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**School Leader Perceptions Regarding the Role of the School  
Based Speech-Language Pathologists**

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**SCHOOL LEADER PERCEPTIONS REGARDING THE  
ROLE OF THE SCHOOL BASED SPEECH-  
LANGUAGE PATHOLOGISTS**

by

Dawn D. Guice, B.A., M.A., CCC-SLP

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the degree  
Doctor of Education: Educational Leadership

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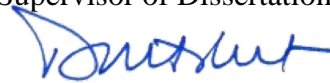
**Based Speech-Language Pathologists**

be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

**Doctor of Education, Educational Leadership Concentration**



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## **ABSTRACT**

Through this research, school leaders' knowledge-base, experiences, and perceptions regarding the role of the school-based speech-language pathologist were investigated. The purpose of this study was to address how school leaders perceived and interacted with speech-language pathologists and any barriers that affected leader perceptions. A qualitative instrumental case study design was selected for the study. Data obtained from personal interviews were analyzed and interpreted through a critical theory lens. Key themes that emerged from school leader perceptions included:

- (a) limited knowledge regarding the role of speech-language pathologists,
- (b) understanding of school-based challenges for speech-language pathologists,
- (c) limited knowledge on contributions speech-language pathologists provide, (d) school leader recognition of limited knowledge-base regarding speech-language pathologists, and (e) school leaders want to learn more about the complete role of the school-based, speech-language pathologist. Findings were interpreted relative to educational leadership, speech-language pathologists, and specific policies and practices related to school leadership.

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There are two verses I kept diligently in my mind and on my heart, when times of difficulty arose during this journey. Jeremiah 29:11, “For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.” And Hebrews 12:1, “Let us run the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith.”

Now as I close this chapter in my life a new verse emerges, 2 Timothy 4:7, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.” For everyone who has walked this road with me, or only for a moment in passing; thank you for all you did, for who you are, and know I will forever be grateful, thankful and blessed.

# **CHAPTER 1**

## **INTRODUCTION**

Speech-language pathologists (SLPs) are an essential part of the school student support team. However, due to the marginalization of SLPs secondary to lack of school leader support and job ambiguity among non-speech peers, SLPs are leaving the school system for other job markets. Based on current and future SLP shortages in the public school system, it is essential to retain current and recruit future SLPs. Conducting research on school leader perceptions regarding the role of the SLP and how those perceptions affect lack of support and increase job ambiguity among non-speech peers could improve the retention and recruitment of school-based SLPs. The perceptions of school leaders are essential because they are the cornerstone of the school building, and therefore affect the overall cultural climate of the school.

First, information is provided on the role of the SLP and school-based SLP, as outlined in the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) handbook and special education legislation. Next, the researcher will show the importance of retaining and recruiting SLPs to the public school system by providing background evidence to support the problem and rationale for the current research study. Then, the formulated research questions, theoretical framework, delimitations, and research limitations are discussed. Lastly, the necessary terms to increase understanding of the general information regarding the role of the SLP are listed.

SLPs have the unique responsibility to help individuals who demonstrate communication deficits reach their greatest potential (Jones, 2009; Van Hattum, 1985). They evaluate and treat speech, language, cognitive-communication, and swallowing disorders with individuals of all ages (American Speech-Language-Hearing Association [ASHA], 2009). SLPs practice at a variety of work sites, including (a) public and private schools, (b) rehabilitation centers, (c) nursing care centers, (d) universities, (e) hospitals, (f) community clinics, and (g) private practice (ASHA, 2009).

Based in Rockville, Maryland, ASHA is a national organization representing over 204,000 professionals. Per ASHA, 175,025 of those professionals are SLPs, with 58 % of those SLPs working within the school setting (ASHA, 2018). In addition, the expected job growth for SLPs from 2018-2028 is ranking SLPs as one of the fastest-growing occupations in the United States, with a growth of approximately 27% (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019). This projection of SLP job growth within the educational setting is determined by the following factors: (a) growing awareness of the importance of early identification and diagnosis of speech, language, and swallowing disorders in young children, (b) growth in elementary and secondary school enrollments, including enrollment of special education students, and (c) the continual growth of diversity and need for bilingualism (ASHA, 2018).

The mandatory legislation of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of (1975) directly impacted the need for qualified SLPs. The law guaranteed special education and related services to all eligible children with disabilities. Furthermore, it provided these services across a broad population by expanding eligibility ages from preschool children to young adults up to age 21. The Individuals with Disabilities

Education Act (IDEA) of 1975 mandated that all children receive free and appropriate education and recommended changes in school practices concerning special education. IDEA promoted SLP practices within the classroom setting and the routine pull-out service delivery model (Jones, 2009). IDEA legislation was amended in 2004 by Public Law 108-446-17, which required that highly qualified individuals provide services for disabled children and adults, thus influencing the qualification requirements for SLPs in the school setting (ASHA, 2009). Students today are more diverse and, with medical advancements and ever-changing technology, students' needs are more complex. Thus, ASHA's (2010a) Scope of Practice adds new expertise and expectations and federal and state legislation and local policies and procedures; thereby, placing greater demands and accountability on SLP professionals.

The paucity of qualified SLPs to serve students in the public school setting is a national concern: SLPs are at high risk for leaving school employment (Singer, 1992). According to an ASHA (2020), workforce trends survey from 2004-2020 of school-based SLPs, five hardships impact them in the school settings. These top five hardships included: (a) amount of paperwork (79%-83%), (b) high caseloads (55%-71%), (c) limited collaboration with other professionals (50%-55.9%), (d) lack of understanding of the role of the SLP by others (34%-41%), and (e) limited support from administration (21%-26%). SLPs have historically been and continue to be dissatisfied with the paperwork, high caseloads, limited collaboration with others, role ambiguity of non-speech peers, and lack of school leader support. These areas are directly related to the high turnover rate of SLPs in public-school settings (Blood et al., 2002; Edgar & Rosa-Lugo, 2007). I designed this study to gain greater knowledge about the marginalization

of SLPs within the P-12 public-school setting by investigating school leaders' perceptions regarding the role of the SLP.

### **Background Problem**

According to ASHA (2010a), SLPs play a pivotal role in supporting special education students within the educational setting. SLPs provide a variety of services for students to increase effective outcomes within the academic environment. The responsibilities of SLPs in school settings include prevention, assessment, intervention, program design, data collection and analysis, and compliance to all federal, state, and parish mandates. School-based SLPs work across all levels (i.e., early intervention, pre-kindergarten, elementary, middle, and high schools), serving students who exhibit various communication disorders (e.g., language, articulation, fluency, voice). School-based SLPs are also responsible for the following roles: (a) ensuring educational relevance of disorder, (b) providing unique contributions to curriculum, (c) highlighting language/literacy interrelationships, and (d) providing culturally competent services to all students (ASHA, 2010a).

The national shortage of SLPs continues to worsen. In 2014, there was a 48% increase in the demand for school-based therapists (Bush, 2018). Additionally, the ASHA (2018) Schools Survey reported a projected 55.3% increased need for speech therapists within the elementary school setting nationally and a 41.9 % need within the west south-central region, including Texas, Louisiana, Arkansas, and Oklahoma.

SLPs have pivotal roles and responsibilities that must be completed daily and weekly based on federal, state, and national guidelines. The size of a caseload, amount of paperwork, lack of collaboration, lack of school leader support, and job ambiguity by



non-support personnel has determined job satisfaction for school-based SLPs (Blood et al., 2002; Edgar & Rosa-Lugo, 2007; Flahive & Wright, 2006; Jones, 2009; Reeter, 2012; Schetz & Billingsley, 1992; Singer, 1992). However, the alleviation of SLP challenges regarding lack of administrative support, lack of collaboration, and job ambiguity will change through advocating and educating (ASHA, 2010b).

SLPs are responsible for supporting and advocating for their students (ASHA, 2010b). According to Hatcher (2017), advocating and forming student support systems are not easy because school leaders and teachers do not understand the SLP's role. Inclusion education for students with disabilities is another area that school leaders and teachers struggle with due to a lack of knowledge on properly accommodating or modifying curriculum within the academic setting (Cagney, 2009; Hanley, 2015; Morgan, 2015). Rosas and Winterman (2015) noted that teachers lack an understanding of inclusive education for special education students. Without understanding the necessary support system for special education students, this further compounds the inability of SLPs to provide appropriate service and support within the inclusion environment. Pre-existing perceptions and lack of knowledge regarding supporting students with disabilities have plagued special education, and consequently, no one is discussing it. Blood et al. (2002) and Edgar and Rosa-Lugo (2007) noted that SLP job duties have become challenging to fulfill, stress levels are increasing, support continues to be nonexistent, and consequently, SLPs are leaving.

### **Significance of Research Problem**

Gersten et al. (2001) found that building-level support from principals and general educators substantially affected virtually all critical aspects of (special education) working conditions. Values and supportive actions of principals and general educators influence special educators' sense of collegial support (DiPaola & Walter-Thomas, 2003). School leaders who clearly understand the needs of students with disabilities, IDEA, and the instructional challenges that educators who work with special education students face can provide appropriate support (DiPaola & Walter-Thomas, 2003). SLPs need to routinely examine how other professionals view their professional role and performance within the school settings that may impact students' service delivery and treatment (Miller, 1993).

Many school districts place SLPs under building-level school leaders' direct supervision. Examining school leaders' perceptions relative to speech pathology services has become essential (Jones, 2009). The relationship between school-level leadership and special education needs further study (DiPaola & Walter-Thomas, 2003). School leaders shape positive school culture by encouraging teacher leadership, team learning, collaboration, flexibility, and professional growth. Effective principals skillfully engage stakeholders, students, teachers, specialists, paraprofessionals, other support personnel, families, and business partners in developing child-centered communities based on (a) shared values and beliefs, (b) a coherent vision of the future, and (c) a mission to educate all students well (DiPaola & Walter-Thomas, 2003).

School-level leaders who understand the needs of students with disabilities, IDEA requirements, and the instructional challenges of serving students with special needs will

provide special needs providers with the support they need to be effective (DiPaola & Walter-Thomas, 2003). However, most principals have received minimal training in special education, despite knowing that they are responsible for serving all students (Browder et al., 2006). A paucity of empirical inquiry into principals' understanding of SLP's roles demands further research; understanding school leader perceptions could influence areas such as program planning, compensation, recruitment and retention, and student success (Jones, 2009).

### **Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this instrumental case study was to investigate school-level school leaders' knowledge-base, experiences, and perceptions of school-based SLPs. In qualitative research, the focus is on the process, meaning, and understanding derived from the data gathered during the study, allowing the researcher the opportunity to explore an individual fully within their natural environment (Merriam, 2009). Using a qualitative design facilitates a deeper understanding (Merriam, 2009) of this underexplored special education area from the school leader's perspective.

### **Research Questions**

The research questions were as follows:

1. What are school leaders' perceptions of the role of SLPs in public schools?
2. What are school leaders' perceptions of SLP contributions in their schools?
3. What are school leaders' perceptions of challenges that SLPs face in their schools?

4. What are school leaders' perceptions of professional relationships and collaboration with the SLP?
5. What do school leaders want to learn about school-based SLPs?

### **Theoretical Lens**

A lens of critical theory is appropriate for this study. Critical theory research aims to change and empower marginalized populations. Critical theory does not simply study marginalized populations but also seeks to critique and change the culture. Power dynamics are the central essential concept of critical theory. Critical theorists study how the construction of knowledge and the organization of power can lead to the oppression of specific individuals and groups. Critical theory is not tied to a particular methodology and can be applied to various contexts ranging from micro to macrosystems of context (Reeves et al., 2008). Critical theory is explanatory, practical, and normative, all at the same time. It explains what is wrong with current social reality, identifies the actors to change it, and provides explicit norms for criticism and achievable, practical goals for social transformation (Horkheimer, 1972).

### **Delimitations**

Delimitations are parameters deliberately established by the researcher to narrow the scope of the study (Creswell, 2012). I explicitly selected the parameters and geographical regions to obtain school leaders' perceptions in schools with high levels of students with disabilities (SWD). Therefore, I narrowed the study to particular districts, schools, and school leaders. Additionally, I targeted only the perceptions of public school leaders because they are the ones I was exploring to explain the research

questions. Further, I added delimitations to the study based on participant criteria. Participants were required to participate voluntarily, have three or more years of experience in an administrative role at the current school location, be a school leader at a school with high SWD numbers, and complete the interview process within a 9-week timeline. School leaders selected were located at schools with district-high SWD numbers; therefore, I assumed that they would have adequate knowledge about the role of SLPs.

### **Limitations**

Researcher bias is one of the potential limitations. The researcher's status as an emic researcher created a possibility for background and experiences to influence interactions with participants and the interpretation of findings. Limited external validity reduced the generalizability of findings due to the targeted research group, demographic locations, and specific research situation. Readers have to make naturalistic generalizations based on their own experiences and contexts. Therefore, the generalization of this study may not be possible beyond the target group and situation. Because it is non-experimental, there can be no claims can be made about cause and effect. Furthermore, the researcher can make no claims of correlations because of the methodology used.

### **Definition of Terms**

1. *American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA)* - The American Speech-Language-Hearing Association is the national professional, scientific, and credentialing association for 211,000 members and affiliates who are

audiologists; SLPs; speech, language, and hearing scientists; audiology and speech-language pathology support personnel; and students (ASHA, 2009).

2. *Articulation disorder* - Errors incorrectly producing sounds during spontaneous speech. Errors can consist of omissions, deletions, distortions, substitutions, or the addition of speech sounds (Hallahan et al., 2019).
3. *Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)* - A condition characterized by severe problems of inattention, hyperactivity, or impulsivity, often found in people with learning disabilities (Hallahan et al., 2019).
4. *Augmentative and alternative communication (AAC)* - Alternative forms of communication that do not use the vocal sounds of speech or augment speech use (Hallahan et al., 2019).
5. *Autism spectrum disorder* - A disability wherein symptoms of social communication impairment and repetitive/restricted behaviors fall on a continuum from relatively mild to severe (Hallahan et al., 2019).
6. *Blindness* - An individual's visual acuity falling between 20/70 and 20/200 in the better eye with correction (Hallahan et al., 2019).
7. *Communication disorder* - Impairments in the ability to use speech or language to communicate ideas, facts, feelings, and desires may involve language or speech or both, including hearing, listening, reading, or writing (Hallahan et al., 2019).
8. *Deaf* - An individual whose hearing disability precludes the successful processing of linguistic information through audition, with or without a hearing aid (Hallahan et al., 2019).

9. *Disability* - A disability is an inability to do something due to a specific impairment (Hallahan et al., 2019).
10. *Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)* - Every Student Succeeds Act is the primary law for K–12 public education in the United States that replaced the No Child Left Behind legislation. The primary purpose is to make sure public schools provide a quality education for all disadvantaged students (ASHA, 2016).
11. *Emotional or behavior disorder* - Problematic behavior that interferes with educational progress (Hallahan et al., 2019).
12. *Exceptionality* - Any condition or situation that may significantly interfere with a child’s ability to learn in school (Blalock, n.d.).
13. *Expressive language* - Encoding or sending messages in communication (Hallahan et al., 2019).
14. *Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)* - Primary intent of federal special education law. Every student with a disability has an appropriate public education at no cost to the parents or guardians (Hallahan et al., 2019).
15. *Hard of hearing* - An individual who generally has residual hearing sufficient to enable successful processing of linguistic information through audition, with the assistance of hearing aids (Hallahan et al., 2019).
16. *Inclusion* - Teaching students with disabilities in the same environment as their age peers who do not have disabilities (Hallahan et al., 2019).
17. *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)* - Federal Public Law 94-142 ensures all children and youths with disabilities between the ages of three

and twenty-one have the right to a free, appropriate public education (Hallahan et al., 2019).

18. *Intellectual disability* - A disability characterized by significant limitations in intellectual functioning and adaptive behavior as expressed in conceptual, social, and practical adaptive skills. This disability originates before age 18 (Hallahan et al., 2019).
19. *Language disorders* - Oral communication involves an inability to understand and express ideas, putting linguistic skills behind an individual's development in other areas, such as motor, cognitive, or social development (Hallahan et al., 2019).
20. *Other Health Impairments (OHI)* - Individuals whose physical limitations or health problems interfere with school attendance or learning to such an extent that they require special services, training, equipment, materials, or facilities (Hallahan et al., 2019).
21. *Receptive language* - Decoding or understanding messages in communication (Hallahan et al., 2019).
22. *Response to Intervention (RTI)* - A student's change, or lack of change, in academic performance or behavior resulting from the instructional intervention (Hallahan et al., 2019).
23. *Special education* - Special, individualized instruction is provided according to federal, state, and local laws designed to meet student's individual educational needs with disabilities or giftedness, or both (Hallahan et al., 2019).



24. *Specific learning disability (SLD)* - A language disorder with no identifiable cause; language disorder not attributable to hearing impairment, intellectual disabilities, brain dysfunction, or other plausible reason (Hallahan et al., 2019).
25. *Speech-language pathologists (SLP)* - Work with individuals with disorders related to speech, language, communication, swallowing, voice, or fluency (Hallahan et al., 2019).
26. *Stuttering* - Speech characterized by abnormal hesitations, prolongations, and repetitions; may be accompanied by grimaces, gestures, or other bodily movements indicative of a struggle to speak, anxiety, blocking of speech, or avoidance of speech (Hallahan et al., 2019).
27. *Voice disorder* - Individuals that have difficulty producing a sufficiently clear voice quality when speaking (Hallahan et al., 2019).

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

The review of the literature began by researching topics that included: school leader perceptions of inclusion, teacher perceptions of inclusion, school leader perceptions of speech-language pathologists, teacher perceptions of speech-language pathology, communication disorders in academic settings, perceptions of communication disorders, the role of the SLP in educational setting, IDEA and speech-language pathology, and speech-language pathology scope of practice. The literature search resulted in studies ranging over 40 years from each area indicated in literature review topics. At the same time, studies existed regarding school leader and teacher perceptions of inclusion and special education, few studies about school leaders' perceptions of SLPs.

The review of the literature culminated in 35 studies. Criteria for the review were as follows: (a) school leader knowledge of special education, (b) school leader and teacher perceptions regarding inclusion, (b) school leader and teacher perceptions regarding communication disorders in the classroom setting, (c) school leader and teacher perceptions regarding speech-language pathology in the school setting, (d) participants from the P-12 public school setting. Thirty-two studies met the criteria; therefore, I included those studies in the review.

Following the discussion of the theoretical lens, the first research pathway examines school leaders' knowledge as it relates to special education. Proper implementation of special education services at the school level is dependent on a school leaders' knowledge set and support. Furthermore, this understanding helps school leaders provide the necessary support for all personnel and students considered special education. School leaders who cannot properly support or advocate for special education students are doing their school and community an injustice.

The second research pathway examines school leaders' and teachers' perceptions regarding inclusion settings for special education students. How school leaders and teachers view special education students can affect their acceptance and achievement within the inclusion setting. Unfortunately, institutional practices that continue to be uninterrupted in school communities contribute to the marginalization of students with disabilities. These institutional practices affect all those involved in special education.

The third research pathway examines school leaders and teacher perceptions regarding students with communication disorders within the inclusion setting. Students who exhibit communication disorders are labeled as special education. Communication deficits can include articulation disorders, voice disorders, fluency disorders, and language delays. These students require extra support to be academically and socially successful. The way their school leaders and teachers perceive them is essential to their success.

The final research pathway examines school leader and teacher perceptions regarding the role of the SLP in the public school system. Understanding educators' perceptions regarding the SLP role is essential because of the student population served.

In addition, with a national shortage of SLPs within the educational setting, due to marginalization and job ambiguity playing a role in that shortage, perceptions are relevant information.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Critical theory aims to change and empower the marginalized population. This form of research does not study to understand society, but it seeks to critique and change the culture (Merriam, 2009). Critical theorists study how the construction of knowledge and the organization of power in society generally and in institutions such as schools can lead to the oppression of specific individuals and groups. Critical theory is not tied to a particular methodology and can be applied to various contexts ranging from micro to macrosystems of context (Reeves et al., 2008). Critical theory must be explanatory, practical, and normative. It must explain what is wrong with current social reality, identify the actors to change it, and provide clear norms for criticism and achievable, practical goals for social transformation (Horkheimer, 1972).

According to Esposito and Evans-Winters (2007), critical theory presumes a critical perspective. It questions what is going on, whose interests are being served, how the situation can be theorized or explained, and the researcher's role in implementing change. Carpenter and Cooper (2009) noted that critical theory is ideal for educational professionals to research rigorous inquiry into their professional practice.

Carpenter and Cooper (2009) conducted an educational study that employed a critical theory lens. Carpenter and Cooper conducted a critical theory study to investigate and address the school-wide behavior patterns of a group of seven-year Maori boys. This group of boys was academically struggling, challenging to manage, and had very

destructive behavior that adversely affected teachers and peers. The local housing area had a gang culture to compound the school issues, and the boys had strong connections. They hypothesized that the dominant culture of the school was marginalizing this minority culture, which was causing ongoing academic and behavior problems. After Carpenter and Cooper researched the Maori culture and visited neighboring school sites for model programs, 11 Maori students were selected and families interviewed. Over time, the students' behavior patterns decreased, and academic performance began to increase. Eventually, the boys were mainstreamed back into peer classes to see if their empowerment would carry over. In the end, the boys were successful and able to discuss what they learned while in the achievement gap class. Carpenter and Cooper (2009) reported that understanding the boys, their cultures, and their lives was essential to their success. Taking Esposito and Evans-Winters' (2007) position, this critical theory research was used in urban education reform by placing the students' needs first and recognizing their lives' social and cultural contexts.

Critical theory research targeting school leader perceptions regarding the role of the school-based SLP could assist in bridging the knowledge gap between school leaders and SLPs. The researcher selected a meaningful topic for a particular time and schools that could help understand the current perceptions of school leaders toward this marginalized group of educators.

### **School Leaders' Perceptions Regarding Preparation for Special Education Students**

The importance of understanding how school leaders view special education is critical because the school leader sets the tone and attitude in the school for all school

members, including students, teachers, paraprofessionals, support staff, parents, and the community (Hanley, 2015). The school leader sets a school's path, and it is the school leader who sets the tone for the entire school community (Horrocks et al., 2008).

Administrative support is the foundational component of a school-wide transformation toward inclusion. School leader inertia and mindset play an essential role in culture-makers accepting students with disabilities (Roberts et al., 2018).

Roberts et al. (2018) investigated school leaders' perceptions toward high-quality instruction for students with severe disabilities. School leaders were not able to articulate specific instructional practices demonstrated by teachers of students with severe disabilities. This limited understanding of the role of special education teachers produced low expectations for students with severe disabilities. The descriptions used by several of the school leaders revealed a failure to recognize that students with disabilities are everyone's responsibility within the academic setting, not just the special education teachers. This stereotyping leads to negative perceptions about students and their abilities. This perception about ability and access to educational spaces can perpetuate negativity within the academic setting concerning students with severe disabilities.

Hanley (2015) interviewed four school leaders from public-school systems to identify their understanding of special education. Themes emerged from the data that identified school leaders' experiences and perceptions of special education. The language of special education was inconsistent among the school leaders, yet they all agreed that inclusion was important for students with disabilities. There was variability in the terminology related to special education, supporting the research on the lack of specific training in their preparation. School leaders expressed a sense of being

overwhelmed when handling special education issues, directly related to not being adequately educated on special education expectations. Identification of basic types of disabilities varied among the school leaders, which supported the research on lack of knowledge toward disabilities. Future school leaders must understand disabilities, know best practices in specialized instruction, and ongoing understanding of special education.

Roberts and Guerra (2017) noted weakness among 84 school leaders covering elementary, middle, and high school settings. Based on survey details, 88.9% indicated their lowest knowledge level was on special education rules and regulations. Participants who did not understand the parent's role in the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) process were 86.4%. When asked about curriculum design for students with disabilities, 65.4% did not feel adequately equipped. Developing plans for program improvement in special education, 77.8% of participants were not comfortable due to a lack of knowledge. While school leaders do not have to be specialists in special education disabilities, they must possess essential knowledge and skills critical to accomplishing the challenges of special education leadership (DiPaola & Walter-Thomas, 2003).

Educators do not deem special education important enough to include students with disabilities in their classrooms fully. Administrators are the school setting leaders, yet they lack knowledge on special education laws, student disabilities, modifying or accommodating curriculum, and special education procedures (Roberts & Guerra, 2017). Educators and school leaders feel inadequate to educate students with disabilities and had preconceived notions that only special education teachers and support personnel were responsible for those students (Hanley, 2015; Roberts et al., 2018). With a transition toward inclusive education for all abled students, there needs to be further investigation

of why educators and school leaders are ill-equipped to meet this new demand and cultural shift in education. Furthermore, marginalization among students with severe disabilities historically and continues within the educational setting. School leaders who are actively engaged in leadership facilitate school-wide commitment to inclusion as part of the school culture and set of shared values (Shogren et al., 2015).

Administrators are the culture-makers of a school (Hanley, 2015), and educators must understand school leaders' perceptions regarding their knowledge and competence with special education. With a limited understanding of special education, school leaders have difficulty supporting teachers, support personnel, and students appropriately (DiPaola & Walter-Thomas, 2003). Furthermore, the way teachers perceive special education students and their role in supporting such students continues the marginalization of this population (Morgan, 2015). Therefore, it is crucial to understand school leaders' and teachers' perceptions regarding inclusive education (Roberts & Guerra, 2017).

### **School Leader/Teacher Perceptions Regarding Inclusion or Full Membership of Special Education Students**

Full membership is the acceptance and belonging in a school community in which all stakeholders have a voice, and the culture reflects these values and beliefs (Morgan, 2015). Unfortunately, marginalizing institutional practices that continue to be uninterrupted in school communities affect students with disabilities. School leaders, teachers, students, and community leaders are incapable or unwilling to disrupt values, labels, and assumptions that prevent the full membership of special education students



(Black & Burrello, 2010). Challenges include educator mindset toward students with disabilities and access to full membership opportunities (Morgan, 2015).

Cagney (2009) examined general education teachers' attitudes about educating students with special needs in their classrooms. The teachers' attitudes about supporting full inclusion ranged from neutral to positive. Even though there were positive attitudes and beliefs about special education student success within inclusion, they were neutral about supporting full inclusion. The general education teachers were not 100% willing to provide the necessary accommodations in the classroom setting due to the associated additional workload. Cagney noted that regular education teachers' attitudes could harm special education students' psychological and educational adjustment within the inclusion setting.

Morgan (2015) studied high school teachers' perceptions of inclusion for high school students with disabilities because teachers are among the most critical variables in providing full membership opportunities for students with disabilities. The attitudes about supporting full inclusion were positive; however, Morgan noted teacher limitations. Inclusion would be acceptable if they have the support and it is safe. Teachers viewed a student's disability as a limitation, including cognitive, behavioral, social, and communication. Some teachers believed the high academic expectations would be too much, and how peers viewed those students within the educational setting could lead to bullying. The overall theme developed during the study indicated:

Full membership is important and a deserved right of all students if the students are cognitively able to participate and follow the appropriate social rules. The school community must rally together to ensure that the necessary support is in

place, including specially trained general and special education teachers, along with peer mentors to ensure success. (Morgan, 2015, p. 7)

Kern (2006) investigated the attitudes of inclusion with P-12 regular and special education teachers in an urban school district. This particular study was selected because of the growing prevalence of inclusive education for students with special needs, secondary to acts of legislation. Regular education teachers are vital service providers in inclusive education for students with special needs, and their attitudes are essential to understand (Kern, 2006).

Teachers held a neutral attitude regarding inclusion education; however, this depended on the severity of the disability. The lack of appropriate training was a crucial factor in preventing positive teacher attitudes toward special needs students. Support from administration, peers, and direct consultation through collaboration would assist with more positive attitudes toward inclusion education. Most teachers believed that their school leaders did not provide enough support, materials, or time to attend conferences addressing students with special needs. In conclusion, the attitudes of the teachers were compiled within five domains that included: (a) student variables, (b) peer support, (c) administrative support, (d) collaboration, and (e) proper training (Kern, 2006).

Inclusive education has become more prevalent for students with disabilities. Educators continue not fully to support this movement (Cagney, 2009). Cagney (2009) found that students with disabilities deserved an inclusive education; however, only if they did not impose extra responsibilities on the teacher. These noted additional responsibilities included increased paperwork, behavioral issues, curriculum

accommodation or modification, accountability for student success, and possible bullying (Morgan, 2015). Educators further noted that they perceived insufficient support from school leaders or had limited educational background to support special education students' inclusion (Kern, 2006). What was not evident in the research is why educators perceive special education students as a liability and problem rather than a diverse learner student, further indicating the marginalization of this student population. Various professional and personal experiences cultivate educators' beliefs about students with disabilities. Cultural constructs of differences are representative of individual attitudes, ideas, and values. Such constructs often shape an educator's view and interactions with students with disabilities (Steele, 2012).

First, it was noted that school leaders have limited to no understanding of special education, which resulted in the inability to provide the necessary knowledge and guidance needed for teachers to support special education students within the inclusion setting (Morgan, 2015). Thus teachers continue to hold onto a belief system that special education teachers and support personnel are the ones responsible for educating those students (Cagney, 2009). With regular education educators not fully understanding or supporting the inclusion placement, special education students and their support personnel further marginalize special education students (Morgan, 2015).

### **School Leader/Teacher Perceptions Regarding Students with Communication Disorders**

When a child qualifies for speech-language services, he/she receives the special education label. Elementary-age students have a high rate of speech and language disorders as they are still attempting to figure out correct speech sound productions while

language continues to emerge. Around 1 in 12 children in the preschool population are affected by speech and language disorders (Prelock et al., 2008). As students with speech-language disorders numbers increase, teachers who teach P-12th grade must accommodate speech-language impairment students in their classroom settings. Parents also worry whether their child is unfairly treated based on their acquired label (Johnson, 2015). Over the past 50 years, the consensus has been that people with speech-language disorders are disadvantaged both socially and academically. Therefore, teachers' perceptions of a speech-language disorder student may influence the teachers' academic, social, and behavioral expectations (Overby et al., 2007).

Bennett and Runyan (1982) studied 282 educators' perceptions of the effects of communication disorders upon academic success. When questionnaires were analyzed, 66% of the educators believed that communication disorders negatively impact a child within the educational setting. In addition, educators perceived articulation disorders to hinder the child's success in the classroom and social situations more so than a language disorder, a fluency disorder, or a voice disorder. Educators believed that therapy could improve a child's success. However, there was limited understanding of communication disorders.

Overby et al. (2007) investigated 48 second-grade teachers' perceptions toward students with articulation disorders using a mixed-methods approach. They presented different speech samples and asked the teachers to judge similar attributes. Rice et al. (1993) conducted a similar study with elementary school teachers that utilized various speech samples of students with articulation disorders. Both documented negative perceptions of students with articulation disorders, primarily in terms of academic

performance. The students were rated considerably lower than their non-disabled peers. Students with speech impairments were ranked lowest in intelligibility, leadership ability, social maturity, academic success, and intelligence (Overby et al., 2007; Rice et al., 1993).

Sadler (2005) found that 90% of the 89 teachers studied had no speech and language disorders training. Those teachers who reported having training, none considered their training to be enough. Among the participants, 88% rated their knowledge of speech and language disorders to be limited or very limited and that 72% of teachers believed their confidence was non-existent or not very strong. Seventy-one percent of the teachers believed that students with articulation disorders might be disadvantaged academically for life, though they may eventually catch up with their non-disabled peers.

Teachers who were knowledgeable about articulation disorders had more positive perceptions of students with an articulation disorder than teachers who did not have prior education. They received this education through direct observations of articulation therapy sessions with an SLP (Ebert & Prelock, 1994).

Lass et al. (1992) investigated 103 elementary and secondary teachers' perceptions of students who stutter in school systems across West Virginia, Alabama, Louisiana, Pennsylvania, and Ohio. Most participants, 63.1%, noted they had students who stutter in their classrooms. The teachers' perceptions of stutters included many negative personality stereotypes, including shy, insecure, nervous, and anxious.

Lass et al. (1994) conducted a follow-up study with 42 school leaders on their perceptions toward students who stutter. The leaders worked in school systems across

West Virginia, Alabama, Louisiana, and Texas. Because of the vital role school leaders have in the educational process and the strong influence on teachers' attitudes toward their students, this study was conducted. A vast majority of participants, 90.5%, had known people who stuttered. The results were very similar to those obtained from the previous study on teachers and special educators. Both investigations revealed the negative perceptions of teachers and school leaders on students who stutter, which may have adverse effects on the educational progress of students who stutter. School leader perceptions of students who stutter included many negative stereotypes. This generalization reflected faulty, unfounded preconceptions of and bias toward students who stutter.

Westrum (2019) examined 50 elementary school teachers from North Dakota regarding their perceptions toward augmentative and alternative communication used in the academic setting. Westrum selected this topic due to the increasing number of students with disabilities placed in the inclusion setting. Even though many of the students utilized augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) devices to access social and academic activities, the evidence indicated that only 30% of the teachers held positive attitudes or perceptions of AAC. General education teachers had positive attitudes and perceptions relative to the foundation that all students can learn to communicate; however, self-efficacy and the complexities of inclusive practices, including the roles and responsibilities of other professionals, appeared to be barriers. Furthermore, a lack of support from school leaders, family members, and SLPs decreased self-efficacy and intention to implement AAC.

There were many misconceptions and false generalizations about students with communication disorders (Lass et al., 1992, 1994; Overby et al., 2007; Rice et al., 1993). Teachers viewed children with speech-language disorders as deficient and underestimated their performance and cognitive abilities in the classroom (Ripich, 1989). The studies identified educators' perceptions toward students with communication disorders; however, the rationale behind noted perceptions was not studied. When SLPs educated teachers on communication disorders, the misconceptions changed (Ebert & Prelock, 1994). Therefore, further research should be conducted on how prior knowledge and understanding of communication disorders can affect perceptions within the academic setting. The SLP should provide professional development for teachers because teachers' perceptions toward students with communication disorders can affect their academic, social, and behavioral expectations (Ebert & Prelock, 1994).

School leaders are not equipped with the necessary knowledge to feel confident regarding special education and its students (Hanley, 2015). Teachers do not feel as if the education of special education students is their responsibility and only want to include them in the inclusion setting with the proper support provided (Morgan, 2015). Perceptions of students with communication disorders are the same as special education students compared to their peers (Lass et al., 1992, 1994). With many students exhibiting communication disorders and the perceptions of school leaders and teachers regarding those student populations, the role of the SLP in the school setting is essential to understand.

### **School Leaders/Teachers Perceptions Regarding SLPs**

A significant challenge of the public-school SLP is to become an active member of the educational team. SLPs assume a leadership roles in improving students' communication skills while being sensitive to the concerns of fellow educators who have their perspectives for the student's overall academic program (Tomes & Sanger, 1986). SLPs need to examine coworkers' perceptions toward their professional roles and performance because professional relations can impact the overall treatment services provided to students (Sanger et al., 1995). The studies concerning school leader and teacher attitudes toward the role of the SLP are minimal. Due to the challenges affecting school-level SLPs today, future conversations need to emerge among policymakers, educational leaders, and SLPs to resolve such issues (Jones, 2009).

Ruscello et al. (1980) conducted a quantitative study investigating educators' attitudes toward speech-language pathology programs utilizing The Scale of Educators Attitudes toward Speech Pathology (SEASP). The 103 participants, including regular and special education teachers and school leaders, completed the SEASP survey. The survey data indicated that special education teachers had more positive attitudes toward SLPs than other participants, possibly linked to their student population and increased interactions with SLPs. Ruscello et al. (1980) concluded that SLPs should have increased interactions with teachers and school leaders. These interactions should play an informational role to reduce negative perceptions.

Signoretti and Oratio (1981) conducted a quantitative study investigating teachers' attitudes toward public school speech pathology services. One hundred and forty-seven teachers from nine public schools (including elementary, middle, high



schools) across three school districts participated in the study. A 69-item questionnaire on a 7-point Likert scale gathered the participant data. The researchers used multivariate analysis consisting of factor analysis and canonical correlation analysis to analyze teacher attitudes toward the speech clinician, the speech-impaired child, and the speech-language program.

Teachers' attitudes toward the speech clinician, the speech-impaired child, and the speech-language program varied across all areas. Teachers had positive views on the speech clinician's friendly demeanor toward teachers and speech-impaired students. However, teachers viewed speech clinicians negatively regarding leadership and lack of collaboration about speech impairments within the schools. The attitudes toward the speech-language program were mixed. Teachers believed that they play a role in the treatment outcomes for speech-impaired students; however, teachers felt that the allotted therapy time for each student was inadequate. They perceived students with speech impairments as academically comparable to their non-speech peers; however, the teachers believed most would not grow out of their speech deficits. Teachers' demographic variables did not impact their attitudes toward speech-language services (Signoretti & Oratio, 1981). Additionally, to provide information on communication problems and build professional relationships, a more significant number of interactions between speech clinicians and teachers should occur (Ruscello et al., 1980; Signoretti & Oratio, 1981).

Tomes and Sanger (1986) conducted a qualitative research study to investigate interdisciplinary team members' attitudes toward speech-language services in public schools that used a 64-item questionnaire. Inter-item reliability analysis analyzed the

data obtained from 306 participants. Educators tended to react favorably toward school speech-language programs, which mirrored previous studies. Educators agreed that clinicians communicate effectively; however, they negatively perceived clinicians providing appropriate suggestions and helpful in-services. Educators held positive attitudes toward speech-language programs when they perceived that SLPs included their recommendations in the overall treatment program. Perceptions toward caseload size indicated that educators were uncertain as to whether they were too large. There was confusion regarding which team specialists should be primarily responsible for treating a speech-language impaired child, indicating a continued area of uncertainty about the “role” of the SLPs (Tomes & Sanger, 1986).

Sanger et al. (1995) conducted a quantitative study investigating the opinions of K-6 educational professionals, including school psychologists, elementary school teachers, principals, and special educators, about the role of school-based SLP. Six hundred and twenty-eight participants completed a 78-item survey with a 5-point Likert scale. Sanger et al. (1995) used an analysis of variance (ANOVA) to analyze the data. When appropriate, Sanger et al. (1995) used *post-hoc* analyses to investigate data further using the Scheffe test (alpha 0.05).

The investigation revealed similarities with Tomes and Sanger’s (1986) research. Educational professionals had positive perceptions of the school-based SLPs regarding advocating for students, personality, parent rapport, and advocating for their profession. However, educators indicated that they were uncertain of the specific “role” of the SLP, including the populations they served and their academic preparation programs for diverse populations and general education practices. In addition, teachers in the study

perceived that SLPs did not collaborate enough with educators and did not allocate enough time for speech-impaired students. However, the teachers continued to be uncertain about appropriate caseload size (Sanger et al., 1995).

Recommendations continued to reflect previous studies (Signoretti & Oratio, 1981; Tomes & Sanger, 1986), including increased collaboration efforts with school-level personnel and education on the 'role' and 'responsibilities' of the school-based SLP (Sanger et al., 1995).

Jones (2009) conducted a quantitative study to establish the perceptions of P-12 school leaders toward speech-language programs. Jones utilized the SEASP instrument to survey 201 leaders from the Florida educational system. Jones (2009) placed the items in a web-based program Enterprise Feedback Management Community, to collect data. Data were analyzed with descriptive and inferential statistical techniques, including univariate analysis of variance, Newman-Keuls multiple range tests, Bartlett-Boz F homogeneity of variance.

Research findings showed that there continued to be positive attitudes related to speech-language programs; however, a lack of knowledge about school-based SLPs' "role" continued to exist (Jones, 2009). In conclusion, facts were consistent with previous inquiries examining educators' attitudes and interdisciplinary team members toward speech-language pathology programs (Ruscello et al., 1980; Sanger et al., 1995; Signoretti & Oratio, 1981; Tomes & Sanger, 1986).

The usage of a quantitative study design that used the SEASP survey limited finding specificity. It would not provide specific information concerning the rationale for the school leader's reported attitudes toward speech-language pathology programs. The

study did not allow for conclusive statements about how school-based leaders could support SLPs in the challenges of shortages, workload vs. caseload, recruitment, and retention. In addition, due to the challenges affecting school-level SLPs today, future conversations need to emerge among policymakers, educational leaders, and SLPs to resolve such issues (Jones, 2009).

Hatcher (2017) studied K-5 educators' perceptions of the SLP's role in the Response to Intervention (RTI) process within a rural school in Georgia. The study included eight educators, teachers, school leaders, and reading specialists. Open-ended questionnaires along with intensive interviews gathered the data. Data were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed through an inductive method that used open and axial coding with thematic analysis. The findings concluded four common themes that participants deemed valuable. First, educators understood that SLPs are a resource; however, they were unsure how to access their specialty. Second, educators wanted more time allotted to work with SLP. Third, communication and collaboration needed to occur more often. Finally, educators desired a better understanding of the SLP's role in the educational setting (Hatcher, 2017).

The gap continued in the literature on school leader perceptions regarding the "role" of the SLP within the public-school setting. Much of the inquiries that studied school leader and teacher perceptions of SLPs only addressed perceptions of the SLP role in RTI services, speech-language programs, speech impaired students, and as interdisciplinary team members. Educators and school leaders had a basic idea of what an SLP does; however, there was a consensus on not understanding the fundamental role of an SLP within the academic setting. This lack of knowledge and understanding has

led to the continual marginalization of SLPs within public-school settings. Further research should be conducted to gain in-depth insight into the noted problem (Hatcher, 2017; Jones, 2009; Ruscello et al., 1980; Sanger et al., 1995; Signoretti & Oratio, 1981; Tomes & Sanger, 1986).

### **Summary**

The literature review addressed four pathways that supported the purpose of the study and research questions. Pathways of research included: (a) school leader and teacher perceptions on special education knowledge (Hanley, 2015; Roberts et al., 2018; Roberts & Guerra, 2017), (b) school leader and teacher perceptions on the inclusion of students with disabilities (Black & Burrello, 2010; Cagney, 2009; Kern, 2006; Morgan, 2015), (c) school leader and teacher perceptions on students with communication disorders in the academic setting (Bennett & Runyan, 1982; Ebert & Prelock, 1994; Lass et al., 1992, 1994; Overby et al., 2007; Rice et al., 1993; Sadler, 2005), and (d) school leader and teacher perceptions of SLP and programs (Hatcher, 2017; Jones, 2009; Sanger et al., 1995; Signoretti & Oratio, 1981).

The first pathway revealed that school leaders and teachers lack knowledge on special education laws, student disabilities, modifying or accommodating curriculum, and special education procedures (Hanley, 2015; Roberts et al., 2018; Roberts & Guerra, 2017). The limited knowledge set on special education has prevented school leaders from providing the necessary support for special education personnel, thus affecting student success. These perceptions continue the marginalization of special education students and support personnel, thus supporting the research purpose and questions (Hanley, 2015; Roberts et al., 2018; Roberts & Guerra, 2017).

Hanley (2015) and Roberts et al. (2018) selected qualitative designs to explore perceptions and attitudes using participant interviews. Roberts & Guerra (2017) conducted a quantitative descriptive study using surveys to collect necessary data. Lack of generalizability was due to small sample size, demographics, and limited geographical areas. Further research was recommended on gaining perceptions from school leaders regarding the understanding of modified curriculum development and providing diverse learning strategies and environments. Recommendations included adding special population and special education law classes to school leader programs. In addition, providing ongoing professional developments for school leaders about special education populations was recommended (Hanley, 2015; Roberts et al., 2018; Roberts & Guerra, 2017).

The second pathway addressed perceptions of school leaders and teachers regarding inclusive education for special education students. Teachers were not comfortable providing inclusive education to special education students because of a lack of appropriate training and insufficient school leader support. In addition, proper training, collaboration models, and support from school leaders can change teacher perceptions toward inclusive education (Cagney, 2009; Kern, 2006; Morgan, 2015).

Morgan (2015) used a qualitative research design using interview methods; Cagney (2009) and Kern (2006) used quantitative data analysis on participant surveys to gather participant perceptions. Weaknesses of studies included small sample size, geographical location, and demographics. Further research was recommended targeting factors that affect school leader and teacher perceptions regarding inclusive education. Recommendations were consistent across studies which included (a) professional

developments for school leaders and teachers focusing on special education, (b) incorporating collaborative models, and (c) the addition of special population classes in school leader and teacher preparation programs (Cagney, 2009; Kern, 2006; Morgan, 2015).

The third pathway discussed school leader and teacher perceptions regarding communicative disorders within the inclusive setting. Teachers viewed students who exhibited speech-language impairments as lowest in intelligibility, leadership ability, social maturity, academic success, and intelligence compared to their peers (Bennett & Runyan, 1982; Overby et al., 2007; Rice et al., 1993). School leaders and teachers hold negative perceptions toward students with communication disorders, which reflected faulty, unfounded preconceptions of and bias toward such students (Bennett & Runyan, 1982; Lass et al., 1992, 1994; Overby et al., 2007; Sadler, 2005; Westrum, 2019). School leaders and teachers lack knowledge and understanding regarding speech and language disorders (Bennett & Runyan, 1982; Lass et al., 1992, 1994; Overby et al., 2007; Sadler, 2005; Westrum, 2019). Ebert and Prelock (1994) reported that when an SLP educated a teacher on communication disorders, misconceptions changed.

Different research methods were used to gain school leaders' and teachers' insights on perceptions of communication disorders. Overby et al. (2007) used mixed methods with all other studies utilizing quantitative methods of research. Limitations across studies included sample size and geographical locations. The research mentioned above discussed the need for future research on educators' perceptions of communication disorders and educational performance. Recommendations that evolved from studies included increased collaboration between school leaders, teachers, SLPs, school leaders,

and teacher training on speech and language disorders (Bennett & Runyan, 1982; Lass et al., 1992, 1994; Overby et al., 2007; Rice et al., 1993; Sadler, 2005; Westrum, 2019).

The final pathway addressed school leader and educator perceptions regarding SLPs in the school setting. There are positive perceptions from school leaders and teachers on school-based speech programs and SLPs. Misconceptions about the role of the SLP within the educational environment continue to plague our schools. SLPs need to collaborate more with non-speech peers to reduce job ambiguity. Overall, educators want to know more about the role of the SLP (Hatcher, 2017; Jones, 2009; Ruscello et al., 1980; Sanger et al., 1995; Signoretti & Oratio, 1981; Tomes & Sanger, 1986).

The weaknesses of studies were that most are more than ten years old, and replicated studies utilized a validated survey in 1977. Studies consisted of small samples, diverse participants, and limited geographical areas attributing to the lack of generalization of study findings. Recommendations included (a) increasing school leader and teacher support for enhancing quality speech-language pathology programs in public schools, (b) training school leaders and teachers about the role of the SLP to promote understanding of the field, (c) improved program quality and assistance in the awareness of the relationship between academic performance and communication disorders (Phelps & Koenigsnecht, 1977).

Previous research did not include a qualitative research approach to understanding only school leaders' perceptions of the SLP role in the public-school setting. The benefit of understanding the gaps in school leaders' perceptions regarding the role of SLP was learning what areas to target in educating school leaders to increase SLP support, increase advocacy, decrease job ambiguity, and decrease marginalization of school-based SLPs.



Further research is necessary to explore the perceptions of school leaders regarding the role of SLP in public-school settings. Between 2009-2017, only one study was completed using the SEASP that targeted school leaders in Florida (Jones, 2009). However, the same results as previous studies emerged; further research was needed (Jones, 2009). Using an outdated SEASP survey instrument is inappropriate and cannot help empower the SLP because it is not a true reflection of today's public-school SLP. Change cannot take place at the school level for SLPs. At the same time, there continues to be evident marginalization, secondary to lack of school leader support and job ambiguity among non-speech peers (Hatcher, 2017; Jones, 2009; Ruscello et al., 1980; Sanger et al., 1995; Signoretti & Oratio, 1981; Tomes & Sanger, 1986).

The Jones (2009) Florida study utilized a qualitative approach to research design while maintaining the characteristics of a qualitative interview design model that helped to reduce researcher bias (Merriam, 2009). Semi-structured interviews were implemented to gather data from school leaders to collect an in-depth understanding of the SLP perceptions. Following interviews, I complete inductive analysis to interpret the data. In addition, pertinent documents were collected and analyzed to triangulate study findings further. This study followed the best practices and guidelines established by Merriam (2009) and the ethical guidelines promulgated by the Institutional Review Board. Chapter 3 outlined the qualitative design and the selected research design. I also included participant selection and chosen qualitative analysis for results in the subsequent chapter.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **METHODOLOGY**

The purpose of this instrumental case study was to investigate school leaders' knowledge-base, experiences, and perceptions of school-based SLPs.

#### **Research Design**

Stake (1995) delineated case studies into two categories: (a) intrinsic and (b) instrumental. This study was an instrumental case study designed to analyze a specific problem or issue. A case study is a holistic study, commonly used in educational research, that explores the richness of multiple perspectives in the context of real-life (Yin, 2009) through an in-depth exploration of a bounded system (Creswell, 2008). According to Marshall and Rossman (2006), quantitative data collection can disguise the participants' personal experiences. The qualitative instrumental case study approach gathered an in-depth understanding of personal experiences, knowledge, and perceptions that a survey or close-ended questionnaire could not have provided. This approach aligns with the critical theory framework in which personal interviews and individual perceptions are considered valuable data sources for gaining a deeper understanding of social phenomena (Seidman, 2013). Therefore, the qualitative interview process helped gather a more profound knowledge of this unexplored special education area from the school level administrator's perspective.

## Participants

Creswell (2003) suggested selecting participants with diverse experiences and views. The participant selection process was purposefully conducted and yielded participants well-suited to help discover, understand, and gain insight into school leader perceptions regarding the role of the school-based SLP; therefore, the selected sample was from one in which I could learn much. Criterion-based selections (LeCompte & Schensul, 2010) determined what selection criteria were essential in selecting the schools and leaders to be studied. These criteria included demographics of each school district on student population, district size, special education population, and the number of SLPs serving in the district. I gathered all the information mentioned above from state and local district websites. Out of six possible districts, only three superintendents accepted meetings to meet and discuss the proposed research project and ultimately agreed to participate in the study. After the three districts were selected, I chose elementary, middle, and high schools that fit the study parameters. The site selection criteria included the research questions and population dynamics necessary to obtain fundamental understanding and insight into school leaders' perceptions. Therefore, I targeted schools with high SWD numbers. I retrieved the SWD numbers from the Louisiana state website. Six schools within each district were targeted, totaling 18. Out of the initial 18, only nine school leaders fit the necessary criteria to participate in the study. Of the nine selected participants, only eight agreed to voluntary participation in the study.

Criteria for leader participation included only primary school leaders with three or more years in an administrative position at their current school. These criteria were critical because the participants would assist in fostering helpful and knowledgeable

perceptions toward the research question. First, school leaders control the cultural environment; thus, it would start at the top if a change were to happen. Second, real perceptions and knowledge come with years of experience. Third, working with the same grade levels and schools helped ensure that school leaders understand the corporate and educational culture. The selected participants were engrossed in the day-to-day business of educating, advocating, and protecting their students; therefore, their views were considered an asset to this study.

This study included eight subjects: Leader 1-A, Leader 1-B, Leader 1-C, Leader 2-B, Leader 2-C, Leader 3-A, Leader 3-B, and Leader 3-C.

Leader 1-A was a male leader at a public elementary school with a current student population of 344 with 7% being students with disabilities. Leader 1-A had been in education at an administrative level for 5 years at the current school. The highest education level achieved was a master's degree in education.

Leader 1-B was a female leader at a public elementary school with a current student population of 322 with 20.5% being students with disabilities. Leader 1-B has been in education at an administrative level for 3 years at the current school. The highest education level achieved was a master's degree plus 30 credits.

Leader 1-C was a female leader at a public elementary school with a current student population of 351 with 20.5% being students with disabilities. Leader 1-C had been in education at an administrative level for 11 years at the current school. The highest education level achieved was a master's degree plus 30 credits.

Leader 2-B was a male leader at a public middle school with a current student population of 304 with 22.0% being students with disabilities. Leader 2-B had been in

education at an administrative level for 10 years – 5 years as an assistant principal at a high school, and 5 years at the current school. The highest education level achieved was a master's degree plus 30 credits.

Leader 2-C was a male leader at a public middle school with a current student population of 566 with 18.9% being students with disabilities. Leader 2-C had been in education at an administrative level for 4 years at the current school. The highest education level achieved was a master's degree plus 30 credits.

Leader 3-A is a male leader at a public high school with a current student population of 910 with 13.3% being students with disabilities. Leader 3-A has been in education at an administrative level for 8 years at his current school. The highest education level achieved was a doctoral degree in education.

Leader 3-B was a male leader at a public high school with a current student population of 570 with 15.6% being students with disabilities. Leader 3-B had been in education at an administrative level for 12 years at the current school. The highest education level achieved was a doctoral degree in education.

Leader 3-C was a male leader at a public high school with a current student population of 1,198 with 11.3% being students with disabilities. Leader 3-C had been in education at an administrative level for 8 years at the current school. The highest education level achieved was a master's degree in education.

Table 1 includes the demographic results for the interview participants, identified by interview codes, current setting, gender, years of experience, the highest level of education achieved, and students with disabilities percent of the total school population.

**Table 1***Interview Participant Demographic Information*

<u>Participant</u>	<u>Current Setting</u>	<u>Gender</u>	<u>Years' experience</u>	<u>Education level</u>	<u>SWD</u>
1-A	Elementary	Male	5	Master's	7%
1-B	Elementary	Female	3	Master's plus 30	20.5%
1-C	Elementary	Female	11	Master's Plus 30	20.5%
2-B	Middle School	Male	10	Master's Plus 30	22%
2-C	Middle School	Male	4	Master's Plus 30	18.9%
3-A	High School	Male	8	Doctoral	13.3%
3-B	High School	Male	12	Doctoral	15.6%
3-C	High School	Male	8	Master's	11.3%

**Instrumentation**

Instrumentation consisted of two components. The first component was a participant questionnaire that contained close-ended questions to ensure each fulfilled the criterion necessary for participation (Appendix A). The second component was the interview protocol that included a series of open-ended questions (Appendix B).

I submitted the dissertation proposal to the Louisiana Tech University Institutional Review Board (IRB) for approval. After obtaining IRB approval (Appendix C), I conducted alpha testing on the interview protocol. Alpha testing refers to an instrument's internal testing to improve and refine the tool before universal use. Alpha testing included submitting the interview protocol to essential informant reviewers.

Reviewers included a school leader who worked in a school system, a professor in the speech-language disorders department, and a college professor in the educational leadership department. Each reviewer was consulted in an effort to obtain feedback on the content and phrasing of the interview protocol. The reviewers' modifications included combining two questions to reduce ambiguity and an added question to learn what school leaders wanted to know about SLPs. After the revisions were completed, the reviewers conducted additional alpha testing to see if any further changes were necessary. The informants did not suggest any other modifications.

I conducted beta testing on the interview protocol to ensure that the formulated questions were appropriate for the targeted population and answered the research purpose. The reviewers were an SLP and a school-level leader who completed the interview protocol questions to assess if any further modifications were necessary. Neither reviewer suggested any additional changes to the interview protocol.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

Data collection included using a multi-step process with school leaders. First, leaders who responded to the initial email from their superintendent were provided with a participant criteria questionnaire to ensure the correct selection of school leaders. After receiving the participant criteria that noted their eligibility into the study, I provided an informed consent form via email. The consent form included the study's details and documented participant acceptance into the study (Appendix D). After receiving each leader's consent letter, I sent emails to schedule phone interviews, discuss any questions, and schedule meetings. Each participant completed phone interviews answering questions deemed essential to the study as well as in-person interviews. Interviews were

conducted during the summer months to enhance participant availability and target times of reduced stress, aiming to obtain authentic perceptions during the interview process. Each participant preferred the interview to take place at his/her school location.

I conducted interviews conversationally to build a level of comfort and rapport with the participants. During each interview, participants' answers were transcribed verbatim in Microsoft Word to respect the COVID-19 social distancing guidelines, which inhibited interviews due to mandated face masks causing muffled voices that the recorder could not properly distinguish or adequately transcribe. Immediately following each interview, I emailed participants a copy of the transcription document. Participants read the typed transcription to ensure I had documented correct perceptions. All participants confirmed that I had accurately recorded their perceptions.

Pertinent documents were collected and analyzed. Documents reviewed included administrative job qualifications, administrative job duties, and state-level administrator eligibility requirements. I collected administrator job qualifications and job duties from the participating school districts. Furthermore, I obtained state-level administrator eligibility requirements from the online PDF copy of the State Administrative Codebook. Qualifications for school-level administrators were outlined in Bulletin 746 and reiterated in district qualifications. Qualifications across all districts were (a) valid state teaching certificate (Level 3 or Type A), (b) master's degree, (c) certification as Principal (Bulletin 746) or Educational Leader 1, 2 or 3, and (d) 5 years teaching and/or administrative experience within the last 5 years. Administrative job duties entailed five domains: (a) School Vision, (b) School Culture, (c) Instruction, (d) Professionalism, and (e) Other.



Based on the document review, I found no requirements pertaining specifically to special education knowledge for school-level administrators.

### **Confidentiality**

Creswell (2012) provided guidelines for ensuring that participants and locations were protected. During the process of study, I strengthened confidentiality by the utilization of a variety of methods. All electronic information (e.g., interview transcripts, consent forms) was kept secure by being stored in a password-protected device according to the guidelines from the IRB. As an essential component of confidentiality, in the study all school leaders' names remained anonymous. Rather than identifying them by pseudonym names, I referred to them as Leaders 1-A, 1-B, 1-C, 2-B, 2-C, 3-A, 3-B, and 3-C. Within each District, I identified the schools as Elementary School 1-A, High School 3-A, Elementary School 1-B, Middle School 2-B, High School 3-B, Elementary School 1-C, Middle School 2-C, and High School 3-C. The study results were reviewed to ensure confidentiality was maintained. After the required time elapses, the materials will be destroyed as prescribed by the research guidelines.

### **Data Analysis and Interpretation Procedures**

Inductive analysis was selected for this study because it allows the researcher to search for patterns of meaning in the data collected in order to formulate general statements about the studied phenomenon. Inductive analysis is well suited for studies whose purpose is to discover the cultural meaning from large data sets (Hatch, 2002). The inductive analysis draws meaning from complex data gathered with a broad focus in mind, thus providing greater confidence about what I reported concerning the study's

findings. Using the inductive approach for analyzing qualitative data can lead to reliable and valid conclusions in the end (Thomas, 2006).

Data analysis involved a sequential analysis through several stages, as described by Creswell, (2003), Hatch, (2002), Merriam, (2009), and Miles et al. (2013). The first stage of analysis involved data preparation through the verbatim transcription of interviews collected, excluding any identifying information. The interviews were conducted and the dialog was transcribed manually during the interview process. After each interview, a second stage of data analysis was performed by reviewing each transcript to develop familiarity and gather a general impression. The analysis process used was recommended by Hatch, (2002), Merriam, (2009), and Miles et al. (2013). In this stage, notes were added to the margins of transcripts and began constructing categories in preparation for future coding and analysis. The third data analysis stage consisted of the first cycle of coding and data chunks (Miles et al., 2013). These data segments were labeled to organize data into categories using the research questions (see Chapter 1) as provisional coding schemes. As Miles et al. (2013) explained, these provisional schemes were used as a starting point, later identified as emergent themes during analysis.

The fourth stage of data analysis involved refining the data segments in the “first cycle” with a deeper analysis and processing of the data. Individual and cross-analysis of interview data was conducted to identify commonalities, differences, and frequencies among the generated data categories and themes related to the research questions. The findings were then organized into emergent themes by creating tables specific to participants and research questions to facilitate the final interpretation of the findings.

The initial interpretation of data examined the answers obtained by research questions and then analyzed each answer set for meaning. I derived the meanings from comparing the findings across all school leaders with the perceptions gathered from research questions, the selected theoretical framework, and how those results related to existing literature.

### **Researcher Role**

The ethics of the researcher play a significant role in the validity and reliability of the study. Patton (as cited in Merriam, 2009) identified the researcher's credibility and rigorous methods and a fundamental appreciation of qualitative inquiry as three essential components to endure for qualitative research credibility. Researcher credibility depends on training, experience, track record, status, and self-presentation of a school-based SLP. I aimed to use this study to impact the education of school leaders on the pivotal role of the SLP within the school setting.

The researcher is a nationally certified SLP with 12 years of experience within the school system, private practice, and medical settings. I have worked full-time within the school system for 11 years, and I have been aware of the special education system's daily functioning. I have maintained positive and professional rapport with individual faculty after having had the opportunity to interact with them on all levels consistently. Over the past 12 years after working with students ages 3-21 across various settings and multiple disabilities, the credibility of current training, experience, professional track record, and presentation is evident.

### **Validity and Reliability**

Triangulation included interview analysis results, the documentation provided by human resources from the selected school districts, and state-level documents. I kept field notes from any interactions with school leaders. In addition, pertinent documents were collected and analyzed. Documents reviewed included administrative job qualifications, administrative job duties, and state-level administrator eligibility requirements. I collected administrator job qualifications and job duties from the participating school districts. State-level administrator eligibility requirements were obtained from the online PDF copy of the State Administrative Codebook. Qualifications for school-level administrators were outlined in Bulletin 746 and reiterated in district qualifications. Qualifications across all districts were (a) valid state teaching certificate (Level 3 or Type A), (b) master's degree, (c) certification as Principal (Bulletin 746) or Educational Leader 1, 2 or 3, and (d) 5 years teaching and/or administrative experience within the last 5 years. Administrative job duties entailed five domains: (a) School Vision, (b) School Culture, (c) Instruction, (d) Professionalism, and (e) Other. As recommended by Creswell (2012), member checks were conducted via electronic communication to support concluded research findings' data validity and reliability. Feedback was solicited from the school leaders by asking them to review transcribed materials and confirm the accuracy of statements. Thus, multiple data points were used and compared to verify each data source. I will discuss the themes that emerged during data analysis in Chapter 4.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **RESULTS**

The purpose of this instrumental case study was to investigate school-level school leaders' knowledge-base, experiences, and perceptions of school-based SLPs.

The research questions were as follows:

1. What are school leaders' perceptions of the role of SLPs in public schools?
2. What are school leaders' perceptions of SLP contributions in their schools?
3. What are school leaders' perceptions of challenges that SLPs face in their schools?
4. What are school leaders' perceptions of professional relationships and collaboration with the SLP?
5. What do school leaders want to learn about school-based SLPs?

#### **Analysis**

The first stage of data analysis was transcribing school leader interviews followed by organizing interview transcripts. All school leaders completed email questionnaires and live interviews; therefore, data included oral and written responses. Using a word processing program, the researcher transcribed the live interviews, and the initial member check was completed via email. All pertinent information was included in the

transcriptions, excluding identifying information that could lead to identifying the school leader.

The second stage of analysis involved completing an initial review of all interview transcripts to prepare initial coding and analysis of information for future analysis. I did not formally code data during this stage. Transcripts were reviewed multiple times and then initially coded by placing each interview into Excel sheets using the research questions as a provisional coding scheme. The initial codes were: (a) role of SLP, (b) professional relationships/collaboration, (c) challenges faced by SLP, (d) contributions of SLP, and (e) learning about the SLP. Further analysis emerged of the following eight themes.

1. School leaders have limited knowledge of the role of the SLP.
2. Perceptions were minimal regarding professional relationships and collaboration between school leaders and SLPs.
3. School leaders were knowledgeable on the challenges SLPs encounter.
4. Perceptions of school leaders' expectations of the SLP were consistent.
5. School leaders had positive perceptions regarding the contributions of SLPs.
6. School leaders perceive a positive relationship between speech services and academic success.
7. School leaders recognize a limited knowledge regarding the SLP.
8. School leaders were interested in learning additional information about SLPs.

I will discuss each theme in greater detail within the following sections.

### **School Leaders Have Limited Knowledge Regarding the Role of the SLP**

Participants identified a range of categories of students served by SLPs: (a) RTI, (b) identified speech students, (c) academically low students, (d) behavior concerns, (e) students with speech issues, (f) special education students, (g) articulation, (h) language deficits, (i) English-language learners, (j) Autism, and (k) Mild/Moderate/Severe students. School leader perceptions about the student populations in which SLPs serve were consistent. For example, Leader 1-A told the researcher, “my speech pathologist services students with speech issues, including language deficits, pronunciation of words, and English language learners.” Leader 1B stated, “our speech pathologist services students with articulation/language deficits, including those with behavior concerns.” Leader 1-C also commented, “the speech pathologist services students with articulation and language disorders, special education students, along with RTI students during the referral process.” Thus, elementary school leaders had a consensus on student populations served by the speech pathologist. However, each school leader included a different population; Leader 1-A with English-Language Learners, Leader 1-B with behavior students, and Leader 1-C including RTI students.

Middle school leaders demonstrated consistency in identifying student populations served by the SLP: (a) academically low, (b) special education, (c) speech impediments, (d) communication concerns, (e) identified speech therapy students, and (f) students with other exceptionalities. For example, Leader 2-B stated, “students that are identified to need speech therapy services and those with other exceptionalities, or academically low are serviced by one of our speech therapists.” Leader 2-C further

expanded SLP caseload perceptions by including students that required special assistance to communicate.

High school leaders' perceptions were consistent with the student population served by the SLPs within their school, including mild/moderate/severe intellectual disabilities and Autism. However, Leader 3-B included students with speech impediments.

### **School Leaders' Perceptions Regarding Professional Relationships/Collaboration with SLP**

Professional relationships were perceived differently at the elementary level than at the middle and high school levels. Elementary-level leaders believed they had good working relationships with the SLPs. For example, Leader 1-A stated that "i feel me and the speech therapist have a good working relationship, and communication occurs regularly via email or text." In contrast, middle and high school leaders perceived there was not much or no working relationship with the SLP. For example, Leader 3-A said, "when I see her on occasion, usually in the hall, we speak to each other.", and Leader 3-C stated, "i don't even know who my therapist is." With Leaders 2-B, 2-C, and 3-B, the professional relationship's consensus was "not much" or "no experience."

Participants identified limited opportunities for collaboration with SLPs. Collaboration only occurred during individualized education plan (IEP) or school building level committee (SBLC) meetings. Leaders, excluding 1-A and 1-B, only collaborated during IEP meetings. The other leaders included SBLC meetings.



### **School Leaders Understand the Challenges SLPs Face in the School Setting**

Participants expressed consensus regarding challenges SLPs encounter in the public school system. Even though they had limited knowledge of the SLP's role, compounded with little or no communication, school leaders still understood the challenges faced by their SLPs including (a) time, (b) caseload, (c) serving multiple sites, (d) lack of resources, (e) isolation, (f) lack of training for the school system, (g) scheduling, (h) time with students, (i) room availability, and (j) lack of peer understanding.

Elementary-level leaders perceived lack of peer understanding, scheduling, and caseload size as SLPs' most substantial challenges. Other perceptions regarding challenges were reported by Leader 1-C, stating, "speech therapists lack training for the school system, causing more challenges." Middle school leaders perceived time, caseload, and lack of peer understanding as challenges. Leader 2-C stated their perception behind challenges in the school building as, "no one knows what they do or the services they provide." High school SLP challenges were (a) time, (b) resources, (c) room availability, (d) not part of the school community, and (e) serving multiple sites.

### **School Leader Expectations Regarding the School-Level SLP**

Participants' understanding of job duties regarding the SLP was consistent across all levels of P-12 education. School leaders perceived SLP job duties as completing IEPs, adhering to special education timelines, and servicing/supporting all IEP students. However, two Leaders, 1-C and 2-C, believed that the communication of any concerns was an expectation of the SLP.

### **School Leader Perceptions Regarding the Contributions of School-Level SLPs**

There was a broad agreement regarding contributions to the schools and the students SLPs serve. Contributions included (a) building student self-esteem, (b) mentoring, (c) sharing knowledge, (d) enhancing student success, and (e) helping students express themselves. Leader 3-A stated, “speech therapists help students gain communication skills that are an essential part of life and their future.” While Leader 3-C included, “SLPs build the communication bridge for many students because we have a large number of mild/moderate/severe students on my campus. The teachers she worked with reported those things.”

### **School Leader Perceptions Regarding the Correlation of Academic Success and SLPs**

Participants identified a correlation between speech services and academic success. In response to research question 2, seven reported “absolutely,” where Leader 3-A believed that “the correlation between academic success and speech services depends on the student and their disability.” Therefore, school leaders had strong beliefs that speech therapy services correlated with academic success; however, there was no elaboration on what supported that belief.

### **School Leaders Were Aware of Their Limited Knowledge Regarding the Role of SLP**

Leaders across all areas of education expressed consensus that they are not fully aware of a speech pathologist’s role in education. School leader perceptions were solely based on experience during their educational careers, the school sites they served, and their educational backgrounds. In the elementary setting, leaders were curious about the

actual role of school-based SLPs. Two posed questions, while Leader 1-C reported, “that is her area of expertise, not mine.” Leader 1-A asked, “what is an SLP’s actual role? What do their speech sessions look like?” Additionally, Leader 1-B asked, “what services do they provide other than articulation and language therapy?”

Middle school Leaders 2-B and 2-C reported that they were not trained on the role or importance of the SLP. However, both Leaders 2-B and 2-C stated, “i want to learn about the true role of the SLP.”

High school leaders were interested in learning about what the SLP does with students and how they can help students. For example, Leader 3-B asked, “how can they assist with integrating special education students?” and Leader 3-C asked, “how can they help students across all settings and identify students?”

### **School Leaders Want to Learn How They Can Better Support Their SLP**

Participants expressed that they want to learn more about the SLP to support them at the school level better. Leader 1-A asked, “what are their perceptions of administrators? how do we give them more positive experiences in our school?” and Leader 2-B asked, “how can I better support my SLP?” However, as an outlier, Leader 1-C stated, “I do not feel I need to know anything.”

### **Document Analysis**

The primary value of document analysis to this study was in triangulating findings from school leader interviews. School leaders were generally forthright in saying that their knowledge of special education generally and knowledge of the roles of SLPs specifically was limited. Analysis of pertinent documents demonstrated that

the aforementioned knowledge is not a job requirement at the district level, not required for certification at the state level, and not emphasized by the university leadership programs at institutions in the state where the study took place.

Documents reviewed included administrative job qualifications, administrative job duties, state-level administrator eligibility requirements, and university leadership program requirements. I collected administrator job qualifications and job duties from the participating school districts. I obtained state-level administrator eligibility requirements from the State Administrative Codebook. Qualifications for school-level administrators were outlined in Bulletin 746 and reiterated in district qualifications. Qualifications across all districts were (a) valid state teaching certificate (Level 3 or Type A), (b) master's degree, (c) certification as Principal (Bulletin 746) or Educational Leader 1, 2 or 3, and (d) 5 years teaching and/or administrative experience within the last 5 years. Administrative job duties entailed five domains: (a) School Vision, (b) School Culture, (c) Instruction, (d) Professionalism, and (e) Other. Based on the document review, I did not find any requirements pertaining specifically to special education knowledge for school-level administrators.

Based on analysis of coursework and certification requirements, administrators were not required to take any special education courses to fulfill their certifications. Therefore, to obtain the necessary certificates at the state level for administrators, special education classes were not required. Furthermore, analysis of documents that contained the job requirements for administrative level jobs revealed no special education experience necessary to obtain these positions. The analysis of pertinent

documents supports the finding that school leaders have limited knowledge of the role of SLPs within their schools.

### **Summary**

Through data analysis, eight themes emerged. The eight themes included (a) school leaders have limited knowledge of the role of the SLP, (b) perceptions were minimal regarding professional relationships and collaboration between school leaders and SLPs, (c) school leaders were knowledgeable on the challenges SLPs encounter, (d) perceptions of school leaders' expectations of the SLP were consistent, (e) school leaders had positive perceptions regarding contributions of SLPs, (f) School leaders perceive a positive relationship between speech services and academic success, (g) school leader recognition of limited knowledge regarding the SLP, (h) school leaders were interested in learning additional information about SLPs. Themes will be used to answer the research questions in Chapter 5.

## CHAPTER 5

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this instrumental case study was to investigate school-level leaders' knowledge-base, experiences, and perceptions of school-based SLPs. In addition, through the noted research questions, the goal was to inform school leaders and other education leaders such as superintendents, directors, and coordinators about existing potential gaps in knowledge about the role of the school-based SLPs.

The research questions were as follows:

1. What are school leaders' perceptions regarding the role of SLPs in public schools?
2. What are school leaders' perceptions of SLP contributions in their schools?
3. What are school leaders' perceptions of challenges that SLPs face in their schools?
4. What are school leaders' perceptions of professional relationships and collaboration with the SLP?
5. What do school leaders want to learn about school-based SLPs?

I organized the discussion section by the research question, the themes that emerged from the data analysis connected with findings that answer the research questions: (a) school leaders have limited or incomplete knowledge regarding the role of the school-based SLP, (b) perceptions were less favorable among middle and high school

leaders than elementary level leaders regarding professional relationships and collaboration between leaders and SLPs, (c) school leaders were knowledgeable on the challenges SLPs face in the public school system, (d) perceptions of school leaders expectations on job duties, contributions of the SLPs, and academic success of speech students were consistent across all levels of P-12 education, (e) school leaders recognized their limited knowledge set regarding the SLPs' role, and (f) school leaders were interested in learning additional information about the SLPs' role. I discussed the findings and conclusions regarding the empirical findings from the literature review covered in Chapter 2.

### **Discussion**

#### ***Research Question 1: What are School Leaders' Perceptions Regarding the Role of SLPs?***

Research Question 1 is used to investigate school leaders' perceptions regarding the role of the school-based SLP. The majority of school leaders have incomplete knowledge regarding the role of the SLP. I analyzed the data from all participant interviews to address school-level school leaders' knowledge. Incomplete knowledge was present in the students' SLPs serve and the responsibilities of the SLP regarding such students. Beck and Dennis (1997) report that the way non-speech peers perceive the role of the SLP has prevented collaborative practices in schools, secondary to job ambiguity, which is an ongoing obstacle.

#### **Students SLPs Support**

School leaders' perceptions regarding the type of students with whom the SLPs work at the school level did not cover the full scope of student services provided by

SLPs. These perceptions that school leaders expressed through interviews aligned with the existing literature (Hatcher, 2017; Jones, 2009; Ruscello et al., 1980; Sanger et al., 1995; Signoretti & Oratio, 1981; Tomes & Sanger, 1986). I can speculate that this limited or incomplete knowledge is due to a lack of background knowledge or professional experience working with SLPs. Hanley (2015) noted such limitations, along with Roberts and Guerra (2017) and Roberts et al. (2018), due to the lack of special education knowledge.

Therefore, school leaders demonstrate incomplete knowledge regarding student populations that SLPs serve; therefore, uninformed school leaders lack a complete understanding of the SLPs' scope of practice as it pertains to school-based SLPs. This incomplete knowledge indicates a gap in school leader awareness and knowledge of specific student needs. Without a clear understanding of the role of the school-based SLP and student-specific needs that impact academic or social success, SLPs lack the necessary support required from school leaders to serve students with speech and language deficits (Hatcher, 2017). This lack of support can lead to unnecessary stress and difficulty overcoming challenges, which affects job satisfaction and ultimately results in their exit from the school system, as supported by the existing literature (Blood et al., 2002; Edgar & Rosa-Lugo, 2007; Flahive & Wright, 2006; Jones, 2009; Reeter, 2012; Schetz & Billingsley, 1992; Singer, 1992).

***Research Question 2: What are School Leaders' Perceptions of SLP Contributions in Their Schools?***

Research Question 2 investigates school leader perceptions regarding contributions of SLPs at the school level. Participants perceived the following as



contributions of SLPs to the school setting: (a) completing job duties, (b) supporting speech students, and (c) the correlation of academic success and speech therapy services.

### **Job Duties**

School leaders were consistent in perceptions regarding SLP job expectations at the school level. These included (a) servicing all speech students, (b) adhering to special education timelines, (c) IEP duties, and (e) communication of any professional problems. However, school leaders did not elaborate on the aforementioned job expectations. Therefore, they only understand the top layer of job expectations as it pertains to the SLP. The comprehensive literature review yielded no prior studies on school leaders' understanding of the daily functions and sequential steps that entail completing job expectations and requirements for school-based SLPs. Due to the lack of special education knowledge, as reported by Hanley (2015), Roberts and Guerra (2017), Roberts et al. (2018), school leaders do not have a complete understanding regarding the challenges that directly affect the completion of school-based SLPs' job duties. According to Blood et al. (2002) and Edgar and Rosa-Lugo (2007), SLP job duties have become challenging to fulfill, which increases stress levels due to nonexistent support, and, consequently, SLPs are leaving.

In most districts, an SLP's job responsibilities contract is usually signed and agreed upon by the director of special education, supervisor over SLPs, and the SLP. School leaders do not have copies of the detailed responsibilities of the SLP. Therefore, it supports the misconception that school leaders have regarding the role and responsibilities of a school-level SLP and further supports ASHA's (2010b) advocacy responsibilities for school-level SLPs and school leaders.

## **Supporting Speech Students**

School leaders have positive perceptions about the contributions of SLPs; however, they were limited to only speech students. School leaders noted the contributions from SLPs as increasing student self-confidence levels, communication abilities, mentoring, and enhancing student success. School leader 3A states, “speech therapists help students gain communication skills that are an essential part of life and their future.” These perceptions reveal that school leaders continue not to understand the SLPs’ full scope of practice, thus leading to the underutilization of SLPs’ expertise related to education. Non-speech peers have historically misunderstood the fundamental role of an SLP as recognized in the literature (Hatcher, 2017; Jones, 2009; Sanger et al., 1995; Signoretti & Oratio, 1981). According to ASHA (2010a), the SLP’s scope of practice and expertise in the educational setting goes way beyond the perceptions gathered from the participants. The actual SLP scope of practice included preventing academic failure for students with speech or language impairments and other struggling learners (ASHA, 2010a).

Based upon a comprehensive review of the literature, I found no evidence noting specific findings of the underutilization of SLPs in the school setting. During interviews, school leaders did not mention specifics on how SLPs could contribute to their schools beyond the students they serve. Furthermore, none of the document analyses indicates an understanding of how SLPs contribute to schools outside of their caseload contributions. Presumably, because of the lack of school leader knowledge compounded with a lack of self-advocacy from SLPs, SLPs are not recognized or utilized appropriately for their educational setting level. This underutilization of SLPs can affect the academic and

social success of struggling students. Additionally, this underutilization can hinder school leaders' abilities to support struggling students, resulting in poor student performance. Thronburg et al.'s (2000) study indicates that students in collaborative classroom-based settings did significantly better on vocabulary growth than in traditional classroom settings.

### **Academic Success of Speech Students**

School leaders perceived that speech-language therapy services directly affect academic success, which school leaders saw as contributing to their schools. However, no school leader expounded upon his/her statement. The majority of participant answers were "Absolutely," with Leader 3-A perceiving that, "The correlation between academic success and speech services depends on the student and their disability." During interviews, school leaders did not mention specifics on how SLPs contribute to the academic success of the students they serve. Furthermore, none of the document analyses indicate an understanding of how SLPs contribute to their student's academic success. Therefore, presumably, school leaders have limited knowledge of the SLPs' scope of practice regarding academic success, which indicates another gap in school leader awareness and understanding of an SLP's role and scope of practice (ASHA, 2007) in the school setting. If school leaders are responsible for teacher and student success, they should know how SLPs affect their students' academic success. Thronburg et al. (2000) reported that student achievement increases when SLPs and teachers become collaborative partners in the educational setting, which relates to school leaders' perceptions regarding SLP contributions to the schools they serve. Beck and Dennis (1997), Green et al. (2019), Thronburg et al. (2000), and Watson et al. (2020) researched

student success and the role of the SLP. Reading specialists (Watson et al., 2020) and teachers (Beck & Dennis, 1997; Thronburg et al., 2000) reported that they were unaware of the area of expertise SLPs hold regarding literacy acquisition and inclusion services for students and vocabulary development. However, when reading specialists and teachers became aware of the expertise of the SLP and how that expertise assisted in student achievement, both educators wanted to continue the collaborative partnerships. Also, Beck and Dennis's (1997) research concerning teacher and SLP perceptions regarding the inclusion model of services noted that when teachers and SLPs educate each other on their roles in the academic setting, students progress. Furthermore, teachers and SLPs indicated that it was more effective to teach curriculum vocabulary utilizing a collaborative co-teaching instruction model. When comparing traditional segregated education to collaborative education, which included SLPs, student scores were higher in the collaborative settings (Thronburg et al., 2000). The generalizations that umbrellaed across the studies mentioned above included job ambiguity and increased student success when collaborative models were implemented between educators and SLPs. Furthermore, the main barriers preventing such collaborative practices in the educational environment included a lack of school leader support.

***Research Question 3: What are School Leaders' Perceptions of Challenges that SLPs Encounter in Schools?***

Research Question 3 investigates school leaders' perceptions regarding the challenges SLPs encounter in the school setting. The responses of participants regarding the challenges SLPs face in the school setting align with previously noted research (Blood et al., 2002; Edgar & Rosa-Lugo, 2007; Flahive & Wright, 2006; Jones, 2009; Reeter, 2012; Schetz & Billingsley, 1992; Singer, 1992), except for lack of school leader

support (Blood et al., 2002; Edgar & Rosa-Lugo, 2007), which can help alleviate some of the reported challenges. School leaders perceive the following as challenges: (a) time, (b) caseload, (c) serving multiple sites, (d) lack of resources, (e) isolation, (f) lack of training for the school system, (g) scheduling, (h) time with students, (i) room availability, and (j) lack of peer understanding. However, existing literature indicates that the lack of school leader support (Blood et al., 2002; Edgar & Rosa-Lugo, 2007) affects multiple aspects of an SLPs scope of practice, ranging from advocating and forming student support systems (Hatcher, 2017), selecting service delivery models for therapy (Sanger et al., 1995), gaining support and understanding from non-speech peers (Flahive & Wright, 2006; Jones, 2009; Reeter, 2012; Schetz & Billingsley, 1992; Singer, 1992), providing inclusion services for education (Cagney, 2009; Hanley, 2015; Morgan, 2015), and increasing levels of stress secondary to the challenges as mentioned earlier (Blood et al., 2002; Edgar & Rosa-Lugo, 2007).

The noted challenges school leaders believe that SLPs encounter, such as (a) isolation, (b) job ambiguity, (c) room availability, and (d) scheduling conflicts, could be alleviated through increased administrator support. According to Gersten et al. (2001), lack of school leader support affects virtually all aspects of an SLP's working condition. School leaders could alleviate SLPs' professional isolation by including them in multiple parts of the building level community, such as Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). School leaders can offer professional developments (PD) during school-wide faculty meetings to increase the understanding of the role of the SLP, therefore decreasing job ambiguity among non-speech peers. Furthermore, school leaders could ensure a permanent classroom for an SLP to provide effective therapy and adequate

workspace to complete necessary paperwork requirements. Lastly, assisting SLPs in scheduling students when conflicts arise among non-speech peers or changing school schedules would greatly alleviate scheduling issues.

***Research Question 4: What are School Leaders' Perceptions of Professional Relationships and Collaboration with the SLP?***

Research Question 4 investigates how school leaders communicate with their school-based SLPs or view them as professionals in their school buildings. School leaders agreed that the primary form of communication and collaboration took place in IEP meetings, SBLC meetings, or scheduling conflicts as necessary. In addition, elementary-level leaders perceive that they had good working relationships with the SLP (1-A). Nevertheless, middle and high school leaders did not have good working relationships with their school-based SLPs, as indicated with the statements, "I do not know who my SLP is" (3-C), and "We only speak in passing in hallways" (3-A).

Limited communication and interactions between school leaders and school-based SLPs leads to a lack of necessary support and increased marginalization from the school community. This marginalization from non-speech peers increases stress and forms obstacles difficult for SLPs to overcome when properly supporting their students (Blood et al., 2002; Edgar & Rosa-Lugo, 2007). Consequently, SLPs have more difficulty providing support for their students in the inclusion setting (Rosas & Winterman, 2015). Per Leach and Helf (2016), inclusion therapy provided by SLPs increases the use of research-based strategies within the academic settings, reduces the number of students referred for special education, assists with early identification and, most of all, builds a rapport among all the stakeholders.

Furthermore, Ripich (1989) reports that teachers view children with speech-language disorders as deficient and underestimate their performance and cognitive abilities in the classroom. However, Ebert and Prelock (1994) found that the misconceptions changed when SLPs educate their non-speech peers on communication disorders. According to Beck and Dennis (1997), classroom teachers report being the team members responsible for knowing the curriculum and managing whole groups of children. An SLP's knowledge of language directs his/her primary responsibilities to be modifying, adapting, and individualizing the curriculum. Teachers and SLPs reported that success in implementing and continuing classroom-based interventions is greatly affected by school leader support (Beck & Dennis, 1997). Moore-Brown (1991) stated, "Change is usually the most difficult process in any aspect of life, but schools are one of the most difficult places to create change...Change must...ccur in the way teachers view their interactions with SLPs" (p.148).

According to Horrocks et al. (2008), school leaders influence the culture and environment of the school building. Furthermore, school leaders "set the tone" and attitude in the school for all school members, including students, teachers, paraprofessionals, support staff, and the school community (Hanley, 2015). Effective school leaders skillfully engage all stakeholders that impact student success, including students, teachers, specialists, paraprofessionals, and other support personnel in developing student-centered communities (DiPaola & Walter-Thomas, 2003), which potentially minimizes this effect.

### **What do School Leaders Want to Learn About School-Based SLPs?**

According to Beck and Dennis (1997), the way non-speech peers perceive the role of the SLP prevents collaborative practices in schools, secondary to job ambiguity, and this is an ongoing obstacle. School leaders' consensus that they are not fully aware of a SLP's role in education. Leader 1-A states, "What is an SLP's actual role? What do their speech sessions look like?" Additionally, 1-B asks, "What services do they provide other than articulation and language therapy?" Furthermore, Leaders 2-B and 2-C report that they are not trained on the role or importance of the SLPs, but expressed desire to learn more about the SLP. These findings align with the previous research (Hatcher, 2017; Jones, 2009; Sanger et al., 1995; Signoretti & Oratio, 1981).

### **Supporting the SLP**

School-level leaders wanted to learn how to support the SLP at the school level better. Participant 1A said, "how do we give them more positive experiences in our school? What are their perceptions of the school setting?" and 2B said, "how can I better support my SLP?" The overall consensus, excluding Leader 1-C was, "I do not feel I need to know anything more about SLP's in order to support them at the school level." Interactions between SLPs and non-speech peers should occur more regularly to provide information on communication problems and build professional relationships (Signoretti & Oratio, 1981).



## **SLP Student Support and Inclusion**

School leaders were interested in learning about what the SLP does with students and how they can help students. Leader 3-B said, “How can they assist with the integration of special education students?” Leader 3-C said, “How can they help students across all settings and identify students?” School leaders who clearly understand the needs of students with disabilities, IDEA, and the instructional challenges that educators who work with special education students face can provide appropriate support (DiPaola & Walter-Thomas, 2003).

There continue to be positive attitudes related to SLPs; however, a lack of knowledge regarding the role of school-based SLPs continues to exist. In conclusion, school leader perceptions were consistent with previous inquiries examining educators’ attitudes and interdisciplinary team members toward SLPs (Ruscello et al., 1980; Sanger et al., 1995; Signoretti & Oratio, 1981; Tomes & Sanger, 1986).

## **Summary**

Educating school leaders on how to support SLPs appropriately could assist in alleviating the challenges SLPs face on their campuses. Furthermore, such education could change their views and perceptions and shape interactions, thus improving behaviors toward school-based SLPs (Steele, 2012). This behavior change could improve job satisfaction (e.g., reduce job ambiguity, increase support) for school-based SLPs, thus increasing retention rates. School leaders need to be aware of special education policies and procedures to support SLPs in meeting their necessary job duties when challenges arise.

Professional relations, such as those between school leaders and SLPs, can impact the overall treatment services provided to students (Sanger et al., 1995). Increasing communication and collaboration efforts between school leaders and SLPs would provide the necessary stage for an SLP to educate non-speech peers on their pivotal roles in their students' academic and social success. Furthermore, SLPs can educate non-speech peers on how they can assist within educational and social settings to increase student success, and, thereby, decrease marginalization and collaboratively build partnerships (Miller, 1993). Thronburg et al. (2000) reported that student achievement increases when SLPs and teachers become collaborative partners in the educational setting.

Non-speech peers who learned the level of expertise SLPs have related to education reported that they were completely unaware of the multiple areas an SLP could assist struggling learners. Errored perceptions were noted in the areas of literacy (Watson et al., 2020), inclusion therapy (Green et al., 2019), academic relevance of therapy goals (Beck & Dennis, 1997), and language development (Thronburg et al., 2000). However, again, a generalization found in all the studies mentioned earlier was that the main barrier preventing collaborative practices in the educational environment included a lack of school leader support. This lack of support stems from school leaders' limited knowledge set regarding the role of the school-based SLP.

### **Suggestions for P-12 Leadership**

Previous studies found common themes that are deemed valuable. First, school leaders understand that SLPs are an educational resource; however, they do not know their specialties. Second, school leaders want increased communication and collaboration with the SLP to support them in the school setting better. Third, school

leaders wish to understand better the role of the SLP in the school setting and student success. Finally, school leaders understand the challenges SLPs face in the school setting; however, they do not perceive a lack of school leader support as a challenge.

Future conversations need to emerge among policymakers, educational leaders, and SLPs to resolve today's challenges that affect school-level SLPs (Jones, 2009).

These conversations can occur through district and school level PDs supported and led by superintendents, directors, supervisors, and SLPs. Advocacy at state, district, and school levels should become evident and consistent from state-level credentials, unions, SLP supervisors, and SLPs themselves. For change to occur, the historical and current societal perceptions that have guided educational interactions between all educators must change. These marginalization perceptions have embedded and supported the professional isolation of SLPs, special education teachers, support personnel, and even students. Unfortunately, this silently accepted and allowed treatment has left many SLPs feeling marginalized, leading to unprecedented challenges, compounded by individual skill sets being untapped and underutilized. This continued marginalization has led to SLPs leaving the school system workforce, resulting in continual shortages of school-based SLPs. Therefore, bridging the gap between school leaders, SLPs, and non-speech peers through advocacy, education, and implementation of change is of the utmost importance for current school systems, current and future school-based SLPs, and overall student success.

### **School Leaders**

School leaders should regularly attend PD better to understand SLPs and their roles in the education system and offer PDs to their school-level staff to increase

understanding of the role of the SLP. Through gaining knowledge and experience regarding the role of the SLP, school leaders can better support their school-level SLPs. This support system can help alleviate the reported challenges that school leaders are aware of, thus reducing stress on SLPs and increasing job morale. In addition, school leaders' understanding of job ambiguity and marginalization of SLPs will assist in implementing and supporting school-wide non-speech peer collaboration models. Although individual non-speech peers have varying views toward SLPs, providing training through PDs will help them understand the role of the SLP and the benefits of implementing peer collaboration models. This understanding will help increase the support system for special education personnel by decreasing job ambiguity and marginalization. Educational partnerships are essential to student success. Furthermore, school leaders who understand the role of the SLP and understand the proficiency areas specific to SLPs and the students they serve can better complete mandatory observations in a meaningful way.

### **School-Based SLPs**

ASHA (n.d.) promotes that SLPs should advocate for themselves in the school setting on their roles and responsibilities for students with communication disorders and other struggling learners. The ability for an SLP to provide the most effective services and make the most significant impact on students' learning depends on such factors as caseload size, the number of schools served, the workspace, and the relationships with school leaders and teachers (ASHA, 2010b). Based on the findings, SLPs need to advocate because of the evident job ambiguity and school-level challenges among school leaders and non-speech peers within the educational setting. According to Hatcher

(2017), advocating and forming student support systems are not easy because school leaders and teachers do not understand the SLP's role. Recommendations from Watson et al. (2020) include that SLPs advocate for their place at the table in school settings and begin the conversations. By self-advocating, SLPs can start to reduce marginalization through school leader education regarding the challenges they encounter at the school level and how they can assist in promoting student success.

Furthermore, SLPs can educate their non-speech peers on the pivotal roles SLPs play in the academic success of speech students and all students. Highlighting the different service delivery models available in which SLPs can collaboratively work with teachers and other educators will decrease job ambiguity and increase job satisfaction and leads to the utilization of SLPs skill sets beyond their therapy rooms. Lastly, SLPs should mentor new incoming SLPs into the educational setting. Through a mentoring process, new SLPs can learn about (a) learning job responsibilities, (b) advocating for themselves at the school level, (c) discovering service delivery models, (d) handling job-related stressors, and (e) developing necessary skills to be a successful therapist within the educational setting. During an SLP's first year, completing mentoring programs in an SLP's first year could increase retention and recruitment rates in educational settings, thus reducing a district's SLP shortage.

### **District Level Leaders**

According to ASHA (2010b), district-level leaders consist of school-board members, central office leaders (e.g., director of special education, district superintendent, curriculum superintendent), local professional groups, and parent/advocacy groups. Central office leaders are the ones who select the PDs for

school-level leaders and all other educators. They set the district's yearly goals, make or introduce curriculum changes, implement new programs, and initiate state-driven initiatives down to the school levels. With central office leaders gaining an understanding that the number of qualified SLPs to serve students in the public school setting is a national concern, and SLPs are at high risk of leaving school employment (Singer, 1992). Understanding how SLP's serve will help leaders to initiate changes related to increasing retention and recruitment of SLPs. Furthermore, understanding the multifaceted role (Schetz & Billingsley, 1992) of the school-based SLP (e.g., experts in language, literacy, and vocabulary development) and how it relates to student success (e.g., aligning IEP goals to curriculum standards and providing inclusion therapy) would decrease the underutilization of SLPs by communicating their importance regarding student success to school leaders and other educators. SLPs should be equal community member in the schools they serve. This inclusion should reduce marginalization and the underutilization of SLPs.

### **Policy Makers**

The scarcity of qualified SLPs to serve students in the public school setting is a national concern. Per Singer (1992), SLPs are at high risk for leaving school employment. With current and future concerns, there needs to be a greater awareness of the shortage of school-based SLPs and the role of the SLP in the educational setting. This awareness will begin implementing changes in the areas found that most affect the recruitment and retention of school-based SLPs (e.g., job ambiguity, lack of school leader support) and other special education personnel. Those changes need to begin with educational leaders having a greater awareness of special education policies and

personnel. Mandate changes to certification programs for educational leadership positions (e.g., school leaders, superintendents, supervisors, and directors) to have a greater awareness of the aspects of special education. Furthermore, this awareness will give them the leadership tools necessary to support and advocate for their school-level special education team and students.

### **Limitations**

Researcher bias is one of the potential limitations. As discussed in Chapter 3, status as an emic researcher created a possibility for background and experiences to influence interactions with participants and the interpretation of findings. I addressed this area of concern by engaging in analysis and reflections on the interview data and adhering to Merriam's (2009) guidelines for qualitative research. The interviews only gathered self-reported behaviors. Therefore, I did not observe the participants' behaviors in their schools. However, I assumed that all participants were honest and forthright in their perceptions. Additionally, I completed member checks with participants to ensure the validity of interview transcriptions.

The amount of data collected could be another limitation because qualitative research is not designed to yield generalizable results. The study results indicate that a systematic change needs to be made at both district and school levels about the role and usage of school-level SLPs. Such change could ensure that students are given the necessary support to succeed academically and socially.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

SLPs need to routinely examine how other professionals view their professional role and performance within the school settings that may impact students' service delivery and treatment (Miller, 1993). Based on the findings and limitations of this research, future areas of research recommendations include:

1. Replication of the study should be conducted in different settings.
2. School leaders were knowledgeable regarding the challenges SLPs encounter in the school setting; however, there were no elaborations on how they could assist in the noted areas. Therefore, a study should be conducted concerning school leaders' perceptions regarding the challenges SLPs face in educational settings and how school leaders can help alleviate those challenges.
3. Based on the research findings of school leaders wanting to know how to support their school-based SLPs, a qualitative study should be conducted on school-based SLPs regarding their perceptions on how school leaders could help SLPs in the educational setting.
4. School leaders perceive that speech-language services correlate with the academic success of special education students. However, they did not elaborate on how they relate. Therefore, a study should be conducted with school leaders regarding their perceptions of how SLP services correlate with students' academic success with disabilities.
5. School leaders acknowledge their lack of knowledge in regards to the role of the SLP. The perceptions gained from the study interviews indicate that individual perceptions were guided by personal experiences, the school levels



in which they worked, and their previous educational backgrounds. A study should be conducted on how school leader perceptions change regarding the role of the school-based SLP after attending a PD on the role of the SLP in today's school setting.

6. School leaders want to learn about the role of the SLP and how the SLP could help their schools regarding student success. Therefore, a qualitative study should be conducted regarding the perceptions of school leaders and other educational leaders on what areas of academics for student success should include SLPs.

### **Conclusion**

I designed this instrumental case study to investigate the perceptions of public-school leaders regarding the role of the school-based SLP. I identified the interpreted research findings during the analysis stage of personal interviews based on the critical lens theory using the research questions. The lens of critical theory aims to change and empower the marginalized population. This form of research does not study just to understand society, but it seeks to critique and change the culture (Merriam, 2009). Critical theorists study how the construction of knowledge and the organization of power in society generally and in institutions such as schools can lead to the oppression of specific individuals, groups, or perspectives. Critical theory is not tied to a particular methodology and can be applied to various contexts ranging from micro to macrosystems of context (Reeves et al., 2008).

Interpretation relative to the critical theory research reveals that there continue to be gaps in school leaders' knowledge about the role of the school-based SLP across all

levels of P-12 education. This limited knowledge has led to the continual marginalization of school-based SLPs secondary to job ambiguity, underutilization, and lack of administrative support. Since school districts continue to suffer shortages of SLPs and school leaders continue to strive to increase student success, the findings from this study can be used to develop and strengthen district and school-level support systems. Leaders can establish effective PDs for those in leadership roles to bring awareness and understanding of special education personnel and student needs. Additionally, school-level culture development can directly focus on today's school challenges and increasing non-speech peer relations. Mentoring programs for new and existing SLPs can assist in teaching advocacy and understanding their roles at the school level. Measures can be created to ensure that those in leadership positions are well trained to assume positions with great responsibility. School leaders have become the key to shaping positive school culture by encouraging teacher leadership, team learning, collaboration, flexibility, and professional growth. Effective school leaders skillfully engage stakeholders, students, teachers, specialists, paraprofessionals, and other support personnel in developing student success based on (a) shared values and beliefs, (b) a coherent vision of the future, and (c) a mission to educate all students well (DiPaola & Walter-Thomas, 2003). Therefore, filling the knowledge gap of the district and school-level leaders and bringing regular and special education educators to the table together through sharing of expertise is essential for the success of all students.

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## **APPENDIX A**

### **PARTICIPANT CRITERIA QUESTIONNAIRE**

**Participant Criteria Questionnaire**

Thank you for participating in this research study. Please answer the following questions. Your answers will be kept confidential. Nothing that could identify you (such as your name or the name of your school) will be mentioned in the research

1. What is your name?

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2. What is your current education level?

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3. What is the name of the school that you are currently an administrator?

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4. How many years have you been in an administrative position in the educational system?

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5. Have your administrative years been at your current institution? If not, where else have you been in an administrative position?

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## **APPENDIX B**

### **INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

Research Questions  
Administrators Perceptions Regarding the Role of the Speech-language Pathologists

Participant: \_\_\_\_\_

School-Level: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Location: \_\_\_\_\_

**Q1: How would you describe a school-based speech-language pathologist (SLP)?**

**Q2: What contributions do you feel SLPs make to educational settings?**

**Q3: What challenges do you feel SLPs face in the educational setting?**

**Q4: What is the role of the SLP on your campus?**

**Q5: Describe any experiences you have had working with an SLP.**

**Q6: What type of students does the SLP support in your school?**

**Q7: What are your expectations for the SLP?**

**Q8: What experiences have you had collaborating with the SLP?**

**Q9: Do you feel speech-language services and academic success are related?**

**Q10: What would you like to learn more about when it comes to a school-based SLP?**



**APPENDIX C**

**HUMAN USE APPROVAL LETTER**

## MEMORANDUM

TO: Ms. Dawn Guice, Dr. Bryan McCoy, and Dr. Richard Shrubb  
FROM: Dr. Richard Kordal, Director of Intellectual Property & Commercialization  
(OIPC)  
[rkordal@latech.edu](mailto:rkordal@latech.edu)  
SUBJECT: HUMAN USE COMMITTEE REVIEW  
DATE: April 10, 2020

In order to facilitate your project, an EXPEDITED REVIEW has been done for your proposed study entitled:

**HUC 20-100****“Administrators Perceptions toward the Role of the Speech-Language Pathologists”**

The proposed study’s revised procedures were found to provide reasonable and adequate safeguards against possible risks involving human subjects. The information to be collected may be personal in nature or implication. Therefore, diligent care needs to be taken to protect the privacy of the participants and to assure that the data are kept confidential. Informed consent is a critical part of the research process. The subjects must be informed that their participation is voluntary. It is important that consent materials be presented in a language understandable to every participant. If you have participants in your study whose first language is not English, be sure that informed consent materials are adequately explained or translated. Since your reviewed project appears to do no damage to the participants, the Human Use Committee grants approval of the involvement of human subjects as outlined.

Projects should be renewed annually. *This approval was finalized on April 10, 2020 and this project will need to receive a continuation review by the IRB if the project continues beyond April 10, 2021. ANY CHANGES* to your protocol procedures, including minor changes, should be reported immediately to the IRB for approval before implementation. Projects involving NIH funds require annual education training to be documented. For more information regarding this, contact the Office of Sponsored Projects.

You are requested to maintain written records of your procedures, data collected, and subjects involved. These records will need to be available upon request during the conduct of the study and retained by the university for three years after the conclusion of the study. If changes occur in recruiting of subjects, informed consent process or in your research protocol, or if unanticipated problems should arise it is the Researchers responsibility to notify the Office of Sponsored Projects or IRB in writing. The project should be discontinued until modifications can be reviewed and approved.

**APPENDIX D**

**INFORMED CONSENT LETTER**

**Human Consent Form  
Research Study**

Read the following summary of the qualitative study in which you have been requested to participate. Upon completion of the reading summary, please sign the statement that is located at the bottom of the form.

**Title of study:** Qualitative study for gaining insight on administrators' perceptions toward the role of the speech-language pathologists (SLPs) within public elementary, middle, and high schools.

**Purpose of study:** The goal of the current study is to gather information on the knowledge that public-school administrators have pertaining to the role of SLP. The paucity of qualified speech-language pathologists to serve students in the public school setting is a national concern. The national shortage of SLPs has been continually progressive since 2000, as evident in the annual ASHA School Survey reports. With SLPs being an essential asset in the academic and social success of their students, A new study should be conducted to understand where the gaps in the knowledge are occurring. Through this study, I will be able to analyze data and draw conclusions that will contribute to both fields of education and speech-language pathology.

**Subjects:** Administrators with at least three years' experience in the current role that reside within a public elementary, middle, and high school.

**Procedure:** You will voluntarily participate in a research study utilizing a semi-structured, open-ended question interview process pertaining to questions about the role of speech-language pathologists. Upon signing this form an email will be sent to you requesting a date and time for a virtual interview utilizing Zoom, or an in-person interview. This study will follow the best practices and guidelines as established by Merriam (2009).

**Benefits/Compensation:** By participating in this study, I can share knowledge in areas of special education and the role of the speech-language pathologists within the public-school setting.

**Potential Risks or Discomforts:** Risk will be with confidentiality measures. This will be mitigated through strict confidentiality procedures. No one will be allowed to access to the interviews other than the researchers. The interviews will be audio-taped and transcribed each time. Original information secured by the investigator will be locked up in a file cabinet. Along with all electronic copies and analysis results and will be kept on a password protected device owned by the researcher.

**The participant understands that Louisiana Tech is not able to offer financial compensation nor to absorb the costs of medical treatment should you be injured as a result of participating in this research.**

I, \_\_\_\_\_, attest with my signature that I have read and understood the following description of the pilot study, "(Knowledge and characteristics of schools with diverse student populations)", and its purposes and methods. Further, I understand that I may withdraw at any time or refuse to answer any questions without penalty. Upon completion of the pilot study, I understand that the results will be freely available to me upon request. I understand that the answers of my interview will be confidential, accessible only to the principal investigators, myself, or a legally appointed representative. I have not been requested to waive nor do I waive any of my rights related to participating in this study.

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Signature of Participant

Title

Date

**CONTACT INFORMATION:** The principal experimenters listed below may be reached to answer questions about the research, subjects' rights, or related matters.

**Principal Investigator:** Dr. Brian McCoy, Email: [bmccoy@latech.edu](mailto:bmccoy@latech.edu)

**Co-Investigator:** Dawn Guice, (318)355-6983, Email: [dawn.guice@bossierschools.org](mailto:dawn.guice@bossierschools.org)

**Members of the Human Use Committee of Louisiana Tech University may also be contacted if a problem cannot be discussed with the experimenters:**

**Dr. Richard Kordal, Director, Office of Intellectual Property & Commercialization**  
Ph: (318) 257-2484, Email: [rkordal@latech.edu](mailto:rkordal@latech.edu)