of the participants commented, "If the entire faculty was trained in working with special education students as co-teachers, the entire culture of the school would be knowledgeable enough to approach all students." As specified, there is such a variety of special education labels, it would be difficult to find a person, who would be able to service all issues. Given the opportunity to express their experience, the participants select some significant concepts one of which would be to have administration more knowledgeable to assist with ideas and support in instructing reading to the diverse students.

Theme 1 emerged from data about assessments and reading strategies. The first theme demonstrated that instructors relied on basal instructional strategies to introduce and reinforce reading skills and that teachers realized engaging students especially on topics of student interest took precedence over basal instructional strategies. Evidence supported time constraints, assessments and curriculum prohibited progress in student's reading achievements. Teachers agreed the vital data was the student's current reading level. The student's current reading level was the foundation for planning, assessments, instructional strategies and activities. Teachers were using the basal readers to provide various reading levels; however, there was not sufficient progress being made with instruction strategies and basal readers. Time was a large issue in trying to connect with all the students on various reading levels during the English Language Arts class.

Theme 2 identified that teachers acknowledged the challenges of instructing students with diverse ability levels and collaborating with co-teachers, yet they have not mastered the skills to work confidently. Two data categories supported this theme: (a) team teaching in an inclusion classroom and (b) instructing students with diverse learning abilities. Teachers felt that time prohibited them from using cooperative grouping and effective planning with co-teachers. Planning and acquiring prepared accessible activities for each student to improve on their reading level were issues with time management. Co-teaching dilemmas resulted in sharing a common learning environment, dominance in instructing, relationship conflicts and communication. These dilemmas caused by insufficient training of interpersonal skills have not been mastered to create a secure and confident team teaching approach in the inclusion classroom.

Theme 3 showed that teachers are interested in professional development that provides differentiated teaching approaches, direct learning instruction, scaffold learning strategies, and co-teaching approaches. It was concluded by the responses from the teachers that the need for training was pertinent to improving the confidence and efficacy levels of instructing diversity students in the inclusion settings. This theme revealed a positive aspect of the teacher attitudes of willingness to learn additional techniques and information to create an enhanced learning environment for everyone in the inclusion classroom.

Discrepant Cases

In this qualitative case study, the data collected from one on one interviews, observations, and notes were used to explore, examine, and identify primary inclusion educators' attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions of their preparedness to teach in an inclusion classroom. A key element of improving validity is dealing with discrepant data that does not fit dominant patterns and themes. If there had been discrepancies of accuracy or process within the data, the data would have been looked at in detail to determine why they differed and checked for consistency. All data were aligned with the research questions and themes; there were no discrepant cases.

Evidence of Quality

Following the interview transcripts, observations and themes were determined relating to each research question, the results were shared with the participants. As part of providing legitimacy to the data, the themes were shared with the participants to confirm the interpretation was accurately provided by the participant's perspectives. Merriam (2002) stated member reviewing as a common practice of the data constitute ensuring validity. The participants were provided the opportunity to comment on the researcher's interpretation of the data. This review by the participants allowed them the chance to check for accuracy and edit interpretations of any of the data. All the data was analyzed in accordance with the process specified on the IRB form approved by Walden IRB. Interviews and observations were not conducted until Walden University IRB approval was received.

Once approved by the Walden IRB, I initiated the letter of explanation regarding the study with a consent form. Voluntary participants e-mailed a response which stated, "I consent". This response reflected concurrence with the letter of consent from participants. Questions by participants were addressed individually before the consent process. Only the participants who agreed to the terms of the consent agreement were interviewed and observed in this study.

First, I conducted one on one interviews with individuals in a secured room. I gave all participants adequate time to answer each question. During the interviews, I used primary, follow up, and probing questions. All interviews were conducted using the proper protocol. The interviews were recorded, transcribed verbatim, and stored in a password protected Microsoft Word document labeled Participant 1 through 9 to protect participant identities.

Secondly, I conducted an observation of each participant's classroom during the instruction of reading in an inclusion classroom. I collected data in the inclusion classrooms by taking notes regarding the instruction and student engagement, which I documented on the Jane Sick study note template. These notes were given an assigned number corresponding to the assigned participant label. The documenting notes were labeled as teacher 1 through teacher 9 to protect participant's identities. There were no interruptions and the observations continued for 45 minutes, during which I observed reading strategies and teacher approaches using whole, small and one on one groups. I watched, listened, and took notes. The purpose of the observations was to complement,

reinforce, and build upon the interviews, by collecting additional data on the attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions of teaching reading to a diverse population in the inclusion classrooms as they described their experiences without any researcher input.

The themes were compared across the collected data to maintain trustworthiness and substantiate the perceptions of instructing reading in a primary inclusion classroom. I observed participants in the instructional learning environment to acquire data on experiences and perceptions regarding instructing such a wide diverse student population. I interviewed those same participants to collect their perceptions of their experiences and feelings about instructing reading in a primary inclusion classroom with such a varied student population in one inclusion classroom. Evaluating the observation data, my intention was to look for correlation of curriculum, techniques, strategies and diversities related to instructing various reading levels. When comparing one data source with another, I cross checked for less obvious data, potential bias, and possible issues within the information. By interviewing nine primary inclusion teachers who teach reading, I gathered various perspectives to answer my research questions. I have provided themes that portray the authentic attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions of primary inclusion teachers in their own words without researcher prompting. This study was conducted in an ethical manner and cannot be used to generalize about all teachers in the district. These efforts will continue to maintain the trustworthiness and validity of the study.

This section included the process of how the data were created, recorded and collected. Tracking and collecting data procedures were explained. The themes were

presented logically with relevancy to the research questions. The data regarding the

relationships, themes and patterns were stated. Section 4 concluded with the explanation

of evidence of quality. ....Section 5 provides a presentation of how and why the study was

performed. Implications for social change and recommendations for action are provided

in this section. My reflections on the experiences of this study, along with a concluding

statement, are described and discussed in Section 5.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the teachers' perceptions about reading instruction in an inclusive classroom. An inclusive classroom has a diversified population, and I investigated what teachers believed they need to improve in the efficiency of their practice. Themes from teacher interviews and observations revealed that instructors required additional training to increase their pedagogy of instruction to meet the needs of reading with all the students in their inclusion classroom. Teachers felt their instruction was inadequate due to the diversity of students, time constraints, and the multiple reading skills. Participants indicated that they were performing to the best of their ability with their tools; however, the teachers felt instruction could be improved with professional development on topics related to the challenges that occur in the inclusion classroom. Inclusion teachers who teach reading communicated that managing time due to required objectives from curriculum impacted their ability to instruct efficiently in small groups and student-centered learning and use differentiated instruction. Major challenges expressed by most of the teachers were team teaching and relationship building between the coteachers. Although participants focused on the students, they expressed their anxiety that time or circumstances often prevented them from meeting the needs of all students in their classrooms.

Interpretation of Findings

Inclusive classroom teachers in a local school located in Texas are struggling to meet the learning needs of their diverse student populations in reading instruction. The diversity in the inclusion classroom encourages the inclusive teacher to incorporate varied teaching strategies as they develop lessons that meet the learning needs of all students. However, teachers were becoming frustrated with the limitation of tools and resources they used in the classroom to use with instructing multilevel readers. The data resulted in responses from interview questions and observations. The responses to the research questions were derived by aligning the data to themes. There were three conclusions that emanated from the data related to the research questions:

1. Elementary inclusion classroom teachers rely on basal instructional strategies to introduce and reinforce reading skills, but they recognize the importance of engaging students in more individualized learning activities.

2. Elementary inclusion classroom teachers struggle with diversified instruction, wide ranges of student ability levels, and coteacher collaboration.

3. Elementary inclusion classroom teachers require on-going training in diversified instructional strategies, instructing wide-range student ability levels, and working with coteachers within inclusion classrooms.

The aggregated data from interviews and observations led to the themes of the study. Research questions were the focal point in conjunction with alignment of the

themes to produce the conclusions. This case study was structured by the following research questions:

Research Question 1: What teaching strategies do educators use to instruct reading in their inclusion classroom?

Research Question 2: What are the instructional challenges of inclusion teachers when teaching reading to multilevel ability readers?

Research Question 3: What are teachers' perceptions about professional development support to improve the success of teaching reading in inclusion classrooms?

The first conclusion revealed that teachers relied on basal instructional strategies to introduce and reinforce reading skills, though they recognized the importance of more individualized learning activities. Although teachers felt unprepared, teachers displayed a variation of strengths in teaching reading. These strengths were using small groups, differentiated questioning in whole group, and even using cooperative learning groups to motivate a reading concept. The diversity of the population was frustrating for all the inclusion instructors. Participant responses indicated that the combination and blending of experience and knowledge or lack of these factors influenced instruction and perception of using multiple reading strategies in the inclusion classroom. Teachers provide a dynamic aspect that influences the learning environment in the inclusion classroom.

Teachers influence students' learning with their style, resources, activities and attitude of instruction in the inclusion classroom. Their level of knowledge regarding diversified instructional techniques in reading and their perception toward the diverse population affects students' performance. Many teachers expressed unrealistic and unmanageable expectations to meet the reading needs of all the diversified students in the class. Teachers realized that when students do not meet the necessary reading levels, it results in a gap in their education. For instance, Rhodes, Branum-Martin, Morris, Romski, and Sevcik (2015) indicated that "the achievement gap between students with disabilities and their peers is widening and that 69% of 4th graders and 60% of 8th graders with identified disabilities score below basic levels" (p. 545). Even though the teachers acknowledged the gaps in reading performance within their inclusion classrooms, they are not aware of how to adjust instruction to increase the reading competency skills. Teachers become frustrated when they reach the end of learning a segment, and they are unable to complete their planned lesson objectives with all the students. It is at this point that the widening learning gaps between the special needs and regular education students become most evident.

Instructors realized how important all subjects are; however, reading is a necessary skill used across curriculum and schedules needed to be adjusted to have more time for reading instruction. The teachers were confident they can incorporate many of the concepts from the content area subjects into broader time allotments for reading instruction. New learning is built upon and dedicated to information previously learned.

Learning is developmental, a process in which learned information is the foundation. The foundational information continues to scaffold creating an assimilation of information. When students misunderstand new concepts and instructions, the teacher should evaluate if this inability was originated from missing or deficient foundational skills where the new learning was established (Enid Acosta-Tello & Shepherd, 2014). Teachers are aware of the need for foundational abilities to build into the skill of comprehending and assimilating information. Some foundational skills lacking that were specified by the teachers were knowledge of print awareness, identifying sounds and letters of the alphabet, and knowing a story structure.

As I observed in these teacher's classrooms, the teachers were using an array of teaching approaches to engage students in broadening their knowledge and skills. Using basal readers was a common approach I saw in many small group instruction settings; basal reading approaches were convenient, and the lesson components were incorporated into a set of teacher instructions. These basal readers provided guidance to teachers about reading skills, lessons, and instructional strategies. Basal readers were also convenient for teachers to use to plan for small groups to work independently when teachers are working with other students. Teachers felt basal readers were a good tool to use for practice or fun reading. However, teachers believed these books were not the sole answer. Many teachers believed there were other strategies and tools available, but it is a matter of training and finding the resources. Educators expressed that they continue to search for

tools and strategies to use with their multilevel reading students in the inclusion classrooms.

The next conclusion derived from the teachers' responses revealed how teachers struggled with diversified instruction, wide range ability levels, and collaborating with coteachers. The interviews and observations provided formats for teachers to express their frustrations and provide perceptions relating to the challenges that occur in the inclusion classroom and the effects of these preventions on reading instruction. It was determined that time is a major factor when interviewing and observing the inclusion classroom. Participants were overwhelmed with the task of trying to use two to four different strategies with different levels of activities in a 90-minute time frame. The most common strategy used was work stations with various activities focusing on one concept. It was determined by the responses of teachers, that time limits, limited knowledge of differentiated instruction, and managing the classroom instruction to attend to all students' needs in reading were hindrances to instructing reading successfully. Although there were two certified teachers in the inclusion classroom to instruct reading, there were many encounters to confront besides instructing.

Collaboration with coteachers was also a challenge in these inclusion classrooms. The dilemmas that were expressed ranged from communications, dominance in instructing, and relationship issues. These issues could be dissolved with interpersonal skills training to produce a secure and confident team teaching approach in the inclusion classroom. Pugach & Winn (2011) found that "personal compatibility, as well as

volunteering, was central to the success of co-teaching" (p. 39). Teachers must be able to professionally work together to create cohesive learning environments. Friend (2007) recommended that teachers to communicate their strengths and weaknesses and create opportunities to share and build professional relationships to promote successful coteaching. Teachers who have common characteristics when it comes to educating students have a higher likelihood of success. Teachers sharing knowledge, instruction resources, and data can produce an incredible learning environment to the students in the inclusion classroom (Friend, 2007). Teachers must be willing to communicate and share prior to creating the ultimate learning environment. I determined through the data collected that teachers who are teaching in inclusion classrooms must have professional training. This training should include but not be limited to interpersonal relationships, differentiated training, communication and instructing wide range ability levels. Teachers planning to teach in an inclusion classroom need to have training in diversified instruction, instructing wide range ability levels, and mentoring in a coteaching classroom.

All participants expressed a desire to attend professional development in one or all the topics specified in the previous paragraph to assist in diversified reading instruction. The most desired and necessary training was to instruct reading with differentiated techniques, direct learning instruction, scaffolding strategies and coteaching approaches. Although a few of the participants had little training on instructing in inclusion classrooms, teachers had an optimistic attitude toward training.

The inclination to learn and improve reading practices to a diversified population and create an improved learning environment for all students were teachers' ambitions that resonated through the classroom. Providing professional development on ways to incorporate positive aspects and instruction strategies of reading programs for inclusion classrooms would provide optimistic learning environments that could even cross other curriculums. There could be meetings with the coteaching teams providing time for group brainstorming ideas and sharing concerns that occur in the inclusion classroom. Although the special needs group is not an overwhelming number compared to the overall population in the school, what is learned in the professional training can ultimately be transferred to instruction on any subject, creating improved student performance and motivation.

These participants believed support, direction from administration and professional development would enhance the current co-teaching programs in the inclusion classrooms. Hindrances were explained in the observations that the school was student centered, but the issue is trying to meet the reading needs of all the students in alignment with the curriculum. The participants shared their desires to create learning environments where they were confident with diversified reading instruction, and the teachers believed they did the best they could to reach every student in the class with their individual skills.

The data collection methods provided a voice to inclusion teachers to express their   perceptions regarding instructing reading to a diverse population. Educators

merged special and regular education students to instruct all students by engaging them in

lessons with high expectations for all students. By combining students in inclusion

classrooms, educators negate the typical teaching styles which may be counterproductive

and may lead to lower achievement (Guess & Thompson, 1989). It is less important to

focus on the classroom setting for special needs students; it is important for teachers to

use appropriate teaching strategies to accommodate and teach all special needs and

regular education students (Morningstar et al., 2015). Inclusion classrooms were

originated for this purpose.

Integration of the Findings with the Literature and Conceptual Framework

The themes, the literature sources, and the conceptual framework present a

cohesive direction for improving the instruction of reading for all students in inclusive

classrooms. Inclusive education offers the necessary resources and tools to improve the

quality of reading pedagogy to instruct the diverse populations of inclusive classrooms.

York et al. (1992) described inclusion as an ideology where individuals are valued and

supported to ensure they achieve their potentials regardless of setting. Friend and Pope

(2005) defined inclusion as students of varying abilities being welcomed into a common

learning community. Participants agreed all students should have equal access and be

involved with age appropriate peers. Three participants specified that the unique

individual needs of some students must be accommodated in the classroom.

A merge of students with a special education teacher placed in the classroom is

not enough to provide success in reading with all students. Participants acknowledged

that both special and regular education teachers are responsible for the education of all students. However, there are so many students with special needs in some classrooms, it was hard for the teachers to meet the needs of all students. Marzano (2007) noted that educational professionals should be held responsible for the academic achievement of every student. In the interviews and observations, participants realized there were research-based strategies for instructing reading which were successful in the inclusion classroom, however there were none provided unless the teachers could locate strategies on the internet. Marzano (2007) stated with many researched-based strategies that are successful, it is the responsibility of the teacher to choose which one(s) will work with their students. Teachers are willing to expand their pedagogy to have choices of diversified strategies to instruct reading to all students.

During the observations, it was clear the team teachers in the most effective inclusion classrooms contributed their effective reading instruction to knowing the students reading skill and abilities and to locating diversified strategies which would best connect with the multi-level reading students. Although, in discussion with these teachers, it was noted they were only aware of a few differentiated strategies to choose from. The teachers used various resources to meet the needs of the students. This philosophy was proven in the Villa and Thousand (2017) study, which resulted in creating effective inclusion schools requires embracing diversity as well as a dedication to ensuring students' needs are met. One participant referenced an important point: students with special needs do not reflect a large majority of the school population. As a

result, the focus was put on teachers who had students who were not successful on state mandated tests instead of training of inclusion teachers. It was understood by the teachers how this philosophy evolved, although the entire purpose of the ESSA was to encompass the entire population for academic growth.

Laws are imposed to ensure all students are guaranteed an education that is appropriate, free, meaningful and in the least restrictive setting (Boroson, 2017). ESSA (2015) claimed all students will be taught with high academic standards preparing all students to become successful for career and college. As reflected in the responses of the interviews and observations, training for teachers to successfully implement this task has been overlooked. All participants were in concurrence that to become successful in the inclusive classroom with teaching reading, teachers must be trained, supported, and directed.

Practical Application of the Findings

The purpose of this study was to explore the teachers' perceptions about reading instruction in an inclusion setting and to investigate what teachers believe they need to improve the efficiency of their practice. It is this information that provides research and strategies on teaching reading to a diverse population, allowing teachers to become independent in their use of instructional strategies in the inclusion classroom. Federal law requires the students with disabilities to learn in the least restrictive environment. The inclusion classroom provides a least restrictive environment for special needs students.

The turning point will be applying the data from the study to the appropriate persons to create a pedagogy sufficient for the inclusion classroom.

There are three themes identified in this study that aligned with the research questions. The first theme revealed that teachers relied on basal instructional strategies to introduce and reinforce reading skills. Although the inclusion teachers elected to use this method, teachers believed the students required more engagement of individualized learning strategies. In the second theme, it was discovered teachers realize and acknowledge the many challenges of instructing a diverse student population and the arduous task of collaborating with co-teachers. However, the teachers have not mastered the skills to work with the students and adults confidently. The final theme concluded that teachers are interested in professional development providing differentiated teaching approaches, direct learning instruction, scaffold learning strategies, and co-teaching approaches. Administrators should provide the inclusion teachers and classrooms proper tools and support staff to ensure an equitable education for students with special needs. Supplying research with the perceptions of the teachers in the inclusion classroom will assist in producing professional training with its focus on differentiating teaching, scaffolding, and other strategies to help teachers instruct a diverse population. By providing insight to administration, stakeholders and other interested support personnel who are interested in improving reading instruction, administrators will continue to support the needs and resources the teachers use to teach in their environment daily.

One of the significant accomplishments about this study was sharing perceptions of teachers who experienced the successes and challenges of working with diversified populations of students in the inclusion settings. Strategies concentrating on the student's individual skills were more successful. Inclusion teachers had challenges resulting from limited knowledge of differentiation strategies. Professional development regarding differentiation strategies in reading could provide teachers with confidence, resources, and methods to enhance their reading pedagogy. To initiate this action and to translate the needs of the teachers into action, I will present the findings and recommendations of this study to the participating school administrators and stakeholders. I will use a PowerPoint format to present the data and the findings which may serve as a guide for change and possible future research.

Implications of Social Change

The implications for social change from this research study concern opportunities for regular education and special education teachers to work collaboratively to provide for the educational needs of a diverse group of students. Identifying the beliefs, perceptions, and experiences of inclusion classroom teachers about the challenges and benefits of working within inclusion classrooms may help inform administrators who make responsible decisions about school programs and student placement. Schools of education may address gaps in teachers' preparation to work in co-teaching teams, instructing with differentiated strategies, and teaching multi-level reading skills within a time block. As teacher's preparations evolve and student populations become more

diverse, teachers should confront challenges related to learner inconsistencies in all classrooms (Jackson & Davis, 2000).

This study demonstrates a need to improve local school practices by enhancing the knowledge of inclusion classroom instructional strategies through the insights of inclusion teachers. This study provided understanding that school districts will have the opportunity to improve their educational program in the inclusive classroom through expanding the differentiated strategies, experiencing relationship cohesiveness, and instructing multi-level reading skills to provide improved instructional techniques with all students, including students with special needs.

Recommendations for Actions

Recommendations were suggested based on the findings, analysis, and conclusions of this study. The following recommendations are for: (a) Administrators, (b) regular and special education teachers, (c) Educator leaders. Recommendations for administrators at the district and school level should:

1. Work toward creating reading baseline assessments and protocols for all grades to have a standardize reading assessment which will convey the reading skills of all students.

2. Provide professional development on interpersonal relationships – especially for the co-teaching/team teaching staff.

3. Be proactive in placement of teachers and co-teachers in inclusion classrooms prior to the first day of school-allowing time to establish a relationship rapport

4.   Provide support for the inclusion classroom educators

Recommendations for Educator Leaders

Educator leaders at the district and school level should:

1.   Review and evaluate differentiating reading strategies to assist in improving

reading skills for the diversification population and share with staff

2.   Provide ongoing professional development relating to incorporating creative

reading strategies, students individual reading needs and curriculum requirements

into instruction.

3.   Provide professional development on different disabilities, teachers will confront,

that students may have, in the inclusion classrooms. (Multiple Sclerosis, Muscular

Dystrophy, hearing impairments, visual impairments, dwarfism, down syndrome)

4.   Provide flexibility in the reading time block by providing content with curriculum

frameworks, without perimeters of how or when to instruct reading.

5.   Communicate and attempt to acknowledge teachers willing to enhance their

pedagogy in instructing reading to a diverse population.

6.   Locate local districts with successful inclusion programs. Allow teachers of

inclusion classrooms to visit and observe, documenting data of successful ideas

which may work in the current local school.

7.   Co-teaching and other collaboration models for working with team teachers in the

inclusion setting.

8.   Ensure placement of special needs students in appropriate classrooms.

Recommendations for Regular and Special Education Teachers

Teachers in local schools especially with inclusion classrooms should:

1. Communicate to administrators and educator leaders regarding placement of students in the inclusion classroom.

2. Expand participation with the curriculum department, providing feedback with challenges or ideas in teaching reading to the diversified population.

3. Create guidelines on the responsibilities and collaboration of team teachers in an inclusion classroom.

4. Establish a meeting three times a school year (mandate at the beginning of the school year) to meet with all inclusion staff. (team teachers, teacher's assistants)

5. Attend professional development to expand the pedagogy of instructing diversified populations in the inclusion classroom. (Team teachers attend together)

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Recommendations for Further Research

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This study opens the door to further research in the areas of inclusion, special and regular education teacher preparations to work as co-teachers. The goal of inclusion programs is to educate all students by offering differentiated instruction and individualized approaches to deliver quality education for all students. Professional development programs need to address the specific skills required of teachers to work in collaborative settings to serve all students.

The recommendations for further research are the following:

1. Explore and research developing and structuring co-teaching classrooms.

2. Research the use of differentiated instruction and individualized approaches to improve academic skill in all students placed in an inclusion setting.

3. Research data to prove if inclusion classrooms are being successful.

Summary

As the researcher of this study, it is my opinion the education system needs to focus on instructing reading, and the impact it has on student's academic success, success in the community and success in life. The district of the elementary school has a mission to have all third through twelfth grade students be reading on grade level by the year 2025. As a result, the teachers in this study responded with critical concerns that students are not having their reading needs met. In seven years it will be 2025, these students in the elementary grades that are not getting their reading needs met will be struggling to read on grade level by the district's timeline. Although, there are a small percentage of special needs students integrated into the inclusion classroom, the numbers will continue to expand with growth and population. It is imperative the inclusion teachers instructing multi-level reading is firmly grounded with training so the development of the students reading foundation is improving from year to year. Otherwise, it will set back the students and educational system which will cause further frustration, dropouts and higher unemployment because of the students leaving school that are not able to read. These students will end up being a burden on society and socioeconomics will suffer from hiring incompetent individuals that are unable to read instructions, notes or send

appropriate e-mails. Reading is an academic skill which transitions into a foundation for success in all areas of life.

Teachers and students are not here because of the inclusion paradigm shift; they are all here to embrace diversity and differences (Boroson, 2017). Teachers must embrace the differences in students, acknowledge and respect their individuality, because it is in their uniqueness that enriches the school and teachers. Tomlinson (2013) states directly "A differentiated classroom provides different avenues to acquiring content to processing or making sense of ideas, and to developing products so that each student can learn effectively" (p. 1). Teachers in my study were vocal confessing having inadequate skills on how to differentiate the lesson concepts in a minimal amount of time and lack of knowledge with co-teaching models. One participant stated, "I'm not sure we are even instructing in a co-teaching model. We are unsure of what that looks like". Teachers in my study were brutally honest with their responses. There were only two that would hesitate when asked questions regarding administrators in the interviews.

It appears if we as teachers and educators do not acquire the training to instruct reading with multiple instructional strategies the students will be slow in understanding the purpose of reading. King-Sears (1997) recommend regular education teachers increase their teaching to daily use of multiple instructional strategies to create a sense of automaticity when instructing in an inclusion classroom.

Education and time is constantly changing. It is imperative that educators continue to learn to provide greater learning opportunities to their students. Mader (2017)

noted there has been strong progress implemented to integrate students with disabilities into general education classrooms. However, educator instruction has not advanced with the progress of integrating the special needs students. Benner, Bell and Broemmel (2011) stated effective education results from educators' development in content-knowledge, high standards and pedagogical skills for themselves and their students. Educators have a preference of trainings they can attend; students do not have a choice of what they are getting in the classroom. Teachers need to be sure they are providing the quality of teaching that students deserve.

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Appendix A: Observation Format

Date Interviewer	
Notes to Self *Here you can include your own concurrent thoughts, reflections, biases to overcome, distractions, insights, etc.*	**Observation** *Here you should include exactly what you see and hear from the objects, people, and/or settings you are observing.*

Adapted from *"Stretching" exercises for qualitative researchers* (2nd ed., p. 20), by V. J. Janesick, 2004, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. Copyright 2004 by Sage.

Appendix B: Invitation to Participants

Dear Colleagues,

As a Walden University graduate student, I am conducting a research on inclusion reviewing the dynamics of the classroom and the affect inclusion has on students' abilities to learn. Although studies and debate about effective inclusion programs have been ongoing for some time, a focus on the educator's perception of inclusion with its positives and negatives have not been exposed to the degree of requesting the instructor to express their insight. As you have been identified as a key member of the inclusion classroom teaching team at your school, your participation in this study would be invaluable. Your participation would only require about two hours in which time you would be asked to participate in an interview, and a 45 minute observation of your classroom. The observation time and day will be at your discretion.

I am seeking eight to 12 participants who have been teaching in an inclusion setting for three years. If you to choose to volunteer, you will be considered to receive an invitation to participate in a 45-minute interview (in person), and a 45-minute observation of your inclusion classroom at your discretion. The interview consists of four sections that include statements and questions investigating factors felt most important in educating students in reading placed in inclusion programs who work in diverse ability classrooms. I am attaching an informed consent form for you to review to better assess your

willingness to participate. If you are interested in participating, please send me an e-mail ██████████████████████ or contact me ███████████ indicating interest that provides contact information. I will need a response by (date). After that date I will select up to 12 participants from the group that has expressed an interest. If you are interested in participating, please sign the consent form and return it to me. I will ensure you receive a copy.

Your experience working in this unique environment is invaluable in that only those facing the challenges found in multi-ability classrooms know what they need in developing successful programs. The results will provide empirical evidence of the current state of teacher preparedness as well as provide information that could help ensure teachers are receiving the information they need to help all students achieve academic success in inclusion classroom environments.

Many thanks for considering collaborating with me on this study. If you have any questions or clarification regarding the study please contact me at ███████████.

Sincerely,

Ann Kempf, MS

Appendix C: Interview Protocol

Time of Interview: _45 minutes_____

Date: _____

Place: _____ _____

Interviewer: Ann Kempf_____ _____

Interviewee: ____TBD_____

Position of Interviewee: _____

Interview Protocol

This research study is focusing on techniques and strategies used in improving instruction

for all students in the inclusion classroom. The purpose is to provide an accurate vision of

an inclusion classroom and the multi dynamic abilities and strategies it takes to instruct

such a diversified population. It will provide a venue for teachers in this learning

environment to express their ideas regarding instruction in this setting. This study has

opportunities to improve the learning environment using differentiating techniques to

instruct such a diverse population in one educational environment by providing enriched

data from the perception of the inclusion instructors.

Thank you for your attention, thus far, I appreciate you taking the time to meet with me

today. My name is Ann Kempf and I would like to talk to you about your perceptions of

inclusion classrooms. Specifically, I am investigating what perceptions teachers have regarding the dynamics of educating such a diverse population in an inclusion classroom. I am performing this interview in partial fulfillment of my Ed.D. through Walden University.

This interview should take approximately 45 minutes. I will be using a tape recorder to record your response. In addition, I will be taking notes during the interview. The recording is to support your response and my notes. When the interview is complete I will transcribe your response, and provide you a copy of the transcription for your review. Remember, if this interview is printed in any form or fashion, your name will not be mentioned. Your responses will be considered anonymous. I have received your consent form and appreciate all the time you have provided to me.

Do you have any questions regarding the interview?

Okay, let's begin-push record on the tape recorder.

Start Recorder

Interview Questions

Research Question 1: What are the teaching strategies that educators use to instruct reading in an inclusion classroom?

1.   Describe how you differentiate reading instruction within an inclusion classroom?

Probe: Can you tell me about an effective whole class reading activity that you differentiated to meet the learning needs of all students in the classroom?

2.   How do you decide the reading strategy to use in your instruction?

Probe: What factors do you consider when selecting materials and resources for children?

3.   How do you integrate the requirements of the reading curriculum and the special needs of students into your instruction?

Probe: Share an effective method you have used to modify the general education curriculum for both general education and special-needs students.

4.   How has your reading instruction changed since you have been teaching in an inclusion classroom?

Probe: Tell me how you collaborate with your partner teacher and plan for diversification in each lesson?

5.   What do you believe are the essential elements when planning a lesson for reading in an inclusion classroom?

Probe: How do you ensure a balance of instruction time through large group, small group, and individual instruction in your classroom?

Follow-up question: Why do you feel inclusive education promotes successful learning?

Research Question 2: What are the instructional challenges of inclusion teachers when teaching reading to multi-level ability readers?

6.   Tell me about your experiences with instructing a diverse population within one classroom.

Probe: In what areas do you believe you excel? Struggle?

7.   What are the challenges and benefits of collaborating with another teacher?

Probe: In what areas do you believe you excel? Struggle?

8.   An important dimension of your role as teacher is to improve reading for all students in your classroom. What steps do you take to accomplish this?

9.   **Probe:** In what areas do you believe you excel? Struggle?

10.   How would you describe the culture of the school?

11.   **Probe:** Do you believe administrators and teachers are supportive of the inclusion classrooms? How are they supportive? What additional support or help do you believe they could offer?

Follow-up question: Why do you believe it is challenging to create a cohesive teaching team among two professionals, focusing on the same objective of educating students?

Research Question 3: What are teachers' perceptions about professional development

support to improve the success of teaching reading in inclusion classrooms?

12.   What kind of professional development sessions about teaching diverse student

populations in inclusion classrooms would be most helpful to you?

Probe: Explain how this would benefit you and your students.

13.   If you have attended professional development workshops about inclusion, what

was the most helpful information that you gained?

Probe: Describe an experience in which you effectively improved your

professional competence.

14.   Do you think professional development sessions about inclusion are needed for all

teachers in your school? Please explain why or why not? Will you please share

your perception of a "perfect" professional development session built around this

topic?

Probe: What might change if all teachers in your school gained a better

understanding of the operation of inclusion classrooms?

Follow-up question: Why do you believe in an occupation such as teaching, where

expectations are for students to learn new information, that teachers are so skeptical to

expand and develop their own knowledge base?