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Practices of Instructional Leaders Which Support and Monitor Implementation of Individualized Education Plans and Influence Teaching in Inclusive Classroom Settings

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PRACTICES OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERS WHICH SUPPORT AND MONITOR IMPLEMENTATION OF INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATION PLANS AND INFLUENCE TEACHING IN INCLUSIVE CLASSROOM SETTINGS

by

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative case study was designed to learn more about how the practices of instructional leaders support and monitor the implementation of Individual Education Plans (I.E.P.s) and influence teaching in inclusive classroom settings. It was designed to explore a sample of general educators' and administrators' perceptions about the challenges they face to remain in adherence to obligations bound by duty to deliver I.E.P. services as outlined by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). The selected participants were twelve middle school general educators and administrators from two school districts in northwest Louisiana chosen through purposive sampling. The primary data collection method was semi-structured interviews. Document analyses of school improvement plans, district contingency plans, professional development opportunities offered to teachers, and the Louisiana Educational Rights of Children with Disabilities manual were used as supportive methods to establish triangulation.

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my daughter, Ariel. I want to thank her for her words of encouragement, support, and always believing in me. She pushed me when I felt like giving up. She watched me and ensured me to keep going because she believed that I could do anything I set my mind to and have. To my son, Joshua, my inspiration and my reason for becoming who I am today. I have been his advocate and one for special needs children during my career as a classroom teacher of autistic children. Finally, I thank my mother, Linda, and my father, Oliver. I would not be where I am today if it was not for their constant support, faith, and uplifting. I love you all very much.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

When ordinary people strive to do extraordinary things, God gives them the strength to make things happen. My own story begins as a mother, a paraprofessional working with students I adore, and spending more time thinking and praying about how I can make a difference in the lives of students with disabilities, including my son. My journey to making things happen has been trying yet prosperous.

As someone who has always done a little more than what is required, I searched and found the future God has planned for me. My experiences with caring for a child with a disability made all the difference. It prepared me to work through God's plan for me. In addition, I have had the good fortune to meet people who have encouraged and supported me every step of the way.

I would first like to give special thanks to my committee members, Dr. Bryan McCoy, for his guidance and expertise, Dr. Dawn Basinger for being a mentor, and Dr. Carrice Cummins for seeing me through the process. Before working with them, I did not know about qualitative research or any research methodology. I also want to thank Dr. Richard Shrubb, who was not a part of my committee but offered his assistance along the way.

Many thanks to the teachers and administrator participants included in my study. I would not have completed this dissertation without their willingness to share their experiences and knowledge of educating students with disabilities in inclusive education.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

New approaches to educating students with disabilities with non-traditional learning methods in inclusive settings have affected the delivery of quality instruction and implementation procedures (Alea et al., 2020; Darling-Hammond & Hyler, 2020). Full implementation of the Individualized Education Program (I.E.P.) in inclusive settings challenges instructional leaders and classroom teachers (Braunsteiner & Mariana-Lapidus, 2014; Cate et al., 2018; Dapudong, 2014). Supporting and monitoring the I.E.P. processes is an essential part of instructional leadership.

Background

The Education for All Handicapped Children Act mandated that children with disabilities receive free and appropriate public education (FAPE). The Education of All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 mandated that I.E.P.s be included when making placement decisions for students with disabilities. The appropriateness and types of educational services provided to physically and mentally disadvantaged children were initially recommended solely by educators and administrators who worked with students (Nilsen, 2017). General and special education teachers must adhere to I.E.P.s (Dragoo, 2017; Wright et al., 2017).

The least restrictive environment for many students with disabilities is an inclusive setting. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) created procedural safeguards to ensure that districts educate students with disabilities with their peers in the least restrictive appropriate environments (Nilsen, 2017). The least restrictive environment is determined through the I.E.P. process (Lee-Tarver, 2014; Sacks & Hadler, 2017). School districts must provide children with disabilities opportunities to attend public school programs that provide appropriate services to accommodate students' needs in the least restrictive environment (MacLeod et al., 2017). Districts must also take the necessary steps to equip teachers with tools to succeed (Kauffman et al., 2016).

General education teachers struggle to fully implement I.E.P.s because they do not have sufficient training on inclusive education and I.E.P. implementation (Dapudong, 2014). More intensive training is required of special education teachers (Black & Simon, 2016; Pantic & Florian, 2015). Savage and Erten (2015) found that even though teachers struggled to implement I.E.P.s, they favored teaching in inclusive settings but openly expressed that a clear understanding of policies, curriculum adaptation, and tailoring instruction affects instructional delivery.

Preconceived biases that impact teaching students with disabilities have influenced how educators approach inclusive education practices (Kavelashvili, 2017; Ozokcu, 2018). Lee-Tarver (2014) discussed how unintended biases such as stress and co-teaching efforts in inclusive settings affected teachers' behavior and found that instructional leaders could reduce classroom issues by increasing collaboration among educators to support implementation practices.

Significance of the Problem

According to Nilsen (2017), the population of children with disabilities continues to increase. Ninety-five percent of students with I.E.P.s spent 80% or more of the school day in inclusive settings. Therefore, inclusion must be valued by all educators who work with students with disabilities (Dapudong, 2014; Gaines & Barnes, 2017). Challenges to fully implementing I.E.P.s in inclusive settings include inadequate delivery of related services, incompetent teachers, poor leadership, and limited training, contributing to the growing population of students (Abawi et al., 2018; Braunsteiner & Mariana-Lapidus, 2014). In addition, general educators face moral, ethical, and instructional pressures to comply with I.E.P. laws (Billingsley et al., 2014; Trapani & Annunziato, 2018).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to study how the practices of instructional leaders support and monitor the implementation of individualized education plans and influence teaching in inclusive classroom settings. The researcher focused the study's problem on instructional leaders' efforts to ensure that teachers fully implement I.E.P.s in inclusive settings with leadership support.

Adequate instructional leadership support involves designing for variability and monitoring teachers to understand why some struggle to implement I.E.P.s (Braunsteiner & Mariana-Lapidus, 2014; Dudley-Marling & Burns, 2014). Dudley-Marling and Burns (2014) found that when districts identify areas of need that affect teacher apprehensions to implement I.E.P.s fully, they can implement strategies to support inclusive settings and build on strengths.

The following questions guided this case study:

RQ1: How do instructional leaders support the implementation of the I.E.P. in inclusive settings?

RQ2: How do instructional leaders monitor the implementation of the I.E.P. in inclusive settings?

RQ3: How do teachers respond to the support of implementing the I.E.P. in inclusive settings by instructional leaders?

RQ4: How do teachers respond to the monitoring of the implementation of the I.E.P. in inclusive settings by instructional leaders?

Theoretical Framework

Social constructivists demonstrate that all children can learn and that inclusion is a practice that acknowledges students' differences (Al-Shammari et al., 2019; Dudley-Marling, 1985). Constructivist leaders embrace the collaborative nature of learning through growth opportunities, view schools as communities, and practice shared leadership (Lambert et al., 2002). They believe that knowledge is obtained through individual and shared experiences and interactions (Lambert et al., 2002; Lynch, 2016).

Ainscow (2005) maintained that educators who supported inclusion shared views about disabilities from the constructivist point of view and emphasized engaging, collaborating, and eliminating social barriers that negatively influence teacher practices. Through a constructivist lens, disabilities are seen as simple variations from the norm (Al-Shammari et al., 2019; Dudley-Marling, 1985).

Diamond (2010) concluded that the whole child was more inclined to actively and academically achieve, regardless of disability, when teachers addressed all learning attributes such as social, emotional, and physical. Slade and Griffith's (2013) perspective

of the whole child was centered around the child and curriculum and how teacher expectations should not be confined to what a teacher thinks a child knows or place limitations on what a child can do. Oldfather and Dahl (1994) found that when children experience holistic learning processes, it builds intrinsic motivation and views of whole learning, perspectives taken on by social constructivists to support relevant learning.

Dudley-Marling and Burns (2014) believed that educators practiced social constructivist points of view when delivering the curriculum. These researchers felt that when educators took on the constructivist perspective, they assumed that children with deficits in cognitive, linguistic, or social skills needed specialized services to address deficiencies in classroom settings other than inclusive settings. Social constructivists reject the idea of specialized classroom settings and individualization (Oldfather & Dahl, 1994). Instead, social constructivists believe that appropriate inclusive practices are real-life scenarios, hands-on learning material, and self-monitoring strategies that motivate and boost confidence in students with disabilities when delivering curriculum (Dudley-Marling & Burns, 2014; Mallory & New, 1994).

Significance of the Study

Outcomes of this case study enabled instructional leaders to understand better how to monitor and support teachers in inclusive settings and determine the areas of need. In addition, this study highlighted the value of unification and collaboration among teachers and instructional leaders. Problems with fully implementing I.E.P.s have always existed but were heightened by the current crisis. Finally, the study's theoretical lens gave readers a better understanding of how leadership practices and styles affect the delivery of I.E.P.s in inclusive settings, specifically during a crisis.

Assumptions

Based on the researcher's experience as an educator, four primary assumptions were regarded in the study. First, the researcher assumed that I.E.P.s were used with fidelity in all-inclusive settings and that teachers' and instructional leaders' concerns were not related to disability biases. Second, general educators were subjected to similar teacher certification programs as special educators, and they met students with disabilities' requirements in a traditional or non-traditional setting. General educators are adequately intelligent individuals who are licensed and satisfy all requirements to teach differentiated instruction. Third, teachers and instructional leaders were honest about their experiences with implementing I.E.P.s, non-traditional learning, technology use, and ability to accommodate students. The fourth and final assumption was that general educators had been influenced by their relationships with administrators' approaches to inclusion, influencing teaching practices. This assumption was based on the belief that an environment conducive to diversity and inclusive learning is modeled or shaped by its leaders, and teachers will adopt the style.

Limitations

Because this is a non-experimental study, no claims can be made of cause and effect or correlational relationships. External generalizations were limited because the study was limited to two school districts and did not sample a broader population. Readers of the study utilized thick descriptions of the content to make naturalistic generalizations.

Delimitations

One delimitation of the research was that schools not funded through Title 1 were not included in the study. A second delimitation was that the researcher did not examine elementary, high, or charter schools for research sites. Finally, the study's third and final delimitation is that educators who taught in self-contained classroom settings or instructional leaders who did not lead inclusive schools were not included.

Definition of Terms

Accommodations - Variations made to the curriculum and assessments to support a student's inability to adapt to the general curriculum (Wright, 2004).

Attitudes - Internal influences that shape opinions about a phenomenon that may be negative or positive and can potentially influence or affect behavior (Saloviita, 2019).

Beliefs - Biases or opinions formed by previous experiences or perceived knowledge about an event or phenomenon (Fuchs, 2009).

Collaboration - Two or more educators collaborate on strategies and methods that promote student achievement and effective teaching practices (Ostovar-Nameghi & Sheikh Ahmadi, 2016).

Differentiation - Personalizing lessons and learning styles to accommodate students' needs (Hord & Roussin, 2013).

Disability - Any impairment that affects a child's ability to hear, see, speak, and socialize (Lipkin & Okamoto, 2015; Wright, 2004).

Distance Learning - Instruction provided to students under emergency conditions that do not include face-to-face learning but through remote learning (Darling-Hammond & Hyler, 2020).

Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) - Rights that have been established by the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 for any child who has a disability under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act's definition (Lipkin & Okamoto, 2015; Wright, 2004).

General Education Teacher - An educator who provides all children with appropriate education regardless of abilities or disabilities (Wright, 2004).

Inclusion - Students with disabilities are provided an education in the least restrictive environment with children who are not. It ensures that students are not separated from their nondisabled peers (Lipkin & Okamoto, 2015; Wright, 2004).

Individualized Education Program (I.E.P.) - A plan constructed by a team of educators, including parents, for students with disabilities. It guides the general education classroom and addresses students' strengths, needs, goals, objectives, and present performance levels (Lipkin & Okamoto, 2015; Wright, 2004).

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) - It is a law that mandates equality and accountability in education for children with disabilities. It ensures that children have a free and appropriate education tailored to their needs (Lipkin & Okamoto, 2015; Wright, 2004).

Least Restrictive Environment (L.R.E.) - The general classroom setting is considered the least restrictive environment, unlike locations strictly for special needs children. Children are provided with supplementary aids and accommodations in the least restrictive environment and educated with non-disabled peers, at least 80% of the school day (Lipkin & Okamoto, 2015; Wright, 2004).

Modifications - Changes made to any course, teaching strategy, assessment, environment, or schedule to assist with a student's disability (Wright, 2004).

Pandemic - A globally spread disease that affects all aspects of life (Darling-Hammond & Hyler, 2020).

Procedural Safeguard - Safeguards found in the IDEA of 2004 established protective laws for children and families. Safeguards were put in place to address violations that may occur in the development of the I.E.P., such as violations in the decision-making process, accessibility to student records, proper notifications concerning meetings, and amendments (Lipkin & Okamoto, 2015; Wright, 2004).

Professional Development - On-going professional learning ensures proper curriculum implementation and current researched-based strategies in the classroom (Hord & Roussin, 2013).

Provisions - Measures taken to prepare or address a contingency plan before the uncertain occurs (United States Department of Health and Human Services & United States Department of Education [USDHHS/USDOE], 2015).

Social Constructivist Theory - Theorists who favor individual differences and address needs for social activities in the classroom, including relevant curriculum, meaningful teaching that promotes diversity, and classroom communities (Mallory & New, 1994).

Special Education Teacher - Educator who provides students with disabilities specialized services to meet the needs of I.E.P.s (Wright, 2004).

Title 1- Funding made available to assist and support students in schools located in high impoverished areas (USDHHS/USDOE, 2015).

Universal Design for Learning (U.D.L.) - This way of teaching utilizes several teaching or instructional formats to suit learners' needs (Kurtts, 2006).

Summary

The problem addressed by the proposed study was to understand why general educators in inclusive classroom settings do not fully implement I.E.P.s and have a clear understanding of policies. Guided by the social constructivist framework during the qualitative case study, the researcher acquired more knowledge about how the practices of instructional leaders support and monitor the implementation of the individualized education plan and influence teaching in inclusive settings. Research questions were aligned to instructional leadership styles in inclusive education and how teachers responded to their support. The study results led to a greater understanding of how leadership practices affected delivering essential parts of the I.E.P. In Chapter 2, the author of this study discussed the framework and relevant literature.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The literature review was based on the purpose of I.E.P.s in inclusive education and constructivist leadership roles in inclusive school communities. The focused approach of the study was on how the preparation of instructional leaders influences teachers to progress in inclusive classroom settings. Therefore, it was necessary to review the literature on constructivist leadership, interpretations of the IDEA, the purpose of the I.E.P., defining roles and responsibilities, instructional leadership practices, attitudes, and preparation in inclusive education.

Instructional leadership preparation determines the directions and approaches to leading inclusive school communities (McLeskey et al., 2014). Unfortunately, instructional leaders adhering to time-constrained agendas and limited resources face challenges to support all students. However, they progress towards establishing inclusive visions and school systems that encourage team-based approaches despite multitudes of barriers. The current study examined instructional leaders who guide general educators in administering I.E.P.s in the least restrictive environment.

Instructional leaders' willingness to foster collaborative school communities ensures effective practices in the least restrictive environment supporting I.E.P. implementation (Kauffman et al., 2016). Current demands of the least restrictive

environment requires changes to instructional practices, even though change is not always embraced. Sacks and Hadler (2017) believed that the way I.E.P.s are implemented depends on instructional leaders who are seen as facilitators of change.

Seven research areas informed this review: constructivist leadership, interpretations of the IDEA, the purpose of the I.E.P. in inclusive education, defining roles and responsibilities, instructional leaders' practices to support I.E.P. implementation, instructional leaders' attitudes towards inclusion, and instructional leaders' preparation for inclusion. The focus of the current study emerged from the nexus of the seven research areas listed above.

Theoretical Model: Constructivist Leadership

Veale (2010) noted that instructional leaders create and sustain thriving, inclusive school communities by supporting differentiation using adaptable approaches. Veale believed that the constructivist instructional leader could only make changes when goals and values are unified. To create a thriving, inclusive school community, instructional leaders must establish a clear understanding of roles and responsibilities to address the needs of students with disabilities in inclusive classroom settings (McLeskey et al., 2014; Yildirim & Kaya, 2019). Constructivist leaders maintain that being adaptable to change creates a positive school culture that communicates shared visions and values (Veale, 2010; Yildirim & Kaya, 2019).

Constructivist leaders in education support teachers by creating a community that encourages flexibility, diversity, and distributed leadership. They are not afraid to deviate from cultural norms to adapt to change (Yildirim & Kaya, 2019). Lambert et al. (2002)

found that social constructivists believe that problems become more complicated during change because underlying perceptions, experiences, and beliefs influence behavior and how people interact with new things. Lambert et al. (2002) compared constructivist leadership to a cloth woven with different textures, colors, and lengths representing a diversified school community. The fabric represents a school environment that relies on social interaction, shared leadership, and an environment that makes room for change. Effective instructional leadership entails problem-solving, improving teacher performance, reinforcing collaboration, and understanding pedagogy regardless of leadership types (Yildirim & Kaya, 2019).

Democratic vs. Authoritarian Leadership Styles

Yildirim and Kaya (2019) used qualitative phenomenology to gather data on constructivist school leaders. Participants included primary, middle, and high school teachers chosen through maximum variation sampling. Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data on leaders' contributions to their organizations. Teachers thought instructional leaders encouraged them to develop their profession to keep up with current learning and teaching. In addition, teachers thought school leaders prepared them to lead and displayed an equal distribution of power. Finally, teachers believed that administrators played a significant role in shaping the school community by encouraging acceptance, differences, and flexibility.

Hussain et al. (2017) conducted a quantitative study focused on determining the nature of the relationship between leadership styles and teacher job satisfaction. Results showed that authoritarian styles negatively impacted job satisfaction because teachers could not work freely and share ideas. Instructional leadership styles, directly and

indirectly, influence job satisfaction and set standards and expectations to achieve organizational goals.

McLeskey et al. (2014) believed that an effective inclusive school transpires when school principals are held accountable for establishing educational standards and distributing and sharing leadership to strengthen instructional practices. Instructional leaders must create an environment free from biases that affect the quality of the school environment. Unlike authoritative leadership styles that oversee all school-related processes with little input from others, democratic leadership styles welcome alliances in decision-making processes. The most effective leadership style instills the value of team relationships (Yell et al., 2007).

Leadership plays an integral role in inclusive education (Kauffman et al., 2016; McLeskey et al., 2014; Yildirim & Kaya, 2019). It influences all aspects of teaching and learning with the right approach. Effective leadership involves planning, coordinating, and working directly with teachers to impact students' lives and understand IDEA processes (Yildirim & Kaya, 2019).

Establishing Interpretations of IDEA

Congress mandated the IDEA of 1990 to protect the rights of students with disabilities (Dragoo, 2017; Lipkin & Okamoto, 2015). Before the law's reauthorization, students with disabilities had limited access to educational opportunities offered by districts to students without disabilities. Students with specific disability types such as autism, deafness, or blindness were denied appropriate education and were excluded from public school settings. Students with severe disabilities were educated in separate school settings away from the general population or in schools outside of their neighborhoods.

IDEA did away with excluding these students to form more inclusive settings known as the least restrictive environment and put I.E.P.s in place to meet their needs (Dragoo, 2017; Lipkin & Okamoto, 2015).

Rowley v. Board of Education of the Hendrick Hudson Central School District of 1982 was one of the first court cases to address procedural violations of the I.E.P. that involved a student placed in the least restrictive environment (Yell et al., 2007). The case is often recognized as the first to address the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (Koseki, 2017). Parents claimed that their child was denied a FAPE in the general education classroom in the Rowley case (Yell et al., 2007).

Plaintiffs argued that parents were not recognized as members of the I.E.P. team. Amy Rowley was a deaf student placed in a general education kindergarten classroom specified in her I.E.P. Also, the student's I.E.P. team and parents agreed on suggested supports to accommodate the student even though administrators refused to provide a sign language interpreter. In addition, parents opposed the idea and felt that an interpreter was necessary. Yet, school administrators declined to provide her with an interpreter because she could read lips, performed above average without assistance, and excelled in academics with the aid of a speech therapist and a specialized tutor for the deaf (Yell et al., 2007). She was also promoted to the next grade, moved from self-contained to general education classrooms, and utilized an F.M. hearing aid to translate spoken words. The courts believed that the I.E.P. in Amy Rowley's case was strictly adhered to, and no procedural violations were committed. The courts stated that Congress's requirements were clearly defined and adhered to in individualization and support to benefit the child in the general classroom setting (Yell et al., 2007).

Rowley v. Board of Education of the Hendrick Hudson Central School District of 1982 was a significant case involving inclusive practices because, in 1982, Congress had not fully established inclusive procedures (Diaz, 2014; Yell et al., 2007). The courts ruled in favor of the district in the Rowley case because school administrators accommodated the student. Teachers were not held accountable to assist with implementing I.E.P.s or provided training to accommodate students placed in general education classrooms. Case reports stated that only administrators, speech therapists, and tutors for deaf students were responsible for adapting to students' needs (Yell et al., 2007).

Oberti v. Board of Education of the Borough of Clementon occurred in 1993 and exemplified the opposite of FAPE (Diaz, 2014; Yell et al., 2007). Unlike in the Rowley case, educators and administrators were held accountable for violating IDEA requirements. The district did not take any measures to accommodate the student in the general education classroom because administrators disagreed with placement suggestions and recommended a self-contained school setting for educational placement. In addition, school leaders and teachers felt that the child would not perform as well in the general education classroom because of his disability, Down syndrome (Yell et al., 2007).

The Oberti case was an example of non-compliance (Diaz, 2014; Yell et al., 2007). The school district did not comply with the requirements of the I.E.P. According to court records, the I.E.P. was determined to be improperly written and did not reflect any beneficial accommodations or modifications to address the student's needs. Because the child experienced unaddressed behavior problems in the previous grade, a behavior plan was warranted but was not included in the I.E.P. or addressed in the original I.E.P.

The I.E.P. team did not provide the student with supplementary aids or services to manage potty training, communication, or collaboration issues. Because collaboration did not occur between educators after the student's placement in the general education classroom, the arrangement made it challenging to address the student's behavior (Diaz, 2014; Yell et al., 2007).

The court acknowledged several procedural violations in the Oberti case. First, the school district refused to apply curriculum modifications. The district was against inclusive education for students with disabilities such as Down Syndrome, which they perceived as disruptive in a general classroom setting. Finally, the courts ruled that the district was out of order and required the I.E.P. be rewritten. After professional evaluations and I.E.P. revisions, teachers found the inclusive setting placement beneficial for the student and supplementary aids and services. In addition, the student's performance level advanced after district changes (Diaz, 2014; Yell et al., 2007).

Kavelashvili (2017) unveiled several problems school districts encountered in Georgia's inclusive settings. Locating and securing certified educators experienced with differentiating curriculum created issues in the classroom. Parents had negative perceptions about inclusion. Teacher perceptions of collaboration limited efforts to assist students in developing positive attitudes towards engaging in learning. Districts did not provide ongoing training for educators who worked in inclusive education. Many school communities exercising inclusion were inappropriate and failed to meet the needs of students who required accommodations. Finally, schools failed to provide students with related services outlined in I.E.P.s such as speech, occupational therapy, and assistive technology.

Current court cases related to I.E.P. implementation and teachers' readiness to administer I.E.P.s in inclusive settings in their entirety have created ongoing problems. Jameson et al. (2020) highlighted two court cases that infringed on students' rights to a Free and Appropriate Public Education. One case found in Jameson et al. (2020) was *Brennan and James v. Wolf, Rivera, and the Pennsylvania Department of Education* that initiated lawsuits on behalf of autistic students who were allegedly denied a FAPE. Plaintiffs argued that the district failed to meet requirements included in the I.E.P. that addressed augmentative and alternative communication, one-on-one assistance, motor skills assistance requiring hand-over-hand, and extended time. In addition, because remote learning had taken precedence over face-to-face learning, plaintiffs accused the district of failing to prioritize these services as critical components of I.E.P.s.

Another case found in Jameson et al. (2020) was The *Chicago Teachers Union v. Betsy DeVos, United States Department of Education, the Board of Education of the City of Chicago* that involved I.E.P. implementation and teacher preparation in transitioning to virtual learning. Plaintiffs filed charges against the Department of Education for not giving teachers sufficient time to amend and update I.E.P.s to reflect changes. Teachers argued that they did not receive adequate support or time to transition or amend 60,000 educational plans, and they expressed that the act of doing so would have taken away from instructional time.

A lack of teacher preparation and support in the least restrictive environment continues to pose problems that hinder successful implementation practices of I.E.P.s (Dapudong, 2014). Teachers in inclusive classroom settings require district and school-level leaders' support with interpretations of I.E.P.s (McLeskey et al., 2014). However,

variations of I.E.P.s and persistent demands of IDEA have made it difficult for districts to continue supporting teachers and students with disabilities (Hurder, 2014; Nilsen, 2017). Landmark court cases have shown why districts must support teachers and validate inclusive education practices to make the least restrictive environment the initial placement for students with disabilities with the necessary support before considering a more restrictive setting. In addition, some school communities continue to provide appropriate inclusive programs even though districts do not offer training programs on integrated approaches of the I.E.P. or prepare instructional leaders to head inclusive communities (Yell et al., 2007).

Purpose of the I.E.P. in Inclusive Education

Educators struggle to comply with I.E.P. requirements in inclusive settings. They have expressed uncertainties about the job-related duties of teaching a child who has an I.E.P. I.E.P.s represent a significant paradigm in inclusive education (Gilmour, 2018). The importance of monitoring implementation is a relevant practice that may influence teaching in the setting (Gaines & Barnes, 2017; Gilmour, 2018). Influences beyond teachers' control, such as their interpretation of the I.E.P., leadership support, negative perceptions of disabilities, and unaddressed apprehensions about legal mandates, have hindered approaches to inclusive education (Lee-Tarver, 2014; Savage & Erten, 2015). These uncertainties have brought about the need for instructional leaders and educators to work collaboratively to help learners master concepts they would not master without assistance (McLeskey et al., 2014; Yildirim & Kaya, 2019).

Lee-Tarver (2014) communicated that one of the earliest studies to examine the significance of I.E.P.s and inclusive education was performed by Dudley-Marling in

1985. The study reiterated the inclusive setting's purpose and how the environment did not limit students with disabilities. The authors believed that districts must educate students with peers who were not identified with a disability. Dudley-Marling (1985) found that I.E.P.s greatly assisted special educators when individualizing lessons and accommodations but did not assist in planning in the inclusive setting. Teacher participants expressed concerns about the inaccessibility of I.E.P.s because of limited access due to privacy laws that require it to be stored, locked, and accessed with obtained consent.

I.E.P.s have been significant components of inclusive settings designed to measure progress, address student deficiencies, and measure growth (Dragoo, 2017; Dudley-Marling, 1985). If not appropriately implemented, districts may create problems that impact all involved in educating students with disabilities (Hurder, 2014; Lee-Tarver, 2014). The I.E.P. provides educators opportunities to practice differentiation and improve instructional outcomes of students in the least restrictive environment (Hernandez et al., 2016). To improve instructional outcomes teachers use researched-based approaches to enhance student performance and believe that it improves student achievement, provides direction for teaching, and reinforces collaboration in inclusive educational practices (Hussain et al., 2017; McAlister et al., 2017).

Dapudong (2014) observed constraints of inclusive education found within the classroom setting, including inappropriate curriculum challenges, placement issues, and lack of experience to address the needs of students. However, the researcher was optimistic about professional development and training if districts frequently offered general educators to influence inclusive teaching practices. The attitudes of educators

who did not experience or have training working with children with disabilities to demonstrate if training would change professional growth outcomes were investigated. Through stratified sampling, 52 educators from four international schools in Thailand with various teaching degrees were chosen.

Participant schools in the quantitative study were guided by the American and U.K. curricula for inclusive education (Dapudong, 2014). A three-part descriptive survey collected background knowledge of both curricula and opinions about inclusion. Demographic data included participants' gender, age, education levels, training, experience, and teaching years. Many educators lacked knowledge about placement guidelines and inclusion procedures. Special educators were found to be the most knowledgeable about inclusive practices and had the most training. Thirty-four participants who were well-informed about inclusion completed training programs and experienced teaching students with disabilities. Eight participants had minimal experience working with children who had disabilities. The remaining participants had only background knowledge of teaching students with disabilities but no training. Districts used the study's final results related to suggestions and positions about inclusive education to inform professional development (Dapudong, 2014).

A need was identified for professional development that emphasized developing knowledge and skills in inclusive classrooms. Professional development must clarify the roles and responsibilities of all involved in educating students with disabilities to be effective. Instructional leaders must also be willing to apply feedback to guide professional development to ensure teachers' needs are met (Dapudong, 2014).

Defining Roles and Responsibilities in Inclusive Education

Defining roles and responsibilities in inclusive education informs all stakeholders of their legal obligations to educate students in the least restrictive environment to provide students with the instructions outlined in I.E.P.s (Dudley-Marling & Burns, 2014; Hernandez et al., 2016). Shamberger et al. (2014) focused on the effectiveness of inclusive settings and how educators support classroom design to address I.E.P. goals relevant to student learning outcomes. They found that instructional leaders must clarify roles and responsibilities for teachers to succeed in collaborative teaching. Shamberger et al. stressed the importance of defining roles in co-teaching and believed that educators in co-teaching partnerships could address various student needs with the same degree of education as their peers.

Each educator's role and knowledge are critical to successful co-teaching (Scruggs & Mastropieri, 2017; Shamberger et al., 2014). Unfortunately, they may be unsuccessful in their approach to reaching desired results in the least restrictive environment if they are not adequately trained (Hernandez et al., 2016; Hornby, 2015). Furthermore, teachers who had no experience working with students with disabilities were deficient in the skills needed to address disabilities and showed resistance to inclusive educational practices (Shamberger et al., 2014).

Braunsteiner and Mariana-Lapidus (2014) found that resistance to inclusive practices has existed between educators in co-teaching, administrators, and parents. General educators were unprepared due to a lack of training and felt restricted in co-teaching classroom settings. General educators assumed that special educators were more qualified to accommodate students in inclusive settings because of training. Parent

participants voiced concerns about diversity and its influence on student achievement. They feared that students would not receive individualized services applicable to the curriculum as they would in self-contained classroom settings.

Efthymiou and Kingston (2017) concentrated on inclusive setting's hidden curriculum that focused on academic objectives and conditions of schools. The hidden curriculum in this qualitative study targeted classroom structure, group differentiation based on student skills, stride or consistency in teaching styles, variety of student work, and types of reinforcements used to reward good behavior.

Efthymiou and Kingston (2017) used qualitative methods to study four students, ages 11-12, who had mild or moderate disabilities. Two of the student participants were taught in inclusive settings by a beginner teacher who had only been teaching for 3 years and was not supported or provided a paraprofessional due to short staffing. The remaining student participants were taught in an inclusive setting by an experienced teacher supported by a paraprofessional (Efthymiou & Kingston, 2017).

Instruments used in the study measured the attitudes, drive, and enthusiasm of teachers, paraprofessionals, and student participants. After several interviews, observations, and focus group meetings, the results showed differences between the two classrooms and how they occurred when teachers grouped students by ability (Efthymiou & Kingston, 2017).

The study showed that when newly certified teachers are not given the necessary support in the classroom and have no training to differentiate lessons by ability levels or groups in the inclusive setting, students are less likely to succeed than with an experienced, trained teacher (Efthymiou & Kingston, 2017).

Districts share responsibilities to ensure that educators receive the proper training to serve students better in inclusive settings (Braunsteiner & Mariana-Lapidus, 2014; Cate et al., 2018). Teachers should be provided training geared towards best practices and encouraged to expand their knowledge through professional development and coursework (Cate et al., 2018). Instructional leaders must look beyond inclusive classroom settings and redistribute roles that exhibit shared practices and responsibilities to educate students (Braunsteiner & Mariana-Lapidus, 2014; Dreyer, 2017).

Instructional Leaders' Practices to Support I.E.P. Implementation

Leadership preparation and being actively involved in inclusive education are critical when creating environments that support educators with implementation practices (McLeskey et al., 2014; Yildirim & Kaya, 2019). To establish successful inclusive education, instructional leaders must exercise leadership responsibilities by ensuring that all I.E.P.s are implemented with fidelity and clarify the roles and responsibilities of all involved in educating students with disabilities (Dapudong, 2014).

Instructional leaders, teachers, and related service providers must ensure that I.E.P.s are fully implemented and that every child with a disability receives all requirements of the I.E.P. (McAlister et al., 2017; Sacks & Hadler, 2017). For example, the Pennsylvania Department of Education brought charges against a school district that failed to accommodate all students. Teachers followed I.E.P. requirements related to compensatory services. Nevertheless, lawsuits were filed against the district. Parents in the community accused the district of inappropriately accommodating non-verbal and limited verbal students who utilized online learning platforms. Parents specifically held the district responsible for failing to provide related services to students and believed they

were responsible for overseeing all services offered in I.E.P.s. They also believed that teachers should not have been held accountable for non-collaborative district actions (Jameson et al., 2020).

Hernandez et al. (2016) believed that instructional leaders must address teachers' concerns and assume responsibilities to establish consensus to build inclusive school communities. They also thought that successful collaboration among educators reiterates team problem-solving to meet the requirements of I.E.P.s and supports classroom teachers. Finally, they concluded that leadership support was a determining factor in shaping perceptions towards inclusion, and teachers need ongoing collaboration to help eliminate negative views of implementation practices.

Instructional Leaders' Attitudes Towards Inclusive Settings

Hernandez et al. (2016) surveyed educators in a public school system using the Scale of Teachers' Attitudes Toward Inclusive Classrooms to collect information about teachers' perceptions of I.E.P. processes. Findings showed that special educators had higher comfort levels in inclusive classroom settings than general educators, even though special educators were more confident when implementing I.E.P.s due to extensive training they received before entering the classroom. In addition, Bandura's self-efficacy model was used to establish comfort levels in teaching.

Gaines and Barnes (2017) found that general educators are more inclined to implement all parts of the I.E.P. when districts allow timing and budgeting to support inclusive classrooms. When timing and budgeting are not factored in to support teachers, instructional leaders place increased duties on general educators to provide appropriate instruction to students with disabilities. These researchers stressed the importance of

teacher training to reduce the stress brought on by worries in inclusive settings, including negative teacher-student interactions, instructional hindrances, and classroom overcrowding of students with I.E.P.s. Gaines and Barnes determined that districts could better inform professional development by acknowledging teachers' perceptions of inclusive education and using them to guide it. They found that when districts offered professional development based on teachers' needs and experiences, they could train novice teachers and retain tenured teachers to have more positive attitudes about inclusive education.

King-Sears and Strogilos (2018) examined the differences in teacher attitudes towards inclusion through the process of self-ratings. Teachers rated their own experiences in co-teaching environments. Participants included special and general educators who taught in inclusive classrooms. Students were asked to rate both sets of teachers. Personal teaching efficacies were rated on a 5-point scale, with 5 being the most favorable. Teachers had a heightened sense of effectiveness in inclusive settings when they supported each other in areas where they felt ineffective. Students were more inclined to seek help from general educators in co-teaching situations and viewed special educators as subordinate teachers. Data collected from questionnaires revealed that the most practical co-teaching method was the "one teaches one follow" method. Students identified with disabilities had higher aspirations of belonging, felt supported, and had higher self-efficacy towards general educators than students without disabilities and felt that they learned the most from general educators.

Being well prepared to support students with disabilities contributes to instructional delivery and how educators view and respond to students. Preparation

influences student performance in the least restrictive environments, whether educators are trained or untrained. Educators who receive sufficient training in inclusive practices tend to be more successful than those who do not (King-Sears & Strogilos, 2018).

Instructional Leaders' Preparation for Inclusive Settings

Instructional leaders who have not been prepared to lead inclusive school communities do not successfully implement or maintain the practices (McLeskey et al., 2014). District support is necessary for school leaders to be successful in their efforts to form inclusive school communities (Yildirim & Kaya, 2019). Without formal training programs or coursework on diversity, co-teaching, and disability knowledge, instructional leaders, cannot fully apply I.E.P.s in any setting (McLeskey et al., 2014; Yildirim & Kaya, 2019). McKay (2016) suggested that inclusive settings benefited students with disabilities, but maintaining it impacted educators' longevity when they felt unsupported and untrained. McKay recognized that educators exhibited the most problems and had the least training in paperwork and following procedures to implement the I.E.P. and modify the curriculum.

Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2017) completed a study on teacher attrition in special education and examined educational skills and support needed to teach students with disabilities. They surveyed first-year African American teachers whose retention rates were higher than other ethnicities and who were least likely to stay in the field. All participants were certified and used alternative certifications to acquire degrees. Because most alternative programs do not require completing coursework or student teaching before entering the classroom, teachers without prior knowledge of teaching students with disabilities were permitted to teach.

Teachers who completed alternative programs encountered the most difficulties in the classroom compared to teachers who took the traditional certification route and were required to complete coursework and student teaching (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2017) suggested that lack of preparation, instructional planning, classroom support, disability knowledge, effective collaboration, and classroom management contributed to low morale and unsuccessful teaching practices in the least restrictive environments. Investigators found that instructional leaders must provide the necessary contributions to successful preparation programs for first-year teachers before placing them in schools. As a result, retention rates would decrease, and teachers would be less likely to leave the field.

Yildirim and Kaya (2019) explained the need to examine how instructional leaders' contributions influence their performance in school communities. They believed that instructional constructivist leaders have significant roles in continuously guiding educators to develop their profession through professional development. Instructional leaders must create clear visions that promote progress, support constructivist learning applications, and build on responsibilities to include all stakeholders as decision-makers.

Summary

Seven significant areas of literature were reviewed to provide an overview of the history of inclusive education's rules, policies, and purpose under which instructional leaders must work to obtain adequate classroom settings and school communities. The literature review explored the interconnectedness of participants' experiences, and the support they perceived was available to them in their efforts to implement I.E.P.s in the least restrictive environment. The social constructivist theory was used as the framework

for this study to provide a context for understanding participants' knowledge, skills, and perceptions about inclusive education. This framework demonstrated the need for shared leadership and guidance to ensure that students with disabilities are provided a free and appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment.

Hussain et al. (2017) observed that teachers were more satisfied with democratic leadership styles in inclusive education because of shared decision-making. However, few studies follow instructional leadership styles in inclusive education that observe constructivist views that enable and engage teachers to construct meanings of pedagogy with limited direction. Veale (2010) recommended that future research investigate the relationship of leadership styles that affect teacher motivation, job satisfaction, and instructional delivery in inclusive classroom settings.

Many of the problems educators face in inclusive classrooms go beyond the classroom setting. Issues such as districts not providing ongoing training, lack of adequate classroom monitoring, and ineffective communication practices to determine the needs of teachers were some of the problems that affected I.E.P. implementation (Gaines & Barnes, 2017; Hernandez et al., 2016). Limitations found in the literature involving classroom issues were that studies used quantitative methods to measure apprehensions about inclusive classroom settings but did not elaborate on behaviors and patterns that brought about teacher apprehensions.

The literature has directed attention to inclusive education problems but did not focus on solutions to equip general educators with the necessary training on adaptation, cooperative learning, content enhancement, and identifying disability needs. Much of the literature focused on classroom problems (Gaines & Barnes, 2017; Hurder, 2014;

McKay, 2016). It did not examine relationships outside the classroom or present information on the vast majority of students educated in the least restrictive environment and how instructional leaders support teachers. Only one qualitative study in the research, Sanahuju-Gavalda et al. (2016), sought to understand school culture and administrators as participants to assess leadership styles and how they affect inclusive practices.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to study how the practices of instructional leaders support and monitor the implementation of I.E.P.s and influence teaching in inclusive settings. Focusing on individual experiences, perceptions, and attitudes about inclusive education allowed for more appropriate data (Dooly & Moore, 2017). In addition, it allowed for flexibility by using broad, open-ended questions that were not limited to a given set of responses (Dooly & Moore, 2017; Nie, 2017).

An absence of adequate leadership support has caused teacher concerns and uncertainty about teaching students with disabilities in inclusive settings (Dapudong, 2014; Nilsen, 2017). Constraints such as lack of training, experience working with students with disabilities, an absence of professional development, limitations beyond teachers' control due to failures to exercise leadership responsibilities served as a basis for barriers that hinder inclusion (Savage & Erten, 2015). Problems that have emerged from these barriers have led to ineffective instructional practices, procedural violations of the I.E.P., and improper practices in inclusive settings (Dapudong, 2014).

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative case study design with multiple embedded cases. According to Mohajan (2018), narrative research intends to study participants' lives to better understand attitudes, opinions, experiences, and behaviors that have been unconsciously associated with a central concept. Nie (2017) had a similar definition of narrative research that revealed how the method provides quality information that helped identify issues placed before researchers that were transformed into descriptions and theories addressed throughout the study. Nie also suggested that narrative research is utilized to make sense of others' knowledge and experiences about events that alter their perspectives. Typical qualitative methods were used that consisted of interviews and document analyses.

Sources of Data

Buthe and Jacobs (2015) suggested that transparency for trustworthiness was established in research grounded on reliable sources and various collection procedures. First, using multiple forms of data helped understand the problem under study. Second, collection methods ensured that data were not misinterpreted. Finally, employing more than one form of data collection provided clarity and evidence of the study's problem. Primary data collection sources in qualitative research included in this study were semi-structured interviews and document analysis.

Semi-Structured Interviews

Interviews have been the preferred choice for most qualitative research because of the abundance of rich, thick information provided (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016; Creswell, 2013). Interviews allow the researcher to collect data on participant perspectives,

feelings, and firsthand experiences of the study's purpose (Creswell, 2013; Dooly & Moore, 2017). In addition, the interview method of data collection promotes interaction between participant and researcher when participants are willing contributors and agree with procedures involved in the study.

Document Analysis

Bloomberg and Volpe (2016) provided insight on document analysis. Primary document types can come from public records, mission statements, handbooks, artifacts, training manuals for professional development, and written documents. In document analysis, information is coded and transcribed to establish themes to understand a study topic. Document analysis has been used with various qualitative data collection methods to create credible evidence and establish triangulation.

Site and Participant Selection

In purposive sampling, participants are selected based on the study's purpose with the expectation that each will provide unique and rich information that will be valuable to the study (Etikan et al., 2016). Purposive sampling was appropriate for this study because it emphasizes saturation (Etikan et al., 2016). The aim of this study was to sample until no other new information was acquired. Schools in large urban, southern districts in Northwest Louisiana that received assistance from Title 1 funding were selected for this study. This federally funded program is one of the most extensive secondary and elementary education programs to assist low achieving students in high poverty school districts (USDHHS/USDOE, 2015). The sample or target population was identified through district and school-based websites. A list of middle schools, school districts, locations, job titles, employee emails, and names of employees who met the study's

criteria was documented on handwritten notes. Participants were contacted by email, which included informed consent, the purpose of this study, and my contact information. Principals who responded forwarded emails to colleagues.

Sample

Twelve participants were interviewed for this study and chosen through purposive sampling methods. Some volunteered to participate in the interview process, while others were recruited via email and colleagues. Participants represented in the sample population were certified general educators in core subject areas and accredited instructional leaders. Subject areas of certification included English/language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies. In addition, one science/social studies teacher and math teacher had taken the alternative certification career path.

The number of teaching years varied among the 12 educators sampled. However, three teachers and three instructional leaders with 21 years or more experience represented the majority sample size. Participants with 0-5 years, 6-10 years, and 16-20 years in education were equally represented, with two in each category. All participants were employed in the public-school sector in Northwest Louisiana at Title 1 schools. School sizes and student populations varied among participants. Table 3.1 shows participants listed by certification area.

Table 3.1

Participants by Certification Areas

Participant	Gender	Grade Level	Experience	Subject Area
1	F	7	10	ELA
2	M	6, 7, 8	16-20	Science/Social Studies
3	F	8	23	ELA & Math
4	F	8	0-5	Math
5	F	6, 7	21	ELA
6	F	6, 7, 8	16	ELA
7	F	7, 8	20	Science/Social Studies
8	M	7, 8	0-5	Science/Social Studies
9	F	7	11-15	Math
10	F	Administrator	21	All
11	F	Administrator	16-20	All
12	F	Administrator	6-10	All

Two sample population schools were located in rural areas with enrollments totaling 1,000 or more students. The third school was in a small city with fewer than 900 students. All three schools serve economically disadvantaged students and account for 45% or higher of the schools' populations.

Ten of the 12 participants identified themselves as female, and the two remaining participants were male. Teaching experience varied among participants, ranging from 0 years to 21 years. Ten participant teachers were certified to teach middle school grade levels 6-8 grades. Two were in the process of completing alternative certification programs offered by the school districts. Three instructional leader participants had a combined total of 60 years or more in education, and all had been teachers before becoming administrators. Again, the ages of participants varied.

Data Collection

Dooly and Moore (2017) stressed that communication mechanisms such as email and internet websites in qualitative research enable the researcher to engage in ongoing

communication with participants equally effective as face-to-face invitations. Invitations were offered via email and telephone to participants to understand the purpose of the research. After identifying and selecting school sites, demographic data were collected using semi-structured interviews via Zoom meetings from administrators who led inclusive school settings and general educators who taught core subject areas in inclusive settings.

An open-ended interview protocol and researcher-created questions were utilized to gain information about the study topic. In addition, comments from Zoom recorded interviews were used to capture participants' experiences, thoughts, and perspectives. Written and verbal consent was obtained from participants to record interviews and collect artifacts relevant to the study. Interviews allowed participants to elaborate on their feelings and perspectives on the problem discussed in the study. Data collection measures took place during July and August 2021 and were collected in single interview sessions. Participation was voluntary, and responses were kept anonymous. Twelve participants, two male ten female, with 0-21 years of teaching experience, were recruited using purposive sampling procedures and district databases of email lists. Participants who met the study's criteria were middle school administrators and general educators who taught grade levels six through eight and worked at schools funded by Title 1. All participants were notified via email and through referrals from colleagues. In addition, participants were provided an accurate description of the study's procedures and purpose. Semi-structured single interviews ranged from 20 to 30 minutes using 12 open-ended questions from which responses were analyzed and transcribed with Nvivo professional software.

Creswell (2013) discussed the relevance of document analysis and how documents and artifacts are linked to behaviors and perceptions. Documents included in this study included district handbooks for the exceptional child, professional development material, course expectations, curriculum guidelines, lesson plans, and technology-related support such as material or manuals provided with each lesson for inclusive settings.

Data Analysis

Semi-structured, audio-taped interviews were the primary source of the research data, done with the assurance of confidentiality and anonymity. Professional transcription was performed through NVivo, and the researcher employed hand-coded hard copies. In addition, artifacts such as district-based documents explaining contingency plans of I.E.P.s during a pandemic, literature based on special education procedural safeguards, and inclusion support documentation have guided teachers in their experiences with inclusive education and were utilized to support interview data. Several things were considered that may have influenced data analysis before coding narratives. First, I wanted to be objective about my teaching background working with students who hold I.E.P.s. Second, I did not take on any preconceived thoughts or beliefs about this study's problem. Finally, I did not allow my opinions to influence the data and let the data speak for itself. Instead, I chose narrative statements and words that addressed research questions to help understand this study's problem perspectives.

All data were assigned labels to address research questions after the researcher collected specific stories and statements from participants and analyzed district documents and manuals to look for relationships or reference specific content. After complete labeling, short words and phrases from all data sources were sorted into groups

based on relationships among categories and research questions. Statements and expressions that addressed research questions that were considered relevant were placed under their respective codes and identified as significant categories. Themes were generated based on specific content, and areas that represented the study problem, showed a relationship, were used frequently. The data yielded six significant themes that used participants own words: resilience to change, shared responsibilities (administrators and paraeducators), meaningful collaboration connections, parental involvement, not placing limits on the expectations of children who hold I.E.P.s, and constraints placed on teachers. Finally, participants' thoughts and opinions from interviews about their daily experiences in inclusive settings captured the essence of what was identified through data collection and analysis.

Buthe and Jacobs (2015) found that qualitative data analysis helps establish connections when collecting relevant words or phrases to look for similarities and differences. In addition, the process helps to close inconsistencies in most qualitative data. Sutton and Austin's (2015) thematic content analysis procedure suggested finding patterns for category purposes and using feedback to develop themes. This study's interview transcripts were coded for emergent patterns and relevant pieces such as words, phrases, and sentences that yielded six significant themes described in the previous paragraph. Data were coded and labeled by sources that included interviews and district documents, sorted based on the relationship between codes, code frequency, and research questions, and synthesized into relevant pieces to develop themes. All documents were collected through district-based websites and analyzed for the intended audience and purpose.

Additionally, coding is a reliable way to describe data collected in patterns and reduce it by meaning. This study's content was summarized in tables to establish connections to similar studies and theories on the study's problem. Finally, Glaser (1965) described the advantages of constant comparative methods to form views generated in qualitative research by processes of thorough analysis and comparisons of data. This approach to data analysis is the most appropriate approach when examining social issues of concern in research.

Dooly and Moore (2017) expressed the importance of identifying themes in qualitative data as an appropriate research method to show repeating events or feelings relevant to the study. Words, phrases, and sentences repeated in several places in interview transcripts and documents were labeled and categorized to create codes. Finally, asking additional questions to enhance the overall understanding of the study's problem allowed participants to elaborate on their experiences.

Trustworthiness

Mohajan (2018) explained that researchers must address potential problems to test reliability and validity by enhancing credibility by considering complexities that may occur, determining dependability with stable data that may be limited to similar contexts, and improving confirmability through objective data. The trustworthiness of the research is established when all aspects of qualitative data are addressed.

Credibility was established through triangulation of multiple data sources, limiting researcher bias brought to the study. Dependability was shown by providing readers with thick descriptions of the study's findings, results, and recommendations that

can be followed and supported by data (Creswell, 2013). The study's transferability is limited only to similar contexts and settings.

Researcher Positionality

Beginning with identifying a meaningful topic, participants in the research provided a systematic analysis of teacher experiences concerning delivering instruction in inclusive settings. By developing appropriate research questions and choosing specific participants that meet the study's purpose, I wanted to reduce any personal biases that I may have about the research topic because I am also a teacher. I did not wish to influence participants in such a way as to force responses that I believed the participants should have. I was determined to promote objectivity in this qualitative study by using a neutral voice and not interpreting the results. Potential ethical conflicts regarding how the researcher gained access to the list of teacher participants involved in educating students with I.E.P.s in the general education classroom were considered. The researcher evaluated the effects of the research on participants by allowing them to describe first-hand experiences and perspectives of the research problem. The ethical practices used in this study included the appropriateness of the research design, the methodological design, behaviors in reporting data, and teacher involvement in the services provided. Mohajan (2018) suggested that there were three types of problems that may affect qualitative studies: (a) the researcher/participant relationship, (b) the researcher's subjective interpretations of data, (c) the design itself. Respect for the participants' rights was also addressed, including the right to be informed about the study. Participants had the right to freely decide whether to participate in the research and the right to withdraw at any time without penalty through informed consent. The researcher maintained the principle of

beneficence by overseeing the consequences of revealing participants' identities. Participants were told how the results would be published. Documentation of all activities was included in the study. Participants knew that legal requirements could breach confidentiality and anonymity if the researcher's data were subpoenaed for lawful purposes and used to help reauthorize IDEA and its processes.

Having spent many years as a special educator, I have a legal obligation to advocate for students who hold I.E.P.s. I am a teacher responsible for implementing and adhering to I.E.P.s. I feel that my contribution stems from three areas: (1) being a parent of a child who currently has an I.E.P. and has since entered school, (2) being an I.E.P. team member who tries to promote involvement from everyone who has the responsibility to carry it out effectively, and (3) my love for special needs children and the need to provide equity and equality in the learning environment. The value of being a college graduate has been a top priority. My certifications are special education, mild/moderate, and elementary education. I take pride in educating all students. As an educator, I encourage all students and parents to seek help whenever needed, whether for academic or personal support. Students and parents may be reluctant to ask for help because of embarrassment. Still, most find satisfaction in having done so if they are comfortable enough to discuss issues and get positive feedback. By addressing teacher barriers to non-traditional learning, instructional support, and I.E.P.s, I hope that eliminating procedural violations would strengthen teacher practices. My study intended to encourage administrators to offer professional development relevant to the general educator's concerns about I.E.P. implementation practices and reinforce teacher knowledge and academic support to serve students' needs with I.E.P.s.

Summary

This qualitative case study aimed to learn more about instructional leaders' supporting and monitoring the implementation of individualized education plans and influencing teaching in inclusive settings. A comprehensive analysis of documented responses was collected from interviews conducted with instructional leaders and educators who teach in inclusive settings. Data were based on participants' experiences with I.E.P. implementation, related concerns, behaviors, and practices. The research problem in this qualitative case study brought on the need for research. Gaps in literature have addressed concerns of the past that still exist today in most inclusive settings. The study targeted adequate instructional leadership, which ultimately affects the outcome of I.E.P. implementation and differentiation practices that impact student achievement and teacher readiness to change. The study examined leadership involvement in teaching and learning processes in inclusive settings.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to study how the practices of instructional leaders support and monitor the implementation of individualized education plans and influence teaching in inclusive classroom settings.

This chapter is consistent with that which aligns with qualitative case study methods. Interview protocols were aligned with research questions to understand the study's problem. Participant demographics were summarized to establish teaching experience, years, certification areas, and gender. The chapter will include tables, word clusters, and graphics to reinforce the summary. Sutton and Austin's (2015) thematic content analyses and open coding and in vivo processes were performed to analyze relevant pieces such as words, phrases, and sentences in individual interview transcripts. Relevant details were summarized in a table to establish a connection and compared for similarities and differences. Categories and themes that emerged from the process were outlined in more detail. Credibility was enhanced through the triangulation of multiple data sources. It was established after gaining a better understanding of existing knowledge that focused on patterns and themes found in the literature.

The researcher utilized four questions to guide the study to examine the practices of instructional leaders and how they support and monitor the implementation of I.E.P.s

in inclusive classroom settings. Murphy (2018) found that instructional leaders spend more time addressing inclusive classroom issues such as clarifying roles and responsibilities, short staffing, and discipline. Nilsen (2017) found that improperly executing IDEA policies was another problem instructional leaders and general educators faced that influenced I.E.P. implementation, which has caused some concern about implementing I.E.P.s with fidelity. The research questions below were appropriate to understand the study's problem and expound on the need for training and programs that focus on leading inclusive education to identify areas of strength and requirements related to leadership.

RQ1: How do instructional leaders support the implementation of the I.E.P. in inclusive settings?

RQ2: How do instructional leaders monitor the implementation of the I.E.P. in inclusive settings?

RQ3: How do teachers respond to the support of implementing the I.E.P. in inclusive settings by instructional leaders?

RQ4: How do teachers respond to the monitoring of the implementation of the I.E.P. in inclusive settings by instructional leaders?

Themes

Recurring keywords and phrases emerged from interviews when participants were asked about the support they received involving I.E.P. implementation in inclusive settings. For example, more than half of participants recounted experiences in the classroom or described school culture and community perceptions that practiced inclusive education, which helped establish themes relevant to research questions. In addition,

categories associated with the positive and negative attributes of themes based on inductive coding evolved and described perceived conflicts and strengths of inclusive education. Finally, interview responses that reinforced the need to increase supportive efforts in inclusive settings compiled the same reactions, phrases, and thoughts about instructional leadership. Table 4.1 shows the coding results of words and phrases repeatedly found within the text and sorted by themes.

Table 4.1

Coding Results

Theme 1	Theme 2	Theme 3	Theme 4	Theme 5	Theme 6
Resilience to Change	Shared Responsibility Administrators /Paraeducators	Meaningful Collaboration Connections	Parental Involvement – Support Structure	(Not Placing Limitations & Expectations)	(Teacher Constraints)
Struggle	Not	Coordinate	Trust	Encourage	Time
Fear	Supportive	Conversation			
Whole New	Administrator	Do not feel like it	Communication	Accommodate	Ill-Prepared
Ballgame	Head	accomplishes			
	Chair	anything			
Anxious	Paraeducator	Talk Complaints	Family	Peer to Peer	Better
			Environment		Equipped
Figure Out	Better Serve	Extra	Educate Parents	Interaction	Overwhelmed
Difficulty	Structure	Support			
Adjust	Inclusion	Disconnect	Continuing	Positive	Training P.D.
Flexible	Teacher	Growth	Education	Behavior	
Short	Parents	Not	Lack	Successful	Meeting
Notice	Community	Productive	Unwilling		Standards
Challenging	Collaborate	Negativity	Support	Fair	Constant
Frustration	Expectations	Solution			Interruptions

Theme 1: Resilience to Change

Theme 1 relates to RQ1 and focuses on the keywords “figure it out,” “not prepared,” and “ineffective.” Resilience is a term that many educators can relate to that forces them to be flexible, adaptable, and able to change at a moment’s

notice despite the pressure. In their efforts to attain success in the face of resistance on an ongoing basis, educators described the processes of staying in compliance with I.E.P.s in inclusive settings. Eleven relevant keywords emerged under Theme 1, Resilience to Change. Nine out of 12 participants referred to at least four keywords listed under the theme resilience.

One participant fervently shared her experiences about her concerns and preparations to meet guidelines during a pandemic and how the school district addressed them when trying to meet requirements of I.E.P.s, virtually and face-to-face simultaneously.

> No, we were not prepared at all because the system that we used was new. We trained on it for 2 weeks prior to school, starting, I believe, right before school. felt like a brand new teacher last year. My biggest concern was, first of all, the number of students that were in that one class that had I.E.P.s. I struggled with not only teaching those students with I.E.P.s but, of course, my other students as well. That anxiety, that frustration! I felt that feeling that I was not doing enough. I've been teaching for 20 years. It was just a whole new ballgame. I really felt that they waited too late. They said, learn this, get your pace up and be prepared to teach. We were not prepared. (Participant 7)

Another participant, having shared opinions, expressed her concerns about inclusive settings and expanded on the emphasis to be supported due to recent changes to accommodate these students.

> Teaching students virtually, it was practically impossible to actually do real accommodation because most of our I.E.P.s were extended time. You get that

> anyway. Modify the same and was given to everyone. So did that really meet the needs of the I.E.P., which was a question that we asked the administrators? Figure it out, basically. I don't think there's a cookie-cutter way to do it. You just have to see what you know, what you're going through, and what resources you have. (Participant 4)

A math teacher of 23 years having broad experiences to instruct in any setting reiterated the difficulties teachers faced to provide accommodations for children with I.E.P.s in inclusive settings. When asked what was her most significant challenge when implementing I.E.P.s, specifically during a pandemic, and virtually she responded:

> To be honest, the greatest challenge for me was when those kids were virtual and trying to figure it out. How? To work with them one on one and in a small group setting and really be effective and give them extra accommodations, I really feel like I was ineffective because of my fear. (Participant 3)

Four out of nine teacher participants felt like instructional leaders supported them. The remaining five teacher participants felt that instructional leaders were not beneficial because general educators were provided inclusion paraeducators or inclusion teachers to assist in the classroom. One participant expressed frustration about not receiving support because instructional leaders were under the impression that she did not need it.

> That is a big problem. Getting the staffing that they need so that aides and stuff will not be pulled when they are supposed to be rendering service. I think that accountability, you know, really holding everyone accountable for their part. This is my 16th year as a teacher, and I did one year of regular third grade. When talking with regular teachers, you know, they are always saying to me, I feel like

> there is a gray area. They are afraid. Saying what if I'm not doing it right. Instead of concentrating on what you are doing right, lets just see what we are doing right. So I focus on junior educators because I feel like general educators will have a harder time. Seasoned teachers are used to dealing with accommodations. (Participant 6)

Two teacher participants had not received any formal training or professional development on diversity or how to address the needs of a student who had an I.E.P. The most significant challenges experienced by participants in inclusive settings who felt they were not supported were meeting I.E.P. accommodations and standards, lacking time and training, and "feeling ill-prepared and ineffective."

Teacher participants who deemed themselves as supported by instructional leaders in inclusive settings designated themselves as experienced educators. They expressed that the support received consisted of formal and informal observations containing constructive feedback, screenings through programs that assess, progress monitor, and manage data, reading inventories, and having designated areas to keep student data. One participant shared her thoughts about the support teachers receive.

> I do not have any concerns with implementation procedures because the school formed a multidisciplinary team to address the curriculum and the importance of I.E.P.s. The principal sends reminders to teachers about the importance of following I.E.P.s, and we meet twice a week. (Participant 3)

Another participant was a first-year teacher who had not been trained on I.E.P. procedures or practices found it most challenging to implement with fidelity without

assistance. This participant expressed the need for specific training in the classroom was one of his biggest concerns.

> Last year I had a couple of kids in the class with I.E.P.s. The kids who needed extra support, it was usually pretty easy for me to get that kid who just needed this stuff read aloud, but I felt inexperienced and not prepared. My biggest concern was the need for information about I.E.P. procedures. Collaborative efforts and team teaching helped me better serve the students with I.E.P.s. I also had five observations, formal and informal, from the instructional leader, who provided feedback on implementation practices. (Participant 8)

The remaining participants identified the most significant support from instructional leaders as "collaborative meetings involving consistent input from the administrator of instruction, training within the school setting, parental support, and valuing teacher feedback" (Participant 3).

Theme 2: Shared Responsibilities

Theme 2 relates to RQ1, RQ2, and RQ4; it focuses on collaborating, communicating, listening, and struggling. Twelve emergent keywords corresponded with this theme. In addition, teacher participants openly expressed the need for administrative support and finding more opportunities to coordinate to maximize the delivery of I.E.P. services. When asked how they were supported and monitored to ensure that students were receiving the requirements of I.E.P.s, most participants expressed the need to prioritize collaboration and shared responsibilities.

> Administrators should make sure that accommodations are documented and go back to see if those things will work. Then, they should communicate those things

> to the I.E.P. holder as well as parents, just having conversations with those teachers making sure that the documentation is there. Without documentation, it didn't happen. During the previous school year, administrators helped struggling teachers by having people from the school board, say, specialists, come in and try to support us more within the school setting as compared to other years. Also, just being in the classroom listening. That was the big thing, just being able to hear the teachers' concerns and then try to come up with the solution. We had parents going in and trying to support the teachers and the students as much as possible to try to take some things off of the teacher's plate. So I would say the biggest thing is to implement more professional development and listen to the teachers and their needs to try to put some strategies and structures in place to support them. (Participant 5)

Participant 4, a new teacher seeking alternative certification specializing in math, spoke on not having confidence in paraeducators serving inclusive classrooms. She described her experience in the classroom:

> The aides have large caseloads and cannot see all the kids they service because of administrative pulling them, and students did not have the support. Being a new teacher in the field and not having full knowledge of curriculum procedures, I was told that there are so many apps and so many websites out there. You can put the problem you are having in the classroom and get your answer. I stressed the need for better assistance and monitoring from administrators to enforce staffing procedures. (Participant, 4)

When asked if she was supported or monitored, she replied:

> I wouldn't say monitored because I don't feel like anyone came in and was making sure that we were doing what we were supposed to do. Of course, you know, you annotate your accommodations on your lesson plans and that type of thing, but that is not a true representation. The inclusion teacher would come in and work directly with the teacher. So I guess that would be considered monitoring. Well, that would be supported because I would support the inclusion teacher, and she would support me when she was able to come in because we were often short-staffed. (Participant 4)

Administrator participants were asked similar questions regarding support, sharing responsibilities, and finding opportunities to coordinate with staff. Participant 10 described the need to support teachers in every way possible, especially during a pandemic. However, trying to follow strict guidelines for the pandemic took the focus off of academics.

> Teachers were dealing with so many things and trying to keep the students safe. So, it took the focus away from working on academics. They had a whole extra thing to deal with. We supported our teachers by having a paraprofessional in every class. They would follow students to all classes except for P.E. and electives. They would check on students, and that helped a lot. So, I think that being able to do that as an administrative team gave teachers some type of help and assistance to ensure that the I.E.P. was being followed and by having another person in the room to help them. (Participant 10)

Participant 10 thoughts on sharing responsibilities ensured teachers implemented I.E.P.s and progress monitoring.

> We use a couple of things in addition to our state monitoring to progress monitor. Instructional coordinators and assistant principals monitor implementation practices through pretest unit tests for math and reading and then post-test. So that was also a form of the way we evaluate along with student work they have completed throughout those different units. We use this to see what our students need. Tests were used to monitor progress to adjust I.E.P. goals and objectives if needed. So I will say informal and formal progress monitoring took place throughout the school year with classroom teachers and I.E.P. holders. Also, administrative team members formed breakout rooms for teacher collaboration to track student progress across the subject areas. Instructional leaders also provided Response to Intervention (RTI) to all students regardless of whether they had an I.E.P. or not. (Participant 10)

Participant 11 conveyed the need to monitor the implementation of I.E.P.s to have another set of eyes in the classroom, a paraeducator, to help with following I.E.P.s.

> Luckily, in my school, we have a paraprofessional in every class. They follow students to all of their classes except P.E. classes and electives. They go check on them. But in our core classes, there is a paraprofessional in there. So that helps a lot. So I think us being able to do that as an administrative team gives the teachers some type of help and assistance to make sure the I.E.P. is being followed and by doing their part and also having another person in the room to help them with that

> as well. Someone from the administrative team would do daily walkthroughs. (Participant 11)

Instructional leaders provided teachers with a communication liaison to keep parents, students, and administrators abreast of student progress. Participant 11 was also the Officially Designated Representative (ODR) for the school. Therefore, she had insight and information about all I.E.P. meetings. If there were any concerns, she would know about them first-hand. In addition, instructional leaders conducted formal and informal observations, and inclusion teachers were allowed to pick the class they needed the most assistance with implementing I.E.P.s.

Participant 12 communicated the steps that instructional leaders at her school have taken to support and monitor teachers in the inclusive setting.

> Walkthroughs are conducted daily to ensure students are on task, and teachers use visuals to support learning. In addition, classroom observations are carried out to help guide and support teachers in areas of instruction that they struggle with implementation and accommodations. Departmental meetings are held to discuss strategies to serve students with I.E.P.s best. Professional Learning Communities (PLC) and Response to Intervention (RTI) are guided by school leaders to ensure that collaboration is meaningful. (Participant 12)

Theme 3: Meaningful Collaboration

Theme 3 relates to RQ3 and focuses on the keywords extra supportive, coordinate and collaborate, showing progress, and communicate. The research unveiled 11 emergent keywords under collaboration. Collaboration is only effective when it is productive. Document analysis of district handbooks for exceptional students shows that there is

limited literature on the language and policies of inclusive education and does not specifically address inclusive education matters. Participants expressed that parents were least likely to initiate collaborative efforts because most are not versed in the language and laws of inclusive education. One participant described her thoughts about why some parents may not feel the need to collaborate as much.

> I did have a parent come in and sit with them and work with them. So that was fine. But those students that were virtual at the time did not have support, and a lot of them, depending on their disability, would not even come to class. Not everybody feels the same way about collaboration. I think you could always learn from people about what to do or not to do. Some people feel like their way is the law, and you know, you may come up with an idea, and it is oh no, no, no. (Participant 4)

One participant described the support he receives in the classroom setting related to meaningful collaboration.

> Like the kids who needed extra time, it was usually pretty easy for me to get that kids needed this for reading aloud. I had a paraprofessional with me in my science class. She kind of helped me with some of those accommodations. So normally, when we had to change some things around, she would kind of take charge ofthings to meet those accommodations. (Participant 8)

Participants expressed the importance of collaboration and believed it allows them to share knowledge, enabling them to increase skills in areas that may otherwise fall short or lack knowledge. Still, not everyone wanted to be active participants in collaboration. For example, one participant felt that instructional leaders and colleagues “should be

active listeners, experience different points of view, and reach common goals" (Participant 9).

> Nevertheless, several participants valued the idea of collaboration. We check on each other, say, hey, what are you working on or something. If I come across something that I think the other seventh-grade social studies teacher needs, I'll send an email. The eighth-grade teacher is right across the hall from me. We talk every day about what we are working on but do not constantly meet to meet. (Participant 7)

This participant discussed the benefits of collaboration and reiterated the downfalls of collaboration when it is not productive.

> Yes, you learn from each other. I definitely believe in humans paying attention to humans and not reacting based on what they see. If you want to be successful, you can not find success when you repeat what you do. But why reinvent the wheel? You know, why create something that is already created? You know, I am not here to hear complaints or talk about administration or our school system. I am here for growth betterment. I am for the child, not for anything else. (Participant 2)

Several participants preferred to work alone. Opinions varied. Some tenured participants did not feel the need to collaborate because of having acquired teaching years and experience working with students who had I.E.P.s.

> People do not always agree. I mean, yes, sure, compromise is a thing, but sometimes it is hard to compromise because, at the end of the day, we still go and teach in your individual classes. When you are working with a group, it can be

> difficult because you do not want to hurt people's feelings or annoy people, or whatever. But you still want to get the team mission accomplished. (Participant 1)

One participant with over 23 years of teaching experience shared her thoughts about working independently and being set in her ways. She described how she had been the teacher who continually sought to problem-solve. However, she felt that it was time for the younger teachers to step up and contribute suggestions or concerns to instructional leaders.

> To be honest with you, my friend, I am not really trying to be in anybody's space or face that I do not have to be. As far as I know, we do not have any plans to collaborate simply because we all have our own PLC meetings, and they are pretty much done by content. I will be honest with you. I do not have any plans to collaborate with anyone other than, I mean, even the aides that come in. You know, there is really no collaboration with them on how to better serve the students. (Participant 3)

Even though participants expressed concerns about supportive efforts implementing I.E.P.s in inclusive settings, participants who had taught for ten years or more were more comfortable teaching and collaborating in inclusive settings than newly certified teachers.

> Yeah, it is actually eye-opening and a nice situation to see both subjects collaborating because the curriculum does line up between them really well,especially for our third unit. I can definitely reference the other subject more. Our instructional coach sits in on pretty much all meetings during the school year. Our principal would come in, and he did like a form with us to evaluate ourselves

> as a team and see where we would need improvement and then all of the groups. (Participant 1)

Participant 1 also described what she thought was meaningful collaboration and what it looked like after being asked how administrators supported her when delivering effective instruction.

> I started the year off on a split team, so everybody on my team-taught two subjects. The social studies teacher on my team volunteered to go to the virtual program. Therefore, I had to start teaching her social studies classes. So I taught ELA and social studies. I felt like my administration was extra supportive of me because they knew they were putting me in a difficult situation. I was learning the subject matter as I went along. I felt like they were very supportive and checked on me to see if I was doing ok. I think that it was super beneficial for our students with I.E.P.s. (Participant 1).

One administrator shared her thoughts about collaboration and addressing concerns of teachers in inclusive settings, stating:

> I get together with some of the administrators and try to address collected concerns from different teachers. An actual person on staff was designated specifically for students with I.E.P.s. The teacher was the communication liaison between the teacher, student, and the parent. So that helped us as well. She would tell us if something was off or not right, and then we would go from there. (Participant 11)

Participant 2 elaborated on the usefulness of using peer-to-peer collaboration to meet the standards of I.E.P.s when paraeducators are not readily available. He explained

how implementing I.E.P.s using non-traditional methods with limited administrative support "pushed teachers to come out of their comfort zone" and forced them to learn the new technology to implement I.E.P.s faster and with shorter notice. He also stated that "the district did not readily address the glitches in technology that affected instructional delivery daily." He continued:

> We had to communicate a little bit more with our parents. We were teaching coding this year, and everything that the kids learned, the parents had to learn. So I think that it was a family environment of learning. Also, I always use peer-to-peer learning during periods when the paraeducator is not present. That interaction with others helped kids learn from each other, promoting positive behavior instead of negative. (Participant 2)

When asked about using collaborative efforts to better student outcomes of receiving quality services based around I.E.P. accommodations, Participant 6 provided this detailed description of school processes that monitor and support teachers and administrators using meaningful collaboration:

> Teachers had to fill out a collaboration form weekly with our inclusion students and talk to the teacher who teaches that subject. They had two different forms. One is a collaborative form, and the other is an inclusion form. This form gives teachers snapshots of students' grades. So, with those forms of documentation, it does help to see where a child is failing before the end of the nine weeks. It helps to show that teachers are collaborating. It should be used to verify why a child is either passing or failing at the end of the nine weeks. My biggest concern was being able to show progress. (Participant 6)

Participant 2 directly stated his personal experiences about collaboration and explained the need for meaningful collaboration. He was blunt and felt that collaboration did not necessarily advance professional skills if it is redundant. He expressed satisfaction and dissatisfaction with collaboration processes and how unstructured professional development does not promote growth or ensure that teachers stay abreast of current policies. When asked if he would be working with other teachers to help meet the requirements of I.E.P.s, he stated:

> I work on my own and learn on my own. Sometimes working with other people can be difficult because they bring their trash to the table. They talk about negativity and not positive things. I rather not be a part of the conversation. I find that if someone is successful at something, it should be shared. I would love to come to meetings and hear success stories. I'm not here to listen to complaints and talk ill about people. I mean administration, our school system, and what have you with people. I'm here for growth or betterment and the child. Most collaboration meetings usually start to become conversational and not intentional. (Participant 2)

Opinions varied from participants, specifically by subject area. For example, Participant 9 stated, "Students need more support than other curriculum areas because math requires manipulatives and visuals. I think it was harder to accommodate using non-traditional methods."

Another participant shared that having static groups promoted social skills and gave I.E.P. holders opportunities to collaborate more with students and classroom teachers. According to Participant 1,

> [Teachers] switch students, and they get extension tasks. That allowed the special education department to start pulling kids every 30 minutes every day. Static grouping did not give students the accommodation of extended time, but it promoted social skills.

On the other hand, Participants 3, 5, and 6 felt that the curriculum chosen for the district last year had many built-in accommodations that supported diverse learning and thought that was a plus. Participant 3 shared:

> I try to work smarter, not harder. So a lot of the accommodations were blanket accommodations. Everybody got them. So like, for example, it was easy to do sentence frames, you know, to maybe perhaps help them write paragraphs. But a lot of support and accommodations are built in organically into the lesson so that it looked more like help for everybody, which you did not necessarily have to take advantage of if you did not need it. The aides would come in, you know, for students who needed assistance in the classroom. They would pull her for so many things. Four or five of the students in my first-hour class had I.E.P.s., where it was not even funny. Other than that, that was one of my biggest disappointments that I feel like I was not supported the way that I needed to be in order to better serve those students' needs.

An ELA participant shared the following further details about the benefits of the curriculum and how it changed the delivery of instruction:

> Teachers were already familiar with the program so that would not have to struggle with learning how to use it. They just go into planning. They know how

> to adjust some things from what they learned last year. We were able to tweak some things with the support of administrators. (Participant 5)

Participant 6 discussed the curriculum's advantages on reading, emphasized comprehension, and extended time for students with I.E.P.s. with the following:

> The computer can read documents to them, you know. So that helped a little bit with comprehension if they were paying attention. If they are not paying attention, they are not comprehending. Whereas with math, I can pretty much get my feedback immediately whether or not students got the answers right or wrong. With my inclusion students, they fill out the collaboration form and talk to the teacher. It gives them a snapshot of their grades.

Participants explained that they received support from inclusion teachers but would prefer to receive more input from instructional leaders. According to Participant 4, the "inclusion teacher would come in, and I would work directly with her. Teachers are able to do other duties when they come in. Often, we were short-staffed. It would be helpful if they hear the concerns of the teachers."

A first-year science teacher shared his experiences of being new to the field and expressed difficulties adhering to I.E.P. guidelines without current knowledge. Participant 8 stated:

> For the first 3 or 4 months, I did not know what I was doing. I was not completely sure what I was supposed to be doing with those I.E.P.s. I had a paraprofessional in the classroom with me. The support was there, but it was limited to time and collaboration.

Theme 4: Parent Involvement

Theme 4 relates to RQ3 and RQ4; it focuses on the keywords communication, not prepared, and listening. Parental involvement and the data from speaking with participants revealed the importance of parent involvement in inclusive education and eight categories found within the data. Teachers and administrators emphasized family priorities and their influences on the home and school environments. Participants emphasized factors that would enable success and how having a solid home structure was vital. Participant 8 highlighted the significance of parental support and approached his concerns about diversity in the classroom.

> There was little communication between the administration, teachers, and parents. We had a couple of meetings throughout the year with the parents to go over what was being done. But, other than that, there wasn't a whole lot of support, to be honest. Being a first-year teacher, I understood a little bit about inclusion, but it wasn't until halfway through the year that I really understood the changing things and how different people were going to need different things. Then, I was able to start helping them more. I don't feel like I was prepared at all about the I.E.P.s and how to handle it. It was a learning process. (Participant 8)

Administrator participants stressed the importance of parental involvement in inclusive education and encouraged any interaction with parents, teachers, and students. "I want to make sure that we include everyone" (Participant 12).

Addressing concerns of angry parents were highlighted in individual interview transcripts. Participants spoke about the many instances they faced addressing these issues. One, in particular, shared an experience she encountered with angry parents who

were unhappy about a student's failing grades but were unwilling or unable to do the work to help the child excel. Last year, she taught 120 students and 50 virtual students, and more than 20 of those students had I.E.P.s. She wanted the research to examine the problem with districts that allowed students to advance to the next grade level, specifically, seventh grade, that had not received accommodations before then and how this incidence makes it harder for the following year's teacher, who is expected to provide those accommodations. Participant 9 stated:

> I want the administration actually to listen to their teachers. Usually, it's sad when it comes to these students because, you know, No Child Left Behind? A lot of these students are getting left behind. I understand when it comes to speed and paperwork, there is a stigma. But, usually, these kids are hitting seventh grade in middle school, and we will see I.E.P. accommodations. We've been telling the administration this for a while, even though we know that it falls on the parents. There are kids who are literally making it to the eighth grade and can't read or write. You know, all they can do is really just sit there and what the parents will do is take them from school to school to escape the paperwork. I don't know if the administration is truly the root of the problem, but I think the parents are as well. I wish that there was a way to just talk to the parents and make them aware. Parents have a responsibility too.

Another participant did not feel that teachers had the trust in parents, and instructional leaders did not do enough to promote a community that welcomed feedback so that parents would do their parts in helping to educate the children. "The biggest challenge was to trust the parents and have them be a part of the activities or either

concerned about keeping the child on task when students were virtual learners" (Participant 2).

Participant 4 had the opposite reaction from parents involved in their children's education and was pleased with the student outcome and the efforts to get them to participate actively, noting, "I did have a parent come in and sit with them and work with them."

Interview participants provided a general overview of the monitoring efforts of instructional leaders in their schools. In addition, responses were compiled of opinions and views about monitoring procedures in the inclusive setting. Participants agreed that if monitoring were done more often and in a productive manner, it would strengthen instructional skills, increase collaboration, and address problems before they become unmanageable. In addition, participants agree that instructional leaders could address the issues found in the data through effective monitoring practices. However, many feel that monitoring procedures are limited to none, and restrictions placed on teachers to meet standards have become overwhelming. They equally agree that overwhelming curriculum expectations and not meeting standards pose difficulties for teachers and affect job performance.

Theme 5: Not Placing Limitations or Expectations

Theme 5 relates to RQ4 and focuses on the keywords collaborate, input, interaction, and encourage. Seven categories were assigned to the limitations section. Several participants expressed their beliefs about setting limitations on expectations for students who hold I.E.P.s and how that hinders intellectual gains and opportunities to interact with peers. On the other hand, teachers and instructional leaders were adamant

about keeping students to the same standards as their peers because it allowed them to improve academically and provided them with grade-level materials. Participant 5 shared:

> We do the very best that we know how to do and try to meet them where they are. We bring in parents if necessary. We can collaborate, and the parent can take on a prominent role. But, whether they have an I.E.P. or not, there are still student deficits. So you are going to have to provide individual learning and input for all your students. You are going to have to provide RTI for all of your students. So, whether or not they have an I.E.P. or something on paper, you still have to look at the data. You still have to know where to provide those accommodations.

Participant 6 passionately expressed her thoughts about encouraging students to excel and preparing them to meet their academic needs and feel good about it. She thought that this effort to support students should be school-wide and not classroom-based only. She shared:

> I always have to show students for me to really tap into their learning. I always have to show them some growth so they can feel good about themselves. When they are constantly not able to understand or read something, it isn't very encouraging. That's why as teachers, we got to put ourselves in that child's position. How would I want somebody to approach me if I was having difficulty? How would I want them to teach me if I didn't understand? So often, when teachers get themselves in a teaching position, it's easier for them to succumb to the learning position.

One participant mentioned that not being partial to students with I.E.P.s helped both the student and the teacher. Participant 4 expressed that the focus should not be on disabilities but the child's abilities.

> My thing is not to treat them differently from regular education students even though they have an I.E.P. It would be best if you still had the same level of expectations for them. Most students have been coddled along the way and feel like they don't have to perform. A lot of times, some of them do not try because they have been given a pass. They think that it is safe for them not to perform as well as they should because they have accommodations. Even though some students learn at different levels, you can still learn, and that kind of behavior is not acceptable. (Participant 4)

Theme 6: Teacher Constraints

Theme 6 relates to RQ1, RQ2, RQ3, and RQ4; it focuses on constraints of lack of preparation, overwhelming feelings, constant interruptions, lack of training, challenges, and struggles. Eight categories capture the essence of the research questions and describe the experiences educators have faced in the inclusive classroom setting. Participant teachers felt that they have continuously faced challenges to perform and make themselves available to every student. In addition, participants emphasized the personal responsibilities they have taken on and how these responsibilities continue to grow with little time to get them done. Finally, participants highlighted several constraints in the study that hindered effective performance in the inclusive classroom that instructional leaders have not fully supported. Participant 1's "biggest concern last school year was the

limited number of learning types and students with I.E.P.s not being prepared to implement technology used to complete assignments."

Challenges beyond teacher control have been encountered in inclusive classrooms that leave participants feeling insufficient in their efforts to support students without the aid of administrators. "Teachers were anxious about the periods and tried to keep lessons short and simple. I constantly stressed about being able to meet the standards of I.E.P.s and overwhelming curriculum expectations" (Participant 2).

Participant 3 explained how she struggled with meeting accommodations due to insufficient support and overcrowded classrooms with the following:

> My biggest concern is trying to work with students in terms of giving them those extra accommodations. I felt ineffective. Many accommodations were blanket accommodations. Therefore, all students got them. Classroom sizes were overwhelming, and I felt like I was not supported the way I needed to be to better serve those students, particularly by paraeducators who came into the room for only thirty minutes at a time and left.

Participants expressed concerns about ensuring that students with I.E.P.s achieved the same outcomes as their peers. Participant 4 shared:

> It was practically impossible to do actual accommodations last year and virtually because many were for an extended time. I gave extended time to all students. I could not provide students one-on-one assistance using non-traditional methods due to short staffing and constant interruptions with computer technology. The only good thing about using technology last year was that it was a sound tracking system.

Participant 5 expressed concerns about workloads and the need for training and timing to adapt to non-traditional methods that affected instructional and I.E.P. delivery.

> The challenge for me was implementing virtual learning for students with I.E.P.s. Also, when you have students who need individualized learning, teachers were already trying to figure out the new program they were required to teach last year. I don't think that the district gave us enough time or training. (Participant 5)

According to Participant 6, several barriers to disability hindered student progress during the school crisis, and accommodating students with I.E.P.s was challenging because most require hands-on activities and teacher modeling. Participant 6 stated:

> I found that organization was a challenge for me because when students were virtual and had an I.E.P., they did not have that teacher to model for them. We had to teach students how to share the screen. I think that was an accommodation for them. When they were able to do that, we would walk them through and teach them how to submit an assignment. It was difficult for them to learn how to do all that stuff. They lost a lot of homework by not being familiar with the technology.

One participant acknowledged the need for district leaders to take notice of problems teachers encounter in inclusive classrooms, such as placement issues, technology training, and professional development on new programs, noting:

> I struggled with navigating technology and teaching, trying to show students how to submit assignments. Students who had I.E.P.s took a while to learn the system that we were using. Inclusion teachers supported inclusion students. My problem was the number of students that were in my class. Students who had I.E.P.s were grouped in one class. I don't feel that the district or instructional leaders addressed

> our concerns or prepared us to use the new system. We trained for only two weeks before the start of school. I felt like a new teacher and have been teaching for twenty years. (Participant 7)

Participants agreed that sufficient time to train on programs and plans that have been used in inclusive settings was not provided. One shared:

> Having the ability to change what you're doing at a fast pace was my most significant challenge in the inclusive classroom last year. I had a paraeducator in the room with me to help get some of those accommodations done daily. Nobody came around to see if we were doing it. I wasn't entirely sure about what I was supposed to be doing with the I.E.P. because it was my first year of teaching. I don't feel like I was prepared at all about the I.E.P. and how to handle it. It was a learning process because they don't offer PD to general educators about I.E.P.s. (Participant 8)

The need for parental support was indicated throughout the text and was communicated by this participant as one of the biggest challenges of her teaching career. She shared:

> I would have to say that it would be parental support as my biggest challenge to address the needs of the I.E.P. The problem I have is with assignments and getting parents involved in the completion of those assignments. Not everyone is math-minded, which is the subject that I teach. You need those foundational skills with us, and parents must teach those skills. I felt like I wasn't reaching those parents of the children that needed the extra accommodations and felt ineffective in my efforts. (Participant 9)

Summary

A significant finding in my study was that female instructional leader participants demonstrated more democratic leadership styles within their school communities. Only one instructional leader participant displayed characteristics of a constructivist leader. In addition, two of the three instructional leader participants expressed more flexibility in supporting teachers and engaging in decision-making processes that enhanced instruction in inclusive settings. Previous studies indicate that constructivist leadership styles are open to collaborative learning and interaction and encourage flexibility, diversity, and distributed leadership (Yildirim & Kaya, 2019). Democratic leadership styles have characteristics of constructivist leaders but focus more on building team relationships and solving problems efficiently (Hussain et al., 2017).

This chapter contains the themes that emerged related to investigating leadership styles for inclusive education and how they affect I.E.P. implementation in general classroom settings. Results were consistent with qualitative methods used to disclose more data about how instructional leaders support and monitor the implementation of individualized education plans and influence teaching. Twelve participants were interviewed for this qualitative case study. Research questions were structured to study how teachers have been supported and monitored in inclusive settings and uncover constraints that hinder the effective implementation of the I.E.P. All participants were certified educators who had taken the traditional certification path and two who were currently taking the alternate route to teach. Three of the 12 participants were instructional leaders who had more than 50 years combined of leadership.

Consistent with qualitative methods, constant comparison analyses were performed through inductive coding, open-coding, and in vivo processes to discover themes about instructional leaders' positive and negative influences on inclusive education. Six themes emerged from coding processes into categories that described relationships between the themes. The six themes that emerged from the study that summarized the need for consistent instructional support and monitoring efforts were: (1) Resilience to Change, (2) Shared Responsibilities, (3) Meaningful Collaboration, (4) Parental Involvement, (5) Placing Limits on Students, and (6) Teacher Constraints. When looking at previous literature on inclusive education, numerous similarities contribute to unsuccessful inclusive practices. Current data show that the differences in leadership styles to sustain and support inclusion have changed from a more democratic leadership style than previous research. The researcher sought to understand how instructional leadership practices supported teachers to help develop their profession to implement I.E.P.s with fidelity. Although inclusive education is progressing and data clearly show that instructional leaders are more open to change, problems still exist to sustain and support implementation practices consistently.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to learn more about how the practices of instructional leaders support and monitor the implementation of individualized education plans and influence teaching in inclusive classroom settings. The current study aimed to enhance understanding of instructional leaders' efforts to ensure that general educators fully implement I.E.P.s in inclusive settings. McAlister et al. (2017) recognized that with frequent changes in inclusive education, leaders must understand that active participation was one of the predictors of change. The current study examined constructivist leadership styles to obtain information that would empower teachers in inclusive settings and improve school performance (Lambert et al., 2002). Chapter 5 outlines significant patterns related to the literature in Chapter 2 and research questions about leadership styles and perceptions of inclusive practices. The discussion provided insight into how instructional leaders monitor and support general educators to successfully guide inclusive settings and limit constraints that prevent teachers from fully implementing I.E.P.s. The chapter concluded with recommendations for leadership practices, recommendations for future research, and a conclusion.

Interpretation of Findings

My research contributes to the literature and supports constructivist leadership's theoretical framework by maintaining that supporting general educators in inclusive settings creates a sense of community, encourages flexibility, diversity, and distributed leadership (Yildirim & Kaya, 2019). Instructional leadership styles have been determined to significantly influence the direction of inclusive education. Results from the current study are intended to support existing studies in Chapter 2 and depict a more integrated picture of a constructivist leader. In this chapter, the current study's findings are consistent with each of the four research questions presented in Chapter 1. In addition, results are related to perceptions and behavior patterns outlined in Chapter 2.

McLeskey et al. (2014) referenced inclusive education in their research and provided relevant evidence on how leadership reinforces and builds the foundation of schools that support diversity. McLeskey et al. (2014) explained that effective inclusive education transpires when instructional leaders are held accountable for establishing educational standards and distributing and sharing leadership to strengthen instructional practices and alliances between educators, administrators, and students. McKay (2016) suggests that when inclusive educations' intended policies and procedures are not established, it impacts teachers' perceptions and longevity in the field.

The qualitative methods used in this study provided substantial knowledge of each participant's position on inclusive education. Triangulation of multiple data sources such as district contingency plans, school improvement plans, professional development opportunities, and the Louisiana Educational Rights of Children with Disabilities: Special Education Processes and Procedures Safeguards pamphlet, along with semi-structured

interviews, were utilized to strengthen overall findings and address internal validity (Creswell, 2013; Sutton & Austin, 2015).

RQ 1 focused on how instructional leaders support I.E.P. implementation in the inclusive setting. Participants in the current study indicated that leadership was essential to endorse inclusive pedagogical procedures.

Instructional leaders in the current study identified supports that corresponded to King-Sears and Strogilos (2018), who used words and phrases such as valuing teacher feedback, collaboration, and supporting each other during the I.E.P. process. All three instructional leader participants had a high need to support teachers and resolved multiple concerns. They encouraged teachers to communicate with each other and I.E.P. holders to ensure that documentation was there.

The current study supported Diaz's (2014) findings. One of the most noticeable differences in inclusive education today compared to school communities in Chapter 2 was instructional leaders' willingness to change and utilize the improved programs and services for students in the settings. Hussain et al. (2017) reiterated the notion that instructional leaders have become more open to accepting feedback from teachers by taking suggestions and supporting them in every way, even though classroom challenges exist. Participant 10 in the current study described what she thought was the best way to accept feedback and support teachers: have a paraeducator in every class, address teacher concerns about following strict guidelines during the pandemic that took the focus off of academics, and provide assistance with I.E.P. implementation. Participant 11 expressed the importance of team teaching and collecting concerns from teachers to address problems in the classroom. Participant 12, who practiced a democratic leadership style,

felt it was essential to include everyone in I.E.P. implementation practices and encourage faculty participation in all decision-making.

Two out of three administrator participants in the current study who exhibited a more democratic leadership style agreed that teachers must be given opportunities to share supportive strategies and ideas to be more productive in delivering I.E.P.s. To achieve this outcome, instructional leaders must create an environment free from biases and behaviors that affect the environment's quality. This finding suggests that innate leadership characteristics may cause some schools more than others to succeed in attaining supportive I.E.P. practices and contribute to inclusive education by involving all stakeholders to support teachers, including parents, as supported by Hussain et al.(2017).

Brau (2020) examined Lev Vygotsky's perspective on constructivism and found it evident in the current study's findings on shared responsibilities involving all stakeholders in school practices. Vygotsky argued that potential abilities could surface through social interaction when given proper guidance and leadership. Administrator participants in the current study were aligned with Vygotsky's perspective. Although two out of three administrator participants exhibited democratic leadership styles, they all agreed with the idea of fully supporting teachers through shared activities such as Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) and multidisciplinary teams to meet all parts of the I.E.P. Also, participants highlighted the need to support teachers in ways that were not only physical but emotional and informational as well.

RQ 2 sought to determine how instructional leaders monitor the implementation of the I.E.P. in inclusive settings. According to Participants 10, 11, and 12 in the current

study, the most effective way to monitor I.E.P. implementation is to collect data and monitor progress to ensure that students meet I.E.P. goals.

Regarding the different leadership styles, Participants 10 and 11 disclosed clear plans to facilitate monitoring processes of I.E.P.s in inclusive settings. Instructional leaders in the current study shared relevant information about the strategies used in their schools to establish good working relationships between teachers and administrators. Yildirim and Kaya's (2019) study supports administrators' expectations and their contributions to organizational success. One finding from the study was that teachers felt that instructional leaders encouraged them to develop their profession to keep up with changes.

An overwhelming majority of participants in the current study perceived that instructional leaders did not monitor classroom implementation practices to help them keep up with changes. They also perceived that many school leaders did not fully exercise their leadership responsibilities to ensure that teachers implement I.E.P.s to the fullest extent. Participants 3, 4, 7, and 8 described monitoring efforts performed through data analysis only but did not include classroom visits from administrators. Participants agreed with comments about leaders not following through on collaboration efforts, and a teacher participant made a statement on the following incident in this manner:

> Nobody came around to see if we were doing it correctly, and there was little communication between administrators, teachers, and parents. I would not say monitored because I did not feel like anyone came in to ensure that we were doing what we were supposed to.

The current study revealed that all teacher participants needed to acquire some form of I.E.P. training but understood the processes to carry out implementation. Participants felt that instructional leaders did not prepare them to carry out the requirements of I.E.P.s, specifically during a pandemic, and to use non-traditional teaching methods. Instructional leaders in the current study described their readiness to address teachers' concerns by utilizing reading and math data to adjust I.E.P. goals when necessary and forming breakout rooms for collaboration to track student data across subject areas, as expressed by Participant 10. Participant 11 described identifying the who, how, and when to monitor implementation in classrooms at her school. The participant explained it this way:

> Who is the I.E.P. holder and teacher responsible for carrying it out? How will collaboration be conducted among teachers to ensure that services are delivered? When will they be given measurable timelines, goals, and objectives?

Participant 12 in the current study monitored teachers through informal observations and classroom walkthroughs. The findings of Gaines and Barnes (2017) and Gilmour (2018) support all forms of classroom monitoring in inclusive settings. These researchers further explained the importance of supporting and monitoring instructional leaders' practices that may influence teaching in inclusive environments by looking at inclusion from an ecological perspective. They acknowledged the impact that inclusion had on teachers and not teachers' impacts on inclusion.

Gaines and Barnes (2017) suggested that developing teachers' self-efficacies about inclusive education worries should be done through professional development because teacher efficacies vary. Gilmour (2018) suggested that teachers be supported

with behavioral management and instructional leaders account for students in classrooms that exhibit disruptive behavior when teachers are spending more time on classroom management than instruction. In the current study, administrators and teacher participants elaborated on the constraints to implementing the I.E.P. and stated that classroom management was one. Statements and phrases such as constant interruptions and feeling overwhelmed illustrated the demands placed on teachers and how they responded to them.

Gilmour (2018) highlighted the focus on interactions between all stakeholders to combat problems in the classroom that affected the delivery of services. She advised that interventions be developed to support teachers with implementation practices and perceptions of inclusion. Therefore, establishing processes that clarify instructional leaders' expectations of teachers, students, and vice versa.

RQ 3 sought to understand how teachers respond to the support of implementing I.E.P.s in inclusive settings by instructional leaders. Lee-Tarver (2014) and Savage and Erten (2015) described influences beyond teachers' controls that may cause them to require continued support in inclusive settings. Teachers' interpretations of how they should implement I.E.P.s, inadequate leadership support, and unaddressed apprehensions about legal mandates concerning I.E.P.s were some influences that suggested constant support is warranted in the setting.

Participants in the current study reported that supportive efforts were inconsistent and usually not done by instructional leaders but by someone else, like paraeducators, inclusion teachers, or peers. They felt the absence of formal guidance from instructional

leaders and the need to rely on themselves and their colleagues to understand and carry out implementation processes.

A recent case found in Jameson et al. (2020), the *Chicago Teachers Union v. Betsy DeVos, United States Department of Education and the Board of Education of the City of Chicago* addressed the experiences of teachers who were unprepared and not supported in their efforts to deliver instruction in a non-traditional manner to students with disabilities. The study described the value of instructional support and how it directly affects the classroom.

In the previous Jameson et al. (2020) study, the *Chicago Teachers Union v. Betsy DeVos, United States Department of Education, and the Board of Education of the City of Chicago,* constant teacher constraints were a lack of knowledge, support, and time. Teachers were not given adequate time or support to amend and update I.E.P.s to reflect changes brought on by the pandemic. It would take time to amend all 60,000 I.E.P.s in this particular school district and would interfere with instructional time. Teachers felt that instructional leaders' support was not an active part of the inclusive setting and did not improve classroom productivity due to insufficient levels of involvement.

As an instructional leader, building a school community that supports inclusion solely on its leadership style and structure may be debatable but essential to the current study. Although several studies examine possible ways to support teachers, being resilient and developing thinking and practice is the key to sustaining a school community that can move forward despite constant change (Ainscow, 2005; Lambert et al., 2002; Murphy, 2018). The current study described an example that often occurred in inclusive settings, as stated by participant teachers who indicated the need for significant

change in implementation practices. Participant 9 outlined problems in the interview that required ongoing vertical and horizontal curriculum support. She gave an example of an experience with a sixth-grade student with reading deficiencies who had not received accommodations until the previous school year. The participant believed that district staff must ensure students acquire skills and receive accommodations to advance to the next grade level. Participant 9 also expressed concerns about data on high percentages of students in inclusive settings who have not shown progress in crucial subject areas, suggesting that I.E.P.s need to be reconvened to reflect changes. Yell et al. (2016) emphasized that developing sound I.E.P.s that address student needs and providing consistent support was essential in confronting problems early before student progress is affected.

RQ 4 addressed how teachers respond to the monitoring of the implementation of I.E.P.s in inclusive settings by instructional leaders. Nilsen (2017, 2020) supported the need for ongoing monitoring in inclusive settings by finding that teachers will continue to prepare and deliver curricula that do not adequately address I.E.P. provisions if their concerns continue to go unaddressed.

Participant responses and opinions varied in their views of monitoring procedures. However, they all agreed that procedures conducted by instructional leaders were inconsistent and often unproductive. Participants were convinced that if monitoring were consistent, it would increase collaboration among teachers and administrators and help address implementation problems before they become unmanageable.

In this current study, there were several instances where participants communicated the desire to have continued communication with instructional leaders to

ensure that they were carrying out the responsibilities of I.E.P.s correctly. For example, Participant 7, an experienced teacher with a 20-year education background, indicated that because she was an experienced teacher, instructional leaders did not monitor her as much because they felt like she did not need it. She spoke about how she struggled to keep up with instruction using new technology and had an overwhelming number of students in the class who needed accommodations. In contrast to Participant 7, Participant 2 showed resistance to collaboration and monitoring because he perceived that either would not ensure growth because of inconsistencies.

Lambert et al. (2002) suggested that constructivist leaders have attributed to engaging with others to alleviate educator worries, deepen understanding of new learning processes, and focus on conversations geared towards problem-solving and resolution. Instructional leaders in the current study expressed the importance of devoting time to collaboration to address concerns and equip teachers with the necessary abilities to provide services for students with disabilities. This sentiment contrasts with instructional leaders in previous literature, such as the Rowley case of 1982, where school leaders practiced aristocratic leadership styles and did not welcome input from teachers or parents about the I.E.P. (Koseki, 2017).

Zimmerman et al. (2002) emphasized the constructivist's leadership style as a shared purpose and growth that relied on everyone's patterns and learning needs involved in learning processes. Zimmerman et al. (2002) suggested that the changes in schools that have affected inclusive settings and learning methods have altered how instructional leaders make meaningful connections with teachers to deliver the curriculum. In the

current study, Participants 1, 2, and 6 expressed the need for relevant collaboration that makes instructional leaders and teachers active participants in all I.E.P. procedures.

Many participants in the current study encouraged collaborative teams as a support system but shared their concerns about being active participants in decision-making. Some were direct about their feelings and implied that they received little to no support from instructional leaders. I assumed that participants showed concern about instructional leaders' efforts to monitor and support them because of the ever-changing job demands. Because state and national curriculum standards are continuously changing, the need to support and monitor is evident. McAlister et al. (2017) and Sacks and Hadler (2017) suggested that schools promote active processes when working towards a common goal of establishing open communication lines between instructional leaders and staff. Participants 1, 3, 4, 5, 7, and 8 in this study acknowledged that they were ill-prepared and felt ineffective due to a lack of support in many classroom situations. In addition, changes in schools that included technology-related instruction affected inclusive settings and led to numerous problems for both teachers and administrators.

The current study found that teachers' constraints that made them feel unprepared to perform job duties were good predictors of the classroom direction. Participants used words like ill-prepared, overwhelmed, ineffective, and not equipped to teach as hindrances to instruction. The case in Jameson et al. (2020), the *Chicago Teachers Union v. Betsy DeVos, United States Department of Education, and the Board of Education of the City of Chicago* also addressed the effectiveness of educators in inclusive settings during transitioning and why school leaders must diligently support and monitor them.

The *Chicago Teachers Union v. Betsy DeVos, United States Department of Education, the Board of Education of the City of Chicago* case occurred where teachers were not prepared to deliver instruction virtually (Jameson et al., 2020). Plaintiffs accused the United States Department of Education and the Board of Education of the City of Chicago of not giving them time to amend and update students' I.E.P.s to reflect the changes brought on by learning provisions. A total of 60,000 I.E.P.s were the target of the court case, which is ongoing today. Teachers argued that amending all educational plans would result in hours taken away from instruction provided to students, resulting in a lack of a FAPE at no fault of the teachers.

In conclusion, teachers felt that if adequate instructional leadership and support became an active part of the inclusive setting, it would have improved classroom productivity and I.E.P. implementation. Gilmour (2018) explained that when students are not making progress in the inclusive setting, they are not accessing the general curriculum, which is the intended purpose of inclusion. Insufficient levels of involvement in implementation practices of the I.E.P. and preconceived perceptions about inclusion continue to affect the quality of inclusive education (Gaines & Barnes, 2017). In addition, the difficulties teachers have faced to address student needs to be combined with the need for time management, training, and collaborative practices, further the hindrances to advancement in practices and the delivery of quality services (Hernandez et al., 2016; Hornby, 2015). Participants in this study continuously expressed similar thoughts about maintaining classrooms, emphasizing struggles, and the overwhelming need to perform and meet standards of the inclusive setting.

Recommendations for Leadership Practice

The current study illustrates various reasons that general educators might feel unprepared to teach in inclusive settings, and instructional leaders' preconceived bias may undermine educators' teaching abilities. In addition, it offers explanations as to what educators think they need to know to implement the I.E.P. and why specific factors have been seen as either supports or hindrances to their progress. These factors have given teachers a false sense of self-efficacy when educating students with disabilities. Hernandez et al. (2016) used Bandura's self-efficacy model to determine educators' comfort levels in the inclusive classroom and how they were supported. They found that special educators' comfort levels were higher than general educators. Also, they were more confident when implementing I.E.P.s because of the extensive training received before entering the field.

Yildirim and Kaya (2019) elaborated on the constructivist leader and how he or she prepare all teachers and contribute to change by letting go of traditional roles and ways of thinking by providing all educators with the same training to meet curriculum guidelines. The current study results have demonstrated that districts have not shown much progress in preparing instructional leaders to enact school-wide visions and goals to make commitments to implement inclusive practices with fidelity.

Based on findings in the current study and the discussion in the previous section, the following recommendations are offered:

1. Professional development should be made available to teachers, including extensive collaboration training, cooperative learning, adaptations, alternate assessment, content enhancement, and team teaching.

2. Leadership practices should include a cohort of active participants in evaluation meetings, I.E.P. meetings, observations, and discipline meetings.

3. Leadership practices should determine the needs of their staff through ongoing communication using effective monitoring techniques that utilize best practices.

4. Leadership practices should support teachers by educating themselves on special education concepts and procedures and have set policies to comply with those regulations.

Recommendations for Future Research

Leadership creates the framework of the school community, and school leaders must stay abreast of current practices. However, the current study has demonstrated that districts have made some progress in preparing instructional leaders to enact school-wide visions and goals to commit to carrying out inclusive practices with fidelity. Still, there is much needed to be done.

Based on the findings of the current study, the following recommendations for future research are offered:

- Future research should be conducted on teachers and have ongoing evaluations to ensure that job demands in inclusive settings are consistent with knowledge, skills, and interests. Paraeducators who assist teachers should also receive the same support to ensure that qualifications are updated.
- Future research should be conducted on teachers to survey and determine the perceived disconnects to implementing I.E.P.s in inclusive settings.

- Future research should be performed using qualitative studies describing in-depth leadership styles and applications that make I.E.P. implementation school-wide, not a classroom effort.
- Future research should be conducted on educational leadership programs to determine if they are designed to prepare school leaders in diversity and inclusive education cross-curricular integration.

Conclusion

This research focused on constructivist instructional leaders and their roles in overseeing I.E.P. processes. Inclusive classroom settings have evolved, yet there remain challenges to making significant progress. In addition, teacher constraints that have been in place for years still exist today. Therefore, the role of school leaders is vital in ensuring that I.E.P.s are implemented with fidelity. Failure to do so may lead to procedural violations and a denial of a FAPE.

The current study revealed that several educators in the general classroom setting continue to struggle to develop effective, inclusive learning environments without risking violations. Two of the participating school leaders in this study practiced similar leadership styles to implement well-developed school policies and procedures to support teachers. Yet, participants shared their experiences and stressed the need for ongoing professional development, collaboration, and external support to help them to stay abreast of current I.E.P. standards. Teachers gave feedback about not clearly understanding roles and responsibilities or having the necessary training to deliver services outlined in the I.E.P., specifically during a pandemic when the I.E.P. included contingency plans. They also acknowledged that instructional leaders did not readily address concerns or feedback

from teachers, which is a complaint found to be consistent with Chapter 2 involving the inclusive setting.

Participants in the current study who had low fidelity in delivering I.E.P. services identified concerns that hindered effective delivery, including time management, constant classroom disruptions, lack of collaborative co-teaching, referring to I.E.P.s as a guide, and training. Instructional leaders relatively impact and guide the classroom direction and how teachers perceive challenges. Challenges to inclusive education are consistent across the literature. Inclusion policies have not been constant and ever-changing. To enforce them has caused more significant challenges.

Districts have not prepared school leaders or teachers to balance the challenges and stay motivated. While school leaders and teacher participants in the current study shared their experiences about inclusion, most experiences were positive, but some participants had preconceived biases that were disconnected from the true purpose of inclusion. All participants were certified, competent teachers who spoke highly regarding teaching and shared their love for students. Yet, many felt the need to acquire new skills in policies and practices involving I.E.P.s and used descriptors such as *professional development*, *better equipped*, and *ill-prepared* to narrate their thoughts about I.E.P.s when conveying the need to instructional leaders. Even though this is a small-scale study with a limited number of participants, it is concluded that continued research on leadership styles is critical to understanding teacher challenges and responses to the support or lack thereof to incorporate change in inclusive settings.

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APPENDIX A

OPEN-ENDED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Interview Questions

Demographic:
Gender- M, F
Grade Level Taught- 6, 7, 8
Teaching Experience- 0-5 years, 6-10 years, 11-15 years, 16-20 years, 21-over
Subject Area(s) of Certification- ELA, Math, Science, Social Studies, Not Certified, Alternative Certification/Student Teacher
Administrator/Teacher District-
Bossier/Caddo/Other

Teachers:
1. During the 2020/2021 school year, many districts faced unprecedented challenges to meet the needs of every student. What do you think was the greatest challenge of implementing the Individualized Education Program virtually and face to face, specifically in inclusive settings?
2. Were the challenges to accommodate greater in one subject area than another or equally the same?
3. What were the strengths and weaknesses of implementing the provisions of the I.E.P. during a pandemic using non-traditional methods?
4. How were implementation practices supported and monitored to ensure that students received the requirements of the I.E.P.?
5. What were your biggest concerns about adhering to the requirements of the I.E.P.?
6. How did the district address teacher concerns and prepare teachers for the changes to utilize non-traditional methods to address I.E.P. provisions?
7. Did the changes affect the delivery of effective instruction based around I.E.P. accommodations/modifications, or related services, whether virtual or face to face? How?
8. As you look ahead to a new school year, what plans do you have about the technology used to deliver instruction that requires accommodations? Are you working with other educators who teach in the inclusive setting to coordinate learning activities that meet the requirements of the I.E.P.?
9. What are the strengths and weaknesses of this collaboration?
10. Has your administrator conducted any formal or informal evaluations to ensure that collaboration is working?
11. Do you think that these collaborative efforts will better your outcome of delivering effective and quality I.E.P. services in the inclusive classroom setting?
12. How can teachers and administrators coordinate to maximize the delivery of I.E.P. services?

School Administrators:

1. During the 2020/2021 school year, many districts faced unprecedented challenges to meet the needs of every student. What did you find to be the most significant challenge for teachers who taught in the inclusive classroom setting and had to implement the Individualized Education Program virtually and face to face? How did you support struggling teachers?
2. How prepared do you think your teachers were to incorporate learning provisions in the I.E.P. this school year into the current curriculum? How did you monitor their progress?
3. What did you find to be the strengths and weaknesses of implementing the provisions of the I.E.P. using non-traditional methods?
4. How were implementation practices supported and monitored to ensure that students received the requirements of the I.E.P.?
5. What were your biggest concerns about adhering to the requirements of the I.E.P.?
6. How did the administration address teacher concerns and prepare them for the changes to utilize non-traditional methods to address I.E.P. provisions?
7. Were formal or informal evaluations conducted? If so, did you find any changes that affected the delivery of effective instruction based on I.E.P. provisions? What were they?
8. As you look ahead to a new school year, what professional development plans do you have about the technology used to deliver instruction that requires accommodations and related services?
9. Are you working with teachers to coordinate learning/teaching activities that meet the requirements of the I.E.P.? How? Are you considering making any changes to the way that instruction is delivered?
10. Do you think these collaborative efforts will better your outcome for teachers and students when delivering effective and quality I.E.P. services in the inclusive classroom setting? Why?
11. What will you do with the information you get from this study related to teacher concerns about delivering effective instruction and meeting I.E.P. requirements?
12. Would you like to add anything else?

APPENDIX B

CONSENT FORM - SUPERINTENDENT

Informed Consent Form

I, Pamela Williams, the principal investigator and Doctoral candidate of Louisiana Tech University would like to conduct a research study titled, "Leadership Initiatives to Support and Sustain Implementation of the Individualized Education Program: A Case Study." I want to interview middle school general educators who teach core subjects and administrators in the Bossier/Caddo public school system. The study will take place from July 2021 to August 2021. This consent form details the purpose of the study, a description of the level of involvement, and participants' rights to withdraw at any time.

- The purpose of this study is to: To better understand how instructional leaders' practices support, monitor I.E.P. implementation, and influence teaching practices in the inclusive setting. The research will establish a relation between instructional leaders' initiatives and teacher implementation practices to adhere to I.E.P. guidelines.

- The research benefits will be: To construct better I.E.P. applications related to traditional and non-traditional learning by discovering ways to deliver equal and practical support to students and support teachers in inclusive settings.

- The methods/procedures used to meet this purpose: One-to-one semi-structured interviews with middle school general educators who teach core subjects and administrators will be conducted on a volunteer basis.

Participants have the right to withdraw from the research at any time or express concerns or questions about research procedures. Participants will be notified of any changes or benefits of this study. All information, schools, district, and identities will remain anonymous, and the researcher will maintain confidentiality throughout the research process. Please contact me at any time through email or telephone, and I will quickly respond. Contact information: The principal investigator listed above may be reached to answer any questions about the research, subjects' rights, or related matters. Pamela Williams (318) 272-0183 or pamela.williams@bossierschools.org.

Semi-structured interviews will be used to identify the need for the study, clarify perspectives from both administrators and teachers, generate ideas for improvement, and gain a perspective on how the problem affects the school as a whole. Interviews will be audio-taped via Zoom or face-to-face only with the participant's consent to gain insight into real-life situations. The researcher will be the only person with access to the tapings for study purposes only.

Participants can ask to remove or cut off the recording at any time during the interview. Suppose a participant decides to withdraw from the study at any time. In that case, he or she may do so without any worries, with all provided information destroyed and omitted from the study.

By signing this informed consent form, I understand and agree to the terms of the study methods conducted in Bossier/Caddo Parish.

_____

Superintendent Signature

_____

Date

APPENDIX C

HUMAN USE EXEMPTION LETTER

LOUISIANA TECH
UNIVERSITY

Office of Sponsored Projects

EXEMPTION MEMORANDUM

TO: Ms. Pamela Williams and Dr. Bryan McCoy

FROM: Dr. Richard Kordal, Director of Intellectual Properties
rkordal@latech.edu

SUBJECT: HUMAN USE COMMITTEE REVIEW

DATE: June 21, 2021

TITLE: "Leadership Practices To Support and Sustain Implementation of the Individualized Education Program: A Case Study"

NUMBER: HUC 21-110

According to the Code of Federal Regulations Title 45 Part 46, your research protocol is determined to be exempt from full review under the following exemption category(s): 46.104(a)(d)(1)(2)(i)(ii).

a) Unless otherwise required by law or by department or agency heads, research activities in which the only involvement of human subjects will be in one or more of the categories in paragraph (d) of this section are exempt from the requirements of this policy, except that such activities must comply with the requirements of this section and as specified in each category.

(d) Except as described in paragraph (a) of this section, the following categories of human subjects research are exempt from this policy:

(1) Research, conducted in established or commonly accepted educational settings that specifically involves normal educational practices that are not likely to adversely impact students' opportunity to learn required educational content or the assessment of educators who provide instruction. This includes most research on regular and special education instructional strategies, and research on the effectiveness of or the comparison among instructional techniques, curricula, or classroom management methods.

(2) Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:

(i) The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects cannot readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects;

(ii) Any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research would not reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, educational advancement, or reputation

Thank you for submitting your Human Use Proposal to Louisiana Tech's Institutional Review Board.