

Running head: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS AND
REASONS FOR RETENTION

A Phenomenological Study: Why Do Special Education Teachers
Choose to Stay in the Profession?

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SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS AND ATTRITION

A Phenomenological Study: Why Do Special Education Teachers Choose to Stay in the Profession?

I have examined the final copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Educational Leadership.

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this work to all of my fellow special educators that work tirelessly to help children with the most needs be as successful as possible. Your work and efforts do not go unnoticed. Special education is a calling, and being a voice for a child or advocating for a family that would not otherwise have one is admirable and honorable. I would also like to take the time to dedicate my efforts to my amazing daughter, Avery and my son, Aidan. I can only pray that they witnessed the trials and tribulations along with the feelings of accomplishment in what it takes to complete the dissertation process. Dream big my darling children; you are both going places.

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Abstract

In one particular state within the Midwest region, special education teachers leave the teaching profession at a higher rate of 13.9% per year than the national average of 12.8% (Stewart, 2018). Research indicates 66% of educators that left the profession in some geographic locations were a result of their dissatisfaction with administration (Barth, Dillon, Hull, & Higgins, 2016). The purpose of this study is to explore how building leadership practices may influence special education teacher retention. The data collected for this study includes anecdotal records, interviews, personal journals, and the analysis of special education teacher attrition rates within one urban school district. The implication(s) of understanding why special education teachers leave the field and the possible correlation to school administration could impact special educators' attrition rates in the research state and throughout the United States.

Keywords: special education teachers, job satisfaction, retention, embedded, mentoring, administration

Chapter One

Introduction

The concept of teacher shortages, especially in special education, is not a new or surprising concept for local and federal education governing bodies. The reasons for teacher shortages in special education vary as widely as they do by geographic location (Mason & Swanson, 2018). The selected state that is the focus of this study is in the Midwestern portion of the United States. This study focuses on special education teacher attrition in a large urban district.

As a special education teacher for over fourteen years, the researcher observed many special education teachers leaving the profession within the first two years of service. Indeed, many districts are experiencing significant teacher shortages in special education (Brief, 2018; Mason & Swanson, 2018). This study's selected state has a considerable lack of highly qualified special education teachers due to high attrition rates (Stewart, 2018). Therefore, unqualified teachers may serve children with significant disabilities.

The special education teacher attrition rate in the research state is currently 13.9%, with the national average being 12.8% (Stewart, 2018). During the 2016-2017 school year, 1,275 of the 9,156 special educators in the research state did not return to the field (Stewart, 2018). State and local educational leaders address this rise in special education teachers' attrition rates by offering sign-on bonuses and alternative certification pathways. In some districts, special education teachers are offered higher salaries than general education teachers. However, the special education teachers' attrition rate within the region continues to increase (Stewart, 2018). Current research indicates that the number of

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undergraduate students enrolling in special education teacher education programs is declining (Arnett, 2017; Barth, Dillon, Hull, & Higgins, 2016). Additionally, many universities in the United States have reported double-digit percentage drops in overall enrollment in all teacher education programs since 2015 (Yaffe, 2016).

To reduce special education attrition rates, school districts often hire non-qualified special educators to understand they will obtain the appropriate certification while serving simultaneously in a special education classroom (Harfitt, 2015). Hiring unqualified special education teachers has become commonplace, only to have them replaced with another non-licensed teacher, and then the attrition cycle repeats (Ouellette, Pellecchia, Beidas, Wideman, Xie, & Mandell, 2019).

Current literature indicates the teacher shortage within special education is due to a variety of issues. Four overarching themes related to the attrition of special education teachers emerged in current research. These four themes include taxing workloads, inadequate preservice preparation, lackluster mentoring programs, and perceived lack of administrative support. This study's primary focus is to obtain a greater understanding of building-level leaders' practices that improve special education teachers' retention.

The first theme from current research on special education teacher attrition centers on the workload, including extensive paperwork, the number of students on a caseload, and the severity of student disabilities. The amount of work outside of teaching, including drafting learning plans, making contact with parents, and planning meetings, is more taxing for special education teachers than general educators (Ouellette et al., 2019).

The second theme in the research involves inadequate preservice training. This component addresses the possibility that prospective special educators are not adequately trained with authentic special education classroom experiences and special educators may not feel adequately equipped when

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faced with challenges within the field (Brief, 2018). The third overarching theme within the literature explores the lack of quality mentoring programs for special education teachers. The literature indicates special education teachers are often matched with mentors that are regular education teachers who do not have special education training. Therefore, the mentor teachers may not be familiar with special education processes, protocols, or special education law, thereby making the relationship between the mentor and mentee difficult if not unproductive (Mitchell, Howard, Meetze-Hall, Hendrick, & Sandlin, 2017). In addition to a lack of appropriate mentoring, some special education teachers report a lack of administrative support in their position (Langher, Caputo, & Ricci, 2017).

Special education teachers' perceived lack of administrative support is the fourth and primary focus of this study. Lack of administrative support pertains to a special education teacher's perception of administrative involvement and positive rapport within the day-to-day job duties related to a special education teaching position (Langher, Caputo, & Ricci, 2017). Since building-level administrative support is rooted within the individual special educator's perception, this study intends to collect and analyze qualitative data from special education teachers to provide insight into those feelings.

Special education recruitment and retention are an area of personal interest for the researcher due to the extensive work and costs associated with recruiting, training, and retaining special education teachers. However, more importantly, the researcher is concerned under qualified educators teaching are students with the most significant needs. Many educational agencies are looking to districts without shortages to gain insight regarding successful recruitment and retention practices.

Problem Statement

Retaining special education teachers is becoming more of a concern for school leaders. Barth et al. (2016) explained 66% of teachers left the profession because of dissatisfaction with administration. However, many administrators feel their hands are tied related to special education teacher job

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satisfaction. Building leaders report their inability to make substantial changes related to job satisfaction due to special education laws and budget constraints (Rodl, Bonifay, Cruz, & Manchanda, 2018).

Through a study conducted by The New Teacher Project (2012), three-quarters of highly qualified teachers who left the profession would have remained in their positions had administrators addressed their concerns. Such concerns included feelings of isolation, excessive paperwork, conflict with parents, and a lack of resources to engage learners at their appropriate learning level (The New Teacher Project, 2012). The same study indicated even after resigning; these same teachers were not asked or encouraged to stay in their positions (The New Teacher Project, 2012).

While current research suggests a variety of reasons for high attrition rates among special education teachers, there is a lack of information regarding the administrators' role in improving retention (Santoro, 2017). McDowell (2017) explained administrative support played a crucial role in the retention of special education teachers. However, there is a lack of research regarding specific administrative supports and their effects on special education teacher retention (McDowell, 2017). Special education teachers leave the profession at significantly higher rates than other subject areas, and their positions are often filled with unqualified personnel (McDowell, 2017).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to explore how building-level leadership practices may influence special education teacher retention. The setting for the research is an urban district in a Midwestern state. At this stage in the study, urban special educators' attrition rate is defined as teachers that work with identified students on individual education plans within a large urban school district located within this region.

This study focuses on two essential components of building-level leadership that could reduce special education teachers' attrition rate within the large, urban Midwestern district. These components

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include "what" building leaders do and "how" they do it? The first component involves determining leadership qualities that influence special education teachers to either remain in their current job assignment, seek an alternative position, or leave the profession altogether. The second component focuses on applying leadership qualities implemented by building-level leaders with low special education attrition rates. The reviewed literature indicates special education teachers' perceptions of feeling supported and valued are critical to improving retention.

Research Questions

One primary question and four secondary questions will guide this qualitative study to explore building-level leadership practices that increase special education teacher retention.

Primary research question: What building-level leader practices influence special education teacher retention?

Secondary research questions:

1. What are the internal or motivation factors of special education teachers that would motivate them to remain in the field of special education?
2. What are the external or hygiene factors that lead to dissatisfaction in the field of special education?
3. What are special education teachers' perspectives of motivating factors exhibited by building-level leaders that create feelings of support and value?
4. What are special education teachers' perspectives of hygiene factors exhibited by building administrators that lead to dissatisfaction within their job?

Significance of Study

This study's significance will contribute to the education profession by helping building-level and district-level leaders understand special education teacher satisfaction that leads to retention.

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Additionally, this study will highlight leadership qualities that lead to special education teacher dissatisfaction in their position. The study addresses the embeddedness theory, focusing on motivation-hygiene theory to identify factors that contribute to overall job satisfaction. According to the key terms utilized in this review, minimal studies have been conducted or published using Herzberg's (1974) motivation-hygiene theory in conjunction with special education teacher job satisfaction and attrition. Teacher shortages in areas of already hard-to-fill positions such as math, science, bilingual education, and special education are a top priority for many building and district level leaders across the nation (Barth et al., 2016).

Not all districts suffer from the same type of teacher shortages. However, researchers and educational organizations across the United States notice one trend is the lack of qualified teachers to fill special education positions (Dupriez, Delvaux, & Lothaire, 2016). Twenty-seven percent of schools nationwide have vacancies for special education teachers (Harfitt, 2015). Special educational professionals are defined as teachers specially trained in educating students with exceptional academic, cognitive, social, and behavioral needs compared to their same-aged peers (Brunsting et al., 2014). There are approximately 6 million special education students nationwide and only 400 thousand special educators to serve those students with disabilities (Dupriez, Delvaux, & Lotaire, 2016). For this review and the significance of the problem being addressed, special education teaching positions will be referenced as hard-to-fill teaching positions.

This study intends to determine what a building leader can do to improve special education teacher attrition. The reviewed literature suggests building leaders need to help teachers feel more supported, cohesive, and part of the overall building team to improve retention (Shaw and Newton, 2014). According to Shaw and Newton (2014), a building leaders' goal should be recruiting and

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retaining high-quality staff. However, according to Shaw and Newton (2014), many special education teachers perceive building-level leader apathy regarding retention.

Overview of Methodology

This study will employ a qualitative design. Qualitative research is a form of inquiry that explores the relationship between people and how they make meaning of their world through lived experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Qualitative research is primarily used by sociologists, anthropologists, and scholars seeking to investigate how people interact with their environment, what impact their experiences have on their perception of a particular phenomenon, and what could be changed or improved as a result of obtaining this insight (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2015). Qualitative research is often used in professional areas such as education in attempts to better understand teacher perspectives and experiences within the field (Bennett et al., 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Qualitative research allows for the researcher's interpretation based upon the data collected, themes derived, and researcher reflexivity (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In contrast to quantitative methods, this form of research is utilized to understand *how or why* something occurs based upon the data collected from the participants and specific variables, nor is a hypothesis used. Since this study explores how administrative relationships with special education teachers in one particular urban school district possibly impact the attrition rate, the qualitative approach method will lend itself to arriving at common themes and patterns as the data is analyzed. The researcher will then interpret this information. Due to the nature of qualitative methodology, the researcher is also aware the study is ever-evolving, thus, allowing the researcher to explore topics brought to the forefront by carefully selected research participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Phenomena of Special Education Teacher Attrition

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This study seeks to explore how special education teachers relate to building leaders and form positive working relationships. Establishing positive relationships and creating a climate of building support is a practice that takes place on many levels (Dahlkamp et al., 2017). Each building, grade level teams, or departments and individual relationships are unique in the type of relationship formed with the administrator (Arnett, 2017). Realizing that positive relationship and building a supportive administrative/special education teacher culture within individual learning environments lends itself to a qualitative research design. This design allows the researcher to delve deeper into the interactions between the administrator and the special education teacher, thus, learning what creates feelings of support or lack thereof to the special educator (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Social Constructionism

Qualitative research also illustrates the ability to create or construct one's meaning out of individualized perceived truths from daily stimuli, also known as social constructionism (Gergen, 1985). As individuals, we do not all perceive, process, or arrive at the same understanding of life's daily events or the world around us. The same is true with perceived positive or negative relationships with others (Crotty, 1998; Gergen, 1985). Since relationship development is considered a process shaped upon previous experiences and interactions involving more than the individual themselves, special education teachers constantly try to make meaning from their daily social interactions (Erkutlu, 2012; Capri & Guler, 2018). Utilizing concepts from social constructionism, the researchers derive meaning through direct interaction with purposefully selected participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Despite the multitude of classroom and organizational challenges of teaching special education, these teachers remain in the field. In other words, there are more reasons than just monetary compensation or high-quality facilities that motivate a special education teacher to stay in the profession (Stephens & Fish, 2010; Treuren & Frankish, 2014). Also, having both internal and external reasons for

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remaining within a special education position, some educators are just more embedded within their career choice aside from just motivating (Lee, Burch, & Mitchell, 2014).

Common themes and other critical components from study participant interviews, personal participant journals, and focus groups related to Herzberg's (1974) motivational-hygiene theory focus on the research. This view directly leads to the secondary research questions: how do special education teachers determine qualities from building leadership that makes them feel supported and want to remain in their current job assignment? How do these feelings affect motivation and hygiene factors in working with students with special needs, and how does building leadership influence these feelings? Herzberg's (1974) motivational-hygiene theory serving as the theoretical framework leads back to the primary research question: what are special education teachers' perceptions of the impact of building leadership qualities on attrition in their profession within a large, urban and Midwestern school district?

In attempts to answer the research questions, this study uses phenomenological design to allow the researcher to derive meaning through the perceptions of the individual interviews, participants' journal entries, and focus groups. The focus groups involved selected special education teacher study participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This study is valid because it directly affects special education teachers' participation from a large, urban, and Midwestern school district. This study's data was triangulated by conducting focus groups, individual interviews, and the review of qualitative documents involving participants' journal entries. The data gathered from this research was then disaggregated, coded, and analyzed by the researcher for resulting common themes (Crotty, 1998).

Limitations and Delimitations

Limitations

This study's limitations are those circumstances and components that are out of the researcher's control and include resources, institutional, ethical, and time limits (Krathwohl & Smith, 2005). Due to the study's one semester period, the researcher's ability to access special education teachers within their professional environment and their availability to actively participate in the study was limited. Also, the researcher is currently an employee within the district where the research was conducted. Therefore, this may have altered study participant's responses within focus groups and personal interviews. The limitations were counteracted by cross-referencing the data with qualitative documents to increase data interpretation validity (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Delimitations

Delimitations are circumstances controlled by the researcher and for this study included the use of social constructionism and the theoretical framework involving Herzberg's (1974) motivational-hygiene theory (Crotty, 1998). An additional delimitation of the study is the focus on special education teachers under the pretense that they are certified within special education, have experience in working with students from low-socioeconomic backgrounds and students of color. A final delimitation for this study included the researcher's decision to utilize phenomenological design for the study. This research method also allowed the researcher to control what interview questions are asked, the allotted time for the focus groups, which qualitative documents are reviewed, and any additional follow-up action needed.

Definitions

Building level administration- Building level administrators are those leaders that work within a specific building(s) and are considered managers of the day-to-day operations of staffing issues, building level finances and budgets, teacher evaluators, and various other commanding roles (Bossoppo-Moyo, 2010; Dahlkamp, Peters & Schumacher, 2017).

Job Satisfaction- Job satisfaction is described as an employee's level of comfort and contentment within their occupation or job assignment (Stephens & Fish, 2010). Job satisfaction and reasons for feelings of pleasure within a career can come from internal (surfaces) of accomplishment, relationships with colleagues, and celebrating success and external (emotions) from having the necessary items and materials for teaching from or with, quality physical surroundings, and monetary compensation (Herzberg, 1974; Sachau, 2007).

Retention-As it pertains to this study, retention can be described as remaining within a teaching assignment (special education) and remaining within the assigned building (Vittekk, 2015).

Special education teachers-Special education teachers are educators specially trained in working with students identified as having an exceptionality to the general education population (Christianakis, 2017). Special education teachers work with a variety of students and learning differences. These exceptionalities include but are not limited to intellectual disabilities, high incidences (working with students with mild to moderate learning disabilities), low incidences (working with students with emotional disturbances, Autism, and various other rare exceptionalities), and gifted (Stewart, 2018).

Overview of Theoretical Framework

Herzberg's (1974) motivational-hygiene theory will serve as the primary theoretical framework for this study. This theory has predominantly been used in business research to understand the factors that influence employee retention within an organization (Ali, 2013). However, Herzberg's (1974) work has started to catch educational leaders' attention because this theory seeks to explain the factors that assist in employee retention (Ali, 2013). This theory is especially salient in this study as the researcher aims to understand building leader practices that influence special education teacher retention (Ali, 2013). Herzberg (1974) explained certain factors that either cause feelings of satisfaction or dissatisfaction within an organization or act utterly independent from one another (Ali, 2013). Just because an employee is satisfied with their salary, there may be dissatisfaction with their supervisor based on their perception of the leader's support (Andrews & Brown, 2015). This theory may help the researcher understand the factors that create special education teacher retention. The following section will explain the organization of the study.

Organization of the Study

Chapter 1 of this study begins with an introduction and overview of the study. Chapter 1 is where the research problem is defined, the purpose and the significance of the study are explained, and an overview of the methodology. Additionally, the research questions that guide the study are stated, and an overview of the theoretical framework that underpins the study is reviewed. Finally, potential limitations and delimitations of the study are explained, and primary terms are defined.

Chapter 2 starts with a thorough description of the epistemology and the theory utilized to drive the study, after a literature review that profoundly explores previous studies regarding special education teacher attrition rates. This chapter also discusses the literature gaps regarding the research questions

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and why further research needs to be conducted utilizing the motivation-hygiene theory. Chapter 3 explores the study's methodology, the research design, data collection methods and analysis, and the emerging themes. Chapter 4 discusses the study's findings and provides connections to the research questions. Finally, chapter 5 includes a culminating discussion of the study's findings, any further limitations, and areas where more research is needed.

Chapter Two

Review of the Literature

The second chapter of this research is divided into three sections. The first section explores the conceptual framework for the study, explaining the researcher's beliefs about the construction of knowledge. The section is a review of the theoretical underpinning for the research, and the final section is a review of the literature related to special education teacher retention. Retaining special education teachers within schools and districts in certain geographic locations of the United States is becoming more of a concern for administrators. The percentage of special education turnover rates (39%) in comparison with general education teacher rates (22%) are in contrast, as special educators make up 40-50% of the total teacher turnover (DeCesare et al., 2016; Jones, Youngs, & Frank, 2013).

Background to the Study

Chapter 2 focuses on the overarching themes that were mutually found within the literature. The review also includes previous strategies implemented to reduce special educators' attrition rates and how theory is utilized to prevent further implications. The literature review reveals that school and government officials recognize the importance of sustaining and retaining quality teachers to understand the importance of special education teacher job satisfaction (Bassopo-Moyo, 2010; Cancio, Albrecht, & Johns, 2013). Themes within the literature related to high attrition include perceived lack of administrative support, job duties of special education teachers that listed caseload, amount of paperwork, student disability severity, appropriate pre-service training, and mentoring. The gaps within the research include, how school districts and building leaders are addressing special education teacher shortages, how or if building climate surveys for special education teachers are currently being

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implemented, how data is being used, and available supports identified by special education teachers to remain in the field of special education.

Historical Context

Systematic exclusion of students with disabilities was commonplace until 1975 when President Gerald Ford signed P.L. 94-142 Education for all Handicapped Children (EAHCA) into law. Before the passage of EAHCA, many children with disabilities were either not served at all or received inadequate educational services (Yell, Rogers, & Rogers, 1998). EAHCA has been amended twice since its inception, once in 1990 and then in 2002 to what is known today as the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) (Craparo, 2002; Yell, Rogers, & Rogers, 1998). While extensive research has been conducted on the historical aspect of special education student equality, there is minimal research on how to retain qualified special educators (Watson & Olson-Buchanan, 2016). This research is especially timely because, once again, many students with disabilities are receiving inadequate educational services due to the shortage of special educators (DeCesare et al., 2016).

Possible factors for Special Education Teacher Attrition

Some of the possible factors within the literature that may be responsible for the higher special education teacher attrition rate include:

- lack of pre-service exposure (Bennett, Brown, Kirby-Smith, & Severson, 2013; Leko, Brownell, Sindelar, & Murphy, 2012)
- limited training in high needs classrooms (Leko, Brownell, Sindelar, & Murphy, 2012)
- lack of or low quality collegial mentoring (Hobbs & Putnam, 2016; Jones, deKock, Charles, Jourdan, Copeland, & Willis, 2015)
- high stress levels (Pretsch, Flunger, & Schmitt, 2012)

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- relationships with building colleagues and administrators (Jones et al., 2013; McCray, Rosenberg, Brownell, deBettencourt, Leko, & Long, 2011)
- caseloads numbers (Petty, Fitchett, & O'Conner, 2012)
- overall working conditions (Kumedzro, 2018), and
- an organizational commitment is known as job embeddedness (Lee, Burch, & Mitchell, 2014).

Addressing the problem of special education teacher attrition in a Midwestern state within a large urban school district began with an exploration of the theories the researcher considered applicable for studying the problem. The researcher recognizes knowledge and thus understanding is unique to the individual and develops over time and through lived experiences (Merriam, 2016).

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study focuses on three major areas: (a) the researcher's epistemology, (b) personal belief statements regarding special education teaching, and (c) the researcher's work experiences within the field of special education. The researcher's understanding of the research problem has been influenced by special education teacher attrition while serving fourteen years as a special education teacher, and in some instances, the researcher was the only special educator within her building. The researcher's lived experiences related to the research problem has increased her desire to understand different perspectives, set personal goals for professional growth, and overcome obstacles related to special educator attrition. These experiences have also led the researcher to further reflect on the concept or idea that special education teacher attrition has caught administrators' attention and has been a topic of discussion for special educators currently in the field.

Epistemology

Constructing meaning as to why special education teachers leave the profession in greater numbers than those in other content areas while some special educators stay for the duration of their career leads the researcher to personal belief statements surrounding the topic. This idea or mindset lends itself to constructionism, or making one's meaning out of individualized and perceived truths (Gergen, 1985). Social constructionism is the idea that one constructs meaning out of stimuli within a group or social organization unit (Crotty, 1998).

The researcher's epistemology for this proposed study is centered on the idea that not everyone, especially educators, takes daily stimuli from day-to-day job duties. If a teacher begins feeling overwhelmed or stressed, that can lead to a lapse in professional responsibilities. Responsibilities and stressors could include forgetting lunch count, the instruction being interrupted due to a student arriving late, an upset parent wanting to talk, an administrator asking to meet during plan time, students not performing well on a state-mandated assessment, or a classroom management issue that has not been resolved. The researcher has experience in the special education field, and the theoretical perspective for this potential study involves interpretivism through phenomenological research (Crotty, 1998). Each person perceives, processes, and reacts differently due to being individuals, thinking, and making meaning out of life's daily events.

Everyone is born into a social world where one situation depends upon another, and nothing is isolated without affecting something else (Gergen, 1985). The field of education may be considered a social occupation in which one must effectively communicate, receive feedback, and adjust to students' and colleagues' evolving needs. It makes sense that teachers must construct their meanings from situations to perform job requirements; therefore, social constructionism is the more narrowed epistemology applicable to this study.

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Personal Belief Statements

The researcher believes that a teacher's role or purpose is to provide information and knowledge and allow students to apply their meaning. While some teachers accept or can construct meaningful and professional growth from adverse conditions, others decide to change locations or leave the special education profession altogether (Barth et al., 2016; Capri & Guler, 2018; Cooper & Davey, 2011). Special education teachers must teach students and effectively communicate with administration, general education colleagues, parents, and various other stakeholders as part of the job description (Bennet et al., 2013). As a result of these expectations, special education teachers constantly try to make meaning either positive or negative from their daily social interactions with the entities mentioned above (Erkutlu, 2012; Capri & Guler, 2018). Making meaning from job experiences is frequently a similar experience for novice and veteran teachers who are forced to construct definitions of self-efficacy, how and when to ask for support, and develop interpretations from these interactions (Callahan, 2016; Doney, 2013).

In making one's meaning as to why special education teachers leave the profession faster than teachers of other content areas, much reflection occurred regarding the special education teacher role and responsibilities. The examination also focused on how those demands affected feelings of self-efficacy, the amount of work both physically and emotionally, and how often it can feel as though it is a thankless job for which labor goes unnoticed. The researcher believes that one's perception of the overall impact on special education students' growth, administrative support, and positive collegial relationships is linked to their reality and job satisfaction.

Work experiences

The third area that makes up the researcher's conceptual framework is a combination of the researcher's special education teaching experience, the path of certification to obtain special educator

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licensure, and the necessary support within the first years of teaching was imperative in the decision to stay with the profession. Previous experiences with occupational-related stressors (Kerr & Brown, 2016), lack of administrative support (Luther & Richman, 2009; Shaw & Newton, 2014), and the passion and love for children (Kardos & Johnson, 2010) with special needs, along with collegial support (Morrissey & Deakin University, 2015; Scott, 2008) have led the researcher to have a better understanding of what causes special education teachers to leave the profession (Harfitt, 2015; Jones, Young, & Frank, 2013). Up to 39% of all teachers quit teaching after the first five years, and approximately 50% of that total are special educators (Arnett, 2017; Callahan, 2016; Brunsting et al., 2014). As of 2018, there were approximately 252, 751 special educators nationwide. That makes up only about seven percent of the total educator population within the United States (Capri & Guler, 2018).

Special educators have additional job duties in comparison to their general education counterparts, such as serving as case managers for identified students, attending legally required individualized education plan (IEP) meetings, and fending off those who believe students with disabilities should not be included in the general education setting. In addition to those duties, special educators are expected to implement individual student academic and behavior goals and demonstrate various skills and address responsibilities throughout the day (Dempsey et al., 2009). Special education job satisfaction or lack thereof can lead to high turnover rates (Van Maele & Van Houtte, 2012). Administrative support and collegial trust are noted as being of significance in retaining quality teachers (Van Maele & Van Houtte, 2012). These factors can have a role in a special education teacher's overall experience and lend themselves to social constructionism.

In summary, teaching special education requires thinking outside of the box, possessing the ability to understand and facilitate many communication types, and remembering to find ways to

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perform self-care to remain satisfied within the teaching position (Fall, 2010). These skills evolve, and experience within the field and the teachers themselves often construct meaning. Administrators and other building leaders can foster professional development in ways that help teachers manage time, adversity, and pedagogical skills within the realm of special education. These factors could lead to higher job satisfaction rates related to the theoretical framework of the study.

Theoretical Framework

The primary theoretical framework for this literature review and study is Herzberg's (1974) motivation-hygiene theory. This theory explains that certain factors either cause feelings of satisfaction or dissatisfaction within an organization or act completely independent from one another (Ali, 2013). In other words, just because an employee is satisfied with their salary, that does not mean they are not dissatisfied with how their supervisor communicates with them (Andrews & Brown, 2015). While both situations can be of importance to employees, they are individual situations or issues. Herzberg's (1974) work, also known as the two-factor theory, has been primarily researched within the business sector; however, educational leaders have discovered that schools could benefit from understanding what internally and externally motivates educators in attempts to reduce attrition rates (Ali, 2013; Andrews & Brown, 2015; Arnett, 2017).

Additionally, the job-embeddedness theory (Lee, Burch, & Mitchell, 2014) serves as a supportive framework to the study; however, due to the time constraints and the research parameters, it only serves to illustrate how it supports job satisfaction and dissatisfaction. Both frameworks help explain why special education teachers must possess a sense of intrinsic and extrinsic means of motivation in the work they do within the organization. How connected and positively tied to their work organization a teacher feels has proven to lead to lower teacher turnover rates (Yavuz, 2018). It has been discovered that there is a deep-rooted connection between a building leader, the culture and climate they create

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through meaningful relationships, leadership qualities, and lower special education teacher attrition rates (Cancio, Albrecht, & Johns, 2013).

Motivation-hygiene theory

The motivation-hygiene theory explains why some special education teachers remain in special education despite facing many classroom and professional challenges (Herzberg, 1974 & Sachau, 2007). Special education teachers have been found to enter the field due to wanting to help students who perform significantly lower than that of their same-aged peers (Viel-Ruma et al., 2010). The motivation-hygiene theory explains there is more than monetary compensation or high-quality materials that motivate a special education teacher to remain in the profession (Treuren & Frankish, 2014; Stephens & Fish, 2010). Besides having internal and external reasons for staying within a certain job assignment such as special education, some professionals are just more embedded in their career choice for other reasons than just motivating factors (Lee et al., 2014).

Job-embeddedness theory

The second theory that will be mentioned but not utilized due to the study's scope and time constraints includes the job-embedded idea. Special education teachers become ingrained within their work through establishing relationships with students, families, colleagues, along with support staff and administrators (Watson & Olson-Buchanan, 2016; Felps et al., 2009). When a special education teacher is more embedded within their special education teaching position, their chances of leaving due to attrition have been reduced (Jones et al., 2013; Lee et al., 2014).

Both theories, job-embedded along with motivation-hygiene theories, have been referenced throughout the reviewed literature as to why some special education teachers remain in the field until retirement while others (anywhere from 30% to 50%) decide to leave within the first three to five years (Herzberg, 1974; Lee et al., 2014). While more research needs to be conducted to understand the

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connection between special educators and the two theories, some research indicates that special education teachers, though not completely satisfied with their career choice, find other ways to remain satisfied (Stephens & Fish, 2010). Some special education teachers find alternative methods to stay within the field, such as focusing on areas that they can control, celebrating even the smallest of successes, and making time to collaborate with colleagues.

Motivation hygiene theory and job-embedded theory

The theories supporting the findings of why some special educators decide to stay despite the reasons mentioned above include Herzberg's motivation-hygiene theory (1974) and the job-embedded theory (Lee et al., 2014). The motivation-hygiene theory indicates that employees are motivated to stay within an organization based on satisfiers and dis-satisfiers. Internal rewards such as recognition for a job well done or opportunities for advancement are not the same as external rewards such as a good paycheck or clean facilities to work in (Herzberg, 1974; Treuren & Frankish, 2014 & Stephens & Fish, 2010). Just because an employee is not dissatisfied with their position does not necessarily mean that they are satisfied (Herzberg, 1974). In addition to the motivation-hygiene theory, further underpinning the study is the theory of job embeddedness (1994).

Lee et al., (2014) work is known as the job-embeddedness theory. This theory also supports why some special education teachers stay while others within the same job assignment leave within the first five years. Within this theory, Lee et al. (2014) discovered that employees often remain due to having invested much time, money, emotion, and energy into an organization. It is also explained that the more connections and relationships that an employee has within an organization, the more embedded they are to that specific job assignment (Holtom & Inderrieden, 2006). Job embeddedness is not one particular incident or occasion but rather a web of factors that an employee has to be willing to part with to leave a position (Holtom & Inderrieden, 2006). These theories help researchers better understand relationship

building, employee buy-in, and how they both play a role in special education teacher retention (Lee et al., 2014).

Job-embeddedness as it pertains to special educators. Since overall job satisfaction and special education teacher retention have been directly linked to each other, it makes sense that while some special education teachers may not be completely satisfied with their current job placements; other factors keep them with an organization (Cooper & Davey, 2011; Kerr & Brown, 2016; Kumedzro, 2018; Van Maele & Van Houtte, 2012). The researcher mentions the job-embedded theory within the study to help explain why some special educators decide to stay within the profession of special education even if they may experience adversity, times of uncertainty, isolation, and overall lack of self-efficacy. These concepts and ideas are intertwined with the primary theory utilized within the study known as the motivation-hygiene theory (Herzberg, 1974). Herzberg's theory (1974), while seldom used in the educational sector, also helps explain internal and external rewards or feelings of satisfaction within an organization.

Internal and External Rewards. Teaching includes both internal and external rewards. Internal rewards for special educators include feelings of efficacy, satisfaction in completing a goal, and being able to help a child with learning or physical challenges reach a new level (Anastasiou & Kauffman, 2011). External rewards for special educators include obtaining new materials to assist in adapting the general education curriculum, an extra financial stipend for serving in a field that is considered hard-to-fill, or having the schedule flexibility to complete IEPs at home in exchange for compensation time off. Since the focus of the study is to understand why special education teachers leave either specific buildings and districts or the teaching profession altogether and how that relates to building leadership qualities, this theory seems to be the most appropriate and applicable to assist schools in retaining quality educators (Holtom & Inderrieden, 2006).

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The job-embedded theory in conjunction with the motivation-hygiene theory will help guide this proposed study by analyzing how and why teachers remain in the field of special education while also remaining in their teaching assignments. The job-embedded theory is directly tied to the motivational-hygiene theory because special education teachers must be connected to their work and organization along with being able to recognize internal and external factors that keep them motivated to continue their work. According to Harfitt (2015), self-efficacy is an internal motivational factor influencing teachers' decision to stay in the field and was part of the driving force in including the motivation-hygiene theory within the study.

Motivation-hygiene theory as it pertains to special educators. Herzberg is an American psychologist who specializes in business management solutions. During his study tenure, he discovered what is known as the motivation-hygiene theory (Herzberg, 1974). This theory is also known as the two-factor theory (Herzberg, 1974). From his studies in what motivates or decreases motivation in an organization, he found two components: hygiene factors and motivators (Herzberg, 1974). Hygiene factors keep employees comfortable such as nice office furniture, feelings of job assignment security, or monetary compensation that can and do lead to overall job satisfaction (Herzberg, 1974). However, there is an additional factor or the second portion of the two-part theory that Herzberg terms as motivators (Herzberg, 1974).

Motivators are positive reinforcement for a job well done or simply completing a project (Herzberg, 1974). Both of these components (hygiene factors and motivational factors), in their absence, does not necessarily mean that an employee will not be dissatisfied with their job; however, when they are both present, Herzberg found that it led to higher job satisfaction (Holliman & Daniels, 2018; Yavuz, 2018). Within Herzberg's 1974 publication, he discovered that people within an

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organization have an innate desire to feel appreciated along with needing to be challenged through meaningful work (Herzberg, 1974).

Motivation-hygiene theory in education. Herzberg's motivation-hygiene theory has evolved and is being consulted in more professional arenas other than its primary historical use within laborers, clerical, and police departments (Alshmemri, Shahwan-Akl, &Maude, 2017; Bexheti & Bexheti, 2016). Motivation-hygiene theory has also caught the attention of educational professionals to understand and potentially resolve the large amounts of teacher vacancies and shortages with some school districts (Ali, 2013). Teacher's morale and effectiveness are directly linked and, if an educator is not satisfied or motivated within their job, the quality of instruction will be negatively impacted (Ali, 2013 & McDowell, 2017).

Herzberg's motivation-hygiene theory used abroad. The motivation-hygiene theory is the primary theory to help understand why special education teachers stay in the field or teaching assignment even if they do not give feedback on overall job satisfaction. In addition, current research lends itself to the position that quality leadership may influence teacher job satisfaction. In a study that involved job satisfaction and special education teacher retention, conducted by Kumedzro (2018) from the College of Distance Education at the University Of Cape Coast in Ghana, he found that, of the 140 total teachers surveyed, a majority of them listed salary, working conditions, and workload as the main reasons for job dissatisfaction. This data directly relates to the motivation-hygiene theory and what factors contribute to overall teacher motivation and morale.

While Kumedzro's study was conducted outside of the United States within primary/secondary schools, it would make sense that these findings could be generalized in other areas of education. The job-embedded and motivation-hygiene theories also support and work in conjunction to interpret study results, find places where possible further research is needed, and provide evidence-based practices to

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readers. This may allow a possible explanation for conflicting reasons as to why some special educators remain in the field while others decide to leave or move. There is, however, competing research that explains that some people, in this case, special education teachers, are just more resilient and able to overcome stress by having a repertoire of ways to alleviate feelings of dissatisfaction (Doney, 2013; Lesh, 2017).

Competing Theory

Resilience Theory. The resilience theory is the set of ideas that explains how a person can overcome adverse or challenging events within their life. The alternative to job embeddedness and motivation-hygiene theory theoretical framework is the idea of overcoming adversity due to personal resiliency. At the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities, Masten (2018) discussed the study of resilience science. The concept of understanding how some people can overcome adversity such as a tragic event, loss of a job or spouse, and financial woes have been rooted in research since the days of Darwin and Freud in the 1800s (Masten, 2018).

After the Great Depression and World War II, more attention was given to the idea of why some people were thriving while others were still reeling from adversity, Anthony (1987). While it was not completely understood what made some people more resilient, during difficult circumstances while others fell victim to mental illness and developed the inability to function, early research made some headway into levels of resilience. According to research, some reasons for a lack of resilience include a lack of exposure to adversity, and a lack of coping strategies (Masten, 2018). More recently, some researchers have shifted from viewing resilience from a negative standpoint to understanding the characteristics of people with high levels of resilience (Masten, 2018).

Resilience and Social Norms. Researchers suggest that if someone competently meets established family and societal norms or expectations after an adverse event, he or she is considered

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resilient (Masten, 2018). While that idea may appear to be subjective, researchers also define family and societal norms as maintaining friendships/relationships, making academic progress (if a student), and maintaining employment (Masten, 2018). Previous scholarly thinking either included that people are born innately with the ability to overcome stress or were not; however, this thinking has changed as new research has emerged (Masten, 2018). Researchers now purport resilience can be developed in people. Due to this thinking, proactive measures can be put into place before testing a person's resiliency. Psychological counseling, collegial mentoring, debriefing, and various other estimates can reduce (not eliminate) day-to-day occupational stressors while increasing resilience (Masten, 2018).

Emotional Labor. The resiliency concept and criterion for designating someone as resilient or not, align with a study conducted by Professor Kerr (University of Pittsburgh) and co-author Brown (George Mason University). While they focused their research on the emotional labor theory, the same ideology was utilized that teachers must perform during adversity to maintain order within the learning environment (Kerr & Brown, 2016). For their specific study, 19 special education teachers were analyzed to discover what exact stressors were encountered during a school day and how much topical (minimal) or rooted (profound) acting each was implemented to conceal true feelings and maintain order (Kerr & Brown, 2016).

The subjects were then encouraged to express authentic feelings during interviews for researchers to analyze, code, and arrive at themes for stressful circumstances within the classroom (Kerr & Brown, 2016). The study results indicated that teachers simply having the opportunity to express the stressors they encounter and put them into thoughts and words relieved those (Kerr & Brown, 2016). This ideology is an example of how and when teachers must be resilient and continue teaching even if something goes unplanned.

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This study lends itself to understanding how not all humans, specifically special education teachers, in this case, face, absorb, and mentally deal with stressors or adversity. It can also be better understood that leaders can play a role in reducing stress levels in special education teachers by offering support, a chance to voice concerns, and the opportunity to seek professional counseling as needed. This concept can also be conceptualized across more areas than just education.

The job-embedded and motivation-hygiene theory are being utilized for this study as there is more literature available to the researcher with previous studies that have been conducted in the area of special education teacher retention and is not as subjective (as in able to be measured) in nature as understanding one's ability to be considered mentally strong or resilient. The job-embedded and motivation-hygiene theory, in conjunction with the researcher's beliefs that teachers are required to socially construct their meanings of stimulus within a school and classroom environment, how that stimulus is perceived, processed, and reacted upon, can be as different as the individuals are. The researcher's previous experiences indicate that some special education teachers are motivated and inspired by classroom and workplace challenges. In contrast, others avoid them at all costs, yet everyone has to collaborate to succeed. Also, some special educators value some factors more than others do.

For example, a school schedule is typically conducive to raising a family and that in and of itself may be motivating enough to retain some special educators. In contrast, others value monetary compensations and recognition from the administration. The two theories' views support and influence the proposed study and help guide the study while investigating what leadership qualities contribute to special education teacher job satisfaction and how it affects retention within the profession. Job satisfaction, special education teacher retention, embeddedness, among other terms, were frequently found within the literature.

Search Process

The search process for the literature review included utilizing the Southwestern College's Deets Library database in conjunction with Google Scholar. During the research process, a keyword search matrix, located in Appendix A, included administration, teacher retention, communication, relationships, and embedded words placed in quotation marks to eliminate unnecessary inapplicable search results. The specific databases utilized within Deets Library database options included ERIC, Professional Development Collection, Psychology/Social Sciences platform, and Teacher Reference. The criteria for the full-text and peer-reviewed documents included documents that were published within the last ten years (2009-2019) unless historical issues were being addressed.

Synthesis of Literature Reviewed

The literature synthesis begins with a general overview of potential causes for special education teacher attrition. Following the overview, four themes found repeatedly in the literature related to special education teacher attrition are discussed. These four themes include perceived administrator support, special education teacher workload, pre-service training, and mentoring. Finally, the section will end with a summary of the overall reasons for special education teacher attrition.

Overview of Special Educator Attrition and Retention

Special education teacher attrition describes the departure of teachers who leave the profession. Research indicates one-third of all special education teachers leave the profession within the first three years of teaching (Cancio et al., 2013). Administrators are looking for ways to retain these teachers within their buildings in the hopes of not having a shortage of special education teaching professionals to serve students with varying disabilities (Callahan, 2016; Cancio et al., 2013; & Dahlkamp et al., 2017). It is estimated that it costs some districts from eighteen to twenty-two thousand dollars to train a

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new teacher (Arnett, 2017; Bassoppo-Moyo, 2010). The common causes of attrition found within the literature reviewed included: feelings of not being supported by the administration, the number of job duties that special education teachers must complete in comparison to their general education counterparts, lack of quality or authentic pre-service training, and lack of appropriate and quality mentoring once assigned to a special education teaching placement.

Special Education Teacher Vacancies

According to a study by Donne and Lin (2013), 27% of U.S. school districts had openings for special education teachers, with approximately six million special education students to be served therein. With more than 33% of all new teachers (general and special education) leaving the profession within the first three years, it was discovered that special education teachers were twice as likely to leave within the first five years (Donne & Lin, 2013). This special education teacher shortfall forces current special education practitioners to serve large caseloads of students, manage substantially larger amounts of mandated paperwork and allows less time for collegial collaboration (Brunsting et al., 2014; Arnett, 2017; Bennett et al., 2013; Capri & Guler, 2018; Christianakis, 2017; Hobbs & Putnam, 2016). Research by Brunsting et al. (2014) indicated that these types of working conditions lead to profound mental and emotional exhaustion, dissatisfaction with personal accomplishments, and overall job burnout.

Upon analysis of several current research articles from 2010-2019 and historical research articles before 2009, including full-text and peer-reviewed articles about special education teacher attrition, the studies posit the most documented reasons for these teaching professionals to leave was a result of dissatisfaction with overall organizational culture (Arnett, 2017; Bennett et al., 2013; Brunsting et al., 2014; Capri & Guler, 2018; Cooper & Davey, 2011; Doney, 2013; Dupriez et al., 2016; Fall, 2010). Organizational culture is defined as how day-to-day operations within a school, in this case, are run,

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relationships that are formed, and how cohesive a staff is in working as a team (Cooper & Davey, 2011; Doney, 2013; Dupriez et al., 2016).

Gaps in the Literature

Two noticeable gaps within the literature before major educational shifts within the United States, including the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, included understanding the reasoning for the change of research in recruitment to the retention of special education teachers (Cancio et al., 2013) and the training of building and district administrators in how to properly evaluate special educators when they have little to no background in special education pedagogy and practice (Rodl, Bonifay, Cruz, & Manchanda, 2018). While there were several issues in why some special education teachers decided to change buildings or teaching assignments while others chose to leave the profession altogether, the most often mentioned antecedents included lack of administrative support, (Bassoppo-Moyo, 2010; Barth et al., 2016; Dahlkamp et al., 2017; Ford, Urick, & Wilson, 2018; Hancock, 2016; & Holliman & Daniles, 2018), caseload, paperwork, and severity of student disabilities (Williams & Dikes, 2015; Cooper & Davey, 2011), lack of or inadequacy of pre-service training that included authentic field experiences within a special education classroom to prepare prospective educators with a first-hand account of what the teacher's role is in that environment (Edward-Groves, 2014, Harfitt, 2015), and lack of quality of new teacher mentoring programs (Arnett, 2017; Barth et al., 2016, Dempsey et al., 2009).

Mentoring programs for new special education teachers can be defined as formal induction programs that offer various support for teachers who lack experience within the educational field (Callahan, 2015). Quality mentoring programs have been found to help new teachers within special education areas access materials that were not otherwise known, prevent feelings of isolation, and learn various planning and pedagogical strategies (Dempsey et al., 2009).

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After reviewing the literature about special education teacher retention, the term mentoring is often used in conjunction with collaboration. The assigned mentor is to be utilized as that collegial networking piece within the first years of teaching (Edwards-Groves, 2014; Hobbs & Putnam, 2016). Mentoring and collegial collaboration serve two different purposes and are separate issues (Dempsey et al., 2009). In the research state, the State Board of Education passed licensure requirements that included legislation [K.A.R 91-1-203(b)(1)(A), (b)(2)(A), (b)(3)(A) and (b)(5) requires new teachers to participate in a formal district mentoring program to move from a provisional license to a professional license. Studies regarding special education teacher shortages and attrition have also been conducted within Europe and Africa indicate that special education teacher shortage and attrition issues are not just isolated to the United States but rather a global and far-reaching issue (Capri & Guler, 2018; Cooper & Davey, 2011; Dahlkamp, Peters, & Schumacher, 2017; Dupriez et al., 2016; Kumedzro, 2018).

A study conducted by Tiplic et al. (2015) in Northwestern Europe found that many of the same issues American teachers list for wanting to leave the profession are similar to teachers in European schools. Several hundred teachers in 133 European schools were administered a survey. There was a positive correlation between administrative trust and teachers leaving along with student caseload and classroom demands (Tiplic, Brandmo, & Elstad, 2015). This study positively aligns with the researcher's problem statement. The special education teacher turnover rate is 39% compared to the general education teacher turnover rate of just 22%, and special education teacher turnover accounts for 40-50% of total teacher turnover in the United States (DeCesare et al., 2016).

Special Education Teacher Job Satisfaction

What constitutes overall special education job satisfaction can vary as each teacher is an individual, and what is perceived to be fulfilling to one is not necessarily fulfilling to another (Brunsting et al. 2014). Special education teacher job satisfaction, in some instances, has been defined by how

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effective (self-efficacy) and successful special education students are under the care of the special educator (Dahlkamp et al. 2017). While self-efficacy and student success are identifiable factors in special education teacher job satisfaction, four major themes contributed to dissatisfaction.

The major themes that were discovered surrounding special education teachers and why they either transfer or leave the education profession at a faster rate than that of general education teachers included (Ingersoll et al., 2018) perceived lack of administrator support (Luther & Richman, 2009); the job duties that special education teachers are required to complete such as the amount of paperwork, number of students on caseload, and severity of students' disabilities (Bennett et al., 2013; & Severson, 2013); lack of quality or authentic pre-service training (Mitchell, Howard, Meets-Hall, Hendrick, & Sandlin, 2017); and the absence or inadequate new teacher mentoring programs (Van Zandt, 2013). This review explores the major themes found within the research in more detail and allows the reader to look more in-depth at the topics surrounding special education teacher attrition.

Typically, special education teachers are highly qualified individuals who have pursued further education in specialized pedagogy and practice to help students who have disabilities. These educational disabilities can range from mild or moderate learning disabilities to non-verbal students with profound developmental impairments (Fall, 2010). The job duties of a special education teacher include: being a case manager for assigned students with disabilities, creating and implementing lesson plans that cover all general education subject areas, scheduling yearly reviews of individual learning plans in collaboration with families and outside agencies, along with serving as a liaison between the parents of the student and the school in attempts to assure inclusive educational practices are being implemented (Jones, Youngs, & Frank, 2013). However, some special educators seek alternative certification to either obtain a teaching position in an otherwise saturated job market or have the opportunity to earn money simultaneously while teaching (Bennett et al., 2013). While these alternative

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measures fill some special education teacher job openings, it stands to reason that the teacher hired for the position is not adequately prepared to serve in a specialized area, therefore leading to feelings of job-related stress and eventually burnout (Bennett et al., 2013; Doney, 2013; & Fall, 2010).

Special education teachers' needs can be perceived as different from their general education counterparts because they have to perform and complete many extra duties on top instructional duties. Special education teacher job satisfaction and self-efficacy have been discovered to play a major role in deciding to stay or leave the teaching assignment or profession altogether (Capri & Guler, 2018). Job satisfaction and dissatisfaction factors are so closely related that one must be aware of special education teacher reports related to job satisfaction.

Special Education Teacher Job Dissatisfaction

Special education teacher job dissatisfaction has been discovered to be directly related to feelings of isolation, emotional/physical exhaustion, and lack of perceived recognition and support from administration (Cancio et al., 2013). According to Langher, Caputo, and Ricci (2017), building and district level support found that a special educator's perception from administration and general education colleagues was vital in feeling satisfied within their special education teaching assignments. Langher et al. (2017) also discovered that four other factors also played a role in special education teacher job satisfaction. They include the teacher's socio-demographic characteristics, teacher training, professional background, how they got along with building staff, and fit in the overall building culture.

In a separate study by Vittek (2015), using the Collaboration and Support for Inclusive Teaching program or (CSIT), specific role assignments and explanations for special educators constituted higher job satisfaction levels. According to Vittek's (2015) research, special education teachers struggle with understanding what their role within the school truly includes. Special educators are often required to serve in areas such as a behaviorist, vocational and transitional coordinator, and case manager. Still, they

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are not always professionally equipped with the necessary skills (pre-service training) and experience to serve in these roles (Vittekk, 2015). However, during the new teacher induction process by the building administrator, intentional practices can help alleviate some special education teacher role confusion and ultimately lead to higher overall job satisfaction levels (Vittekk, 2015).

Special Education Teacher Turnover

Special education teachers leave the field at a rate of 50% within the first five years of service (Arnett, 2017). Not only is consistent special education teacher turnover an area of concern for administrators, but it is also becoming a national crisis (Sutcher et al., 2016). Reports are finding that to replace one special educator can cost a district upwards of \$18 000 per teacher (Arnett, 2017; Sutcher et al., 2016). The national public-school teacher attrition average is 7.68%, with two-thirds of those leaving not being old enough to meet retirement requirements (Barth et al., 2016). This suggests a total of a 238,000-teacher special educator shortage in the United States (Sutcher et al., 2016).

While these numbers have caught administrators' and government officials' attention, the progress in rectifying the shortage has been slow (Bennett et al., 2013). Funding for higher salaries, lack of time to overhaul current practices for retaining and mentoring the currently assigned teachers, and the ability to collaborate with pre-service teacher institutions are not helping matters (Callahan, 2015). Sutcher (2016) explains that more time, energy, and funding need to be spent on a grass-roots initiative to make the appropriate changes. If these measures were taken, according to Sutcher's (2016), Arnett (2017), and Barth's et al. (2016) research, school districts, local, state, and national government would save more money as opposed to constantly having to hire new and sometimes unqualified educators to fill special education positions.

Special Education Teacher Shortage Impact

To address the special educator shortage in the United States, many states have developed alternative licensure programs (Donne & Lin, 2013). Such programs allow underqualified educators to teach students with disabilities while taking courses that lead to certification (Fall, 2010). Alternative pathway certification has been most pronounced in low socio-economic schools, with as many as 30% of their special education teachers working on a special education waiver (Fall, 2010). A special education waiver is a means for school districts to fill open special education positions with certified teachers currently working on college courses to obtain special education certification within a frame of three to seven years (Fall, 2010). While this method may help eliminate special education job openings, it has been discovered that alternative certification professionals need not only additional support from administrators and colleagues but also appropriate coursework to prepare teachers for working with special needs students (Spooner, Algozzine, Wood, & Hicks, 2010).

The literature supports a vast array of reasons why special education teachers leave the profession at rates higher than they leave general education teachers at rates higher than general education teachers do. However, the question remains, what makes special educators stay? Two possible theories aid in explaining why some special educators stay the course. The two theories identified within this review include the motivation-hygiene theory and the job-embeddedness theory. The psychology and human behavior behind why special educators remain in the field can make building and district leaders more cognizant in fostering better employee buy-in (Olsen & Huang, 2019).

Many special education teacher duties are emotionally charged and can become overwhelming without administrative support and participation and collegial relationships and trust (Bennett et al., 2013). Frequently, the administration is not adequately trained in assisting special education teachers

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and evaluating them on effective practices, therefore leaving those educators feeling unsupported and untrusting of leadership (Cancio et al., 2013). The following section takes a more in-depth look at how special education has evolved from a historical perspective.

Historical Perspective of Special Education

Historically speaking, special education was not universally provided in the U.S. Prior to 1975, many students considered to have any physical or mental impairment were deemed unworthy of public education and were purposefully excluded (Yell, Rogers, & Rogers, 1998). One of the many misconceptions regarding education is that the United States Constitution ensures every American a right to a public education. The Tenth Amendment placed educational responsibilities with each state (Martin, Martin & Terman, 1996). Rhode Island was the first state within the country to enforce compulsory attendance laws in 1840, and it was not until 1918 that all states had similar attendance requirements (Yell, Rogers, & Rogers, 1998). However, these state mandates did not require or protect individuals with disabilities but rather left the decision to educate those with any impairment(s) up to the individual school or district leaders (Yell, Rogers, & Rogers, 1998).

Systematic exclusion of students with disabilities continued until 1975 when President Gerald Ford signed P.L. 94-142 Education for all Handicapped Children (EAHCA) into law (Yell, Rogers, & Rogers, 1998). This EAHCA law intended to bring the state and federal laws together (Craparo, 2002). Within the passage of this law, for states to receive federal funding to educate students with disabilities, each state had to ensure an equitable education for every student (Yell, Rogers, & Rogers, 1998). Procedures under EAHCA required non-discriminatory testing, evaluation, and placement procedure. Furthermore, states were required to provide for a least restrictive environment, procedural due process including parental involvement, and to a free and appropriate education (Yell, Rogers, & Rogers, 1998). In 1990, President George Bush renamed the EAHCA of 1975 to the Individuals with Disability

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Education Act or IDEA. In 2002, IDEA was amended to address students with physical and mental impairments, and autism (Craparo, 2002).

While special education policies and procedures measures have changed dramatically over the last thirty-plus years, there is not a vast amount of research regarding the actual special educator component and why they choose to stay in the profession (Cooper & Davey, 2011). Special education teachers rely on the synchronization of colleagues, students, families, and school administrators to effectively serve students with special needs (Christianakis, 2017). Historically, understanding the role school level leaders play regarding special educator teacher retention has had little attention from researchers (Bassoppo-Moyo, 2010).

Building Level Leader Support

Research indicates building level leaders are often inadequately prepared to support special educators (Dahlkamp et al., 2017). It has been reported that one-third to half (depending upon geographic location and socioeconomic status of the school) of all teachers leave the profession within the first five years of service with feelings of not being supported by the administration as the leading cause (Callahan, 2016; Carver-Thomas & Darling Hammond, 2017). According to Arnett (2017), special education teachers do not feel comfortable reaching out to their building administrators with concerns or issues for fear of appearing incompetent or lacking the necessary skills to serve in the specialized area of special education. When this cyclical pattern starts, it can breed resentment and a perceived lack of support by the special education teacher. At the same time, the building level leader is under the impression that things are going fine (Arnett, 2017). It is therefore incumbent on building leaders to be aware of leadership qualities that create a supportive environment for special educators (Cancio et al., 2013).

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Desirable leadership qualities. Cancio et al. (2013) found that even small amounts of emotional support or check-in by the administrator led to special educators feeling supported. In one study, it was discovered that pay had little to do with why special education teachers left the field. Special educators were more likely to report quality leadership practices influenced their retention (Bassoppo-Moyo, 2010). Desired leadership qualities include school administrators that support special educators in their pedagogical practices, helping communicate with parents and guardians, serving as an outlet for special education teacher stressors, and overall credit for working with students that are perceived as more challenging than that of general education (Arnett, 2017).

Application of desirable leadership qualities. Along with knowing what leadership qualities are desirable for special educators, leaders must know how to implement such qualities. Building level leaders must establish conditions that allow for implementation of the aforementioned desirable qualities. Such conditions include a conducive building climate for learning and professional growth (Luther & Richman, 2009). While some building leaders may have the innate ability to be supportive, establish a positive teaching and learning environment, including having a confident mindset of themselves, it is not necessarily a skill that all possess (Rodl et al., 2018).

According to a study of 929 building administrators, 88.1% did not have any background or credentials in special education, all while having to evaluate special education teachers' pedagogy (Rodl et al., 2018). The second piece of that study posited that of the 929 respondents to the survey, 61% felt they needed more professional development to evaluate special educators (Rodl et al., 2018). The lack of confidence in such a specialized and diverse area and not having credentials in special education may explain some of the support gaps that special education teachers perceive regarding building leader capabilities to provide adequate support (Santoro & University of Colorado at Boulder, 2017).

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The findings throughout the literature address a myriad of concerns special education teachers have listed as reasons for feeling unsupported and allow administrators to be cognizant of such reasons as administrative support is one of the leading reasons given as to why special education teachers leave the profession (Cancio et al., 2013; Dupriez et al., 2016; Luther & Richman, 2009). Finally, special educators also reported leaving the profession due to perceived burdensome workloads.

The workload of Special Educators

The second theme addresses the workload of special educators. The literature indicates many special educators perceive their workload as excessive. This theme encompasses paperwork, student disability severity, and caseload, along with levels of support needed by special educators. The research also posits this perceived workload leads to burnout. Some special education teaching assignments can be considered manageable. Public schools must serve students within their attendance boundaries (or find an appropriate alternative), meaning that the workload can vary throughout the year (Donne & Lin, 2013).

Paperwork. The amount of paperwork required of a special education teacher is more than just lesson planning, grading, and correspondence with parents. It includes completing required documents such as individualized education plans (IEPs), monitoring progress of said IEP goals, and reporting progress each grading period (Fall, 2010). This has to be completed for each student on what is known as the special educator's caseload or class size. When caseloads are high or more students with disabilities must be served, more IEP drafting, benchmark monitoring, and reporting must be completed.

Individualized education plans (IEP) require the special education teacher to assess, plan, and evaluate specific customized learning, behavioral, transitional, and social-emotional goals created by the IEP team. The IEP team consists of the special education teacher, students' parents, general education teacher, building administrator or delegate, speech pathologist, occupational therapist, physical therapist

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(if services are deemed necessary for the student), and any outside agencies working with the family that has been invited to attend the annual meeting. Since the special education teacher is considered the case manager of the IEP, all documentation and file upkeep are solely the special education teacher's responsibility. This paperwork includes giving parents/guardians the mandated ten-day meeting notice in writing, communicating with all other invited parties, conducting the meeting, and then following up with any decisions made during the IEP meeting (Jones et al., 2013).

Special education teachers, according to research, are typically not given any additional plan time to draft IEP documents in addition to lesson planning and the other daily duties of any classroom teacher (Bennett et al., 2013). These duties lead to feelings of being overwhelmed, stressed, and eventually may cause burn out (Severson, 2013; Capri & Guler, 2018; Williams & Dikes, 2015; Cooper & Davey, 2011). These paperwork duties listed above are not required of most traditional or general education teachers, yet special educators typically have the same amount of plan time as a regular education teacher. In addition to paperwork, the severity of disabilities adds to the workload of special educators.

Student disability severity and caseload. Special educators, depending upon the area of licensure or alternative certification on file with the state and district, can work with students ranging in disabilities from a moderate learning disability to more severe and profound disabilities such as an emotional disturbance or various other psychiatric issues. Special educators have explained building level leaders often do not understand the taxing nature of working with the most severely disabled students (Cancio et al., 2013; Andrews & Brown, 2015). While some special educators have caseloads with mildly disabled students, many have a caseload that includes a range of disabilities for mild to severe. The more severe needs via the caseload, the more support a special educator needs from the building level leader (Cancio et al., 2013; Andrews & Brown, 2015).

Possessing knowledge of pedagogical and research-based interventions helps special education teachers act proactively to work with students with severe, cognitive, and behavioral issues. An increased knowledge base often results from collaboration among peers. However, many special educators do not have departments or teams but instead work alone. Such situations may lead to feelings of isolation and emotional exhaustion (Cancio et al., 2013; Andrews & Brown, 2015). If a teacher continuously experiences negative emotions, research indicates that it can lead to burnout and eventually attrition (Erkutlu, 2012; Harfitt, 2015). Since stress and feelings of being overwhelmed with the vast array of job duties within special education such as severity of disability can lead to a lack of job satisfaction and uncertainty of teaching effectiveness or self-efficacy (Kumetzro, 2018), Job-satisfaction can be defined as one's overall happiness within one job and according to Herzberg (1974), is one of the components of what motivates a person to stay in their field.

Levels of support needed by special educators. Special education teacher support can look different from school to school, and special educator supports likely look quite different from that of general education teachers (Bennet et al., 2013; Brunsting et al., 2014). The amount of paperwork (benchmark testing, individualized education plan preparation, and general case manager documentation), the number of students that special education teachers are required to keep accurate records of (caseload), and the severity of student disabilities are all factors that look different in comparison with general education teacher job duties (Stephens & Fish, 2010). Supporting and acknowledging special education teaching assignment differences in contrast to regular education colleagues is necessary to retain qualified special education teachers.

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Furthermore, providing adequate supports for preservice teachers is critical to teacher longevity as well. Stephens & Fish (2010) explained many special educators report a lack of necessary support during their pedagogical training, and limited support during their student teaching semester likely contributed to their lack of success in the classroom. Failing to adequately train preservice special education teachers for what to expect in the field is a contributing factor in why special education teachers leave the profession at a faster rate than regular education teachers (Tiplic et al., 2015). Job duties of special education teachers and classroom expectations are not experienced during pre-service training for many of today's special educators due to alternative routes to certification (Barth et al., 2016).

Pre-Service Training

The third theme noted throughout much of the literature reviewed that leads to special education teacher job dissatisfaction and attrition focuses on lack of quality or authentic pre-service training for future special education teacher candidates. Pre-service training can be defined as the coursework, internships, and overall preparation that special and general education teachers must complete before graduating from an accredited teacher preparation institution (Christianakis, 2017). According to a study conducted by Ulusoy (2015), of 240 newly graduated special education teachers, it was discovered that 95% of them had concerns regarding their teaching methods courses that included reading, math, science, and social studies, with only 5% of them finding the coursework to be of quality. Connelly and Graham (2009) concluded in their research that there is a direct correlation between student teaching in a special education setting and retention. Of the 168 teachers surveyed as having taught three or fewer years, 80% of them, that student taught ten weeks or more in a special education classroom remained in their positions the following year (Connelly & Graham, 2009).

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Special education pre-service training also involves formal and authentic teaching experiences with students with individual learning differences compared to same-aged peers (Leko et al., 2012). This includes the understanding and exposure to special education-related issues, pedagogical practices, and the understanding of how to interpret data so that it drives quality instruction (Dempsey et al., 2009). One study by Ulusoy (2015), containing 240 study subjects, found that 95% of participants found their teaching methods courses did not prepare them for the realities of the classroom. These study participants reported feeling unprepared, feeling a lack of self-efficacy, and even an uncertainty regarding their choice to join the special education field (Ulusoy, 2015).

Alternative certification pathways. Alternative special education teacher certification allows for a person with any level or type of education degree to teach special education in while taking necessary coursework at an accredited higher educational institution to obtain special education teacher licensure (KDSE, 2019). For example, a first-year teacher with a standard issued elementary education teaching certificate could apply to teach in a special education position even though she is not certified within the area of special education (KSDE, 2019). The research state requires the alternative certification teachers to show proof of enrollment in special education courses along with a long-term plan of study for degree completion (KSDE, 2019). As alternative special education teacher certification routes are one idea to help alleviate the shortage, it also comes with many potential problems (Donne & Lin, 2013).

Those participating in alternative routes of special education certification do not always have the necessary experience or knowledge of best teaching practices to meet the needs of students with disabilities (Fall, 2010). Since there are various special education certification areas that are required to teach students with disabilities, alternative licensure allows inexperienced teachers to practice outside their scope of expertise (Dupriez et al., 2016). These certification areas include high incidences (learning

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disabilities, developmental delays that are considered common), low incidences (profound autism, social/emotional disturbances and disorders, which is regarded as rare), visually impaired, and hearing impaired (KSDE, 2019). Since there is such a vast array of disabilities and special education student needs, this poses an issue for quality pre-service training for alternative certification seeking candidates in terms of participating in student teaching, having an available certified special educator present, and possessing the repertoire of special education pedagogical skills (Fall, 2010).

Impact of alternative certification methods in special education. There is also documented evidence that special education teacher candidates participating in alternative certification methods do not receive the same quality of pre-service training compared to general education teachers (Doney, 2013). This has been discovered to be especially true for those that are seeking certification through alternative routes in comparison to those that state special education as a major (Capri & Guler, 2018). To put this into perspective, up to half of all schools and over 90% of schools that serve high-poverty students cannot fill special education teaching positions. Teacher preparation institutions have documented a 35% decrease in prospective teacher enrollment over the last five years (Sutcher, Darling-Hammond, & Carver-Thomas, 2016). As a result, some school districts rely on long-term substitutes to fill these open positions, which does not always lead to quality teaching practices for students with individualized educational, emotional, and behavioral needs (Sutcher, Darling-Hammond, & Carver-Thomas, 2016).

Since alternative pathways to seeking special education teacher licensure are being utilized to fill special education classroom that does not have a certified special education teacher, making sure these new special educators are provided with the appropriate support through mentoring programs and materials is the next theme that was discovered to have an impact on teacher attrition (Edwards-Groves, 2014). Building relationships and pairing up experienced teachers within the same area of expertise has

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been found to help overcome feelings of isolation and feelings of being overwhelmed with job duties required specifically for special educators (Jones et al., 2015). However, some research indicates that quality and appropriate mentoring programs are not always offered or implemented within a school district or building (Lambeth, 2012).

Teacher Mentoring Programs

The fourth and final overarching theme is mentoring. Brunsting et al. (2014) explained that since many teachers accept positions within special education through alternative routes of certification, measures need to be taken swiftly to support new teachers through quality mentoring and professional development for building level leaders. These leaders need training in how to appropriately support new special education teachers before burnout sets in.

New teacher mentoring or induction programs have been found to have a significant impact on novice special education and general education teachers alike. Networking and establishing relationships with colleagues who are working alongside special education teachers help reduce feelings of isolation, being overwhelmed, and overall job satisfaction if implemented strategically and with fidelity (Kardos & Johnson, 2010; Yavuz, 2018; Olsen & Huang, 2019). However, research indicates that not all mentoring programs fit special education teachers' needs. Lack of quality mentoring programs is a contributing factor in special education teacher attrition (Donne & Lin, 2013).

According to Merriam-Webster's Dictionary (2019), a mentor is defined as a counselor or guide or a tutor and coach. Since there is a worldwide teacher shortage, much time and effort have gone into looking at ways to prevent a larger teacher shortage (Hobbs & Putnam, 2016). Strategically mentoring new teachers, especially in the first three years of service, has been identified as a way to increase the retention of new teachers (Jones, Young, & Frank, 2013).

Special education mentoring models. The question that plagues most districts is what does a quality mentoring program look like, how can it be funded in already lean financial times, who will fill the roles of mentors, and when will mentoring occur (Lambeth, 2012; Jones, deKock, Charles, & Jourdan, 2015)? Current mentoring practices involve pairing an experienced teacher with a novice teacher. Unfortunately, in the area of special education, novice teachers are often paired with non-special education mentors (Jones et al., 2015; Kardos & Johnson, 2010). This type of mentor/mentee arrangement does not lend itself to adequately preparing special educators for the rigor of their duties (Kardos & Johnson, 2010). Kardos and Johnson (2010) reported that of the three states being analyzed in their study, (Florida, Massachusetts, and Michigan) 78% of teachers did participate in a formal mentoring program (Kardos & Johnson, 2010). However, the same study reported only 41% of the mentees were even observed teaching by their assigned mentors (Kardos & Johnson, 2010).

One size fits all. Novice and veteran teachers alike report mentoring is typically a one-size-fits-all program (Kardos & Johnson, 2010; Lambeth, 2012; Morrissey & Deakin University, 2015). General and special education teachers need different types of support within the classroom to experience maximum success. Common new teacher needs include where to locate materials, how to requisition for supplies, how to make copies, and where to go when they have questions. However, special educators need to know how to write an IEP or how to best meet the needs of a student with disabilities. Therefore, their needs are quite different from those of the regular educator (Morrissey & Deakin University, 2015). Oftentimes, a mentor is located in a different school. If a mentor is not in the same building or does not teach special education, this mismatch between mentor and mentee can be a recipe for mentoring program failure (Edwards-Groves, 2014).

Minimal research in new teacher mentoring programs. There is minimal research regarding special education teacher induction programs, and most literature focuses on general education

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mentoring practices. One explanation as to why western culture induction programs as described above may not improve retention of special educators is explained in a study conducted by a University of South Florida professor in conjunction with five researchers from New Zealand. These researchers explain that the U.S. implements a European style of mentoring which may not focus on pedagogy, relationships, trust, and what the new teacher believes they need (Jones et al., 2015).

The Maori Pedagogy style of mentoring implemented in some Asian countries allows mentees to control areas where they feel they need the most support and Maori models focus on relationship building, and understanding cultural language and values (Jones et al., 2015). Maori Pedagogy, not to be confused with the western culture's definition of pedagogy, includes an indigenous method of providing support and mentorship (Jones et al., 2015). A concept purports that mentors learn just as much from mentees through relationship building, trust, and through the layering of support (Jones et al., 2015).

New Zealand mentoring study. Within the Maori study, nine mentors and mentees participated while serving in a New Zealand special needs school. They were matched up according to grade level, subject area, and various other interpersonal similarities (Jones et al., 2015). From the study, it was found that new teachers were mentored, but veteran teachers grew as well. Each mentor/mentee pair were interviewed utilizing a structured interview model. The researchers discovered that special education teachers, no matter the years of service, were still under more stress in comparison to their general education counterparts (Hobbs & Putnam, 2016; Jones et al., 2013; Lambeth, 2012) however, those participating in a Maori style mentor program were far more likely to remain in the profession (Jones et al., 2015).

Cost of mentoring programs. While mentoring can cost a school district up to \$5500 per new teacher, according to Kamman and Long (2010), it is still more cost-effective than recruiting, training

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and hiring a replacement which may cost as much as \$22,000 per teacher. According to the State Department of Education (2019), in the research state, if a teacher is within their first year of teaching, mentoring is required. However, the research state has a higher attrition rate for special educators than the U.S. average so the program may not be cost effective (Kamman & Long, 2010).

In one mentoring effectiveness study within the St. Louis, Missouri area, it was found that after a mandatory five-year mentoring program, new teacher retention rates were raised to as high as 96% and the program is considered highly cost effective (Kamman & Long, 2010). Within this new teacher induction program, mentors are hired to only serve as a mentor and not have a classroom teaching assignment, are professionally trained in a one-week course along with ongoing professional development, and must meet a specific criteria to serve as a mentor (Kamman & Long, 2010).

Levels of mentoring support. Since it has been discovered through the literature review that special education teachers have different needs for support than that of general education teachers, it can be reasoned that specific attention needs to be given to more customize mentoring programs for special educators (McCray et al., 2011; Mitchell et al., 2017). Since there are various views on how and what formal mentoring program, if any, should be implemented within districts, it is safe to say that establishing traditional research-based mentoring program tailored to fit the needs of special education teachers could attribute to higher retention rates and overall job satisfaction (Viloria, Huchens, Joliette, & Benson, 2010; Olsen & Huang, 2019).

Job satisfaction through customized mentoring can lead to positive collegial relationships, learning and understanding of new building culture, assisting in diminishing feelings of isolation, along with opportunities for professional development have shown a reduction in special education teacher turnover (Kardos & Johnson, 2010; Jones et al., 2015; Edwards-Groves, 2014; Morrissey & Deakin

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University, 2015). However, if implemented haphazardly, mentoring programs can become counterproductive and cause feelings of one-more-thing-to-do attitudes (Lambeth, 2012).

Special education teachers have unique needs that require a customized and tailored mentoring program to meet those needs. Support in special education pedagogy, job requirements of special education teachers, and methods to maintain job satisfaction are all components that research has found beneficial in special education teacher retention (Mitchell et al., 2017; Petty et al., 2012). Current mentoring practices are not meeting the needs of special education teachers. The attrition rate of up to 50% within the first five years of service from these educational professionals indicates such (Arnett, 2015). There are various other factors that researchers and theorists utilize to explain special education attrition; a quality-mentoring program along with building leader support is something that school district leaders can control and use to retain quality special educators (Lambert, McCarthy, Fitchett, & Line back, 2015).

Summary

Four themes were discovered within the literature that relates to special education teacher retention and attrition. They include levels of administrative support, job duties or large caseloads, the severity of student disability, the lack of appropriate pre-service programs, and the lack of quality and useful mentoring programs tailored specifically to special education teachers' needs. These themes are under the overarching idea of overall job satisfaction reduces teacher attrition (Arnett, 2017; Andrews & Brown, 2015).

Two theories were analyzed to understand their relationship to special education teacher attrition and retention. They include the motivation-hygiene theory (Herzberg, 1974) and the job-embedded theory (Lee et al., 2014). Within the two theories, reasons for employees or special education teachers, in this case, deciding to stay with the profession included items such as feelings of being connected to

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the students and staff, having the same schedule that was conducive to raising a family, and feelings of accomplishment to name a few. While there is still more research that needs to be conducted in special education teacher retention and how the two theories mentioned above are related, understanding and possibly reducing special education teacher attrition rates lays the foundations for research.

Chapter Conclusion

Special education teacher attrition continues to be an issue within the research state, across the United States, and even globally. The need to address the probable causes and explore possible solutions to said attrition rates had sparked educational researchers' interest (Arnett, 2017; Barth et al., 2016; Callahan & Delta Kappa Gamma Teacher Honor Society, 2015). The study of why some special education teachers decide to stay while others leave within the first five years of service lends itself to the research's theoretical perspectives, all while understanding special education teachers' unique needs compared to general education teachers (Jones et al., 2013). Since four major themes from current research have been discovered, such as perceived lack of supportive leadership, special education teacher workload and severity of student disabilities, pre-service teaching courses; and mentoring programs, more research and study needs to be completed as to what is working for districts that do not have high turnover rates and how their apparent effective methods could assist other districts that are plagued with constant special education teacher attrition.

The gaps within the research also do not include what action steps schools and districts are explicitly taking or have taken to reduce the special education teacher attrition rate, how attrition rates were reduced as a result, and were the four themes discovered in the literature contributing factors to implementing change? An additional gap within the literature reviewed includes what steps pre-service colleges and universities are taking to increase prospective special education teacher enrollment and preparation? If enrollment is considered commensurate with other majors, what steps have been taken

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as an institution to maintain or promote special education teacher candidate enrollment? The question also remains whether other districts and higher educational institutions can replicate these processes.

Making district and building leaders aware of what current research is stating overall special education teacher job satisfaction such as working conditions, job responsibilities, need for areas of support, and collaboration time and possible minimal cost solutions could be analyzed and new initiatives implemented. Within the next chapter, the research proposal and framework for the study will be addressed. The common themes throughout the literature are examined as possible reasons for special education teacher attrition. However, more research needs to be conducted to better understand special education teachers' perceptions regarding support needed to be successful. Having a plan and implementing one are two separate issues since funding and time are two factors that building level leaders have documented as roadblocks to resolving the special education teacher attrition (Bassoppo-Moyo, 2010).

Chapter 3

Methodology

Introduction

This qualitative phenomenological study explored how special education teachers in the research district perceive building leader levels of support and the impact such support may have on the special educator's decision to remain in the field of education. This study contributes to the body of literature regarding building level leadership practices that special education teachers deem essential in creating a supportive and cohesive working culture. Chapter 3 begins with an explanation and justification for the named research design. The chapter then discusses the outline of the research setting, context, sampling strategy, and sample description. The final sections explain data collection procedures, analytic processes, and what steps were utilized to ensure the study's validity. Chapter 3 concludes with a summary of the methodology.

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore and understand how building leadership practices influenced special education teachers' decision either to remain in the field of special education or to leave in pursuit of a different teaching assignment or career altogether. One central question and four secondary questions guided the research for this qualitative study and explored building-level leadership practices that possibly influenced special education teachers' decision to either remain or leave their current job/building assignment or the profession of special education altogether: The primary question guiding this research is: What building-level administrative practices influence special education teacher retention?

Secondary research questions:

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1. What are the internal (motivation factors) of special education teachers that motivate them to remain in the field of special education?
2. What are the external (hygiene factors) of special education that lead to dissatisfaction in the field of special education?
3. What are special education teachers' perspectives of motivating factors exhibited by building administrators that help them feel supported in their job?
4. What are special education teachers' perspectives of hygiene factors exhibited by building administrators that lead to dissatisfaction within their job?

Methodology

This phenomenological study regarding building level leader practices that increase retention of special education teachers used a qualitative methodology. More specifically, phenomenological research explores phenomena and includes descriptions of actual lived experiences from study participants through interviews, observations, and document reviews (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In contrast to quantitative methods, this study did not utilize a hypothesis to prove or disprove phenomena through statistical measures (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). A qualitative methodology was the most appropriate method to obtain answers to this study's phenomenological purpose, as teacher perspectives based on their lived experiences are best understood through dialogical processes (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The keywords that were utilized within the purpose statement lend themselves to implementing a qualitative study. The study focused on two essential components that may reduce the attrition rate of special education teachers at the research site. The first component involved determining building leadership qualities that influenced special education teachers to remain in their current job assignment

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or seek an alternative assignment/leave the profession altogether. The second component focused on building leaders with low special education attrition rates and what they did to influence retention.

The study also sought to understand administrative or leadership support components special education teachers perceived that lead to possible attrition, what administrative support components were deemed as necessary that created feelings of being valued and supported, and how those feelings possibly influenced the decision to remain in the field of special education or to seek an alternative assignment/profession.

Epistemology. The epistemology that framed this study involved social constructionism. Social constructionism purports, individuals create meaning based on their lived experiences (Crotty, 1998; Gergen, 1985). Crotty, 1998 explained individuals develop a unique set of lenses based on their life experiences. As individuals try to understand phenomena, they “put on their lenses to “view” and interpret new events based on previously lived experiences. It is through this process of social constructionism, people seek to create meaning (Crotty, 1998). This study elicited the perspectives of special educators regarding building leader practices that influenced teacher retention. The participants, through dialog with the researcher, interpreted practices they perceived influenced retention based on their lived experiences as special education teachers. The researcher served as the primary data collection tool during the data collection. The research data was organized into themes, and coded for interpretation based upon focus interview groups, authentic observation encounters, and individual interview narratives (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Research Design

Perceived administrative support or lack thereof from special education teachers lend itself to a phenomenological inquiry as each individual’s experience within the field of special education was unique. Since it was challenging for special education teachers to separate their perception from reality

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regarding administrative support, phenomenological design was the best tool to explore those feelings and lived experiences (Andrews & Brown, 2015; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Other qualitative design methods such as case study and grounded theory were considered. However, they were rejected, as the purpose of this study was to describe the phenomenon of special education teacher attrition rates related to individually perceived building leader support at the research site (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Phenomenology allowed the researcher to conduct in-depth interviews to gain insight that involved a lived experience (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Since perceived lack of administrative support was among the top three reasons for special education teacher attrition, gaining insight into special education teachers prior experiences with open-ended questions including their opinions/values, feelings, knowledge, how they perceive their environment through the five senses, and personal background was essential to answering the primary research question (Bassoppo-Moyo, 2010; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The phenomena researched in this study explored building level leader support of special education teachers within an urban school district in the Midwest and how it influenced special educators to stay or leave the profession (Andrews & Brown, 2015).

Study Parameters

This study was conducted in an urban, Midwestern public school district. Participants in the study were required to hold a valid teaching license for special education in the research state and practiced in various buildings throughout the district. Teachers included in this study teach special education in grades preschool through 12th. Furthermore, study participants were licensed to teach either “high incidence”- students with mild to moderate disabilities, or “low incidence”- students with significant to severe disabilities.

Timeframe of study. This phenomenological study was conducted over one semester or approximately eighteen weeks. Due to the nature of phenomenological research and the amount of time

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it took to conduct intensive interviews, host focus groups, and conduct any necessary follow-up interviews, the amount of time required was for the researcher to gather and analyze the data into common themes.

Research Setting and Context

This study was conducted in a large urban school district in the Midwest part of the United States and focused on building level leader practices that influence teacher retention. The selected school district serves approximately 13,386 students. Of those students, 2,812 have been identified as having an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). The student population consists of 65% Caucasian, 12% African-American, 16% Hispanic or Latino, 1% Asian, 1% American Indian/Alaskan Native, and 5% multi-racial (Sunflower Public Schools, n.d.). Twenty-eight percent of the students are identified as English Language Learners, and 25.6% of students qualify for free or reduced meals (Sunflower Public Schools, n.d.). The researcher requested and gained permission for this study from Southwestern College, the participating school district's superintendent, special education director, building principals, and the study participants.

Special Education teachers that were included within the setting of this study composed and implemented specific individualized instruction according to the identified child's educational, social/emotional, and behavioral needs. Services include pullout instruction in a separate setting and push-in services within the general education classroom to meet the individualized needs of the identified students (Midwestern Special Education Process Handbook, n.d.). Students identified for special education services are required to complete a grade-level aligned curriculum. However, specific accommodations and modifications are utilized within the IEP document to allow for student success. Due to scheduling and the number of available staff members to serve the number of identified students, pupils are grouped based upon commonalities in need (Mitchell et al., 2017). The idea of this grouping

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served a two-fold need, the number of staff available while also allowing for social interaction with regular education peers (Langner et al., 2017).

Special education teacher qualifications job requirements. Special education classes and services are provided by specially trained (or in the process of receiving specialized training) in learning differences. Within the research state, special education teachers are required to hold a master's degree in the special education-specific area that they are teaching (Midwestern Department of Education: Teacher Licensure, 2020). With the shortage of special education teachers, the research state offers a special education licensure waiver program. This program is designed to allow general education teachers to serve as special educators while pursuing their special education license. Proof of enrollment in a special education teacher preparation program is required for those seeking a waiver (Midwestern Department of Education: Teacher Licensure, 2020).

Special education student diversity. Special education students in the research sites have highly diverse needs and the amount of support they may require. An IEP is considered a fluid document and is developed by the IEP team. Team members included a general education teacher, special education teacher, parent, an building level leader or designee, and any special service provider including, occupational, physical, speech therapist, social worker, mental health professionals, and various other providers deemed necessary to ensure the child's needs are adequately addressed (Midwestern Special Education Process Handbook, n.d.). Students may transition out of or reduce service minutes within special education once the IEP team, according to data, has met all of the assigned individualized goals. However, some special education students remain in special education for the duration of their elementary, middle, and high school years if their needs and performance are significant compared to their same-aged peers (Midwestern Special Education Process Handbook, n.d.).

Sampling Description

Qualitative research aims to strategically select the location and participants within the said study to provide the researcher with adequate data to address the research questions (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Patton, 2015). A phenomenological research design was utilized to gain a deeper understanding of participant's actual lived experiences through in-depth interviews and the data was analyzed and interpreted by the researcher (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Patton, 2015). For this study, eight special education teachers, with at least one year of special education experience were included. Half of the study participants have been in their current special education position for five or more years, and the remaining participants have taught special education for four or fewer years. These criteria were selected to create a matched comparison for the purposeful sampling strategy (Patton, 2015).

Purposeful sampling can be described as selecting people for a study that are considered rich with information on the said topic. Such participants can offer insight into a phenomena that allows for the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of participant viewpoints (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2015) By selecting study participants that have completed their special education licensure and have worked within a special education classroom for at least one year, the researcher assumed the study participants encountered various experiences, including motivators and hygiene factors, within each of their unique job assignments. Teachers who have served at least one year within a special education classroom also are likely familiar with researched-based pedagogy, IEP meetings, communicating with parents and staff, and forming relationships with colleagues (Andrews & Brown, 2015).

Ethics. Permission was received from Southwestern College's Internal Review Board (IRB) before conducting the research study. Furthermore, the researcher obtained permission to conduct the study, from the district's superintendent, special education director, building principals, and the study

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participants. The researcher arranged a meeting with the special education director to ensure all appropriate requests for the study were approved by the district.

Informed Consent. After receiving approval from Southwestern College's IRB and the school district, the selected teachers received a formal invitation to participate in the study. Next, written consent was obtained from participants that volunteered for the study. The written notice provided to participants explained the study was voluntary, and withdrawal from the study was permissible at any point. A thorough explanation of the study's purpose and data collection methods was also included in the informed consent document.

Once written permission from all necessary parties was received, the researcher personally called each participant and set up an initial time to meet with an explanation of how the meetings would be conducted. Since both focus groups and personal interviews were utilized for the study, the researcher arranged each of these times with the appropriate participants based upon either elementary, middle, or high school job assignments. The teachers' names, their school, and any other personally identifying information was not included in the study to protect the identity of the research participants. The researcher also obtained permission to audio record interviews and focus groups. Photos and pseudo names were not used. However, the researcher used alphanumeric identifiers to keep track of study participants for member checking purposes.

Data Collection Strategies

Data was collected utilizing three different qualitative methods. As Creswell and Creswell (2018) suggested, more than one form of data collection is important to ensure reliability and validity. Focus groups, personal interviews, and qualitative documents were utilized for this study. The researcher then reviewed, organized, and placed the collected data into categories or themes (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Patton, 2015). The researcher kept field notes from all focus group meetings,

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interviews, and qualitative document reviews. These notes were reviewed and coded for commonalities. Data collected from all three of the collection methods were coded and stored within a secure database.

Focus group. The initial focus group included all study participants and allowed for social interactions as a means to “break the ice”. Patton, 2015 explained focus groups allow researchers to gain significant amounts of data in a brief period. As a data collection method, focus groups have also proven to increase open and honest dialogue among participants (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Prior to the meeting, the focus group participants were given a brief outline of the study topic, how special education teacher attrition affects the state’s schools, and an interview outline to foster focus group participants' thoughts and feelings in their everyday special education teaching experiences.

Each interview question was carefully worded in an open-ended manner to generate discussion among group participants from the researcher’s guiding and secondary questions. The questions also coincided with Herzberg’s motivation/hygiene theory (1974) regarding what job satisfaction factors are considered to be motivating (internal) and what factors are considered to be hygiene (external), and why. For example, study participants were asked to discuss how a building administrator can create a supportive school culture and how that might influence teacher retention.

Individual interviews. As study participants were available, teachers were asked to participate in personal interviews. The interview locations were conducted via video conferencing due to pandemic related restrictions for social gatherings. Prior to individual interviews, teachers were again informed their participation was voluntary, and their identity and building assignment would remain confidential. With consent, the teacher participant interviews were audio recorded, and the researcher took notes for the interview duration. The interviews were documented so the researcher could transcribe and organize common themes within each interview.

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Individual interview format. The format for the personal interviews followed an interview guide format. The researcher used open-ended questions, but the topics were predetermined (McMillan & Schumacher, 2015). The issues covered within the interview were related to data that arose from the focus group interviews. As Creswell & Creswell (2018) recommend, an interview protocol was utilized for all personal interviews, including an introduction, interview probes, and interview conclusion directions. The researcher included the purpose of the study within the interview introduction and shared the guiding and secondary questions. A sample of interview questions included:

1. What inspired you to become a special education teacher?
2. What are some job requirements of special education you feel you have in comparison with general education teachers?
3. What makes you feel supported in your current position?

A complete outline of the interview protocol can be viewed in Appendix B.

Qualitative document reviews. A qualitative document review is a form of qualitative research that allows the researcher to interpret the meaning and voice the research topic (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). The researcher reviewed qualitative documents regarding special education teacher attrition within the Midwest and, more specifically, within the large and urban school district that participated in the study. The documents were articles published within the Midwestern Department of Education that pertained to special education teacher retention and attrition. In addition, the researcher reviewed journal entries that were supplied by the participating special education teachers. The researcher maintained a research journal for the study duration and asked study participants to keep a daily diary on their feelings throughout the day related to their teaching duties (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). It was suggested that at least three journal entries be made per week to assure that the researcher has adequate data to review. After reviewing the private daily journals, the researcher contacted the participants who

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made the journal entry with a follow-up conversation to seek clarification or ask further probing questions to understand better. Participants' were assured that their innermost thoughts and identities within the daily journal were held with the utmost confidentiality. Contents within the daily journals were not shared with administrators or any other school personnel.

Data saturation

Obtaining and analyzing enough data within a qualitative study is an area within social research that does not offer clear and concise parameters (Meriam & Tisdell, 2016). However, data saturation was considered once the researcher discontinued hearing new information surrounding the original and follow-up interview questions (Meriam & Tisdell, 2016). Since a teacher's time was considered very limited, the interview and focus group questions were deliberately selected. This was done to attain the most insight into a special educator's perceptions that surrounded motivation and hygiene factors within their current job assignment. During individual and follow-up interviews, further probing questions were utilized to understand the participant's responses (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The use of audio equipment, field notes, and answers from follow-up interviews were critically reviewed and analyzed for evidence of an opposing explanation for the phenomena. This was done to create the study's validity and credibility (Meriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2015).

Data Analysis

The objective of data analysis was for the researcher to make sense of the information collected throughout the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This process included combining, finding themes and translating evidence to answer the research questions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2015). Data analysis for this study was a continual process. It included field notes, initial and follow-up interview transcriptions, journal notes from reading qualitative documents, and any other correspondence utilized throughout the study. The constant comparative method brought about findings from the data collected

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and widely known for qualitative studies (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The process for utilizing the comparative method included eight components. One, understanding the whole picture through careful reading and reviewing of the transcripts. Two, selected one particular document and utilized self-questioning regarding what the document was mainly about. Notes were taken within the margins. When that was completed for all study participants, three, and a list was created of topics that arose. Four, took the list of issues, returned to the data, and assessed if any novel codes occurred. Five, utilized the most descriptive wording, turned topics into categories and placed as many topics that related to each other within those categories. Six, created and made final decisions regarding abbreviations for each type and location in alphabetical order. Seven, placed data material under appropriate categories and began the initial data analysis. Eight, had the flexibility and understood that some data needed to be recorded (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Unlike quantitative data analysis, where the researcher tests a hypothesis, qualitative analysis simultaneously occurs during the data collection process (Patton, 2015.). Within the constant comparative method, the researcher consistently analyzed the data collected, compared it to previously collected data, and determined what additional information needed to be gathered (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Data collection

For this particular study, data was collected through the focus groups, individual interview transcripts, participant journal entry analysis, and researcher field notes. According to Merriam and Tisdell, “coding is nothing more than assigning some sort of short-hand designation to various aspects of your data so that you can retrieve specific pieces of the data (2016, p. 199). Since data collection and analysis needed to be simultaneous and ongoing throughout the study, the researcher designated codes that represented identifiable items such as people, places of interviews, or developments within the specific data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2015). The codes were only significant to the researcher

and became more cultivated as data was collected and new insight was obtained (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). This type of process is known as analytical coding and requires the researcher to reflect and make meaning from the data analysis process (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016).

For this particular study, the analysis process followed the following steps. One, understand and review the study's whole by analyzing transcripts, listening to focus interview recordings, reviewing notes and journals created by the study participants. Second, selected one of the interview protocols from the individual interviews, carefully analyzed it, and utilized self-reflection and questioned the underlying meaning of the information collected. These thoughts were kept in the margins of the interview protocols. Third, after the researcher completed this for several of the interview protocols and notes, journals, and focus group interviews, a list of common topics were constructed. Those topics were then analyzed for similarities, including outliers or ones that did not typically fit under any common theme or topic. Fourth, the researcher took the list of issues, returned to the collected data, and began abbreviating topics into codes next to where they were discovered within the data. Fifth, discovered topics were then transformed into categories, and relationships within the categories were sought to show relationships and patterns. Sixth, an abbreviation system for each category was created and then alphabetized. Seventh, the researcher then placed the data belonging to each category for an initial analysis. Eighth, the researcher recorded existing data when necessary (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The researcher kept a log and notes that regarded the process.

Making sense of the data. The next step in the data analysis process involved making sense of the data and then transitioned the codes into themes or categories. This process began with the first set of data. It was then compared, analyzed, coded, and placed within an article or class for the remainder of the data collection and analysis process (Creswell & Creswell, 2019). As stated previously, at this juncture, the researcher then had to think more thematically and focus on the purpose of the study,

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perceived administrative support of special education teachers, and how that contributed to the desire to remain in the field of special education or job assignment, and align that to the conceptual and theoretical framework (Creswell & Creswell, 2019; Merriam and Tisdell, 2016). The triangulated data sources were compared and then emerged as major findings from this study. Triangulation of data can be defined as utilizing more than one method to collect data within the same topic. Doing so assured data collection validity (Creswell & Creswell, 2019; Merriam and Tisdell, 2016). This process continued until no further new revelations within the data occurred, as the data was considered saturated at that point.

Credibility and Trustworthiness

This study utilized the qualitative method approach. Therefore, this study's credibility and trustworthiness included the research-based measures that equated with qualitative research. A study's credibility is defined as how the study was conceptualized, how the data is collected, analyzed, interpreted, and presented (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). A study's trustworthiness within qualitative research allowed for the reader to have enough detail and description of the study so that the researcher's results made sense to the reader (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). As many of the methods were similar to that of quantitative research, those that read the study needed a level of certainty that the study was implemented with fidelity (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In quantitative analysis, the data is numerical and corroborates the researcher's findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Qualitative research, by contrast, generates its findings through copious amounts of detailed data to prove that the researcher presented what the study discovered to be true (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2015). External validity is used within quantitative research to prove a study's trustworthiness and how the results could be applied and generalized to similar study situations (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2015).

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For the qualitative phenomenological study, the intended purpose is to analyze and interpret data from this limited and select population (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). To establish trustworthiness within this qualitative study, should it be applied to similar studies, enough description and detail will be provided to allow the next researcher necessary and detailed information to enable transferability to their situation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This study utilized various measures to authenticate the validity and transferability through a triangulated lens, the lens of the study participants, the researcher, and peers familiar with the study topic but considered external to the study itself (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

The researcher substantiated credibility through the researcher's viewpoint by analyzing data collected by the selected sources: focus group, individual interviews, and qualitative document review. The triangulation process was utilized to search for confluences and viscosity of information to identify common categories and themes and to carry out cross data validity evaluations to discover and limit any debilitations that could be possibly linked to one specific point of data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Patton (2015) delineates how the use of triangulation as it applies to this study. This included reviewing focus groups, individual interview data, and qualitative documents such as diary/journal entries and comparing the remarks and comments given by participants, all while noting similarities and differences throughout the study. This data was continually analyzed, coded, and then placed within categories as themes emerged from the findings. This continued to occur until there were no new gaps within the data that arose or data saturation.

Credibility came through the participants' lens by member checking. The data collected and findings were reviewed to ensure accuracy within the researcher's descriptions (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2015). Upon completing the first focus group interview, the findings were shared with the group participants via email, and advice was requested for member

checking and validity. After focus group interviews were completed, the information collected was then examined simultaneously during individual participant interviews to give participants feedback and make modifications if needed. Lastly, a follow-up interview was conducted to check for understanding within the qualitative document reviews of the participants' diaries and journals. Follow-up interviews were undertaken to establish credibility and assure that the researcher understood the intent of the entries and conversations. Due to this study being grounded in social constructionism epistemology, the member checks were a vital component. That was how meaning was derived from the data collected from study participants and the researcher's interpretation.

Transferability

The study's transferability component utilized people who were not directly involved in this study and provided broad and rich descriptions of the data collected (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Social constructionism allows others to view and interpret the world according to how they individually receive the stimulus and make meaning (Crotty, 1998; Gergen, 1985). The objective of providing thick and rich explanations of the data collected is that others considered external to this study would have a general understanding and apply the research findings within their realm of research or situation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2015).

Data audit. Lastly, the researcher maintained an audit trail of evidence to show the data collection and analysis process documentation. Also, field notes that were taken during focus group interviews, individual interviews, and qualitative document reviews of participant journal entries were made available for those that were external to the study to gain insight on any researcher bias, how and what the researcher was feeling during the data collection and analysis process (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Doing the steps as mentioned earlier allowed for people external to this study to determine if the

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data, researcher's findings, and categories were congruous to the conclusions derived are logical (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Credibility. Varieties of measures were taken to assure study credibility. Credibility measures began with a focus group and individual interview transcripts that were evaluated for inconsistencies and errors. Secondly, field notes were taken during focus and personal interviews and qualitative document reviews of participant journal entries to check where possible shifts in information occurred. Lastly, the interview questions and protocols were provided within the index should the study be replicated (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Researcher credibility. It should also be recognized that the issue of researcher credibility and trustworthiness were also considered. As previously mentioned in Chapter 1, the researcher has taught special education and works within the district where the study occurred. Establishing trust and meaningful relationships with special educators and possessing prior knowledge of their experience within the field allowed for more forthcoming and honest conversations. The researcher is also familiar with special education terminology, protocols, and day-to-day job demands.

However, facilitating a study among lateral colleagues may have altered study participants' confidence and behaviors to protect their job security. Additionally, having previously served as a special education teacher may have influenced the researcher's perceptions of the data. The researcher continuously practiced self-introspection and documented any potential limitations that the study presented as data was gathered (Patton, 2015).

Researcher transparency. While it is considered that the previous experience of the researcher can be a benefit to the study regarding special education programming and practices, the researcher's position could have negatively influenced the data interpretation. The researcher followed and remained cognizant of the study's design and upheld the highest ethical practices to ensure trustworthiness and

validity of the research data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Patton, 2015). These practices included complete transparency with field notes and memos, providing explicit and rich descriptions, and continuous examination of the data for omitted or incomplete information. In implementing these practices, other researchers will have the ability to utilize this study's data for their research position.

Summary of Chapter 3

Chapter 3 explains and provides a blueprint for this study's methodology and includes the review of the study's purpose: to explore and understand how building leadership practices can influence urban Midwestern special education teachers' decision to either remain in the field of special education or to leave in pursuit of a different teaching assignment or career altogether. Secondly, the research design selection of qualitative research and the phenomenological study was defined along with its parameters. This chapter also explains the data collection strategies utilized, including focus group interviews, individual interviews, and qualitative document reviews of study participant journal entries in detail. Chapter 3 concludes with measures that were taken to assure study credibility and how potential future researchers could transfer the acquired information for similar research situations. Chapter 4 will discuss the findings from the data collection.

Chapter 4

Findings and Analysis

Introduction

Chapter 4 provides an analysis of the researcher's data regarding building-level administrative practices that influence special education teacher retention. The researcher organized sixteen individual interviews, two focus group interviews, and eight qualitative document reviews. The researcher reiterated the study's methodology, research design, study participants, parameters of the study, data collection process, how the data was coded for analytical purposes, themes that surfaced, findings compiled, and the responses to the research questions are all incorporated within this chapter.

This study's primary research question is, what building-level administrative practices influence special education teacher retention? The secondary research questions include: (a) What are the internal (motivation factors) of special education teachers that would motivate them to remain in the field of special education; (b) What are the external (hygiene factors) of special education that lead to dissatisfaction in the field of special education; (c) What are special education teachers' perspectives of motivating factors exhibited by building administrators that help them feel supported in their job; (d) What are special education teachers' perspectives of hygiene factors exhibited by building administrators that lead to dissatisfaction within their job? The study focuses on two essential components of building leadership that influences special educator teacher retention. The first component involves determining building leadership qualities that influence special education teachers to either remain in their current job assignment or seek an alternative appointment or leave the profession altogether. The second component focuses on building leaders with low special education attrition rates and what they do to maintain current special education staff.

Currently, the special education teacher attrition rate in the research state is 13.9%, with the national average being only 12.8% (Stewart, 2018). In the research state, during the 2016-2017 school

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year, 1,275 of the 9,156 special educators did not return to the field (Stewart, 2018). State and local educational leaders address the rise in attrition rates of special education teachers by offering sign-on bonuses and alternative certification pathways. In some districts, higher salaries than general education teachers are offered. However, special education teachers' attrition rate within the research state continues to increase (Stewart, 2018).

The four major themes found in the literature that addressed special education teacher attrition included, 1. A teacher's perceived lack of building-level administrative support (Langher et al., 2017; McDowell, 2017; Rodl et al., 2018; Santoro, 2017), 2. Special education teacher workload (Ouellette et al., 2019), 3. Inadequate preservice training (Arnett, 2017; Barth et al., 2016; Brief, 2018), and 4. The lack of appropriate mentoring or new teacher induction programs (Mitchell et al., 2017). The theory used for this study, Herzberg's (1974) motivation-hygiene theory, addresses internal and external motivators that increase the likelihood special education teachers will remain in the field of special education.

Methodology and Research Design

This qualitative study used a phenomenological approach. More specifically, phenomenological research studies phenomena and includes descriptions of actual lived experiences from study participants through interviews, observations, and record reviews (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In contrast to quantitative methods, this study does not utilize a hypothesis to prove or disprove a theory through statistical measures (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Qualitative methodology is the most appropriate methodology to obtain answers to this study's phenomenological purpose (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The study also seeks to understand what administrative or leadership actions special education teachers feel might lead to attrition. Additionally, this study aims to understand the building leader

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support components that may create a feeling of being valued and supported. Finally, this study explores how feeling valued and supported can influence the decision to remain in special education or seek an alternative assignment or a new profession.

The epistemology that frames this study involves social constructionism. Within the constructivist view, individuals create their meaning out of their perception and perspective of what is happening around them (Crotty, 1998; Gergen, 1985). The same epistemology is utilized within perceived positive or negative administrative interactions with special education teachers (Crotty, 1998; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The researcher serves as the primary data collection tool within qualitative research methodology, organizes themes, and codes the data for interpretation based upon focus interview groups, authentic observation encounters, and individual interview narratives (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Research Design

Perceived administrative support or lack thereof from special education teachers lends itself to phenomenological inquiry, as each individual's experience within the field of special education is unique. Since it is challenging for special education teachers to separate their perception from reality regarding administrative support, phenomenological design is the best tool to explore these feelings and lived experiences (Andrews & Brown, 2015; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Other qualitative design methods such as case study and grounded theory were considered. Still, they were rejected, as the purpose of this study is to describe the phenomenon of special education teacher attrition rates related to individually perceived administrative support within an urban research state school district (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Phenomenology allows the researcher to conduct in-depth interviews to better understand a lived experience (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Since perceived lack of administrative support is among the

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reasons cited in the literature and discussed by research participants for special education teacher attrition, gaining insight into special education teachers' prior experiences, including their opinions, values, feelings, knowledge, how they perceive their environment through the five senses, and personal background allows the researcher to gain a better understanding of their dispositions (Bassoppo-Moyo, 2010; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Special education teacher perceived job satisfaction is a vast topic and the purpose of this study, within the context of job satisfaction and building leader support, must be identified and ingrained (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The phenomena researched in this study is how administrative support of special education teachers within an urban school district in the research state influences the decision to remain or leave a particular job assignment or the special education teaching profession altogether (Andrews & Brown, 2015).

Participants and Context of the Study

Participants. The eight participants in this study included four elementary teachers, two middle school teachers, and two high school teachers in an urban Midwestern school district. During the 2020-2021 school year, the research district contained fifteen elementary schools, six middle schools, and three high schools. The study's selected school district employs 223.2 special educators in kindergarten through twelfth grades (State Department of Education Data Central, 2021). The district employs approximately 0.05% of the state's total special education teachers (State Department of Education Data Central, 2021). Additionally, there are also four service levels of early childhood education programs in the district that include Parents as Teachers, early learning centers, state pre-k locations, and preschool intervention programs. Early childhood special educators were not included within the scope of this study. Full-time teachers serving within the special education role were in grades kindergarten through twelfth grade were considered for participation in the study.

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The researcher is a former special educator, a current general education classroom teacher, serves on the assigned building leadership team, Comprehensive/Integrated/Three-Tiered (Ci3T) team, and provides mentoring support to a first-year student teacher within the given building. She has also served as an educator for a total of 15 years. Over this period, she has worked in four different public school districts and taught within a psychiatric treatment residential facility.

During the researcher's tenure, she developed various professional working relationships, including many with special educators. Furthermore, during her career, the researcher has observed that many special educators did not stay in their position(s). Inquiry into the possibility that building-level leadership was influential in special education teacher retention was imitative of these observations and informal conversations with colleagues. These new professional relationships allowed the researcher to promote participation in the study and entrust the study's process and impact on education. However, the researcher is only in her second year serving as a teacher in the research district. These circumstances may have influenced research participation and openness with the knowledge and comfort of similar backgrounds. Adversely, the researcher's discomfort or insecurity working closely with building-level leadership may have had minimal influence on participant responses. The study took place in the fall of 2020.

Context of the study. This study is set in a large urban school district in a Midwestern state and focused on special education teacher attrition and retention. The selected school district serves approximately 13,386 students. Of those students, 2,812 are identified as having an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) administered through special education services. The student population consists of 65% Caucasian, 12% African-American, 16% Hispanic or Latino, 1% Asian, 1% American Indian/Alaskan Native, and 5% multi-racial (Sunflower Schools, n.d.). Twenty-eight percent of district children are English as Second Language speakers, and 25.6% of families are below the poverty level

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(Sunflower School District, n.d.). The researcher received permission for this study from Southwestern College, the participating school district's superintendent, special education director, building principals, and specifically selected special education teachers.

Special Education teachers included within the setting of this study compose and implement specific individualized instruction according to the identified child's educational, social/emotional, and behavioral needs. Services include pullout instruction in a separate setting and push-in services within the general education classroom to meet the individualized needs of the identified students (Research State Special Education Process Handbook, n.d.). Students identified as special education students are still required to complete a grade-level aligned curriculum, however, specific accommodations and modifications are utilized within the IEP document to allow for student success. Due to scheduling and the number of available staff members to serve the number of identified students, pupils are grouped based upon commonalities in need (Mitchell et al., 2017). The idea of this style of grouping serves a two-fold need; the number of staff available while also allowing for social interaction with like peers (Langner et al., 2017).

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic during the study's data collection phase, in-person contact was minimal, and virtual meeting technology was utilized more than originally planned. During data collection, in-person classes and virtual learning were deployed on three different occasions. Four of the eight study participants could be individually interviewed in an in-person format, while the other four were interviewed in a virtual setting. The two focus group meetings that were held virtually included all but one of the participants. All participants submitted their daily journal documents electronically to the researcher. All data collected or derived from the three stages of collection centered on the study's theoretical framework of Herzberg's motivation/hygiene theory (Patton, 2015). This theory requires that

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the data be analyzed and disaggregated according to internal or external factors or themes (Herzberg, 1974).

Participants' demographic information. Participant demographic information was collected regarding the eight study participants. The table listed as 4.1 displays the study participants' alphanumeric identifier, age, special education teaching experience in years, and their certification areas. The district offers an annual stipend of \$1,500 to special education teachers as an incentive to serve and remain in the position (Sunflower School District, 2021).

Table 4.1

Participant Demographic Information

Alphanumeric Identifier	Age	Gender	Years of Experience Teaching Special Education	Education & Area of Certification
A1	47	F	23	Masters SpEd
B2	42	F	18	Masters SpEd
C3	31	M	3	Masters SpEd
D4	45	F	10	Masters Early Childhood & SpEd
E5	50	M	26	Bachelors with SpEd Emphasis
F6	27	F	3	Masters SpEd
G7	34	F	6	Masters SpEd
H8	33	F	4	Masters SpEd

Note: Table 4.1 represents study participant demographic data (N=8)

Six females and two males participated in the study. The age range for the study participants spanned from 27 to 50 years. The participants' average age was 38.62 years with 11.6 average years of

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experience in teaching special education. Due to research State's Department of Education licensure requirements since 2004, highly qualified special educators must hold a master's degree unless grandfathered by previous licensure requirements (State Department of Education, 2020).

The Research Process

The first step in the research process included finding willing participants that met the study participation requirements outlined in Chapter 3. Before obtaining study participants, the researcher sent correspondence to the school district's internal review board, superintendent, director of special education services, and building-level principals. Within this communication, the researcher described the study's purpose, the research process, and a brief description of how the results would be presented upon completion. Once the school district permitted the study to commence, the researcher obtained a list of special education teachers within the participating district. Email correspondence was then sent out to eligible study candidates asking if they would be interested in participating. Two study participants who originally agreed to participate in the study later changed their minds in fear of administration retaliation.

Potential study participants responded directly to the researcher through email and included their signed consent to participate in the research study. This process took longer than anticipated as the school district moved to remote learning during this portion of data collection. Upon receiving the signed consent form, the researcher contacted the eight eligible participants by phone to arrange individual interviews and explain the other two forms of the data collection process; focus groups and qualitative document review journals. Upon making phone contact with each participant, the researcher began the individual interview process. Two weeks after each interview was conducted, the first focus group interview time was scheduled through an electronic or virtual meeting platform. The second

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focus group meeting commenced two weeks after the original. The time between individual interviews and focus group interviews allowed the researcher to transcribe recordings from prior discussions.

This phenomenological study answered the research questions: What building-level administrative practices influence special education teacher retention; what are the internal (motivation factors) of special education teachers that would motivate them to remain in the field of special education; what are the external (hygiene factors) of special education that leads to dissatisfaction in the field of special education; what are special education teachers' perspectives of motivating factors exhibited by building administrators that help them feel supported in their job; what are special education teachers' views of hygiene factors demonstrated by building administrators that lead to dissatisfaction within their job? The motivational/hygiene theoretical framework served as the guide for the study participant interview questions. The original data collection process included eight special educators ranging from elementary to secondary level that the researcher interviewed.

Individual teacher interviews. Personal teacher interviews took place either before or after school and on the weekends when each educator was available. The interviews took place either in the researcher's classroom, the participant's classroom, or via a virtual meeting platform. Before conducting the interview, each participant submitted their consent to participate in the study; the researcher reviewed the confidentiality of their identity and the responses shared during this process. The researcher also expressed that the interview would be audio recorded. Each interview lasted approximately 20 minutes, with the longest meeting lasting about 42 minutes. The researcher attempted to decide how the school year was proceeding, caseload numbers, and student engagement with online learning to put the participants at ease. Two of the participants expressed concern regarding their responses getting back to their building level administrator and possible professional repercussions ensuing as a result. One participant asked the researcher regarding her professional relationship with

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one of the building administrators and if their responses would influence the researcher's perception of them as an individual. The researcher re-explained the study's intent and the ethical obligation to keep all study participants and their responses confidential.

During the interview dialogue process, the researcher took notes based on the interviewee's responses. After each interview, the researcher reviewed the notes with the study participant to check for accuracy and answers. This also allowed participants to add more detail or expand on their responses. All but three participants added dialogue to their responses upon review. This allowed for researcher validity as recommended by McMillan & Schumacher (2010).

Upon completion of each interview, the researcher transcribed the audio recording. The researcher then examined the transcriptions documenting or coding recurring words or phrases that were then categorized into themes. Each participant was given an alphanumeric identifier to maintain confidentiality while still making the data accessible to the researcher. This process continued until data saturation was reached, with respondents either repeating information that had already been obtained or no new information was found.

Focus group interviews. After completing individual interviews, each study participant was invited to a virtual focus group interview. All but one of the study participants attended. As Patton (2015) explains, phenomenological interviews focus on obtaining the most authentic experience according to the individual participants' perceptions. The focus group interviews allowed special educators of different levels to respond and add on to others' responses within the group. The group setting interview-style also allowed for collegial collaboration and discussion of different lived experiences within the special educator sector.

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McMillian and Schumacher (2010) express that phenomenological interview questions are designed to evoke a recollection of a lived experience, opinion(s), feelings, knowledge, sensory, and background. The informal and open-ended discussion during the focus group interviews appeared to make study participants more comfortable responding or adding additional dialogue to the discussion. The researcher also observed the participants' body language and took note of the shared non-verbal communication. Heads were nodding in agreement, eye-rolling, and silent clapping were all observed in response to the ongoing discussion. Each focus group meeting lasted approximately 40 minutes, and the participants were notified that the session was being recorded with only the researcher's identity visible.

Each participant was allowed into the virtual meeting by the researcher, and the meeting was given a specific forum identifier and password to allow entry. This measure was taken to ensure the privacy and confidentiality of participants. The researcher served as the meeting moderator and took field notes during the process. After the two focus group meetings were transcribed, common words and phrases were recorded and placed into thematic categories, commensurate with the individual interview transcriptions for analysis.

Qualitative document reviews. The collection and analysis of qualitative documents and artifacts is a means of obtaining authentic insight into study participants' thoughts, feelings, and responses in day-to-day activities ((McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). This process does not include much or any interaction between the researcher and the participant (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

Each study participant was asked to keep a daily or weekly (depending upon preference) anecdotal record as a means of documenting personal thoughts and feelings within a school day. The qualitative document review served as the third form of data collected by the researcher. This form of data collection allows study participants to record each of their perspectives, construct their meaning from the stimulus encountered, and lend itself to the researcher to better understand both a constructivist

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and phenomenological approach (Crotty, 1998). Each study participant could decide if they would like to keep a digital or hard copy version of the record. Six out of the eight study participants kept a running Google document shared with the researcher for analysis purposes. This information was utilized in attempts for the researcher to gain a better insight and understanding of the conscious thoughts that study participants experienced through their own words.

Table 4.2

Participant Responses Based Upon Motivation and Hygiene Factors

Personal Internal Motivation Factors that lead to feelings of wanting to remain in special education (1)	Personal External Hygiene Factors that lead to job dissatisfaction (2)	Perceived Motivating (Support) Factors Exhibited by Building Administrator (3)	Perceived Hygiene (dissatisfaction) Factors Exhibited by Building Admin (4)
A1, 1 innately a highly motivated person	G7, 2 we are often asked to move classrooms each year. I worked out of a closet one time.	C3,3 professional development for general education staff on how to scaffold, differentiate, and modify lessons/assignments	D4, 4 It is very hit or miss, but I definitely do not feel they (admin) are “all in.”
B2, 1 continue to stay motivated because I love helping students that have the most need	C3, 2 I did not have a mentor assigned to me that worked in the same building.	H8, 3 I was asked to be a member of the Building Leadership Team	F6, 4 I have worked here for multiple years and have never been asked to be in a leadership role
C3, 1 I love the feeling I get teaching students	H8, 2 It’s hard to take a day off when no subs	D4, 3 I am sometimes motivated	G7, 4 Things got so bad with the building

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something that they thought was once impossible.	want special education placements.	because my building principal leaves me alone and lets me do my job.	leadership that my entire special education cohort left.
B2,2 witnessing students' progress out of special education	A1, 2 my personal belongings are often destroyed by students that become dysregulated.	B2, 3 My principal stops by my room to say hello, and it is refreshing.	E5,4 I don't feel that my building principal truly listens to my concerns and needs
E5, 2 I enjoy the access to materials that help students with learning differences	H8, 3 It is not clear where to go when I have questions about service minutes or students' options.	E5, 3 I sometimes feel my principal needs my support because district leadership micro-manages her. It makes me think we are in this together.	D4, 4 My principal changes directions on policies and procedures too often, and things are left very unclear when I ask for clarification

Note: Table 4.2 is a sample of the spreadsheet that depicts the words and phrases extracted from personal interviews, focus groups, and qualitative document review.

Upon completion of coding the data, the spreadsheet was consistently reviewed to look for researcher consistency within the four motivation/hygiene subgroups. It was noted that some individual responses were inconsistent with focus group data and qualitative document review data. When this occurred, the researcher reached out to the study participants for further clarification and provided an opportunity to delve deeper into the participant response. After data saturation feelings ensued, the researcher then began to look for emerging themes within the triangulated data of the personal interviews, focus groups, and qualitative document reviews.

Emerging Themes

All data collected data including personal interviews, focus groups and qualitative document reviews were placed within an organized table. The themes that emerged included: prompt and effective communication with building leadership, consistent leadership expectations regarding policies and procedures, leadership opportunities for special education teachers, teacher efficacy and autonomy, and student disability severity and caseload numbers. Each of the five emerging themes will be discussed in detail, as explained below. The first theme discussed is prompt and effective communication with building leadership.

Prompt and Effective Communication with Building Leadership

Prompt and effective communication with building leadership as defined by the study participants is the soliciting of insight, obtaining permission and direction for a particular situation, and being kept abreast of current events. Study participants, whether in personal interviews, focus groups, or in the document reviews, collectively expressed concerns about building leadership communication related to the duties of special education teachers.

As the researcher analyzed the data, it became readily evident the majority of participants had significant concerns about perceived prompt and effective communication from building leaders. The participants spoke of numerous duties related to special education they felt required quick, face-to-face contact with building leadership. Furthermore, educators in the study reported the decisions they make have significant legal and ethical ramifications, and prompt and effective communication with the building leader would likely improve decision-making around special education services. The participants explained the desire to “talk through big issues” with the building leadership, and such communication increased their confidence in performing their duties as special educators. However,

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participants agreed it was more common for communication from the building leader to be delayed beyond a reasonable timeframe.

Participants indicated delayed communication was commonplace and often resulted in teachers feeling unsure how to properly perform duties or manage various situations. As one participant described, “Whenever I don’t receive a response for what I thought was time-sensitive, especially if it involves a student or upset parent, I always feel like I will get reprimanded for not doing the right thing. You know, we live in a lawsuit-happy world, and I don’t feel like I should be held accountable when I communicated that I was unsure of how to respond.” For most study participants, untimely communication equated to ineffective communication. Subsequently, without timely and effective communication, participants reported feelings of uneasiness. These feelings of apprehension centered around whether teachers were performing duties correctly and legally. Feelings of uncertainty or lack of support for special educators due to untimely or ineffective communication from building leaders was highlighted as problematic for teacher retention within the literature review. Bassopo-Mayo et al. (2010) expressed school, government officials recognize the importance of sustaining and retaining quality teachers through effective communication, and the impact such contact may have on special education teacher job satisfaction and ultimately attrition. Yet, according to participants, building leaders did not seem to grasp the gravity of delayed communication.

Indeed, participants indicated, at times, principals did not respond to pleas for help with angry parents, meeting availability, and how to obtain critical resources. Seventy-five percent of the study participants agreed that lack of prompt communication leads to feelings of uncertainty, speculation, and nervousness. Study participant D4 agreed building leadership communication is often ineffective or delayed, when she explained, “I will often email my principal with a situation regarding a student that is perceived as urgent in nature and will not get a response for a week or more later.” Another participant

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also seemed to agree that communication with the administration is often ineffective when he complained, “The only communication I feel we get seems to focus on micromanaging staff behavior, and real issues are not even addressed.” As mentioned above, these “real” issues included dealing with angry parents, student safety and behavior, and management of special education support staff. These real issues, when left unaddressed, led to participants’ feelings of uncertainty.

Feelings of Uncertainty. During the focus group interviews, study participants collaboratively discussed how each of their administrators had different communication behaviors and patterns that varied from day to day. These day-to-day patterns left many participants feeling uncertain about the message and how to carry out some duties. For instance, three participants agreed principals’ communication style depended upon what kind of “the day they were having.” One participant explained, “It depends on what kind of mood our principal is in, whether or not we are communicated with. It always seems like she is too busy to address the concerns we have in our area of teaching.” Yet another participant explained, “She does not feel supported or valued when she does not receive a response to an issue that she felt was time-sensitive.” Whether through interviews or during focus groups, the feeling that principals did not have time for face-to-face communication was predominant. Subsequently, participants reported feelings of uncertainty and frustration around their job duties. Participants said face-to-face communication was key to feeling certain about ensuring job duties were performed correctly.

Face-to-Face Communication. The qualitative data from all sources revealed face-to-face conversations are much more desirable and necessary to prevent misunderstandings or the uncertainty of electronic correspondence. As explained by one participant, “I feel that emails can become very convoluted and often misinterpreted.” An additional participant added, “Many problems could probably be avoided if I were able to just talk to my building administrator in person, but I also understand that

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this is how we communicate in today's time.” However, as reported previously, participants were likely to feel their building leader did not have time for face-to-face communication. If teachers could meet with the building leader, teachers thought they were “bothering” them. Herzberg (1974) explained touch that makes employees feel heard and valued was key to attrition.

Through the data collection, prompt and effective communication was highly desired by all participants. Without timely communication from building leaders, special education teachers felt uncertain about fulfilling some of their duties. Additionally, participants indicated a lack of prompt or effective communication led to feelings of uneasiness, a lack of support, or even fear they may not fulfill duties correctly or legally. Teachers reported a preference for face-to-face communication as a way to avoid miscommunication and hence feelings of uncertainty. Still, it was more commonly reported communication was typically delivered through an untimely and unclear email. As indicated by Herzberg (1974) and Basso-Mayo, et al. (2010), feelings of uncertainty and uneasiness in the workplace lead to higher attrition. The second of the five emerging themes focus on consistent leadership expectations involving policies and procedures.

Consistent Leadership Expectations Regarding Policies and Procedures

The theme of consistent leadership expectations regarding policies and procedures, as collectively defined by study participants, “is having clear, concise, and consistent expectations, explanations of how day-to-day situations are handled by building level administration, and making decisions that are fair.” Kumedzro (2108) explains that perceived favoritism, inconsistent expectations, and disciplinary immunity among teaching staff can cause feelings of animosity and jealousy, thus leading to a divided building culture, which ultimately may lead to teacher attrition. Study participants expressed that expectations regarding policies and procedures were often inconsistent depending on “who you are” and whether you are a “regular education or special education” teacher.

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Inconsistent Expectations. During a focus group interview, a discussion ensued that expectations should be the same for all students and staff despite years of service, performance, personal opinion(s) of the administrator, and personality differences. As a research participant, C3 shared, “I don’t feel like my building principal likes me because I am not anything like her. When I went into special education, I did not realize how much politics were truly at play within schools. Different teachers (depending upon whether my principal likes you) have different sets of expectations.” A second study participant, H8, explained, “I do not feel supported by my building administrator. I feel they change directions on many policies and directives without any documentation to support these changes.” The data from participants clearly show perceived inconsistency in expectations and policy and procedure implementation from several administrators. According to the data, the lack of consistency in how policies and procedures are carried out by building leaders related to their knowledge level regarding special education policy and law.

Building Leader Knowledge Level. During commensurate focus group interviews, different administrators across the district have a different understanding of special education policies and procedures. As explained by one participant, “My principal openly admits that she has minimal knowledge of special education policies and practices and that she relies on me, as a specialist, to make sound decisions. I had to explain that I often don’t have the authority. I feel I need to make those types of decisions sometimes, and I feel very isolated and unsupported.”

The discussion also included perceptions regarding special education teachers and transparent communication regarding policies and procedures. Participants simply felt building leadership did not always know applicable special education policy, which ultimately led to inconsistencies in how such policies were implemented. One participant, for example, explained, “I always feel like there is a hidden agenda or level of secrecy with why certain policies or procedures are being enacted. I mean,

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what's the big deal? We all want to be kept in the loop.” However, ultimately, participants agreed that the building leader's lack of knowledge around special education policies explained their communication styles and inconsistency in policy implementation.

This lack of knowledge even meant teachers within the same building were given different messages about policies and procedures. For instance, during the focus group interview, participant B2 complained, “I do feel like the expectations for special education students and special education teachers are different than that of my general education colleagues. My principal doesn't want to touch our department with a 10-foot pole.” Participants agreed that administrators often avoid special education teachers due to limited knowledge of special education policies, causing them to feel isolated and unsupported. According to Herzberg's motivation/hygiene theory, feelings of isolation and lack of support may lead to job dissatisfaction, contributing to attrition (Herzberg, 1974).

Study participants perceived expectations of staff were inconsistent by building leadership. Some participants felt building leaders were easier on teachers they liked or regular education teachers. Special education teachers also felt building leaders had limited knowledge of special education law and policy. Therefore, policies and procedures were not consistently implemented among teachers even in the same building. Finally, participants' perceived building leadership often avoided them due to their lack of knowledge regarding special education policy—avoidance of participants by building leadership created feelings of loneliness and ultimately job dissatisfaction. Since participants felt building leadership avoided them, they believed they were also passed over for leadership opportunities. The third emerging theme from the study participants' data centered around the lack of leadership opportunities for special education teachers.

Leadership opportunities

As defined by study participants, leadership opportunities are the chance for special education teachers to serve in building initiatives and shared decision-making. Multiple participants expressed an interest in helping to lead in their building. Yet, despite significant teaching expertise among the participants, it was rare to be selected for service on building leadership teams or chair departments or committees. The lack of leadership roles for special education teachers within buildings added to participant frustration and isolation feelings. Participants, however, rationalized building leaders were considering high caseloads when selecting for leadership roles.

However, despite the workload among special education teachers, multiple participants expressed frustration in their lack of leadership opportunities within their building. As a study participant, A1 shared, “I have been in my building for over six years (and that is a long time for someone in my position), and I have never been asked to be a part of any leadership team. This is very discouraging as I don’t feel that I am taken seriously or have anything to offer that is of value.” An additional study participant went on to explain, “Being a special educator already leads to feelings of isolation just due to the sheer nature of the profession but not being included in building leadership opportunities increases those feelings.”

The focus group rationalized that building administrators may fail to provide leadership opportunities because they perceive special education teachers as “having too much on their plate” to take on a leadership role. To further highlight this perception, discussion during one of the focus group interviews highlighted that building principals are often aware of the number of special education teacher duties compared to general education teachers. Special education teacher duties include

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additional meetings, caseload management obligations such as drafting Individualized Education Plans (IEP), classroom observations for data collection, and parent contact (Sunflower School District Handbook, 2021).

Even though participants agreed they shoulder greater responsibilities than regular education teachers do, study participant B2 commented, “Yes, while that may be true [that we have more duties], it would still be nice to be asked or feel included.” Feelings of not being included and professional leadership skills going unidentified, according to Herzberg, can create feelings of job dissatisfaction (Herzberg, 1974). Participant D4 seemed to agree with Herzberg when they expressed upon the rare instance of being asked to serve in a leadership role, “I felt valued and inspired when I was asked to lead a professional development session within my building.”

However, the data were clear; study participants were far less likely to serve in leadership roles than their regular education counterparts were. Failure to “even be asked” to act on building leadership teams or chair committees led to feelings of frustration and isolation. Yet, teachers rationalized building leaders often did not ask participants to serve in leadership capacities out of respect to the difficult caseload they shouldered. The lack of leadership opportunities among special educators led to lower levels of autonomy and self-efficacy—the fourth emerging theme from the participant data centered around teacher efficacy and independence. Study participants expressed low levels of effectiveness and freedom related to their job responsibilities.

Teacher efficacy and autonomy

Study participants defined teacher efficacy as the ability to teach students predetermined materials and bring about desirable outcomes. Additionally, participants described teacher autonomy as being given the freedom and independence to teach based on their expertise as special educators.

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Efficacy and autonomy were brought up in all data collection sessions across all data sources. Participants expressed feelings of low self-efficacy and a lack of independence related to job duties. Teachers explained building leaders placed significant pressure on them to raise achievement scores among special education students despite the severity of student disabilities. Participants admitted often failing to meet achievement goals, and as such, this failure led to a sense of defeat or a lower sense of self-efficacy. Subsequently, failure to meet achievement goals often led to less autonomy, as one participant expressed, “micromanagement” by the building leader.

To highlight the feeling of lower self-efficacy and less autonomy, study participants C3 and F6 made related observations within their journals. C3 explained, “I feel useless sometimes as a special education teacher at Student Intervention Team (SIT) meetings because I am specialized in the field, and yet my input does not seem valued.” While the participant felt, she possessed a level of expertise that could be helpful even for regular education students, the SIT team ignored her suggestions or scoffed at such ideas as being appropriate only for special education students. Participant F6 remarked, “I often feel that a monkey could do my job because my building administrator micromanages everything I do. Where is the autonomy and chance to be creative?” Again, as building leaders pushed for higher achievement and F6 failed to meet building targets, she experienced more micromanagement from the building leader on providing services. This was baffling to participants as they expressed many building leaders lacked basic knowledge of special education services.

Participants saw the achievement issue in a different light. Participants B2 and E5 engaged in a conversation that involved the fact that “growth of any kind should be celebrated as our students are identified as special education students for a reason. If they could grow and be on grade level commensurate with their same-aged peers, there wouldn’t be any need for our job.” Participant A1 added to the discussion, “Teaching is an art, and not everyone can do it. Just as an artist, we should be

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allowed to do what we feel is best to convey IEP (Individualized Education Plan) goals and benchmarks; trust our professional judgment.” As Herzberg (1974) explains, feelings of not being trusted as a professional or given the opportunity to express sound judgment have led to job dissatisfaction.

The sense of frustration and dissatisfaction was palpable during focus groups, interviews, and personal journals around self-efficacy and teacher autonomy. Participants felt discouraged or had less self-efficacy when unable to meet “unreasonable” achievement goals set by building leaders. Participants also expressed “low achievement” rates among special education students led to more micromanagement by building leaders or less autonomy. Low self-efficacy and less autonomy seemed to breed frustration and a sense of hopelessness among participants. Few things caused more frustration among participants, except the severity of disability and high caseloads.

Student disability severity and caseload numbers

The fifth and final emerging theme included student disability severity and caseload numbers. This theme is broken into two parts; it is inextricably intertwined because both pieces play a role in special educator job satisfaction and dissatisfaction. Study participants defined student disability severity as to what extent a student identified as having an exceptionality requires adult support to succeed within the school day. Additionally, as identified by study participants, caseload numbers are defined as the number of students a special education teacher serves as the IEP case manager.

Both student disability severity and caseload numbers affect the amount of time and energy required of special education teachers (Stewart, 2018). Study participants expressed excessive caseloads that included mild disabilities to those with toileting needs. In between these needs was a range of disabilities, including severe dyslexia and behavioral needs. Yet, as discussed in a previous section, the pressure was on “all students to achieve” to high levels. It was not likely a lot of learning was going on

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when a teacher was required to change an elementary student's diaper. Teachers were more likely to feel achievement occurred if a major meltdown ([behavioral incident] did not happen during a toileting session. The study's special educators felt the caseloads were far too high and created a workload that felt crushing at times.

As study participant D4 shared, “If I had an entire caseload of students that had mild to moderate learning disabilities; I could have twenty on my caseload and not be phased. The problem is, I have eight students that have mild reading needs, two that have profound behavior issues, and one student that requires toileting. This makes me feel spread very thin.” Another participant, E5, shared that “I feel that since I am in a specialized teaching assignment of low-incidences, all of my students are within the same skill level. This allows me to “be in my world” and do what is best for each of them. I do not feel pressured that they need to perform at grade level or accept a general education teacher; I get to make the decisions.”

Within the focus group interview(s), it was noted that there were varying degrees of tolerance for student disability severity and caseload numbers. Three study participants openly discussed that they realize their position is difficult and demanding and have signed up to perform these duties. In comparison, two other participants expressed feelings of “compassion fatigue” and a lack of enough workforce to do their jobs effectively. Participant A1 shared that, “I am not sure how much longer I can continue to work with special education students without the appropriate support. I feel like the need continues to outweigh the available services I’m able to provide.” It is likely the high caseloads experienced by special educators lead to attrition.

Connection of Emerging Themes to Theory

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After analyzing the three forms of data that included personal teacher interviews, focus group interviews, and qualitative document review, three of the five emerging themes considered external or hygiene motivators directly linked to leadership response as highlighted in the literature review. These three emerging themes include prompt and effective communication with building leadership, consistent leadership expectations regarding policies and procedures, and leadership opportunities. While all five emerging themes can be considered internal and external motivating factors due to outside influences evoking inner feelings, the building level leader can influence these satisfiers/dis-satisfiers within the special education staff.

The two internal factors seem to have smaller amounts of leadership control and include teacher efficacy, autonomy, student disability severity, and caseload numbers. As Thibodeaux et al. (2015) discusses, building leaders of a public school have very little influence on factors on the types of students that enroll within their building. Still, they can support and encourage their staff in as many ways as possible. In other words, while the building leader may not have much control over how a teacher internally perceives themselves or the disability severity of students being served by special education staff, they can provide support and positive reinforcement to staff. Intentionality in offering support will possibly create feelings of accomplishment, desire for staff members to stay committed to the building and job placement, along with building an inclusive culture (Petty, Fitchett, & O'Conner, 2012).

Emergent Themes as Findings

The data's emerging themes included prompt and effective communication with building leadership, consistent leadership expectations regarding policies and procedures, leadership

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opportunities for special education teachers, teacher efficacy and autonomy, and student disability severity and caseload numbers. Five findings arose from the themes.

Finding 1: Teachers attached intrinsic value to themselves when their questions, concerns, and input are responded to by the administration.

Finding 2: Staff feels when administrative expectations and procedures vary from staff member to staff member, feelings of inadequacy, favoritism, and inequality are evoked.

Finding 3: Special education teachers value being asked to take part in building leadership opportunities.

Finding 4: Special educators value being treated as professionals and allowed to express specialized judgment and skills when working with students with special needs. In addition, the smallest of student successes are celebrated and the value placed on this recognition from the building leader creates job satisfaction.

Finding 5: Special educators want the administration to know and realize how many hours and the amount of work that is going on during “duty-free” time to stay current on the daily demands of a special education position.

The five findings are explored below in further detail.

Finding 1: expressed that special educators value prompt and effective communication with building leadership. Quick and effective communication includes responding to electronic emails, impromptu questions in passing, and communication that result from staff and professional learning community meetings. As study participant B2 explained, “I start to feel anxious and not taken seriously

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when my building principal does not respond to my email(s). Sometimes more than a week will lapse before I get a response.” Participant D4 stated that they “become frustrated that time can be taken to send out emails that appear to be micromanaging in nature but cannot answer what I feel is an urgent question on the same platform.”

Special educators expressed that teaching within special education can feel isolating when compared to regular education colleagues. Receiving prompt and effective communication with administration creates an inclusive and supportive feel. Viel-Ruma et al. express that when teachers feel supported and listened to through purposeful dialogue, job satisfaction increases (2010). This leads to the second finding explained in further detail.

Finding 2: Staff expressed when administrative expectations and procedures vary from staff member to staff member; they evoke feelings of inadequacy, favoritism, and inequality. Study participant F6 shared an experience in which they felt very misunderstood and overlooked. It was shared that, “I feel I have constant responsibilities that are added to my already overwhelming number of duties. These changes do not appear handed out to all staff equally. During an extremely busy week of completing five IEPs and progress reports that were due, I was directed to change classroom locations. I thought to myself, “Why me again?” Within one of the focus group interviews, it was discussed between four of the eight study participants that “general education teachers are the “golden child” of schools, and this makes us feel less supported than we already do.”

Special educators value transparency and equality from administration to prevent widening the already perceived feelings of being overlooked. The findings came forth as a culmination of individual and focus group interviews. Being treated as equals and their already difficult job duties acknowledged,

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created feelings of support and job satisfaction. A third theme that emerged was asking special education teachers to serve in leadership roles.

Finding 3 shared special education teachers felt valued and taken more seriously when asked to serve in their buildings' leadership roles. This finding was coded under extrinsic motivators that can lead to job satisfaction. There were several conversations from focus group interviews that were connected back to the idea of wanting to be included in building leadership initiatives and teams. As study participants explained, "I would love to be given the opportunity for leadership or advancement. I have been working within my building for over six years and have never been asked to serve in a leadership position, whereas my teaching partner has been in the building for half of that time and has already been asked twice. Nope, that did not sit well with me." An additional focus group participant shared that, "Why are special educators always passed up for leadership roles? Is it because we have to deal with so much controversy and bring that to our administrators' laps? I feel like sometimes things are taken personally, and I cannot figure out why?"

Building level leaders who offer special education teachers opportunities to have a voice in leadership roles were valued and deemed important. The fourth finding is being appreciated as a professional or specialized teacher and trusted to make the best decisions in a child with special needs' interests. Finding four involves special educators' value being treated as professionals and allowed to express specialized judgment and skills.

Finding 4 stated that special educators would like their building principal to trust their professional recommendation(s) to recommend, draft, and implement plans in an identified child's best interest. As one participant shared (H8), "I wish my principal would allow me to think outside of the box and allow for my creative side of teaching to come out. I constantly feel stifled and not allowed to

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carry out my ideas of what I think is best for my students. After all, don't I know them better than the building principal?" A similar conversation emerged because of the second focus group interview and involved five participants. Comments that were made included, "I can be sitting at my own student's IEP meeting and someone that has maybe met my student a handful of times is disagreeing with absolutely every idea I present. It is very disheartening and discrediting as a professional when this occurs."

Special educators communicated that they are highly trained and hold a master's degree for a reason; they are specialized within their field of study. Being valued as a professional, creative, and innovative are motivating for special education teachers. The concept of being valued leads to the fifth and final finding within the data, special education teacher workload.

Finding 5 stated that special educators wanted administrators to know and understand the amount of time beyond the contractual duty day to stay current and organized with the day-to-day demands of the position. Study participant A1 shared in their qualitative document, "My husband wants me to quit this job. It is only Thursday, and I have documented over 76 hours already this week. I have missed my own children's ball games, family dinners, and countless amounts of family time. I am feeling very burned out. Might start a new job search this weekend." A second participant D4 expressed, "I have five IEPs this week, two reevaluations on top of my everyday job duties of making and creating lessons for my students. Something's gotta give. I have zero time to do anything of leisure or practice any type of self-care. I spend all of my "off" time trying to stay afloat. ``

During the first focus group interview, two study participants discussed the monetary stipend that special educators within the district receive. Participant B2 stated, "I would gladly give my stipend back to the district if that meant that I could have more time with my family. I see some teachers leaving the

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building at 4 PM, and I almost get jealous. I stop and think, well, I still have about two hours left of work to do.” Additionally, participants commented on how it is very difficult not to work outside of working hours and that a possible additional office hour would help alleviate some of this pressure.

Special education teachers felt that their building leader valued them when communication was prompt and effective, as shared in Finding 1. This type of administrative practice led to job satisfaction and both internal and external motivators. Special educator dissatisfaction was conveyed in Finding 2 when building leader expectations vary from staff member to staff member or department to department. This caused feelings of inadequacy, favoritism, and inequality. Finding three suggested that special education teachers feel valued when and taken seriously as a professional when they are asked to serve in leadership positions. Overall job satisfaction resulted from building leaders soliciting input and offering shared leadership roles to special education teachers. Job satisfaction and efficacy were portrayed in Finding 4 when building-level leaders trust and allow the special educator to make decisions in an identified student's best interest. Job dissatisfaction was demonstrated in Finding 5, which explained the amount of time special educators spend outside of the workday on paperwork, meetings, and communicating with families. The next section discusses how these findings relate to the research questions.

Overview of the Findings as Related to the Research Question(s)

The research questions (primary and secondary) specified within this study were: what building-level administrative practices influence special education teacher retention, what are the internal (motivation factors) of special education teachers that would motivate them to remain in the field of special education, what are the external (hygiene factors) of special education teachers that lead to dissatisfaction in the field of special education, and what are special education teacher perspectives of

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internal and external motivating factors as exhibited by building administrators that lead to feelings of support or job dissatisfaction?

The first and primary question, “What building-level leadership practices influence special education teacher retention?” was responded to within the responses shared by the study participants. As expressed in all three forms of data collection (personal interviews, focus group interviews, and qualitative document review), special education teachers want to know that they are valued, supported, listened to, given autonomy, and considered as specialists within the field of special education. As a study participant shared, “I want to know that my principal has my back because goodness knows, I bend over backward for these kids. If I know, I am supported and valued, and I would stay in this position as long as possible.”

The answer to the primary question regarding leadership practices that influence special education teacher retention is supported throughout the findings and is discussed in length throughout findings 2 and 4. Special educators convey that they value when building administrators make clear and consistent expectations among all staff members and are trusted with the freedom to act on behalf of their special education students’ best interest. Finally, while Finding 5 outlined the amount of work that goes into after the duty day, special education teachers are motivated when acknowledged, and feelings of “you are not in this alone” are created.

The second research question asked, what are the internal (motivation factors) of special education teachers that would motivate them to remain in the field of special education? The answer was revealed when the individual and focus group interview responses included, “I’m motivated when my building principal places enough trust in my professional skills to do what is best for my students and supports me in all aspects.” When a follow-up question to this response included, how does this impact

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job satisfaction in special education? Two teachers responded, “There won’t be such a crisis in finding and keeping special educators. Teachers are going to want to stay in their current job assignments.” A third study participant stated within her journal, “If my building leader is supportive, transparent, and understands what my job entails, it makes me feel appreciated, and I would climb through walls for them.”

Special education teachers shared that they were much more likely to remain in their current job assignment and within the field when they were trusted professionally, treated equitably, sought out to serve or give input in building decisions, and communicated within a transparent and prompt manner. These factors are considered internally motivating for special education teachers and positively impact retention.

The third research question asked, what are the external (hygiene factors) of special education teachers that lead to dissatisfaction in special education? This research question was shared during the second focus group interview and over multiple individuals’ follow-up interviews. Regarding external factors that lead to dissatisfaction, “I always feel special education teachers are the “whipping boy” of the school. Nobody knows what all goes into what we do. We are consistently being asked to give more, give more, and give more. I feel physically and emotionally depleted regularly.” A second teacher from the same focus group responded, “My family misses me. I spend countless hours working on paperwork to prepare for the never-ending meetings. I have to stop often and think, “Is this worth it?”

Special education teacher dissatisfaction involving external factors resulted from not feeling valued or understood, having high numbers of students on their caseload with significant needs, and taking away from their “off duty” time to complete IEP preparations. This result is commensurate with Finding 5, which stated that special educators wanted administrators to know and understand the amount

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of time beyond the contractual duty day to stay current and organized with the day-to-day demands of the position. With that being stated, the final research question encapsulates what influence a building-level leader can have on both internal and external factors as it pertains to special education teacher retention and job satisfaction.

The fourth question asked, what are special education teacher perspectives of internal and external motivating factors exhibited by building administrators that lead to feelings of support or job dissatisfaction? While overlapping in nature with the others, the answer to this question gave insight into specific behaviors exhibited by building-level leaders that either had a positive or negative effect on special education teachers' desire to remain in the field of special education. During the final focus group interview and the culmination of follow-up questions prepared by the researcher, it was explained as “a building principal can make or break a teacher’s spirit and desire to stay in the field. To have that kind of control over someone’s both personal and professional destiny is quite the responsibility.” An additional response to this included a teacher stating, “I want my building principal to know and understand that it does not take much to make me feel valued and appreciated. A simple “good job” or thank you note a great morale booster. What we do is hard. It’s hard every single day, but we keep coming back because we are passionate about helping kids.”

Special education teacher job satisfaction or dissatisfaction as it pertains to building-level leadership behaviors involves (or lack thereof): consistent and transparent communication, offerings of support through morale-boosting correspondence or dialogue, the fair and equitable treatment of all staff members, solicitation of input on building initiatives, and opportunities and understanding of special education teacher autonomy. As perceived by study participants, these factors are heavily influenced by building-level leaders and can lead to either job satisfaction or dissatisfaction. While all five of the research findings are interrelated (internal and external factors), overall special education teacher

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satisfaction can be changed with quality and consistent leadership behaviors according to the data collected.

Summary

The research design for this study was a qualitative phenomenological study that utilized homogeneous sampling. The study answered the research questions of what building-level administrative practices influence special education teacher retention, what are the internal (motivation factors) of special education teachers that would motivate them to remain in the field of special education, what are the external (hygiene factors) of special education teachers that lead to dissatisfaction in the field of special education, and what are special education teacher perspectives of internal and external motivating factors as exhibited by building administrators that lead to feelings of support or job dissatisfaction?

Qualitative methodology was utilized for the structure of the study. More specifically, phenomenological research studies phenomena and includes descriptions of actual lived experiences from study participants through interviews, observations, and record reviews (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The study centered around Herzberg's motivation/hygiene theory (Herzberg, 1974). Motivating factors include intrinsic and external factors and can lead to job satisfaction and dissatisfaction (Herzberg, 1974). Study participants outlined what factors within the field of special education and the influence a building-level leadership can have on their desire to remain in their current job placement.

The study was conducted utilizing eight elementary through secondary special education teachers within the same school district. Each participant is employed full-time and is fully credentialed within the area of special education. Each special educator was asked to participate in all three forms of the data collection process, including personal interviews, focus group interviews, and qualitative

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document reviews. In addition, each participant experienced follow-up questions regarding their responses within the three forms of data collection.

It was determined at the point of data saturation from the three forms of data collection that special education teachers value leaders that demonstrate: prompt and effective communication, clear and consistent expectations for all staff, being asked to serve in building leadership roles, being trusted professionals to make decisions in students' best interest and to understand and support special education teachers' workload outside of the contractual day. Chapter 5 will discuss the findings in further detail.

Chapter Five

Discussion of Findings

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the lived experiences of special education teachers in a Midwestern urban school district to understand, from the participants' perspectives building leader practices that influence teacher retention. This chapter begins with a discussion of the study's major findings. The chapter features the primary themes from the participant data and connects the finding to the theory and current research. The last section discusses recommendations based on the study's findings and is discussed in two categories: recommendations for future practice and recommendations for future research.

The lived experiences of special education teachers with building-level leadership were obtained through individual interviews, focus group interviews, and qualitative document reviews. The themes that emerged from the data collection regarding building level leader practices that influence special education teacher retention are discussed in the following section and include: a) Prompt and effective communication with building leadership, b) Consistent leadership expectations regarding policies and procedures, c) Leadership opportunities, d) Teacher efficacy and autonomy, and e) student disability severity and caseload numbers.

Discussion of Theme 1: Prompt and Effective Communication With Building Leadership

A building-level leader's ability or willingness to communicate quickly and effectively with special educators was pervasive across the data collected in this study. When special educators feel as though they cannot obtain guidance and direction quickly when they reach out to a building-level leader for support, this lack of communication often leads to feelings of confusion, anxiousness, and sometimes ill feelings towards leadership. The personal experiences shared in three forms of data collection

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indicated that more timely and frequent communication was a significant component that could alleviate uncertainty or create it depending upon communication effectiveness by the building leader.

Herzberg's motivation/hygiene theory enables us to understand better the link between prompt and effective communication from building leadership and special education teacher job satisfaction. According to Herzber (1974), inadequate communication from an organizational leader is likely to create confusion and frustration for workers. If a teacher continuously experiences negative feelings related to job duties, research indicates it can lead to burnout and eventually attrition (Erkutlu, 2012; Harfitt, 2015). Many of the study participants indicated experiencing high levels of frustration, feelings of anxiety, and uncertainty when they did not know where to turn for answers. Participants reported these negative feelings often occurred after unsuccessful attempts to correspond with building-level leaders. Conversely, participants explained feelings of confidence and support were created when the building leader communicated frequently and listened to their concerns.

Analysis of participant data also indicated feelings of being uninformed or not effectively communicated with, largely because special education teachers operate as an independent entity within a school building compared to their general education colleagues (Watson & Olson-Buchanan, 2016). For some special education teachers, this independence from the regular education staff led to feelings of isolation and low morale. According to some participants, feelings of isolation were further compounded when the communication from the building level leader was either negative (things perceived as the participant was doing something wrong) or micro-managing in nature. According to Herzberg (1974), repeated feelings of isolation and low morale may lead to job dissatisfaction and ultimately produce attrition. Finally, prompt and effective communication is an area that a building-level leader controls and should implement such communication intentionally to prevent or reduce negative feelings from special education staff. The building level leader should seek to establish an ongoing

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dialog with special education teachers and regularly seek feedback on the appropriateness of their communication as it relates to special education teacher job satisfaction.

Discussion of Theme2: Consistent Leadership Expectations Regarding Policies and Procedures

Consistent leadership expectations regarding the implementation of policies and procedures were a primary theme in the data and were mentioned in all three data collection forms by 87.5% of the participants. Special education teachers spend time in professional development meetings learning that what is equal is not always fair and fair is not always equal. In other words, a special educator's job is to ensure that all identified students with a learning difference are given what they need to access (to the largest extent possible) the general education curriculum (Treuren & Frankish, 2014). In special education policy, this concept is called the "least restrictive environment" (LRE). It refers to students with disabilities having equal access to the same or equal learning resources such as minutes of services provided, relevant learning experiences, and highly qualified teachers as their regular education peers (Midwestern Special Education Handbook, n.d.). Ensuring implementation of LRE policy is largely an administrative function, and special education teachers often do not have the power to ensure students with disabilities receive LRE.

The data shared by participants indicate a perception that many building leaders are not consistent in the implementation of policies and procedures that ensure Individual Education Plans are followed for each student. For instance, participants explained that some special education students receive services as indicated in the Individual Education Plan (IEP). In contrast, other students within the same building were not provided all of their service minutes. Participants indicated perceptions of favoritism occurred between building leaders and some special education providers when LRE is not provided for all students with disabilities. A perception that favoritism existed between building leaders

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and some special education teachers caused feelings of jealousy and frustration among some participants.

Several example narratives were included within the data that illustrate how inconsistent policy and procedure expectations created negative feelings about the building leader. As reported by the participants, these negative feelings led to their thoughts of being disliked by the building leader and ultimately feeling unsupported. One participant explained building leaders lacked understanding of special education policy and procedures and therefore were not consistent with their responses to questions and guidance. Even if the study participants' perceptions were incorrect, the feelings these perceptions evoked were real.

Herzberg's motivation/hygiene theory explained when leaders inconsistently apply policies and procedures across an organization, workers experience negative feelings, which may create overall job dissatisfaction. Herzberg (1974) also purported job dissatisfaction often leads to attrition. Olsen & Huang (2019) seem to agree with Herzberg when they explained that employees who believe they are not liked or accepted by their leader lose motivation to perform at maximum levels and ultimately leave the organization. The data collected within this study support and illustrate when staff feel building-level leaders implement policy and procedures inconsistently, negative feelings toward building leaders emerge, and thoughts of leaving a position or the profession altogether increase for some participants.

Discussion of Theme 3: Leadership Opportunities

The amount of frustration and feelings of isolation expressed within the personal journals of several of the study participants was compelling. Being excluded from leadership opportunities within one's building was mentioned among 75% of the participants in this study. The data from many participants indicated that they did not feel included by building leadership and were often overlooked for typical teacher leadership opportunities within their assigned building. Previous research suggests

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that while not everyone feels comfortable serving in leadership roles, the gesture of being asked to do so is motivating and may lead to feelings of self-efficacy and job satisfaction. However, failure by organizational leaders to provide inclusive leadership opportunities may lead to job dissatisfaction (Van Maele & Van Houtte, 2012).

Herzberg's motivation/hygiene theory regarding externally motivating factors explains the phenomena of teacher leadership as a means to increase job satisfaction. External factors for special education teachers would include being asked to serve on a leadership team or present during professional development. Such external factors offered by leaders can evoke internal feelings of efficacy and professional identity (Herzberg, 1974). However, the study participants verbalized they often feel their leader does not want to give them additional responsibilities due to their high case and workloads. Serving on leadership teams in any capacity often involves additional meetings, professional responsibilities, and an obligation to serve as a role model to colleagues (Dahlkamp, Peters, & Schumacher, 2017). This data suggests just being asked to serve in a leadership role was motivating to the participants and may create job satisfaction even if the teacher turns down the leadership opportunity.

There are ways to mitigate special educators' perceived feelings of isolation related to leadership opportunities. Building leaders must find creative and innovative ways to restore a positive building climate (Andrews & Brown, 2015). One of the suggestions that a study participant mentioned included having the building level leader give an interest inventory for available leadership positions at the end or very beginning of each school year. The leadership roles could be on a rotating basis or job shared among two or more teachers, affording multiple people an opportunity to serve in a leadership role. Leadership opportunities will be discussed in more detail in the *Recommendations for Future Practice* section of this chapter.

Discussion of Theme 4: Teacher Efficacy and Autonomy

Teacher efficacy and autonomy evoked significant emotional responses from the study participants. Lacking the ability to exercise professional judgment related to teaching students with disabilities was mentioned in all three data collection forms (personal interviews, focus group interviews, and qualitative document review) and mentioned by 100% of study participants. Feelings and emotions that were described when autonomy and efficacy were not acknowledged included being ineffective, not taken seriously, disrespected, and feelings of extinguished creativity. As prior research has indicated, repressing or not acknowledging an educator's professional judgment and the smallest of successes causes stagnant personal growth and can lead to job dissatisfaction and ultimately attrition (Brief, 2018).

To the extent in which a special educator feels they are effective in their teaching skills as measured by student academic and behavioral performance, there is a direct link to overall job satisfaction (Ali, 2013). The participants within this study helped frame this component of the research data with detailed narrative descriptions and discussions that the actual nature of serving as a special educator naturally lends itself to acknowledging and celebrating even the smallest successes in student growth. However, these same views are not always shared when building-level leaders look at discipline and academic performance data of special education students (Ford, Urick & Wilson, 2018).

Participants expressed unrealistic academic performance expectations by the building leader for students with disabilities. When expected targets were not met, participants perceived the building leader did not have confidence in their ability to meet the needs of students with disabilities, and their self-efficacy was thus diminished. The perception building leaders lacked confidence in special educators' abilities to meet learning targets created extreme frustration among many participants.

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However, even the slightest support and acknowledgment from building leaders regarding student success led to feelings of effectiveness or self-efficacy and ultimately increased job satisfaction among the participants. To increase self-efficacy and job satisfaction among special education teachers, building leaders should regularly celebrate gains among students with disabilities while giving teachers credit for said gains. The following subsection will discuss the results of teacher autonomy and how it relates to overall job satisfaction.

When an educator is given the freedom and trust to make sound professional decisions they perceive are in the best interest of their students, job satisfaction increases (Dupriez et al., 2016). Participants suggested a strong desire for autonomy related to job performance. Furthermore, participants expressed they are highly trained and qualified special education teachers. The majority of participants did not feel the building leader always trusted them, nor did they provide regular autonomy. In the absence of autonomy, participants felt they were not allowed to do what was in the best interest of their students. This lack of autonomy produced feelings of frustration and guilt if teachers perceived they were not serving students.

However, some participants reported a sufficient level of autonomy. These participants felt respected by the building leader as a professional and could make decisions in the best interest of their students. Such autonomy led to increased job satisfaction. The concept that teacher autonomy leads to increased job satisfaction and potential retention aligns with Herzberg's motivation/hygiene theory (1974), as he explained when a leader places trust in workers and does not micromanage every facet of job performance, feelings of motivation and satisfaction increase, thus reducing the desire to leave the organization. Because 100 percent of this study's participants mentioned the significance of autonomy within their interviews, discussions, and personal documentation, it was deduced autonomy is valuable to educators. Autonomy plays a substantial role in overall job satisfaction (Herzberg, 1974).

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The findings of this study related to teacher efficacy and autonomy are commensurate with analogous research. Supporting research suggests that the building leader can set the tone and culture within a school and provide for self-efficacy and autonomy to increase job satisfaction (Olsen & Huang, 2019). It stands to reason that if teachers, especially special educators, are granted the freedom to plan and implement appropriate pedagogical and classroom management strategies in the way they see fit; overall job satisfaction will increase (Dahlkamp et al., 2017).

Discussion of Theme 5: Student Disability Severity and Caseload Numbers

The final emergent theme from the participants' data includes special education student disability severity and the number of students a single teacher must serve. While the severity of disabilities and caseload might seem to be a single issue, study participants viewed them as separate. Participants viewed the severity of disabilities just as problematic, if not more so than a large number of students the special education teacher was required to serve.

One participant explained her caseload is so large and her students have such significant learning and physical disabilities that in the case of one student with severe disabilities, only one-fourth of the child's service minutes are being covered. In fact, the special education teacher went on to explain that aside from the staffing shortage, she has twenty-two other students that, "Are demanding the same types of services and that there just is not enough of me to go around meeting the demand." The majority of study participants agreed they often face large caseloads that typically include students with significant needs and require extensive support. Yet, there are not enough hours in the day to provide for the needs of each student.

The data regarding study participants' caseloads and their reported inability to meet each student's needs are supported by previous research regarding the depth of services needed by students identified as having a disability and the number of students on a caseload. Andrews & Brown (2015)

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purported if a special education teacher has twenty students on their caseload, and each student only requires twenty minutes of support for reading intervention, this caseload is much different from having twenty students requiring intense and sustained support throughout the entire school day. The more severe the student's disability, most generally, the more services and energy that are needed by the identified student (Kerr & Brown, 2016). Not only do higher caseload numbers and student disability severity require more attention from the special educator throughout the day, but the teacher is also considered the primary case managers for these students' education plans and three-year reevaluations, which add hours and hours to the teacher's workload (Brief, 2018).

To explain further, each identified student is required, by federal law, to have a working document that identifies the exceptionality and the supports required the identified student to access the general education curriculum fully, and service minutes disaggregated into inclusion support or pull-out services (Department of Education, 2021). These plans are drafted as a team that includes the parent, general education teacher, special educator, auxiliary service providers such as speech, occupational therapy, physical therapy, social work, and administration. The participants within this study all serve as primary case managers for their assigned caseload and are responsible for orchestrating these meetings.

Three of the eight study participants have twenty-four or more students with disabilities on their caseload. To put that into perspective, in addition to making and implementing individualized lesson plans, delegating, and managing paraprofessionals, the special educators within this study are also required to draft and attend all annual meetings for the students on their assigned caseloads. Frequently, according to study participants, working outside of the contracted workday is required to complete all of the required job duties of being a special education teacher. Some participants explained the difficulty in maintaining family time and providing the attention their children required. Indeed one participant reported her spouse asked her to quit due to such a heavy workload and how the work interfered with

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family time. This workload explains why many special education teachers leave the profession within the first five years; they are exhausted and burned out (Jones et al., 2013).

According to Ali (2013), the time demand and emotional labor toll required of a special education teacher are difficult for those not in the field to comprehend fully. It also stands to reason that due to the demands of special education teachers, time spent away from family, and lack of time for self-care, many teachers experience burnout. The overall emotional toll from working with students with academic, behavioral, and emotional issues is directly linked to job dissatisfaction and eventual attrition (Andrews & Brown, 2015).

Study participants seemed to validate the research regarding special education teacher burnout when they complained of how much time they spend outside of the school day working on paperwork and how this has influenced their overall decision to remain in the field of special education. As mentioned earlier, one participant even explained that her spouse was ready for her to resign her position and find something that did not require taking copious amounts of work home to complete during off-hours.

These shared experiences regarding special education teacher workload and student disability severity as lived through this study's participants can help building-level leaders better understand special education teachers' challenges. As Herzberg (1974) explained, research indicates that external hygiene factors such as workload can impact an employee's overall job satisfaction, and excessive work likely increases attrition. Finding ways to mitigate and delegate a special education teacher's time spent working outside of contracted work hours can have a possible positive impact on retention (Arnett, 2017), and it is incumbent on the building leader to bring special education teachers together to brainstorm ways to reduce the workload of teachers. The desire for caseloads that are more manageable, permission, and support for self-care, along with the understanding that special educators also have

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responsibilities outside of the school walls, were deemed very important to these study participants.

When leaders ignore these issues, many special education teachers will experience burnout and leave the profession. The following section provides leader practitioners with recommendations that might improve the retention of special education teachers.

Recommendations for Future Practice

What are the study participants trying to tell building-level leaders regarding practices that increase special education teacher retention? The data collected from study participants offer insights into what special education teachers perceive to be building-level leader practices that influence their decision to remain in the profession. The five major leadership practices study participants perceive as influencing retention include:

1. Prompt and effective communication
2. Consistent leadership expectations regarding policies and procedures
3. Leadership opportunities
4. Teacher efficacy and autonomy
5. Severity of disabilities and caseload

Summary of Themes in the Findings

This section provides a summary of the emergent themes from the data collection regarding special education teacher perceptions of building leader practices that increase retention. First, special education teachers within this study want to be heard and included as part of the overall building culture. They would like to be included in the same communications as that of their general education colleagues. Additionally, special education teachers expressed a desire for more face-to-face communication. Secondly, special education teachers want building level leaders to consistently implement policies and procedures, especially related to the “least restrictive environment.” Thirdly,

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study participants want to be considered for leadership opportunities typically provided to regular educators, such as building leadership teams and presenting professional development.

Additionally, the data also illustrate the deeply rooted desire for autonomy. The study participants want to be trusted as educational professionals capable of providing appropriate services for students with disabilities. Finally, study participants want building leaders to recognize their increased workload compared to regular education teachers and consider the severity of disability of students with disabilities as a contributing factor to their workload.

Recommendations

The following section will make specific recommendations for building-level leaders related to the five emergent themes from the data.

- **Communication:** Based upon this study's findings, it is recommended building-level leaders take the time to be intentional with their communication as a means for building trusting relationships with special educators. As part of creating intentional communication with special education teachers, building leaders should meet with teachers face-to-face regularly. This will help the building leader establish intentional relationships with special education teachers. Relationships are the foundation for understanding factors that influence special education teacher retention (Barth et al., 2016). Building level leaders that have been successful in retaining special education teachers have one thing in common; they focus on the relationship, and the amount of intentional communication and support offered to teachers working with some of the most difficult of student populations (Barth et al., 2016 & Brief, 2018). It has also been found that building-level leaders who support and encourage self-care and supporting family time for educators have a higher special educator job satisfaction rate (Ali, 2013). The findings within this study recommended that building-level leaders receive specialized training in

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encouraging and supporting special education teachers with their unique needs through increased communication. This could include but is not limited to learning how to be intentional with communication, emotional support, and being cognizant of when a special education teacher is feeling compassion fatigue and burnout (Arnett, 2017).

- **Consistent Expectations:** Special education teachers within this study value consistency from building level administration around implementing policies and procedures. Study participants perceived some special education teachers receive more support than others within the same building. Participants reported unequal support at times, creating limited access to the least restrictive environment (LRE) for some students with disabilities. It is recommended that building leaders commit to ensuring policies and procedures are implemented consistently across the special education department. Building leaders can ensure policies and procedures are implemented consistently by creating a safe and trusting relationship with special educators where open lines of communication are the norm. Research indicates the smallest of gestures such as weekly check-ins and open-door policies increase consistency of policy and procedure implementation and significantly impact overall special educator job satisfaction, which leads to higher retention rates (Arnett, 2017; Dahlkamp et al., 2017).
- **Efficacy and Autonomy:** Fostering an environment that allows individual teachers autonomy and to think “outside the box” in terms of pedagogy and classroom management strategies was mentioned by participants. Recommendations for building level leaders regarding teacher efficacy and autonomy include establishing professional leader/teacher trust. This can be accomplished by allowing the special educator the freedom and time to express their knowledge and expertise both in and outside the classroom. Building leaders can bring attention to the smallest successes that special education teachers have with their students, even if it has little to

do with academics. Study participants also expressed the desire to offer expertise to general education teachers to assist with the intervention process. Building level leaders can ensure special educators are provided opportunities to lead or share their expertise with all teachers in Response to Intervention (RTI) and various strategies that help all students experience success. When building-level leaders provide autonomy and then celebrate small successes, teacher self-efficacy and retention likely improve.

- **Leadership Opportunities:** Study participants indicated that they often feel “outside of the loop” in terms of day-to-day events within a building. This is often a result of isolation within a specific school area and not having the same networking opportunities that grade-level teams have. It is recommended building-level leaders attempt to mitigate feelings of isolation with special education teachers by including them in building leadership teams and providing special education teachers the opportunity to lead some professional development. Building leaders should also strive to seek special educators' input regarding general education behavior and learning challenges in intervention strategies. Providing special education teacher leadership opportunities creates feelings of job satisfaction within the field (Andrews & Brown, 2015).
- **Severity of Disability and Workload:** Special education teachers within this study wanted building leaders to know and understand the difference between having 15-20 students with a mild learning disability and having 15-20 students with profound social/emotional and behavioral needs; in addition to needing support with academics. It is recommended building-level leaders take the time to study the depth and breadth of their special educators' caseloads, and to serve as an advocate for teachers' needs. Additionally, building leaders should get to know students with disabilities by visiting classrooms regularly. This will allow the building level leader to gain a better insight into what demands a special educator faces and

increase trust with the special educator. A high level of trust in the building leader may increase job satisfaction and retention.

- **Building level administration and special education professional development:** A final recommendation derived from this study is for building level leaders to attend professional development regarding special education so they might gain a better understanding of the needs of special education teachers. This could be a rather easy and cost-effective attrition mitigation strategy. Just as curriculum alignment and building leadership teams or committees are formed, building leader professional development could be created and implemented by special education teachers themselves. Such professional development would provide leadership opportunities for special education teachers and increase opportunities for communication.

Recommendations for Future Research

As explained in Chapters 1 and 2 of this qualitative study, there is a substantial amount of existing research on special education teacher attrition and the building leader's effect on teacher retention. However, there is minimal research combining Herzberg's motivation/hygiene theory and how a building-level leader can influence both internal and external means of overall job satisfaction with special education teachers. Furthermore, during the data collection process, the Covid-19 pandemic affected the world, and among those most affected were educators. The Covid-19 pandemic changed education and teaching delivery, as we once knew it. In-person teaching and learning changed to a remote learning platform, which was mentioned by 100 percent of the study participants.

Additional research is needed regarding how the pandemic affected attrition rates of special education teachers when the attrition rate is already significantly higher (13.9%) than that of general education colleagues (12.8%) (Stewart, 2018). Navigating the uncharted waters of teaching students

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with exceptionalities in a virtual environment, as shared with this study's participants, was extremely taxing.

It would also be helpful to understand how the pandemic affected pre-service teachers' enrollment in special education teacher preparation programs. Higher education institutions and state enrollment rates, and alternative certification applications could be used to measure the impact Covid-19 had on the teacher shortage. Quantitative measures could also be utilized to fully understand the statistical differences in those prospective special educators that were either contemplating or already enrolled in a special education teaching program and their decision to either continue on that path or change course.

Finally, further research could be conducted in which an intentional professional development curriculum is utilized to educate building-level leaders on how to better support special educators. Intentional efforts to educate building leaders regarding special education practices, policies, desirable leadership qualities, and support methods could be included in such professional development. Research in all of the subcategories of leadership practices and the power of building positive relationships to foster a nurturing environment surfaced during the data collection of this study.

Conclusion

This qualitative study focused on the practices of building-level leaders and how such practices influence special education teacher attrition. The study began with a discussion of the shortage of special education teachers within the research state compared to the rest of the United States. Much attention in research has been given to teacher attrition rates and strategies that might improve retention. Such strategies include mentoring issues, perceived quality of preservice education programs, and overall compassion fatigue in working with exceptional students. However, this study focused specifically on the building-level leaders' role in improving retention. Through three forms of data collection, the eight

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participants within this study provided a detailed and rich explanation of leadership practices that increase job satisfaction and thus retention of special educators.

While this study only included eight participants from a single urban school district within a Midwestern state, it does provide compelling insights and recommendations other educational organizations could use to improve the retention of special educators. All of the data collected from the participants indicated building-level leaders could affect the job satisfaction of special educators.

Having served as a special educator for twelve of my sixteen years of service, the data collection evoked both positive and negative feelings related to my personal experiences working with students with exceptionalities. Though I felt that I had many of the same experiences and feelings as those I interviewed, I never taught special education in an urban setting. This might cause some to question my ability to interpret data from this specific study accurately. While this may be a valid point, this study suggested we all interpret experiences from our own perspective.

The fact remains that special education teachers are leaving the field at a higher rate (13.9%) than that of their general education colleagues (12.8%), and this has caught the attention of building, districts, and state leaders (Stewart, 2018). Though efforts have been made to enact certain practices such as mandatory state mentoring programs and changing graduation requirements for pre-service teachers, the statistics for special education teacher attrition rates are continuing to climb (Donne & Lin, 2013; Dupriez et al., 2016; Edwards-Groves, 2014). This study has provided some insight into building level leadership practices that special educators within an urban school district consider when deciding if they will remain in their current special education teaching position.

The data collected throughout this study in the form of personal interviews, focus group interviews, and qualitative document reviews created a platform for better understanding the experiences and perceptions of special educators within a single district. While it is understood that this study is

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limited in the scope of overall educational research, the intent is to highlight potential building level leaders' practices that increase special educator retention.

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