

SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS' BELIEFS AND PERCEPTIONS OF
EVIDENCE-BASED READING INSTRUCTION

by

Loretta Jackson Tatum

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to identify and uncover themes that emerged from special education teachers' experiences, beliefs, and perceptions of evidence-based reading instruction. The theoretical framework that guided this study consisted of the epistemological theory of knowledge and Bandura's social cognitive theory. Data collection methods included semistructured in-depth interviews, documentation analysis, and classroom observations. Data analyses involved reflecting on 13 special education teachers' collective comments, dialogues, written documentation, and interview transcripts. Three themes emerged regarding the phenomenon of teaching reading to children with disabilities (a) Knowledge sources, (b) Environmental diversity, and (c) Organizational constraints. These essential themes reflected special education teachers' beliefs and perceptions of evidence-based reading instruction for children with disabilities.

Keywords: Hermeneutics philosophy, evidence-based reading instruction, special education teachers.

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to my parents, who taught me the source of my knowledge and the value of education. “A man’s heart plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps” (Proverbs 16:9, NKJV).

Acknowledgments

First, I must give all honor and glory to my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. The completion of this project is a personal testimony of His power, His grace, and His love. When I started this journey, I set out to finish each course, one by one. I held firm to Acts 20:24; “However, I consider my life worth nothing to me; my only aim is to finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me.”

I gratefully thank my committee chair, committee members, and research consultant, who guided and supported me throughout this journey. To my committee chair, Dr. Phyllis A. Booth, I thank you for your amazing support and reassurances at each step of this project. I was blessed to have Dr. James Swezey serve as both a committee member and my research consultant. Dr. Swezey, you have provided me with continual advice and an abundance of prayer to help me become a thoughtful researcher. To Dr. Su, words can never express the love and admiration I have for you. Thank you for always being there, always being ready to listen, and most important, always being ready to push me on to complete this process.

Many friends, colleagues, and classmates provided continual support and much needed encouragement along the way. Dr. Epps, we started out as classmates in a 1-week intensive, and you have become my sister in Christ. I could not have done this without you. Thank you, thank you, and God bless you.

Finally, I thank my family for hanging in there for me. Thank you for understanding why this project needed to be done. I owe all that I have accomplished to my wonderful, supportive husband. Will, you have stood by me from the beginning, sacrificing your time, sharing our home with my mountains of research articles and providing an endless love. I love you!

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List of Abbreviations

Curriculum-based measurement (CBM)

Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)

Evidence-based instruction (EBI)

Individual education plan/program (IEP)

Individuals with Disability Education Act of 1975 (IDEA)

Individuals with Disability Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEIA)

Learning disability (LD)

Least restrictive environment (LRE)

No Child Left Behind (NCLB)

Research-based instruction (RBI)

Response to Intervention (RTI)

Special education local plan areas (SELPA)

Specific learning disability (SLD)

What Works Clearinghouse (WWC)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

According to the U.S. Department of Education, during the 2010–2011 school year, 6.4 million children between the ages of 3 and 21 received special education services under IDEA (U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, NCES, 2015). Further statistics provided by the Department of Education indicated that 55% to 60% of these children spent more than 80% of their time outside of the general education classroom (U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, 2015). In other words, more than half of the children receiving special education services were likely to spend the majority of their day in a special education environment.

The special education teachers who provide specialized academic instruction to these children have been expected by legislators and school district administrators to provide access to the general education curriculum using evidence-based practices (NCLB, 2001). However, the quality of specialized reading instruction depends on special educators' knowledge and skills. Previous researchers have documented that knowledge of reading instruction and the development of decision-making skills and instructional strategy skills necessary to address the needs of students with disabilities are strongly influenced by teachers' efficacy beliefs (Dixon, Yssel, McConnell, & Hardin, 2014; Thomas, 2013; Xu, 2012) .

The self-efficacy beliefs of teachers influence how special education teachers implement classroom reading practices (Tanase & Wang, 2010; Theriot & Tice, 2009). Yet little is known about the beliefs and perspectives special education teachers hold regarding evidence-based practices (EBI) and reading instruction (Algozzine, Algozzine, & Morsink, 1988; Rotatori, Oblakor, & Bakken, 2011). Qualitative research focused on special education issues related to

classroom practices and reading instruction has been noticeably scarce in scholarly special education publications (Pugach, Mukhopadhyay, & Gomez-Najarro, 2014; Trainor & Leko, 2014).

The examination of effective instructional practices is critical as educators focus on improving reading outcomes for students with disabilities (Berkeley, Scruggs, & Mastropieri, 2010; Cook & Cook, 2011). Some scholars have asserted that qualitative research is key in deepening the understandings of special education instructional practices (Greenwood & Abbott, 2001; Pugach et al., 2014; Trainor & Leko, 2014). In the current climate of federal education reforms, the lived experiences and stories of special education teachers as they make meaning from the day-to-day phenomenon of teaching reading may bring out substantial information needed to improve the academic outcomes for students with disabilities (Trainor & Leko, 2014).

The purpose of Chapter One was to introduce the background and historical information on the education of students with disabilities in the United States. Also included in Chapter One was the researcher's situation to self, problem statement, and purpose statement of the study. Then, the researcher discussed the significance of the study, research plan, and research questions. The researcher provided subsections on limitations, delimitations, the definition of terms related to the study. Chapter One concludes with a summary.

Background

For many years, societal views toward the education of children with disabilities have been controversial (Osgood, 2008; Winzer, 1993). In the United States, efforts to educate children with disabilities arose from the advocacy of parents, reformers, and the clergy (Winzer, 1993). By the mid-19th century, residential institutions were established for children with disabilities such as deafness, blindness, and mental disorders (Winzer, 1993). The prevalent

belief at the time was that children with disabilities were a special and discrete group of individuals whose needs were different and thus justified institutional separation (Osgood, 2008; Winzer, 1993).

In the 19th century, administrators educated an increasing number of children with disabilities within special facilities (Osgood, 2008). Schools for deaf, blind, and intellectually disabled people emerged and became increasingly sophisticated in the systematic implementation of educational curricula and practices (Winzer, 1993). However, educators allowed groups of children with less severe and emotional behaviors to remain in public schools (Winzer, 1993). Generally, the public school system ignored this unruly and incorrigible group of children (Winzer, 1993). By the end of the 19th century, institutions for children with disabilities were well established (Winzer, 1993).

Throughout the United States, critical issues on the education of children with disabilities began to shift between 1960 and 1970 (Osgood, 2008). In tandem with the civil rights movement, advocates and parents worked to have children with disabilities included in the general education environment (Osgood, 2008). Inclusion and mainstreaming became acceptable ways of ending the separation of children with disabilities and their nondisabled peers (Osgood, 2008; Winzer, 1993). Today, educators have often advocated full inclusion in the general education classroom and blended participation (i.e., mainstreaming) as the preferred placement for all children with or without disabilities (IDEA, 2004). Although separate special education classes are still an option, legislators consider placement in these classes a higher level of restriction on the continuum of service delivery (Education for All Handicapped Children Act, 1975).

Children with disabilities in the United States have historically experienced a substandard quality of education, often separated and isolated from children without disabilities (Osgood, 2008). Evolving federal rules and regulations have been instrumental in changing the cultural context of U.S. public schools, including what educational services children with disabilities are entitled to, where they receive services, and what they are to be taught (Winzer, 1993). The Education for All Handicapped Children Act (1975) addressed the applicability of educational entitlements with a mandate that children with disabilities are entitled to a free and appropriate public education that emphasizes specialized academic instruction and related services designed to meet their individual academic needs.

The debate concerning where children with disabilities should be educated was addressed in the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (1975) in the context of least restrictive environment (LRE). The law requires children with disabilities be educated based on a continuum (see Figure 1) that ranges from full inclusion in the general education classroom to a lesser restrictive environment (e.g., special education resource room or self-contained classroom) and finally to a very restrictive environment (e.g., nonpublic schools, hospitals, or institutions) (Lombardi, Doren, Gau, & Lindstrom, 2012). Although placement throughout the continuum should be made based on each child's disability, the general education classroom is generally considered the least restrictive (Lombardi, Doren, Gau, & Lindstrom, 2012).

In 1997, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act was reauthorized as the Individuals with Disability Education Act (IDEA). Included in the reauthorization of IDEA was the requirement that students with disabilities participate fully in statewide assessment and accountability measures (IDEA, 2004). In 2001, the No Child Left Behind Act (a reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Act of 1994) required students with disabilities

to have access to the full general education curriculum. Both the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) and IDEA legislations emphasized that all students, including students with disabilities, were to be taught by highly qualified teachers utilizing evidence-based instructional practices (IDEA, 2004; No Child Left Behind, 2001). Further, all students, including students with disabilities, were expected to reach an overall goal of 100% proficiency in reading and mathematics by 2014 (NCLB, 2001).

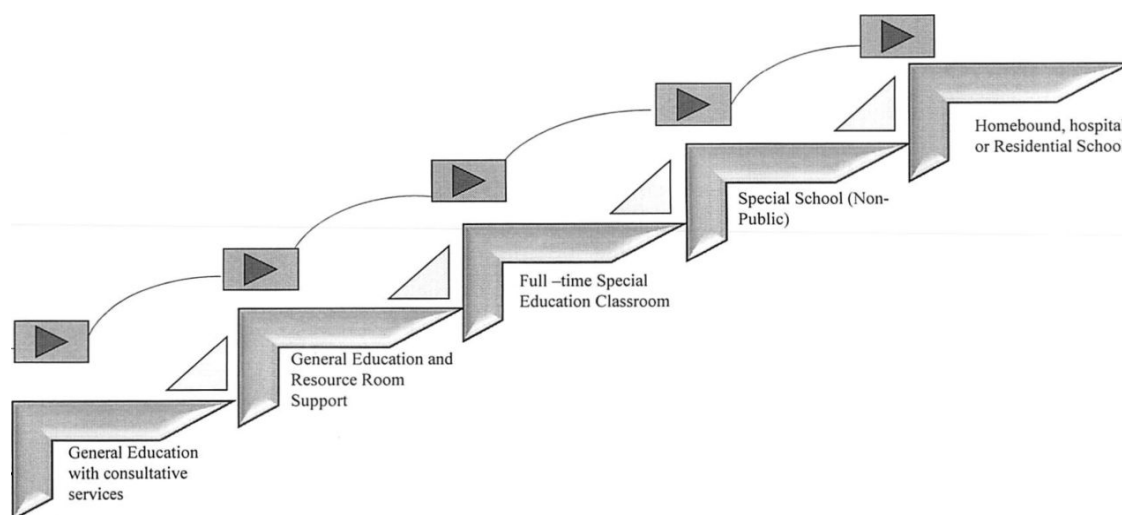


Figure 1. Author's visual conceptualization of special education continuum of alternative placement services. *Note:* Adapted from "Building the Legacy: IDEA 2004," by the U.S. Department of Education, 2004. Retrieved from <http://idea.ed.gov/explore/view/p/%2Croot%2Cregs%2C300%2CB%2C300%252E115%2C>

Legislators considered evidence-based instructional practices, in concert with increased accountability, as a way to attain the mission and vision of IDEA and NCLB (IDEA, 2004; NCLB, 2001). However, no universal definition for the term *evidence-based instruction* exists, and terms such as *research-based instruction* or *scientific-based instruction* are often used synonymously (Cook & Cook, 2011). In this study, the researcher defined evidence-based instruction (EBI) as "practices that are supported by multiple, high-quality studies that utilize

research designs from which causality can be inferred and that demonstrate meaningful effects on student outcomes” (Cook & Cook, 2011, p. 73).

In response to current federal mandates, researchers have sought to identify evidence-based instructional practices. To facilitate the process, the Department of Education established the What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) to review and rank reading strategies and intervention models as determined by the rigor and methodology of scientific research (U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, What Works Clearinghouse, 2015). Until recently, these reviews did not include research-based interventions targeted for children with disabilities. Typically, these programs addressed struggling students not known to have a specific diagnosed disability (U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, What Works Clearinghouse, 2015).

Currently, federal legislation mandates specific job qualifications for both general and special education teachers (IDEA, 2004). All teachers must maintain appropriate licensure, be highly qualified to teach all applicable content knowledge, and use EBI strategies to teach all children (IDEA, 2004; NCLB, 2001). However, the use of EBI for students receiving special education services has presented implementation challenges for teachers, and especially for special education teachers. Special education teachers must be prepared to instruct a heterogeneous group of children representing a diverse range of disabilities and academic needs (Stough & Palmer, 2003). These students often have academic reading skills significantly below their designated grade level (IDEA, 2004).

Despite the continuously changing landscape of educational reform and the onset of EBI practices, researchers have suggested that special education teachers have not focused on reading

instruction (Bentum & Aaron, 2003; Burns & Ysseldyke, 2009; Durkin, 1978; Klingner, Urbach, Golos, Brownell, & Menon, 2010). In order to increase the reading outcomes of students with disabilities, researchers have suggested the need for special education teachers to understand not only how to teach reading, but also how to incorporate EBI practices in reading instruction (Klingner et al., 2010; Woodcock & Vialle, 2010). This type of instructional shift requires EBI instructional methods that incorporate specialized academic skills, along with the essential components of reading instruction.

Situation to Self

A necessary component of a qualitative study is reflexivity. According to Patton (2002), reflexivity involves both self-questioning and self-understanding. Reflexivity requires “an ongoing examination of *what I know* and *how I know* it” [italics in original] (Patton, 2002, p. 64). Thus, the motivations for conducting this research emerged from the researcher’s own epistemological beliefs and assumptions regarding reading instruction for children with disabilities.

This hermeneutic, phenomenological study aligns with the social cognitive theory of learning, which developed from the idea that education is the cultivation of knowledge involving personal interaction, growth, and development undertaken in order to make a difference in the lives of every child (Miller, 2011). Within the structure of the U.S. educational system, the ultimate purpose of education has been to develop an individual’s unique skills, abilities, and talents for the improvement of society (Van Brummelen, 2002). The researcher’s personal philosophical foundation of education was biblically based on the belief that ultimately, God ordains all knowledge.

Building upon this biblical foundation, education also serves to prepare children to become critical thinkers in order to live in and contribute to a diverse society. According to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. (The Purpose of Education, 1947), education's purpose is to emphasize values and morals in a democratic society. Therefore, this study was entered into under the assumption that educators need to engage continually in reflective and lifelong learning in order to provide specialized reading instruction for children with disabilities in a globally changing society.

The field of special education is multilayered, highly specialized, and involves a diverse array of students. Understandably, students with disabilities may present unique learning challenges for teachers and subsequently require specialized services not currently evaluated for their effectiveness. Likewise, some EBI practices have the potential to improve the academic reading outcomes of students with disabilities (Arabzadeh, Nadery, Salami, & Bayanati, 2013; Berkeley et al., 2010; Corkett, Hatt, & Benevides, 2011; Tobin & Tippet, 2014; Wanzek, Wexler, Vaughn, & Ciullo, 2010). This study is significant for extending research in disabilities education by providing a bridge between understanding the lived experiences of special education teachers and the implementation of effective reading practices.

Problem Statement

The problem addressed in this study was that despite existing research that showed strong correlations between the use of effective reading practices and teachers' beliefs, few researchers have examined the beliefs and perspectives of special education teachers regarding teaching reading to students with disabilities (Algozzine et al., 1988; Cameron & Cook, 2013; Tanase & Wang, 2010; Thomas, 2013). Researchers have examined EBI in reading and personal epistemological beliefs among general education teachers across various academic domains

(Cameron & Cook, 2013; Tanase & Wang, 2010; Thomas, 2013). Researchers have studied personal beliefs and experiences with utilization of EBI reading practices for preservice teachers (Cheng, Chan, Tang, & Cheng, 2009), elementary teachers, and secondary general education teachers (Mansour, 2013).

In addition, although limited in nature, researchers have examined teachers' perceptions of EBI (Boardman, Arguelles, Vaughn, Hughes, & Klingner, 2005; Cook & Cook, 2011; Greenway, McCollow, Hudson, Peck, & Davis, 2013). However, to date, current research representing the lived experiences, beliefs, perceptions, and challenges that special education teachers' may encounter as they plan for and implement evidence-based reading instruction is very limited (Greenwood & Abbott, 2001). Additional information is needed about the perceptions and beliefs that influence reading instruction (Cook & Cook, 2011; Greenway et al., 2013). When federal educational mandates are viewed in a social justice context, if EBI practices have the potential to improve the academic reading outcomes of students with disabilities, all efforts should be made to ensure special education teachers actually use such practices (Arabzadeh, Nadery, Salami, & Bayanati, 2013; Berkeley et al., 2010; Corkett, Hatt, & Benevides, 2011; Marks, 2011; Tobin & Tippet, 2014; Wanzek, Wexler, Vaughn, & Ciullo, 2010). This study was intended to explore different perspectives in reading instruction that when brought together could promote literacy for students—and literacy for students with disabilities, in particular—which thus far have not been thoroughly explored in research literature (De Silva, 2013).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to understand and interpret the meaning of the lived experiences of a group of special education teachers who taught reading

to students with disabilities. The researcher explored special educators' knowledge about teaching reading to students with disabilities and sought to discern how their beliefs and experiences influenced the use (or nonuse) of evidence-based reading practices. Researchers have noted that epistemic beliefs stated by teachers often do not match instructional practices actually observed in the classroom (Chai et al., 2010; Cheng et al., 2009; Polat, 2010; Tanase & Wang, 2010; Temiz & Topeu, 2013; Thomas, 2013). Evidence-based instruction was defined as “practices that are supported by multiple, high-quality studies that utilize research designs from which causality can be inferred and that demonstrate meaningful effects on student outcomes” (Cook & Cook, 2011, p. 73). Two theories guided this study: the epistemological theory of knowledge (Hofer & Pintrich, 1997; Schommer, 1990) and social cognitive theory, including the tenets of Bandura's (1989) sense of self-efficacy.

Significance of the Study

This study was important for several reasons. According to researchers Chhabra and McCardle (2004), learning to read is a critical and necessary skill for mastering academic success in today's school system. Since educational researchers introduced and incorporated evidence-based instructional reading practices in United States schools, findings have supported the use of instructional practices based on rigorous scientific evidence (Lyon, 1999).

Evidence-based research has become embedded in the U.S. educational system as truth that is supported by epistemological beliefs and perspectives (St. Pierre, 2006). According to Hoy, Tarter, and Hoy (2006), understanding factors that influence teachers' beliefs could positively affect the academic outcome of students. Therefore, understanding the beliefs special education teachers hold regarding reading instruction may contribute to raising the academic reading performance of children with disabilities.

Many researchers have examined the relationship between teachers' beliefs and instructional practices and noted that epistemic beliefs stated by teachers often do not match instructional practices actually observed in the classroom (Chai et al., 2010; Cheng et al., 2009; Polat, 2010; Tanase & Wang, 2010; Temiz & Topeu, 2013; Thomas, 2013). In addition, although federal statutes require the implementation of EBI practices when public schools receive certain federal funds (NCLB, 2001), few research studies have been designed to examine the successful implementation of EBI for students with diagnosed disabilities. Given that EBI reading practices are deemed critical to the success of mainstream education, EBI practices remain a phenomenon of interest to the special education community.

During the late 1990s, in the field of psychology, very few EBI interventions were implemented for young children with disabilities (Mesibov & Shea, 2010). Although Mesibov and Shea's findings were limited, several potential benefits were noted for children with autism. EBI may help to counterbalance the pressures of historical practices, philosophical trends, and political pressures regarding how educational services are organized and how such services are delivered to children with autism (Mesibov & Shea, 2010). Research aimed at understanding teachers' knowledge, experience, and epistemic beliefs may increase the academic performance of students with other disabilities (Maggioni & Parkinson, 2008).

In addition, using EBI to teach reading may be of interest for teacher education programs. EBI has become a frequent topic in professional development and in-service trainings for teacher education programs; however, the concept of EBI is not widely accepted by all teachers (Cook & Cook, 2011). This lack of acceptance has occurred primarily because of the skepticism and mistrust teachers tend to have toward research, particularly in the area of instructional practices (Cook & Cook, 2011). Skepticism and mistrust generally result in teachers relying on their own

personal beliefs and resources to determine how to teach children with disabilities (Cook & Cook, 2011). Unfortunately, holding on to outdated and ineffective teaching practices will do little to promote the literacy and reading skills of all students, particularly students with disabilities (Cook & Cook, 2011; Zemelman, Daniels, & Hyde, 2005).

The many terms used in reference to EBI have made it difficult for teachers to navigate this new terrain of teaching practice. EBI is often discussed in the same context as research-based instruction (RBI), scientifically-based instruction (SBI), best practices, and recommended practices, yet each of these terms may carry different meanings (Cook & Cook, 2011). Researchers have suggested that conducting qualitative research incorporating the voices of special education teachers may provide additional knowledge in clarifying EBI practices (Brantlinger, Jimenez, Klingner, Pugach, & Richardson, 2005).

Special education teachers often feel they are better guided by what they have found to be successful in the classroom rather than by the changing requirements of federal policies and educational reforms (Boardman et al., 2005). However, progress has been made toward communicating the importance of using research evidence to guide instructional practices in reading (McCardle & Chhabra, 2004). McCardle and Chhabra (2004) emphasized the need to apply in the classroom what has been learned through research:

Research on reading instruction, perhaps more than any other area of education, is ready for application in the classroom. To do that will require that many deeply held beliefs be set aside in favor of what the evidence has proven beyond a reasonable doubt. It will require schools of education to convey to prospective teachers the valuable knowledge that has been accumulated in reading research and make it practical for classroom instruction. It will require that professional organizations give more than lip service to

the findings of research and find ways to educate teachers already in the classroom to the value of research-based practices. (McCardle & Chhabra, 2004, p. 40)

This study adds to the body of research designed to bridge the research-to-practice gap by giving a voice to special education teachers. Special education teachers' beliefs about reading instruction remaining need to be identified and addressed (Behrmann & Souvignier, 2013). Educators may use the knowledge gained from this study to incorporate special education teachers' beliefs about instructional practices in order to address the academic reading performance of students with disabilities (Urbach et al., 2015).

Research Questions

Van Manen (1990) noted the importance of remaining acutely aware of the study's original research question. The study was guided by the following central research question:

What are the lived experiences and instructional intricacies of a specific group of special education teachers who use evidence-based instructional practices when teaching reading to students with disabilities?

A phenomenological study involves searching for the essence and meaning in the lived experiences of individuals (van Manen, 1990). Therefore, this approach was the most appropriate qualitative research design to provide an interpretation of the underlying beliefs and perceptions special education teachers have about teaching reading using evidence-based practices. In addition, the following subresearch questions guided this study:

1. What themes (e.g., personal beliefs, professional judgments, and academic expectations) emerge from the voices of special education teachers when they describe their perceptions and beliefs toward evidence-based instructional reading practices?

2. How do special education teachers describe personal factors and beliefs that shape their day-to-day decision-making regarding evidence-based instructional practices used to teach reading?
3. What meanings or understandings do special education teachers attribute to their preferred practices and/or evidence-based strategies for teaching reading?
4. How do special education teachers describe the perceived benefits and effectiveness, if any, from the implementation of evidence-based instructional reading practices?
5. How do special education teachers describe professional development, training, challenges, or barriers, if any, needed to enhance evidence-based reading instruction for students with disabilities?

A phenomenological design is not typically used to specify a causal effect or determine the effectiveness of an instructional practice; instead, a phenomenological design is essential to gain insight into a phenomenon (van Manen, 1990). In this case, the phenomenological design facilitated exploration of aspects of the teaching environment—for example, special education teachers’ perceptions, beliefs, and feelings about evidence-based instructional practices, and in particular, their beliefs about why instructional practices may or may not work (Cook et al., 2014; Klehm, 2014; McDuffie & Scruggs, 2008; Xu, 2012). Subresearch Question 1 and subresearch question 2 elicited the unique experiences and self-efficacy beliefs of special education teachers as they taught reading to students with varying levels of disabilities (Dixon et al., 2014; Mesibov & Shea, 2010). Understanding teacher beliefs regarding learning content is essential to increase understanding of how teachers teach and how children learn (Corkett et al., 2011; Schunk, 1991). Subresearch Question 3 and subquestion 4 facilitated the development of a descriptive and collective understanding regarding the implementation of EBI reading instruction

(Cook & Cook, 2011; Torres, Farley, & Cook, 2014) as well as any challenges or barriers that may impede implementation. Teachers' beliefs affect teaching behaviors in the classroom and depend heavily on context (Ertmer & Ottenbreit-Leftwich, 2010; Klehm, 2014; Kretlow & Helf, 2013; Mansour, 2013). Subresearch Question 5 provided insight into the successes, challenges, and barriers special education teachers encountered when attempting to implement EBI reading strategies (Dingle, Brownell, Leko, Boardman, & Haager, 2011; Durkin, 1978; Logan, Medford, & Hughes, 2011; Polat, 2010).

Research Plan

The researcher sought three specific groups of special education teachers responsible for planning and conducting reading instruction for this study, which included:

- special education resource teachers tasked with teaching reading to students assigned to the general education classroom,
- special education teachers assigned to teach reading within a collaborative team-teaching environment (e.g., response-to-intervention program),
- special education teachers assigned to teach reading in the self-contained classroom.

Specific definitions of the special education resource program may vary by individual state departments of education. For this study, the researcher used the definition provided by the California Department of Education: A special education resource teacher is responsible for providing instruction and educational services for students with disabilities who have an active individualized education plan (IEP) and are assigned to the general education classroom for the majority of the school day (Legislative Analyst's Office, 2015; Taylor, M. 2013).

The special education resource teacher is responsible for coordinating individualized special education services with the general education teacher. Specialized academic instruction

is determined by the student's IEP and may entail withdrawal from the general education classroom for a specified portion of the day. Instruction provided by the resource teacher may be delivered either in an individualized or small group setting inside the general education classroom (e.g., push-in services) or outside of the general education classroom (e.g., pull-out services; Legislative Analyst's Office, 2015; Official California Legislative Information, 2015).

A collaborative teaching environment consists of a general education class in which the special educator and the general education classroom teacher equally share the responsibility and decision making to provide instruction for all students, including students with disabilities (Damore & Murray, 2009; U.S. Department of State, 2015). In this scenario, both the special educator and general education teacher are directly responsible for the delivery of reading instruction. Special education teachers assigned to teach reading in a collaborative or team teaching environment (e.g., response-to-intervention service delivery model) participated in this study.

Self-contained classrooms are part of the continuum of learning environments where students receive special education services. Located on public education campuses, self-contained classrooms are small group settings of children with specific learning disabilities (SLDs) or special needs that cannot be met in the general education classroom (IDEA, 2004). The self-contained classroom is led by an educator who is licensed to provide academic specialized instruction, including reading instruction and general education content knowledge, (IDEA, 2004; NCLB, 2001).

The researcher recruited an accessible, purposeful, and criteria-based sample for this study from public schools in the southern California region of the United States. A purposeful sampling design facilitated the selection of participants able to provide rich information and in-

depth understanding of the phenomenon being studied (Palinkas, Horwitz, Green, Wisdom & Hoagwood, 2013; Patton, 2002). Given that the focus was on the interpretations and perspectives of special education teachers providing reading instruction for students with disabilities, a phenomenological study was the most appropriate design (Patton, 2002).

Data collection methods included semistructured individual interviews with special education teachers, document analysis, and classroom observations. Semistructured interviews provided data regarding the lived experiences of special education teachers. Semistructured interviews also facilitated the collection of in-depth information about special education teachers' beliefs and perceptions regarding the use of EBI and other reading instruction strategies. Using an interview guide during the interviews provided a mechanism with which to explore, probe, and expand on participants' responses in order to gather comprehensive data (Patton, 2002).

Documents, such as lesson plans, work samples, and EBI training comprised another data source for this study. These documents provided additional insight into aspects that may not have emerged from the interviews. Professional development training materials and program records can be beneficial in stimulating additional information during the interviews and observational phases (Patton, 2002). The researcher also collected reflective written documents (e.g., demographic survey data, field notes).

In addition, the researcher collected observational data for this study. Direct observations within the participants' setting allowed the researcher to understand the context in which teaching occurred. The researcher was able to see and hear information that participants might not typically present during interviews (Patton, 2002). Further, observations are useful for

gaining experience and personal knowledge that may be valuable during data analyses (Patton, 2002).

In order to ensure a rigorous and thorough study, data analyses followed recommended guidelines (van Manen, 1990). Data analyses included the process of developing a narrative of meaning structures and overarching themes, thus illuminating and illustrating the phenomenon of interest. Adhering to recommended data analyses procedures helped ensure reliability, validation, and the development of essential findings (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2002; van Manen 1984, 1990).

Limitations

Certain limitations can be expected in any qualitative research study (Creswell, 2013). Several limitations applied to this study. The limited scope of this study was one notable limitation. For example, this study adhered to a strict time schedule, which may have precluded recruiting from a rich pool of participants.

The small sample size could have represented a limitation. Although a small sample size is not atypical in qualitative studies, perspectives from a small participant sample may be difficult to generalize to the general population of special education teachers or other teacher groups. The researcher mitigated this limitation with the understanding that qualitative research is not generalizable in the traditional sense (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2002); thus, the information and knowledge gained from this qualitative study were meaningful and significant. Given that special education teachers who were currently teaching special education students comprised the sample in this research study, the researcher expected that the responses of participants would be reflections of personal experiences, which likely were not applicable to other groups of special educators.

An additional limitation in the study was that the researcher asked participants to discuss their personal beliefs and perceptions regarding disabilities in education, specifically in the area of reading. The nature of self-reporting personal beliefs presumes that the participants will respond honestly and truthfully. Understandably, while some participants may be more inclined to discuss their personal experiences and knowledge, it is possible that some participants may have felt compelled to answer the interview questions in a manner that supported the philosophy of their employing school district or in a manner they felt was socially acceptable.

Delimitations

Several delimitations were noted in this study. First, the researcher restricted the sample population to special education teachers. This restriction was needed in order to solicit the voices of special education whose voices have been sorely absent in discussion regarding EBI reading practices.

In addition, this study was conducted in the southern region of California within specific geographic boundaries. These boundaries were based on the ability of the researcher to travel within a 100-mile radius to conduct the study. Confining the study to one specific geographic region may have resulted in the collection of unique experiences that cannot not be replicable in future studies. Given that, each state has its own set of legal interpretations, governing legislation, and continuums for providing special education services (e.g., special day classes, resource services). Special education services prevalent in one geographic region may not be appropriate in different regions and states.

Definitions of Terms

The following terms are referred to in this study:

Education for All Handicapped Children Act - A federal mandate (also referred to as EHA or Public Law 94-142) passed in 1975 to ensure that children with disabilities are educated with their nondisabled peers to the maximum extent possible (U.S. Department of Education, 2007).

Evidence-based instruction (also referred to as *research-based instruction*) - Instructional programs or a collection of instructional practices that have been empirically studied and show a record of success (Cook & Cook, 2011).

Inclusion - The integration of a child with disabilities in the general education environment (IDEA, 2004).

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA/IDEIA, 2004) - The law ensuring educational services to children with disabilities (Education for All Handicapped Children Act, 1975; IDEA, 2004).

Individualized education program (IEP) - A plan or program developed to ensure that a child who has a disability identified under the law receives specialized academic instruction and services (IDEA/IDEIA, 2004).

Learning disability - Neurological disorders that affect the learning of academic and social skills (IDEA/IDEIA, 2004).

Least restrictive environment (LRE) - A requirement in federal law that stipulates that children with disabilities are to receive their education, to the maximum extent possible, with nondisabled peers (Henley, Ramsey, & Algozzine, 2006).

Mainstreaming - The placement of a child with disabilities into the daily and ongoing activities of the general education classroom in order for the child to be educated in a classroom with his or her peers (Crockett & Kauffman, 1999).

Self-contained special education classroom - Classrooms designed for children with disabilities who have needs that require specialized academic instruction separate from the general education classroom.

Specialized academic instruction - The adaptation of curriculum and instructional methods individualized to meet the individual needs of a child with a disability (Henley et al., 2006).

Specific learning disability (SLD) - A disorder in one or more areas including oral and written expression, listening comprehension, reading skills (fluency and/or comprehension skills), or mathematics that may prevent the ability of a child to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or do mathematical calculations (*IDEA/IDEIA, 2004*).

Special education - The practices of educating children with special needs in a manner that addresses their individual differences and specific needs (*IDEA/IDEIA, 2004*).

Response-to-intervention (RTI) - A framework of instructional delivery designed to provide a high quality, evidence-based education program for all students while using universal screening procedures to identify students at-risk for academic achievement; and intensive intervention designed to meet the individual and intensive needs of students not responding to evidence-based instruction (Swanson, Solis, Ciullo, & McKenna, 2012).

Summary

Federal legislation requires that states and local school districts receiving federal grant funding use EBI practices to teach literacy skills for all children, including children with disabilities (Wanzek et al., 2010). Additionally, extensive legislation regarding public schooling now includes accountability standards in which schools must show yearly academic growth for all children, including children with disabilities (NCLB, 2001). Researchers have proposed that in order to facilitate changes in instructional practices, teachers may need to change their beliefs, attitudes, or pedagogical ideologies as well as their pedagogical knowledge of instructional practices, strategies, methods, or approaches (Farrell & Ives, 2015; Tanase & Wang, 2010; Xu, 2012). Although researchers have examined the beliefs and instructional practices of preservice and general education teachers, few studies focus on understanding perspectives and beliefs regarding instructional practices of special education teachers who teach reading to students with disabilities (Urbach et al., 2015). The results of this study may be beneficial in understanding the role research and evidence-based instructional reading practices play in raising the academic reading skills of students with disabilities (McCardle & Chhabra, 2004).

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

This phenomenological study encompassed the collection and interpretation of the lived experiences of special education teachers who taught reading to students with disabilities. This chapter provides a description of the epistemological theory of knowledge and social cognitive theory framework that underpins this study. A brief historical background on the education equality of students with disabilities and educational placement follows. Additional relevant literature provides insights into the special education self-contained classrooms, inclusion, and response-to-intervention (RTI), as well as into federal mandates regarding reading instruction. Insights into reading instruction follow, including a discussion of evidence-based practices. An overview of the research questions and methodology is included. The chapter concludes with a summary.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework that guided this study consisted of the epistemological theory of knowledge and Bandura's (2001) social cognitive theory. The epistemological theory of knowledge includes an exploration of personal epistemological beliefs. The discussion of social cognitive theory includes the tenets of self-efficacy and motivation.

Epistemological Theory of Knowledge

Originating from Greek philosophers, epistemology is a convergence of philosophy and psychology (Hofer & Pintrich, 1997). Specifically, epistemology refers to the study of knowledge and justified beliefs (Hofer & Pintrich, 1997). The core of personal epistemology encompasses two main ideas: (a) how people learn, and (b) what concepts or judgments are used

to describe the nature of knowing, understanding, and becoming cognizant of individual beliefs (Hofer & Pintrich, 1997).

Personal epistemological development and beliefs have piqued the interest of researchers in the area of education. Personal epistemology is a way to interpret how teachers come to understand not only knowledge, but also their internal beliefs about pedagogical knowledge, the source of their knowledge, and their beliefs about their ability to teach (Fives & Buehl, 2008; Hofer & Pintrich, 1997). Schommer (1990) included an epistemological questionnaire that examined beliefs in five distinct groups (a) how knowledge is arranged (from complex to simple), (b) the source of knowledge (e.g., knowledge that is handed down by authority versus determined by reasoning), (c) the certainty of knowledge, (d) the innate ability to learn, and (e) how quickly learning occurs.

Schommer (1990) found that personal epistemology was a system of independent beliefs that had a distinct effect on the critical interpretation of knowledge. Epistemological beliefs also appeared to affect how students' processed information and monitored their comprehension of information (Schommer, 1990). This framework of epistemological beliefs incorporated the theoretical connections between personal epistemology and the learning of new concepts (Ravindran et al., 2005). It is from this perspective that researchers have studied certain categories of teachers, including preservice teachers, beginning teachers, and teachers who teach specific content areas such as mathematics, science, and technology (He & Levin, 2008; Temiz & Topeu, 2013; Tobin & Tippet, 2011).

Hunter (1979) defined teaching as a "process of making and implementing decisions, before, during, and after instruction, to increase the probability of learning" (p. 62). Educational researchers have supported the understanding that teachers' epistemological beliefs, values, and

assumptions have distinctly influenced the decisions and instructional strategies applied in the classroom (Dixon et al., 2014; Klehm, 2014; Joram, 2007; Mansour, 2013; He & Levin, 2008; Polat, 2010; Tanase & Wang, 2010; Thomas, 2013; Xu, 2012). Thus, the relationship among teachers' decisions to use effective instructional strategies, teachers' beliefs regarding the nature of knowledge, and teachers' innate abilities remains a current area of focus within teacher education programs and in special education learning environments (Ruppar, Gaffney, & Dymond, 2015).

Tanase and Wang (2010) studied preservice teachers' initial beliefs about teaching using a case-study methodology. The purpose of their study was to seek a clearer understanding of changes in preservice teachers' epistemological beliefs, particularly after a course designed to intervene and change such beliefs. Tanase and Wang asked qualitative research questions to obtain data about the teaching beliefs held prior to intervention, the tracking of changes following intervention, and what influenced any changes (Tanase & Wang, 2010). The researchers concluded that although preservice teachers may begin their teacher education program with varying levels of beliefs, attempts at changing these beliefs might be problematic (Tanase & Wang, 2010). When tracking changes in preservice teachers' beliefs, Tanase and Wang found varying degrees of changes, ranging from substantial change to no change at all. The findings indicated that preservice teachers' beliefs could be subject to change based on specific variables (Tanase & Wang, 2010). More important, the personal beliefs of preservice teachers may fluctuate based on classroom teaching practices, student learning, and learning environments (Tanase & Wang, 2010).

He and Levin (2008) studied not only the epistemological beliefs of preservice teachers, but also the beliefs of cooperating teachers and university teacher-educators. Looking beyond

the beliefs of one subgroup (e.g., preservice teachers), the researchers included the relationship between beliefs developed from fieldwork experiences with cooperating educators and beliefs developed from interactions with university faculty teachers. Preservice teachers, cooperating teachers, and university faculty members held varying perspectives regarding how students learn and how their teaching aligned with their own personal beliefs (He & Levin, 2008). The researchers attributed differences among the three groups to the groups' perspectives of their roles, responsibilities, and level of teaching experience (He & Levin, 2008). In other words, each group constructed its beliefs based on individual experiences, modeling, and position in teaching. Hence, the findings from He and Levin's study represent an example of the convergence of self-efficacies, motivational beliefs about learning, and personal beliefs.

Earlier researchers have described the epistemology of preservice teachers as one of mistrust toward generalization of their specific teaching domain (Joram, 2007). Preservice teachers were prone to distrust the knowledge explicated by research and tended to make decisions about teaching based on their own personal experiences (Joram, 2007). Preservice teachers did not agree in their beliefs about the individual learning differences of each child (Joram, 2007). The majority of the nine study participants expressed the belief that each child learned differently (Joram, 2007). In these cases, their expressed beliefs emerged based on their own personal experiences rather than on the information received through their teacher education program (Joram, 2007).

Cheng et al. (2009) showed that preservice teachers also constructed personal beliefs based on receiving authoritative knowledge. Although the sample of preservice teachers studied may have had doubts concerning such authoritative knowledge, and their beliefs may have fluctuated throughout their student teaching experience, they still believed authoritative

knowledge was valid and convincing (Cheng et al., 2009). However, the researchers noted an inconsistency: The teachers attributed their beliefs to transitional changes experienced throughout their teacher development (Cheng et al., 2009). These findings were consistent with theories of constructivist learning, which showed that teacher beliefs can be changed (Cheng et al., 2009).

In order to transform instructional teaching practices, teachers must be able to examine their own epistemological beliefs and concepts of teaching. Many researchers have examined the relationship between teachers' beliefs and instructional practices and noted that epistemic beliefs stated by teachers often do not match instructional practices actually observed in the classroom (Chai et al., 2010; Cheng et al., 2009; Polat, 2010; Tanase & Wang, 2010; Temiz & Topeu, 2013; Thomas, 2013). Consequently, educators need additional research on the beliefs and observed instructional practices of teachers.

Social Cognitive Theory

Social cognitive theory, derived from the field of developmental psychology, provided the other half of the theoretical framework that supported this study (Bandura, 1991; Miller, 2011). Although Bandura initially presented SCT as one of modeling and imitation, he later introduced a cognitive perspective (as cited in Miller, 2011). Bandura (1989) emphasized that most learning exists in some form of social context connected with social interaction. Bandura (as cited in Miller, 2011) further contended that social cognitive beliefs are subject to change over time as a function of maturation, experience, and self-efficacy.

Bandura (1991) introduced three types of learning environments: imposed, selected, and created. An imposed environment is thrust upon individuals; a selected environment is a part of the potential environment that individuals actually experience. A created environment is a

construct created by the individual (Miller, 2011). Biggs (1996) coined the term *constructive alignment* in reference to using a created environment as a framework to guide decision making in instruction. In this framework, the teacher has major control over the teaching environment even though the teacher may not always be able to anticipate what knowledge learners actually construct (Biggs, 1996). In essence, the role of the teacher is to construct an instructional setting that provides academic challenges and scaffolding to support cognitive learning (Lunenburg, 2011).

Mansour (2013) conducted research on the premise that the social context of the classroom is the best place to study teachers' beliefs and practices. In a study of Egyptian science teachers' pedagogical beliefs and practices within a sociocultural context, Mansour hypothesized that the learning environment was an important factor not only in learning but also in the changing of teachers' beliefs and instructional practices. Further, Mansour believed that including the sociocultural context of the classroom facilitated the identification of supports and barriers for pedagogical reform. Ten science teachers from Western Egypt, ranging in experience from 8 to 30 years, participated in Mansour's (2013) study. Mansour (2013) used semistructured interviews to explore the sociocultural contexts teachers considered when teaching or planning science lessons. Mansour (2013) suggested that

- teachers' personal religious beliefs shaped their pedagogical beliefs and practices;
- teachers' extracurricular activities influenced their views on what science should teach and how science should be taught;
- teachers' past school experiences played a role in shaping their beliefs; and
- a disconnect or gap existed between what was emphasized in teacher education programs and what practices teachers felt were necessary in the real classroom.

These findings are not unique and are consistent with data linking the interplay of teachers' beliefs with pedagogical practices (Chai et al., 2010; Greenwood & Abbott, 2001; Ruppert et al., 2015; Xu, 2012). This perspective aligns with Bandura's (1989; 1991) social cognitive theory, which was based on the idea that human thoughts develop within the social environment and are closely connected to the individual's cultural context. That is, the endeavor to understand how a teacher thinks, feels, or acts and the quest to discern what a teacher knows to be essential in teaching closely align with the social relationships, personal beliefs, and the context of the classroom (Mansour, 2013).

Self-Efficacy and Motivation

Researchers believe self-efficacy is closely linked to academic motivation (Schunk, 1991). Self-efficacy refers to a person's judgment of his or her beliefs about the ability to participate in an activity and attain positive outcomes (Bandura, 1989). It is from this perspective that Bandura (1989) ascertained that a person is more likely to engage in a behavior when he or she feels capable of executing that behavior. In the context of the task of executing evidence-based instructional practices, if teachers are successful in executing a particular reading strategy, they may view themselves as more capable of using that strategy or a similar strategy at another point in time (Baird, Scott, Dearing, & Hamill, 2009). Educators could apply this view of self-efficacy to any instructional reading strategy deemed successful by teachers, regardless of whether empirical evidence has validated the strategy.

In the context of classroom instruction, teachers who exhibit a low sense of self-efficacy about their ability to implement evidence-based reading practices may expend little effort or avoid the instructional practice altogether. Likewise, teachers with a high sense of self-efficacy may work harder and persist in providing quality evidence-based reading instruction in an effort

to achieve positive academic outcomes (Baird, Scott, Dearing, & Hamill, 2009). Teachers may achieve increased feelings of self-efficacy when they use the components of reflexivity and self-regulatory strategies (Joseph & Eveleigh, 2011).

Students with learning disabilities may demonstrate poor self-regulation of their learning behaviors and thus have difficulty in selecting, monitoring, and implementing learning strategies (Baird et al., 2009; Vaughn, Wanzek, Murray, & Roberts, 2012). Joseph and Eveleigh (2011) noted that these students typically do not allocate sufficient time for reading, fail to complete assignments, and are unaware of their academic performances. Researchers have suggested that developing and teaching students' self-regulation skills may increase students' sense of self-efficacy and thereby improve academic outcomes (Vaughn et al., 2012). Furthermore, teachers who use instruction to connect students' sense of self-efficacy to learning behaviors may increase engagement in the reading process, which may increase students' reading performance (Joseph & Eveleigh, 2011).

Social cognitive theory and self-efficacy are important elements in the academic learning process (Anderson, Walker, & Ralph, 2010; Corkett et al., 2011; Ertmer & Ottenbreit-Leftwich, 2010; Joseph & Eveleigh, 2011). In one significant study, Klehm (2014) described the phenomenon of the Pygmalion effect to show how teachers' beliefs affected the academic learning process of children with disabilities. The Pygmalion effect, otherwise known as the self-fulfilling prophecy effect, is a phenomenon that occurs when teachers have high expectations of academic achievement, and students consequently perform at higher levels (Rubie-Davies, 2010).

Using a quantitative design study, Klehm (2014) surveyed the attitudes and practices of teachers of children with disabilities. Approximately 80% of the teachers in the sample agreed

that children with disabilities were able to acquire higher-level thinking and learning skills (Klehm, 2014). In addition, the attitudes of special education teachers predicted the use of evidence-based practices in the inclusive classroom (Klehm, 2014).

The special education teachers who participated in the study reported using EBI practices more often, compared to general education teachers (Klehm, 2014). At a time when all students must achieve academic performance and accountability, it is important to acknowledge that teachers' attitudes and beliefs may affect the academic achievement of children with disabilities. Klehm suggested that teachers (general education or special education) might benefit from training on the utilization of evidence-based practices, which teachers may apply successfully for children with disabilities. Despite debate over methodological variables such as intelligence, behavior, and achievement, and controversy involving the validity of intelligence scores, subsequent research has indicated that a person's expectations can influence the behavior or performance of another (Klehm, 2014; McGrew & Evans, 2004).

In a contrasting study, Cameron and Cook (2013) suggested general education teachers' beliefs toward academic performance for children with disabilities occurred based on the visibility of a child's specific disability. In this study, general education teachers believed that social development and functional skills, as opposed to academic development, were the most appropriate goals for children with severe disabilities (Cameron & Cook, 2013). Further, general education teachers expressed the belief that children with mild disabilities (e.g., learning disabilities, high functioning autism) could achieve some level of academic goals, including goals related to reading and mathematics (Cameron & Cook, 2013).

In summary, social cognitive theory provides the perspective that knowledge construction occurs within a social context (e.g., classroom settings) based on observed or modeled behaviors

governed by a system of self-efficacy beliefs (Mansour, 2013). Teachers with a higher sense of self-efficacy are likely to be open and accepting of new instructional delivery models (Bandura, 1991; Tanase & Wang, 2010). Social cognitive theory is prominent in many research studies that align instructional and decision-making practices to the self-efficacy beliefs of teachers (Anderson et al., 2010; Cheng et al., 2009; Swanson et al., 2012; Tanase & Wang, 2010; Temiz & Topeu, 2013; Thomas, 2013; Xu, 2012).

Related Literature

Federal Mandates Regarding Students with Disabilities

The ability to read is the cornerstone of teaching and learning within the U.S. educational system (Carlisle & Rice, 2002; Fountas & Pinnell, 2006). The U.S. public school system has a significant responsibility in ensuring all students acquire skills in literacy (Carlisle & Rice, 2002; NCLB, 2001). Students who do not develop the ability to read may struggle with academic achievement throughout their educational years (Cortiella & Horowitz, 2014). Additionally, those students who do not acquire adequate reading skills have the tendency to suffer from low self-esteem and low self-efficacy (Cortiella & Horowitz, 2014). In particular, students with disabilities who fail to develop basic reading skills may face limited postsecondary opportunities, employment, and social success (Carlisle & Rice, 2002).

Researchers at the National Center for Learning Disabilities (2015) estimated 42% of the 5.7 million school-aged students had a disability in 2011. Approximately 2.4 million public school students in the United States were diagnosed with a learning disability (LD); reading disabilities were diagnosed most frequently (National Center for Learning Disabilities, 2015). In 2011, students diagnosed with reading disabilities represented 41% of all students receiving special education services (National Center for Learning Disabilities, 2015). A significant body

of research has indicated that children with reading and learning disabilities have more difficulty learning to read and comprehend text, compared to their non-disabled peers (Berkeley et al., 2010; Carlisle & Rice, 2002; Dixon et al., 2014; Fountas & Pinnell, 2006; Henley et al., 2006; McLeskey & Waldron, 2011; Wanzek et al., 2010).

The Education of All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 was a landmark legislative act of Congress that provided support and protection for the rights of children with disabilities (Osgood, 2008). Prior to 1975, administrators virtually ignored children with disabilities and denied their access to formal education (Osgood, 2008). In addition, many states enacted legislation that excluded certain children with disabilities from public school systems (Osgood, 2008).

Reauthorization of the Education of All Handicapped Children Act (EHA) in 1990 included a name change to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA; Education of All Handicapped Children Act, 1975). IDEIA and its 1997 amendments set forth initiatives that allowed children with disabilities to receive, among other educational rights, a free and appropriate education (IDEIA, 2004). Additional legislation included the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965. This federal legislation applied funding for professional development, instructional development, and educational resources for grades K-12. ESEA was renamed The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2001).

IDEIA has emphasized accountability for schools and teachers. Educators have implemented state-administered standardized testing to help allocate school funding for various federal programs (IDEIA, 2004). Administrators provided professional development opportunities to encourage teachers to develop a knowledge base and the skills necessary to implement EBI and RBI teaching methods (IDEIA, 2004). Under the guidelines of IDEIA, then

President George W. Bush proclaimed that all of the country's children (including children with disabilities), would meet or exceed proficient in grade-level reading by 2014 (IDEIA, 2004).

Self-Contained Classrooms

Debate over classroom placement for children with disabilities has a long history. Early reformers thought that children with disabilities needed different education methods and organization of learning (Crockett & Kauffman, 1999). What emerged were institutions, asylums, colonies, and training schools specifically designed for children with disabilities (Winzer, 1993). During the 19th century, rising social pressures pressured educational and institutional superintendents to construct a complex system of institutions and permanent facilities that eventually gave rise to dual educational systems for special and general education (Winzer, 1993).

The self-contained classroom remains a significant part of the current U.S. educational system (Rosenberg, Westling, & McLeskey, 2008; Winzer, 2007). Children assigned to self-contained classrooms are likely to have mild to moderate intellectual disabilities, SLD, speech or language impairments, or health impairments such as visual problems (Aud et al., 2013; Rosenberg et al., 2008). In 2010, 60% of all children with disabilities spent 80% or more of their regular school time in the special education self-contained classroom (Aud et al., 2013). Despite complex social, emotional, and quality access to curricula issues involving placement in self-contained classrooms, little understanding of the self-contained classroom has been reflected in empirical research (Haynes & Jenkins, 1986; McLeskey, Landers, Williamson, & Hoppey, 2012). Bryan and Nelson (1994) commented:

Students in self-contained special education settings present a different set of issues. If the goal is to place these children in regular classrooms, we must examine whether their

experiences in segregated settings are preparing them to be in regular classrooms (p. 488).

Inclusion in General Education Classroom

The movement to include students with disabilities fully within the general education classroom has been at the crux of a historical plight for educational equality (IDEIA, 2004; (National Council on Disability [NCD], 2014; Rotatori, Oblakor, & Bakken, 2011; Seay, Hilsmier, Duncan, 2010; Winzer, 2007). Legislators have typically directed the cycles of special education reform movements toward specific disability groups, educational curricula, and educational settings (Winzer, 2007). The foundation of the special education reform movement appears in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (2004). The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA) stipulated that to the extent possible, students with disabilities should receive their education in the general education classroom (IDEIA, 2004).

Inclusion is well supported by policymakers, teachers, researchers, parents, and advocates (Kilanowski-Press, Foote, & Rinaldo, 2010; McLeskey, Landers, Williamson, & Hoppey, 2012; McLeskey & Waldron, 2011; Seay et al., 2010). Although the inclusion of all students with disabilities in the general education environment is a formidable goal, educational programs must also deliver services that will produce high academic outcomes (Seay et al., 2010). This dichotomy has created a controversy related to time spent in the general education classroom and academic achievements for students with disabilities (McLeskey & Waldron, 2011).

Seay et al. (2010) found a lack of satisfactory achievement for students with mild to moderate disabilities when the majority of academic instruction was provided in a special education resource room or pullout environment. In the same study, however, Seay et al.

attributed high academic and social success for students with and without disabilities to an inclusive environment. Inconsistent and lower patterns of academic achievement for students with disabilities were also noted (Seay et al., 2010). Given such contradictory data, researchers should examine, describe, and clarify the characteristics and practices of evidence-based instruction in both inclusive and special education environments.

An increasing number of students with disabilities are being included in the general education classroom (McLeskey et al., 2012). In investigations of a national trend in which students with disabilities are being placed in the general education classroom, many general education teachers and preservice general education teachers reported they were not prepared to facilitate instruction in an inclusive classroom (Gehrke & Cocchiarella, 2013; Swain, Nordness, & Leader-Janssen, 2012). In essence, teacher preparation programs may not provide adequate knowledge and skills needed to provide collaborative, specialized educational instruction for students with disabilities in the general education classroom (Gehrke & Cocchiarella, 2013; Swain et al., 2012).

The lack of teacher preparation can potentially result in the development of negative attitudes and beliefs toward teaching students with disabilities in an inclusive environment (Swain et al., 2012). Additional research is required to understand the type of programs needed for preservice and in-service teachers that may be beneficial in fostering positive attitudes and beliefs toward inclusion (Swain et al., 2012).

Parents want their children with disabilities to interact socially with their nondisabled peers in inclusive school settings (Dimitrova-Radojichich & Chichevska-Jovanova, 2014). Parents of typically developing preschoolers and elementary-aged students generally expressed positive attitudes toward the inclusion of children with disabilities in the general education

classroom (Dimitrova-Radojichich & Chichevska-Jovanova, 2014). Parents in the study felt that although adequately trained special education teachers were critical, inclusion provided an opportunity for the building and developing of friendships and valuable social skills for children with and without disabilities (Dimitrova-Radojichich & Chichevska-Jovanova, 2014).

Some researchers have voiced the perspective that in the attainment of academic success, the educational setting (e.g., inclusion, resource room, or self-contained classroom) may not be as critical as the instructional variables (e.g., high quality, evidence-based) for students with and without disabilities (Kilanowski-Press et al., 2010; McLeskey & Waldron, 2011). Specifically for children with disabilities, greater academic gains in areas such as reading and mathematics are likely to occur when teachers provide high quality instruction either in an inclusive or in a special education environment (McLeskey & Waldron, 2011).

It should be noted that there is no magical combination of best inclusive practices and EBI practices that will produce an optimum inclusive learning environment. Educational administrators and teachers continue to struggle to determine the appropriate combination of inclusion and evidence-based instructional practices that will yield high academic outcomes for students with disabilities as well as meet high stakes accountability mandates (Seay et al., 2010). Advocates for inclusion believe that the best inclusive environment exists when students with disabilities are instructed in the same classroom and are provided the same EBI practices as their nondisabled peers receive (NCLB, 2001).

Reading Instruction

One of the most comprehensive research studies on reading instruction occurred at the request of the United States Congress. In 1997, the National Reading Panel (NRP; 2000) was established and given the directive to assess the status of research-based knowledge. As part of

its research methodology, the NRP identified more than 100,000 research studies published after 1966 and approximately 15,000 research studies published prior to 1966 (NRP, 2000; Wolfe & Nevills, 2004).

Gathering testimony and input from advocacy organizations, teachers, parents, students, faculty, educational consultants, and scientists, the NRP focused its review on certain reading components:

- alphabetic, phonemic awareness ,and phonics instruction;
- fluency;
- comprehension, including vocabulary instruction, text comprehension instruction;
- teacher education and reading instruction; and
- computer technology and reading instruction (NRP, 2000).

Reading comprehension is one of the most complex and difficult skills to acquire (Berkeley et al, 2010; NRP, 2000). However, without reading comprehension, students are unprepared to meet the demands and high levels of literacy requirements needed in the world outside of school (Carlisle & Rice, 2002).

A critical component of the NRP (2000) review included adherence to rigorous research standards. As a result, only peer-reviewed or refereed published research was included in the NRP study. Educators have incorporated many of the implications and findings from the NRP study into research-based reading strategies featured on the national What Works Clearinghouse (U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, What Works Clearinghouse, 2015).

The NRP (2000) researchers also reported on studies related to teacher education and reading instruction. The analyses of this subgroup of studies were guided by five questions:

- How are teachers taught to teach reading?
- What do studies show about the effectiveness of teacher education?
- How can research be applied to improve teacher development?
- What findings can be used immediately?
- What important gaps remain in our knowledge? (NRP, 2000, Chapter 5, p. 1)

Although teacher education emerged as an area of high concern during the regional pre-research meetings, the NRP researchers were not able to answer all of their stated research questions. The NRP's findings showed that teacher education supports higher student achievement; however, there was insufficient evidence to assure that teachers would sustain implementation of any new strategies or methods.

Researchers have examined how improving teachers' attitude could improve reading instruction. Factoring in student and teacher outcomes, a trend was evident in the data that supported a correlation between teacher outcomes and student achievement outcomes (NRP, 2000). The reported outcomes of these studies warranted cautious interpretation—teachers often reverted to the instructional practices they were using before the study began (NRP, 2000).

The most important implication from the NRP studies appears to be that teachers can learn to improve their instructional practices in reading (NRP, 2000). This finding is compelling given that “it is the predisposition of [the] teacher to change that makes change possible. Without a change in attitude, it is extremely difficult to effect changes in practice” (NRP, 2000, Chapter 5, p. 14). Given that teachers tend to revert to their original instructional practices, it is

important to determine the underlying beliefs of teachers in order to help ensure the maintenance of newly adopted practices (NRP, 2000).

Special Educators' Roles in Reading Instruction

After the NRP report, administrators directed all teachers, including special education teachers, to focus their instruction on reading comprehension (NRP, 2000; Klingner, Urbach, Golos, Brownell, & Menon, 2010). Extant published research studies related to the instructional reading practices of special education teachers provided a foundation for understanding this increased concern regarding reading instruction for students with disabilities. For example, in Durkin's (1978) study, only 20 minutes of actual reading comprehension instruction occurred in special education classrooms over a 1-year time span. Geizheiser and Meyers (1991) compared reading instruction within the general education, remedial (special education), and resource specialist classrooms. Their findings indicated little variance in the intensity of reading instruction provided by general education, resource, and self-contained classroom teachers (Geizheiser & Meyers, 1991).

When Vaughn, Moody, and Schumm (1998) examined reading instruction provided by special education teachers in the special education resource room, they observed very little individualized instruction, compared with whole-group reading instruction. They also noted the lack of differentiated instructional materials or instruction, given that the classes observed included a grade span of three to five grade levels (Vaughn et al., 1998). However, Vaughn et al. reported that reading instruction resembled the reading instruction typically provided in a general education classroom.

Two years later, researchers followed up with the teachers who participated in the earlier Vaughn et al. (1998) study to determine if any significant changes had occurred in the

instructional reading practices used by special education teachers in the resource room (Moody, Vaughn, Hughes, & Fischer, 2000). Six of the 14 original study participants were available to participate in the follow-up study (Moody et al., 2000). All six teachers were still teaching special education students in a pullout resource room (Moody et al., 2000). Results of the follow-up study showed that whole-class instruction continued to be the predominant delivery preference for teaching reading in the resource room (Moody et al., 2000). However, teachers' interviews indicated a positive change in their views and attempts to incorporate differential and individualized activities into their teaching repertoire, as compared with the prior study (Moody et al., 2000).

The question of whether students with disabilities are best served by instruction in the general education, resource, or self-contained classroom continues (Bentum & Aaron, 2003; Moody et al. 2000). In a synthesis of previous research studies, Swanson (2008) reported inconsistencies in the quantity of instructional reading time students actually received in the resource room. Swanson indicated that the time spent in the resource room varied from as little as 11 minutes to approximately 180 minutes, and teachers delivered instruction in a whole-class format. Observations showed teachers provided little instruction in phonics, vocabulary, fluency, or comprehension (Swanson, 2008).

In 2010, Swanson and Vaughn conducted an observational study to determine the components of reading instruction observable in 10 resource classrooms, the grouping strategies used during reading instruction, and the reported academic outcomes from such instruction. Using the Instructional Content Emphasis–Revised (ICER-R) instrument, 2,178 minutes of reading instruction were recorded (Swanson & Vaughn, 2010). Phonics and word study instruction was observed for 696 minutes, comprehension was observed for 557 minutes, fluency

was observed for 193 minutes, vocabulary was observed for 209 minutes, and phonemic awareness was observed for 60 minutes (Swanson & Vaughn, 2010). Although there was evidence to show that instruction in the major areas of reading was substantial, the efficiency of instructional time in the resource room was still questionable (Swanson & Vaughn, 2010). In addition, similar to instruction seen in the general education classroom, the researchers observed whole-group instruction as the most frequent form of instruction (Swanson & Vaughn, 2010).

These findings give credence to the claim that individualized instruction based on the needs of the student is not always provided in the pullout resource room model. The historical trend of research supports the current view among many advocates that the location of instruction does not matter; rather, the quality of teacher practices and access to general education curricula provide a strong impetus for improved reading outcomes for students with disabilities (Cook & Cook, 2011; Cosier, Causton-Theoharis, & Theoharis, 2013).

Special Educators and Evidence-Based Practices

The NRP (2000) report spurred researchers to discuss specific instructional activities derived from empirical evidence specifically aligned with the five key components in reading instruction. As mentioned, empirical evidence has been referred to as evidence-based, research-based, or scientifically-based. Researchers have often used these terms synonymously. The No Child Left Behind Desktop Reference provides the following clarifications:

- Evidence of effectiveness: Programs that have been found through scientifically-based research to improve significantly the academic achievement of participating children or have strong evidence that they will achieve this result.
- Research-based methods: Proven strategies and methods for student learning, teaching and school management that are founded on scientifically-based research

and effective practices and that have been replicated successfully in schools.

(U.S. Department of Education, 2002, p. 49)

Although a special educator's use of evidence-based reading instruction does not reflect the technical quality of instruction, it is nonetheless important to understand what practices are currently being implemented by special education teachers.

The U.S. Department of Education established the What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) as a way to maintain a database of education programs, policies, and practices that meet the specific guidelines based on the rigors of research, evaluation, and statistics (U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, What Works Clearinghouse, 2015). While members of the WWC provide the review of evidence-based practices in the general education environment, they have only recently begun to review evidence-based practices for children with disabilities (Greenway et al., 2013). Not only is there a lack of review of evidence-based practices for children with disabilities, there is also limited research on the use of evidence-based practices by special education teachers (Greenway et al., 2013).

Nevertheless, several examples of the use of evidence-based practices by special education teachers are notable. In one study, data were collected from 49 elementary special educators teaching in self-contained classrooms in Texas and Florida (Boardman et al., 2005). Focus groups and participant questionnaires were the primary source of data collected to understand teachers' perceptions of research and determine how teachers decided if the research was appropriate for the instruction of students with disabilities (Boardman et al., 2005). The researchers reported four thematic categories of results including teachers' perspectives regarding influences on the use of research-based practices (e.g., district and teacher influences),

program implementation (barriers, ease of use, and parental influences), program sustainability (based on student outcomes), and perceptions of professional development (Boardman et al., 2005).

One of the most revealing findings was that despite receiving professional development training on research-based practices, most special education teachers did not feel obligated to use these practices (Boardman et al., 2005). Special education teachers reported administrators often left them on their own to select the instructional practices to use in their self-contained classrooms (Boardman et al., 2005). This group of special educators also voiced a sense of mistrust regarding the effectiveness of research-based practices for the population of children in their classrooms (e.g., children with learning and emotional disabilities) as well as mistrust regarding a number of barriers that needed to be addressed prior to a change of instructional practices (Boardman et al., 2005).

Despite a lack of understanding about how reading instruction takes place for students with disabilities, the missing perspectives and beliefs voiced by the special education teachers, and the paucity of research related to evidence-based reading instruction for children with disabilities, current researchers have offered hope. Researchers conducted a recent longitudinal randomized-control trial study to examine the effectiveness of EBI reading practices for students with borderline and below average IQs (Allor, Mathes, Roberts, Cheatham, & Al Otaiba, 2014). Although most research regarding the use of EBI for reading has typically focused on at-risk student populations or students with the specific category of learning disabilities, this 4-year study targeted the use of a research-based instructional reading curriculum for students with IQs ranging within the borderline range (i.e., 70–80) as well as for those with low IQs (i.e., 40–69; Allor et al., 2014).

This longitudinal study extended across four academic years and included participants with IQ scores in the 40th to 80th percentile range who attended an urban public school district (Allor et al., 2014). Allor et al. employed certified special education teachers to provide instruction for the treatment group; general education teachers provided instruction for the control group (Allor et al., 2014). The control group received instruction using a curriculum designated for their specific school district (either general or special education); the intervention group used a structured curriculum (Allor et al., 2014).

The students in the treatment group made significantly greater progress than did students in the control group on the majority of the language and literacy measurements (Allor et al., 2014). However, despite their positive response to EBI instruction in the areas of vocabulary, phonemic decoding, word recognition, and oral reading fluency, it was noted that these results were achieved over a period of two to four years (Allor et al., 2014). In addition, despite apparent growth, the students with low IQs were still significantly behind their peers with higher IQ scores (Allor et al., 2014). In addition to EBI instruction, individualization and modifications (e.g., pacing and adaptations) were still needed (Allor et al., 2014). Nevertheless, researchers reported the findings of this study were encouraging given that the use of evidence-based reading instruction was explicit, systematic, and delivered with fidelity (Allor et al., 2014). Further, because the population of the study received instruction in an environment similar to the special education environment, the results from this study also support the belief that children with disabilities, including those within the lower IQ range, can make progress when provided with evidence-based reading instruction (Allor et al., 2014). Thus, the findings support the need to provide quality reading instruction for children with disabilities (Allor et al., 2014).

It is not surprising that researchers have suggested that children with disabilities may require more time to make progress, compared with their nondisabled peers (Allor et al., 2014). Because the Allor et al. study was a randomized study that included a control group, the results were eligible to be reviewed and ranked by the WWC as an evidence-based instructional practice. This ranking is encouraging because the WWC has admittedly reviewed only a relatively small number of EBI practices for special education teachers' use (Allor et al., 2014). Solid, empirical research should address challenges encountered in teaching children with disabilities to read (Allor et al., 2014).

Research findings have indicated that the reading skills of many students with disabilities are not adequate to allow them to participate successfully in academic education or in the workforce (Fountas & Pinnell, 2006; Melekoglu, 2011). Although educational standards and reforms have placed an increasing emphasis on improving reading proficiency for all struggling readers, grave concerns persist regarding the reading deficits associated with students with disabilities (Morgan, Fuchs, Compton, Cordray, & Fuchs, 2000, 2008; NCLB, 2001). Without adequate reading skills, children with disabilities may face future limits in academic, occupational, and social success (Berkeley et al., 2010).

Self-Efficacy and Motivation to Read

Educators have attributed reading difficulties to a causal relationship between decreased practice in reading and a lack of motivation (Morgan et al., 2008). Students' motivation to perform academic tasks such as reading has emerged in part from the students' motivational beliefs and their sense of their ability, or self-efficacy, to perform these academic tasks (Lichtinger & Kaplan, 2015). Consequently, students with disabilities may exhibit lower self-efficacy in reading, writing, spelling, and mathematic problem solving (Nelson & Manset-

Williamson, 2006). In addition, students with disabilities tend to perceive reading as more difficult, perceive themselves as less competent, and hold less positive attitudes toward instructional reading activities, compared to their typically developing counterparts (Morgan et al., 2008).

As a result, students with disabilities may demonstrate a lack of motivation and willingness to engage in reading activities and strategies (Arabzadeh et al., 2013; Corkett et al., 2011; Lichtinger & Kaplan, 2015; Melekoglu, 2011). Given that motivation and self-efficacy are important components of learning and may have a distinct impact on the learning and academic experiences of students with disabilities, it is incumbent upon teachers to employ research-based instructional practices for developing self-efficacy and self-regulation skills (Arabzadeh et al., 2013). Teachers may find it beneficial to be aware and reflective of their own beliefs, values, and instructional preferences in order to help mitigate the sense of academic frustration and failure typically experienced by students with disabilities (Arabzadeh et al., 2013).

In a study of student motivation and EBI reading practices, Melekoglu (2011) studied 13 students with learning disabilities and 25 students without learning disabilities. The purpose of the study was to evaluate whether self-reported scores of motivation improved after a series of evidence-based reading instruction (Melekoglu, 2011). After 18 weeks of instruction using a structured, research-based reading program, only students without disabilities showed an improvement between pretest and posttest motivation scores (Melekoglu, 2011).

Despite limitations in the sample, (sample participants were primarily Caucasian students), Melekoglu (2011) suggested that in the reading outcomes for students with learning disabilities, motivation might play a more significant role, compared to the use of research-based instructional practice. In order to develop adequate literacy skills, students with learning

disabilities needed consistent participation in reading and direct reading instruction (Morgan et al., 2008). Research has shown that a supportive learning environment that incorporates immediate and positive feedback enhances the motivation to read, which may help improve the reading performances of students with disabilities (Corkett et al., 2011; Morgan et al., 2008). Most important, teachers must be mindful of their own beliefs in promoting various instructional strategies to ensure they are sending messages that encourage learning for students with disabilities (Lichtinger & Kaplan, 2015).

Special Educators' Role in Response-to-Intervention

After NCLB and IDEIA, response-to-intervention (RTI) was introduced as a systematic, multilevel decision-making process designed to maximize academic achievement by providing intense, quality instruction for all students (Fox, Carta, Strain, Dunlap, & Hemmeter, 2010; Hollenbeck, 2007, National Center on Response to Intervention, 2010). Given that RTI was conceived as a part of IDEA it is often considered a special education reform initiative (Hall & Mahoney, 2013). However, educators commonly implement RTI as a school-wide initiative in which special education personnel are considered an important component of the framework (Fuchs, Fuchs, & Stecker, 2010).

Although no formal definition of RTI exists, the National Center on Response to Intervention provided the following definition:

Response-to-intervention integrates assessment and intervention within a multi-level prevention system to maximize student achievement and to reduce behavioral problems. With RTI, schools use data to identify students at-risk for poor learning outcomes, monitor student progress, provide evidence-based interventions and adjust the intensity and nature of those interventions depending on a student's responsiveness, and identify

students with learning disabilities or other disabilities. (National Center on Response to Intervention, 2010, p. 2)

The four critical components of RTI are:

- High quality, evidence-based instructional practices are incorporated for all students at all levels.
- Student progress is monitored on a continual basis to determine and identify inadequate growth trends.
- A continuum of evidence-based instructional practices are implemented with fidelity, including modification of the core curriculum and individualization of a more intensive curriculum for students who fail to respond to the modified curriculum.
- In some cases, data on response to intensive intervention strategies may be used for disability identification. (Fox et al. 2009; National Center on Response to Intervention, 2010).

RTI begins with benchmark screening of all students, typically at the beginning, middle, or end of the school term (Hughes & Dexter, 2011; Margolis, 2012). The first tier of RTI provides the delivery of research-based and EBI for all students (Hughes & Dexter, 2011). In Tier 1, universal screening, the first step in identifying students who may be at risk for reading failure is conducted (Hughes & Dexter, 2011). Universal screening measures are brief domain-specific assessments focused on specific reading skills and typically administered three times per year (Fox et al., 2009; Hughes & Dexter, 2011).

Teachers move students who performed poorly on benchmark assessments into Tier 2, where they receive targeted systematic interventions and instruction (Margolis, 2012). Educators typically provide interventions to a smaller group of students in order to increase the frequency

and intensity of instruction (Margolis, 2012; National Center on Response to Intervention, 2010). Students' academic performance is measured using curriculum-based measurement (CBM) (Margolis, 2012; Stecker, Fuchs, & Fuchs, 2008).

Curriculum-based measurements are repeated and short criterion-referenced tests designed to determine baseline reading skills and to assess academic progress over time (Deno, 2003; Margolis, 2012). Teachers monitored progress frequently, typically every two to four weeks (Stecker, Fuchs, & Fuchs, 2008). Educators have established empirical performance standards for CBM in reading, writing, spelling, and mathematics (Busch & Reschly, 2007; Deno, 2003).

Teachers and administrators use data from progress monitoring to determine if adequate reading progress is being made (Margolis, 2012; Stecker, Fuchs, & Fuchs, 2008). Students who have not made adequate progress under Tier 2 instruction may require interventions that are even more intensive or a referral for special education testing to assess the possibility of a learning disability (Margolis, 2012; Stecker, Fuchs, & Fuchs, 2008). Tier 3 instruction is the most intensive and individualized level of academic support and requires frequent monitoring of student progress and achievement (Busch & Reschly, 2007; Hessler & Konrad, 2008). Instruction at this level may include instruction provided by special education teachers

At the cornerstone of the RTI model, CBM plays an important role in determining if students are making adequate academic performance in the core curriculum and if at-risk students are progressing in the more intensive interventions (Thornblad & Christ, 2014).

Researchers have examined the effects of CBM on instructional planning and decision making. Although some concerns involve the optimal length of intervention phases and what constitutes

quality data, promising outcomes for reading have been noted with the use of CBM (Christ, Zopluoglu, Long, & Monghen, 2012; Thornblad & Christ, 2014).

To understand the teaching and learning conditions for reading in relationship to CBM, Marchand and Furrer (2014) examined the use of multiple types of CBM, including measures for oral reading fluency, vocabulary, and multiple-choice reading comprehension. Results from this study indicated moderate to strong correlations between reading performance and the CBM reading measures (Marchand & Furrer, 2014). Student engagement was associated with increased reading performance for students, showing that student motivation may play a role in increasing reading outcomes for struggling readers (Marchand & Furrer, 2014).

Curriculum-based measurements embedded in an RTI framework provide a source of information teachers can use to make decisions regarding classroom instruction and implementation of specific individual changes to instructional support, assignments, and curriculum (Fuchs, Fuchs, & Stecker, 1989; Marchand & Furrer, 2014). Research supports the implication that teachers who use CBM tend to rely less on their own beliefs and rely more on objective data to guide student progress in reading (Fuchs, Fuchs, & Stecker, 1989). Despite the promises of improved reading outcomes for students with disabilities, concerns remain regarding implementing and sustaining RTI (Busch & Reschly, 2007; Christ et al., 2012).

As educators continue to implement the RTI framework across the nation, special education teachers are in a unique position to collaborate and calibrate with administrators, general education teachers, and students' families in educating students with and without disabilities (Mitchell & Deshler, 2011). An examination of the role of special education teachers in a RTI environment has shown that special educators spend approximately one third of their time completing paperwork and approximately one fourth of their time collaboratively co-

teaching with general education teachers (Mitchell & Deshler, 2011). In collaborative co-teaching, both the general and special education teachers reported shared responsibility for instruction in the classroom (Mitchell & Deshler, 2011). One fourth of the special educators in the study reported they were engaged in direct instruction using effective instructional practices for the majority of the instructional day (Mitchell & Deshler, 2011).

Given that RTI is a decision-making framework, implementation is likely to occur differently in various geographic locations and school sites. Werts, Carpenter, and Fewell (2014) conducted a study covering 98 counties in North Carolina where 470 special education teachers participated in a survey to examine barriers and benefits of RTI. Each of the special education teachers reported previous involvement with RTI processes at their school (Werts et al., 2014). The survey questionnaire consisted of both multiple-choice and open-ended questions (Werts et al., 2014).

Survey results showed barriers existed, including burdensome processes (e.g., lack of time, increased paperwork, possible delay of services, extra workload); knowledge gaps (e.g., lack of information and training on RTI); faculty attitudes (e.g., lack of teacher buy-in, teacher resistances to change); lack of resources (e.g., materials and necessary personnel); parental issues; and lack of collaboration (Werts et al., 2014). Perceived benefits of RTI included higher levels of instruction provided to students, opportunities for early intervention, and improved quality of special education referrals (Werts et al., 2014). Special education teachers also noted improvements in instructional decisions because of access to ongoing assessment data (Werts et al., 2014). Collaboration and integrated teamwork were both barriers and benefits (Werts et al., 2014). Werts et al. proposed the theory that the perceptions and beliefs of special education

teachers are salient; this idea may be useful in refining the RTI process in order to further the academic success of all students.

Educators designed RTI as an intervention framework to provide high quality instruction to all students while simultaneously providing data to monitor and detect students at risk for poor academic outcomes (Vaughn & Fletcher, 2012). However, educators have implemented RTI primarily at the elementary school level (McCombes-Tolis & Spear-Swerling, 2011). Relatively few researchers have examined the framework of RTI at the middle school or secondary school levels (Dulaney, 2012; Prewett et al., 2012; Vaughn et al., 2010).

Although the essential components and knowledge base may vary at the elementary, middle, and secondary school levels, the RTI framework may face unique challenges at the middle school and high school levels (Sansosti & Noltemeyer, 2010). Unlike at the elementary school level, reading instruction is not always provided for all students at the middle and secondary school levels (King, Lemons, & Hill, 2012; Vaughn et al., 2010; Vaughn & Fletcher, 2012). Instead, reading instruction may reside within content area subjects. In these cases, reading instruction may be taught by a content area teacher and only limited aspects of reading instruction, such as vocabulary or comprehension, may occur (King, Lemons, & Hill, 2012; Vaughn et al., 2010; Vaughn & Fletcher, 2012).

Additional logistical concerns arise from scheduling conflicts when teachers attempt to provide consistent reading intervention among core classes and electives needed for high school graduation (Sansosti & Noltemeyer, 2010). Of note, these issues occur whether the student is struggling or whether the student receives special education services (Vaughn et al., 2010). Researchers have pointed out that although a series of tiered instruction is applicable at the elementary level, middle and high school students struggling with reading may not need to go

through such successions (Vaughn & Fletcher, 2012). In these cases, an intensive, individual framework for instruction is more applicable than an RTI framework (Fuchs, Fuchs, & Compton, 2010; Vaughn & Fletcher, 2012).

Continued research on the implementation of RTI at the middle school and secondary levels is clearly needed. Although teachers can identify students with disabilities who are not able to read at grade level at the elementary level, their struggles may continue throughout their education. It is reasonable to assume that the RTI framework conceptualized at the elementary school level may not be sufficient for students with disabilities at the middle and secondary school levels. Further research is needed to understand the distinct differences of RTI throughout the school years and to understand the roles of content area teachers and special education teachers.

Summary

Learning to read is a fundamental course of study found in virtually all U.S. public school systems. Federal and educational reforms have focused on ways to address literacy instruction for all students, including students with disabilities (Cortiella & Horowitz, 2014; Public Law 94-142, 1975; IDEA, 2004; NCD, 2014). Many researchers have accentuated the importance of addressing key reading skills including phonemic awareness, decoding, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension (Berkeley et al., 2010; Fountas & Pinnell, 2006; McCardle & Chhabra, 2004). Further research studies have demonstrated that instructional practices grounded in methodological and rigorous research are most effective in developing the literacy needs for students in both general and special education environments (Bell & Dolainski, 2012; Carlisle & Rice, 2002; Freeman & Sugai, 2013). However, simply requiring special education teachers to operate within a specific teaching framework or to adopt evidence-based reading strategies does

not ensure academic success or improve the reading performance for children with disabilities (Algozzine et al., 1988; Boardman et al., 2005; Kim, Linan-Thompson, & Misquitta, 2012).

Critical components necessary to meet the expectation that all students, especially students with disabilities, acquire essential literacy skills include evidence-based instructional practices, curricula, and materials (IDEA, 2004; National Reading Panel, 2000). It is important for researchers to invest the time to uncover the beliefs, challenges, and perspectives of special education teachers in order to increase the academic reading outcome for students with disabilities. As noted in the literature, once teachers form beliefs about the process of teaching, it is difficult to change these beliefs (Woodcock & Vialle, 2010). Consequently, when faced with instructional challenges, special educators' personal beliefs and past practices may heavily influence their decisions regarding instructional reading practices (Werts et al., 2014). However, the contingent instructional practices to which teachers defer may not be evidence-based practices sufficient to ensure adequate literacy skills (Boardman et al., 2005).

It is possible that by seeking an understanding of reading instruction from the lived experiences of those who are commissioned to teach children with disabilities, new ideas and learning strategies will emerge. If the goal is to encourage special educators to adopt and implement EBI in the classroom, researchers and special educators must invest the time needed to uncover effective learning strategies. Resulting data from such investigations could provide an impetus for the research community to shape, guide, and equip special educators with professional development programs effective for students with disabilities.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to uncover the deeper meanings, experiences, and interpretations of a group of special education teachers who taught reading to students with disabilities. Phenomenological research centers on finding meaning in the lived experiences of participants in order to understand and interpret the phenomenon (Patton, 2002; van Manen, 1990). The aims of this study were consistent with the essential purposes of phenomenological research.

Presented in this chapter is a brief history of phenomenology as a philosophy, followed by descriptions of the hermeneutical phenomenological research methodology, research questions, setting, and participants. Also included in this chapter are descriptions of the research procedures and the researcher's role, as well as detailed information on data collection and data analysis. The chapter concludes with an explanation of trustworthiness and ethical considerations in relation to the credibility and validity of the findings and ethical implications of this study

Design

The researcher used a hermeneutic phenomenological approach for this research study. According to van Manen (1990), hermeneutic phenomenology is not only a description of the lived experiences, but also is an interpretation of such experiences. The researcher's reason for selecting a hermeneutic phenomenological approach was to employ a method in which participants did not simply answer questions but provided descriptions of the phenomenon of interest.

Van Manen, (1991) emphasized that “the life of teaching is in a curious sense contingent and does not resemble the kind of rational practice that is reflected in many, if not most, teacher education texts and programs” (p. 196). Van Manen (1991) further contended that the pedagogy of effective teaching could benefit from a climate of reflective dialogues and observations among educators. Viewed from this context, the researcher sought to understand the experiences of special educators who taught reading to children with disabilities; thus, a phenomenological research approach was an appropriate methodology.

The phenomenological methodology encompassed the assumptions and use of theoretical frameworks in the interpretation of the collective lived experiences of this group of teachers (Patton, 2002). Therefore, unconstrained by statistical models, predetermined categories, and instrument measurements, a phenomenological design facilitated the in-depth study of special education teachers’ experiences regarding reading instruction for children with disabilities, allowing the researcher to remain open to uncovering and interpreting patterns and themes as they appeared (Patton, 2002; van Manen, 1990). This approach expedited the collection of data in the natural setting in which the phenomenon occurred and promoted the use of multiple methods of data collection and the intimate involvement of the researcher (Creswell, 2013).

Phenomenology as a Philosophy

Hermeneutic phenomenology was the specific research design that guided this study. The term *phenomenology* is both a philosophical term and a methodological approach to research (Patton, 2002, van Manen, 1990). The philosophical definition of phenomenology is the “study of structures of consciousness as experienced from the first-person point of view” (Smith, 2013, para. 1). Essentially, the focus of phenomenology as a philosophy is the presence of the human consciousness (Giorgi, 1997). This focus of phenomenology is consistent with the definition of

phenomenology as a method of research in the sense that researchers can use it to understand the problems and experiences of humans (Giorgi, 1997; van Manen, 1990).

Phenomenology, either as a philosophy or as a methodology, is a key component of qualitative research (Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2002). The theoretical underpinnings of hermeneutic phenomenology emerged from the philosophical frameworks elucidated by Husserl (1859–1938), Heidegger (1889–1976), and Gadamer (1900–2002). Husserl (1913/2014) was instrumental in the development of hermeneutic phenomenology. Husserl claimed the critical components of phenomenology included a description of the essential meaning of the lived experiences of participants based on how this essential meaning appeared in the consciousness of the participants. Further, Husserl asserted that phenomenological reduction or bracketing of the researcher's biases, prejudices, or preconceptions of the phenomenon was necessary (Giorgi, 1997; Husserl, 1913/2014; Patton, 2002).

Heidegger, a classical phenomenologist, identified three components in the methodology of hermeneutic phenomenology (a) a description of a type of experience based on past experiences, (b) the interpretation of an experience within a social or linguistic context, and (c) an analysis of the experience (*Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2013). Although strongly influenced by Husserl, Heidegger partially rejected Husserl's view of phenomenology, specifically regarding the essence of pure description and the presence of phenomenological reduction or bracketing (Patton, 2002). In contrast, Heidegger appreciated the individual's ability to reflect upon experience and knowledge (van Manen, 1990). He believed that phenomenology was not solely a process of describing the essence of the phenomenon but that the essential meaning of experience naturally involved interpretation (van Manen, 1990; Wheeler, 2014). In addition, Heidegger argued that the hermeneutic circle facilitated

involvement in the significant task of interpretation (Wheeler, 2014). Patton defined the hermeneutic circle as “an analytical process aimed at enhancing understanding” within the realm of qualitative research (Patton, 2002, p. 497). In the hermeneutic circle, the construction of interpretation moves from the parts of the phenomenon to the whole (Patton, 2002).

Accordingly, researchers cannot understand the individual parts of the phenomenon without the whole, and the whole cannot be understood without the parts (Patton, 2002; van Manen, 1990). Through the processes of the hermeneutic circle, an interpretation emerges through a language shared between participants (Patton, 2002). The circle is not endless; eventually, a meaningful interpretation is achieved (Gadamer, 1960/1975; Patton, 2002).

Gadamer advanced the works of Heidegger in philosophical hermeneutics by suggesting that interpretation of a phenomenon was greatly dependent on the social, cultural, and historical contexts of society (Dowling, 2004; Gadamer, 1960/1975; Malpas, 2014). Gadamer and Heidegger both asserted that the concept of the phenomenological reduction of preconceptions was unrealistic and therefore not achievable (Gadamer, 1960/1975). Rather, preconceptions provided the pathway for the researcher to become involved in the interpretative process (Gadamer, 1960/1975).

Analysis and interpretation of a phenomenon emerge directly from data gathered in the form of interviews and dialogue (Patton, 2002). In this study, the use of interviews and member checking dialogue aligned with Gadamer’s (1960/1975) view of the hermeneutical conversation. According to Gadamer, hermeneutical conversation depends on a common language between text and language that fuses understanding and interpretation. In this study, the conversational interviews between the researcher and participants allowed the phenomenon to be uncovered,

revealing the deeper meanings of the experiences of special education teachers who taught reading to students with disabilities (Converse, 2011; Dowling, 2004; Gadamer, 1960/1975).

Phenomenology as a Method of Research

In choosing a specific methodology (e.g., ethnography, transcendental, historic, hermeneutic) for a phenomenological research study, the researcher must consider his or her personal interests, identify an important problem, and identify the type of data to be collected (Creswell, 2013; Glatthorn & Joyner, 2005; Merriam, 2009). Given that qualitative research by its very nature is informed by hermeneutics, the methodology of hermeneutic phenomenology was used for this study. The methodology associated with a hermeneutic phenomenology study emphasizes the exploration, description, interpretation, and understanding of the life-worlds of people (Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2002; van Manen, 1990). In this research project, the people studied were special education teachers.

The phenomenon of interest was the activity of teaching reading to children with disabilities. This methodological approach was appropriate because adhering to the tradition of hermeneutic phenomenological research can deepen the understanding and interpret the pedagogical knowledge and curriculum practices in education (van Manen, 1990). The foundation and methodological structure for conducting this hermeneutic phenomenological study followed the six research activities outlined by van Manen (1990):

- Selecting a phenomenon of interest that reflects and commits the research to the lived experiences of people
- Investigating experience as it is actually lived (by the participants and researcher) rather than as it may be conceptualized

- Identifying and reflecting upon essential themes that emerge from the data and characterize the meaning of the phenomenon
- Describing and creating a text of the lived experiences through the art of writing and rewriting
- Maintaining a strong and focused orientation to the interpretative nature of the process in an effort to uncover the essential meanings of the experiences
- Balancing the content of the research by considering the circular process of viewing the parts and wholes of essential themes (van Manen, 1990, pp. 30-31)

Qualitative research in special education can play an important role in helping to teach struggling readers (Pugach et al., 2014). According to van Manen (1990), the value and perspective of hermeneutics in education “is concerned with making visible and understandable in an existential sense the educational experiences, actions, and the changing perceptions and preconceptions of teachers, learners, and other participants of the curriculum process” (p. 214).

The purpose of this research study was not to develop a prescribed set of instructional practices deemed best suited for teaching reading to students with disabilities. Rather, this study opens up possibilities of interpretation and uncovers potential pedagogical actions that emerge from the details in the lived experiences of special education teachers. A specific objective was to explore how special education teachers act, think, feel about, and make sense of using evidence-based reading practices to teach reading to children with disabilities. As such, a hermeneutic phenomenological research approach was the most appropriate methodology for this study.

Research Questions

Central Research Question

A central research question guided the study: “What are the lived experiences and instructional intricacies of a specific group of special education teachers who use evidence-based instructional practices when teaching reading to students with disabilities?”

In addition, the following subresearch questions guided this study:

1. What themes (e.g., personal beliefs, professional judgments, and academic expectations) emerge from the voices of special education teachers when they describe their perceptions and beliefs toward evidence-based instructional reading practices?
2. How do special education teachers describe personal factors and beliefs that shape their day-to-day decision-making regarding evidence-based instructional practices used to teach reading?
3. What meanings or understandings do special education teachers attribute to their preferred practices and/or evidence-based strategies for teaching reading?
4. How do special education teachers describe the perceived benefits and effectiveness, if any, from the implementation of evidence-based instructional reading practices?
5. How do special education teachers describe professional development, training, challenges, or barriers, if any, needed to enhance evidence-based reading instruction for students with disabilities?

Setting

This study took place in the State of California. In California, regional special education consortiums, referred to as Special Education Local Plan Areas (SELPA) are responsible for

delivering all special education services throughout the state (California Department of Education, 2015). By organizing SELPAs by geographic regions, the State is able to pool the financial management and resources of state funds for special education services (California Department of Education, 2015). A SELPA region can vary in size, consisting of a group of several school districts or one large single district (California Department of Education, 2015). It is the responsibility of the regional SELPA to provide a full continuum of special education services for all students with disabilities residing in the region (Los Angeles County Office of Education, 2011).

The researcher targeted five SELPAs in the southern region of the state for recruitment of participants. These five SELPAs represented diversity in student population and disability categories (see Table 1). Diversity was essential to obtain a comprehensive perspective of special education teachers' experiences and beliefs. The researcher contacted each SELPA and utilized the SELPA contact as a resource for obtaining access to each represented school district. Once the researcher had identified potential school districts, the researcher obtained district-level permission to recruit special education teachers with varying levels of experiences.

Participants

Qualitative research studies typically rely on purposeful criterion sampling (Patton, 2002). Purposeful criterion sampling involves selecting participants who have experienced the phenomenon of interest and who meet certain qualifications (Patton, 2002; van Manen, 1990). The people most qualified to provide qualitative data about teaching reading to students with disabilities were special education teachers who lived this experience. Thus, using purposeful criterion sampling supported a deeper understanding of the phenomenon under study (Creswell, 2013).

The researcher used a purposeful criterion sampling method to recruit participants. Thus, each study participant was required to meet certain criteria. Specifically, each participant was required to:

- Hold a current state-issued certification to teach students with disabilities;
- Teach in a special education classroom, general education inclusion classroom, or a response-to-intervention (RTI) learning environment for more than 80% of the day; and
- Be currently assigned to teach reading at the K-12 grade levels.

Table 1

Special Education Enrollment by SELPA

	SELPA A	SELPA B	SELPA C	SELPA D	SELPA E
Intellectual Disability	292	757	283	227	4,234
Hard of Hearing	58	131	43	39	1,304
Deaf	0	33	12	0	335
Speech or Language Impairment	970	3,655	865	626	11,881
Visual Impairment	0	59	16	16	484
Emotional Disturbance	125	417	57	108	1,661
Orthopedic Impairment	56	126	265	34	2,243
Other Health Impairment	391	1,689	2926	194	9,048
Specific Learning Disability	1,931	6,146	0	1,413	37,899
Deaf-Blindness	0	0	0	0	12
Multiple Disability	43	192	118	37	0
Autism	297	1,593	352	521	13,494
Traumatic Brain Injury	0	11	0	0	104

Note: “Special Education Enrollment by Ethnicity and Disability,” by the California Department of Education, Special Education Division, 2014. Retrieved from dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest

Thirteen special education teachers participated in the study. Eleven participants were women and two were men (See Figure 2). Collectively, the participants' teaching experience ranged from six years to thirty years. The ages of the participants varied. One participant fell with the age range of 26 – 30. Four participants' ages fell within the age range of 31 – 40, six participants fell with the age range of 41 – 50, one fell in the age range of 51-60, and one participant fell within the age range of 61 – 70.

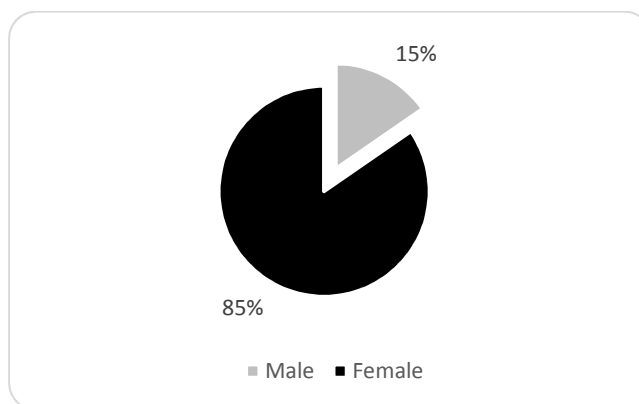


Figure 2. Percentage of female and male participants.

All of the participants had an earned Bachelor's degree, while five participants also reported an earned Master's degree. All 13 participants held state-issued educational credentials in order to provide instructional services to students with disabilities. Specific certifications included Special Education – Mild/Moderate, Special Education – Moderate/Severe, Special Education Resource Services, and Autism Spectrum Certification. Additional certifications reported by participants included authorizations in autism, reading instruction, and cross-cultural language (See Figure 3).

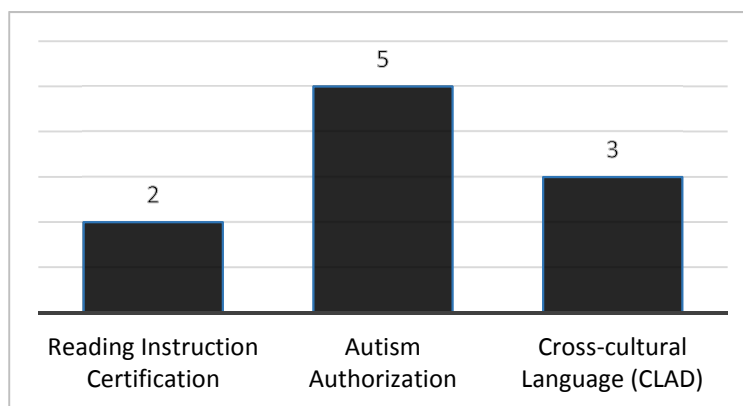


Figure 3. Participants additional earned educational certification.

Participants in the study held various classroom assignments (see Figure 4). Two participants taught in self-contained classrooms for elementary students with moderate to severe disabilities and one participant was assigned to a self-contained classroom for high school students with moderate to severe disabilities. Three participants taught in self-contained classrooms for students with mild to moderate disabilities. One participant was assigned to a self-contained classroom for middle school students with high functioning autism.

One participant taught in a self-contained classroom for students with emotional and/or behavior disorders. Two participants reported working in a response-to-intervention (RTI) or reading lab. The RTI reading labs provided reading instruction for students with and without disabilities. Three participants reported working in a special education resource room. They reported that students were provided special education services within the resource room as well as in the general education classroom. A descriptive profile of each participant appears in a later section. In this report, using pseudonyms to refer to participants helped to preserve confidentiality.

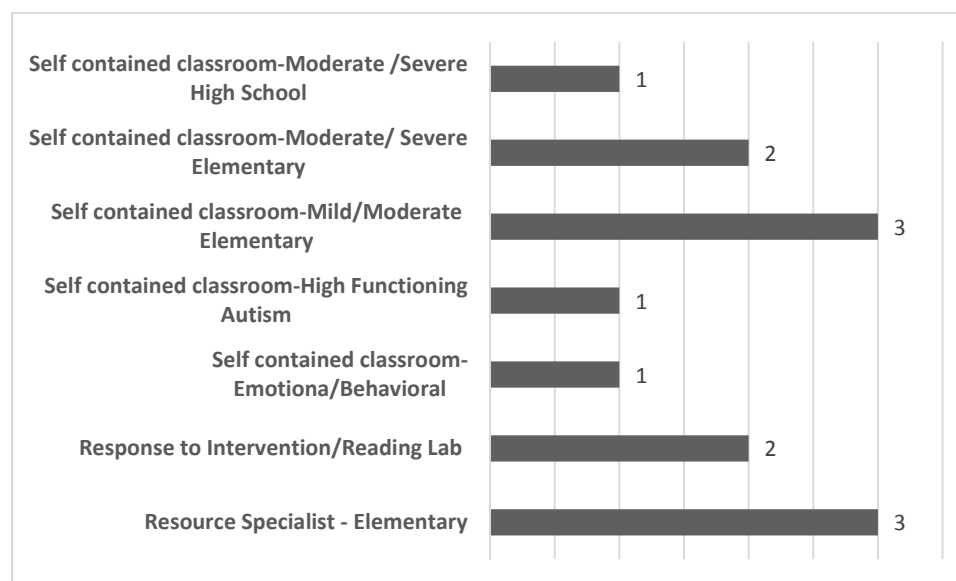


Figure 4. Participants Classroom Assignments.

In qualitative studies, sample sizes can range from three to 30 participants (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2002). Small sample sizes are preferable because they expedite the collection of in-depth information (Patton, 2002). For this study, the researcher recruited 15 special education teachers. Two special education teachers who initially completed the demographic questionnaire and interview withdrew from the study for personal reasons, leaving 13 participants.

The researcher conducted the data collection and analysis process up to and including the 12th participant. At that point, the researcher reviewed the pattern of words, phrases, and initial codes from the 12 participants and noted the absence of any new data or new initial codes. The depth and detailed data collected as well the non-emergence of initial codes suggested that data saturation had occurred. The determination of data saturation typically occurs at the point when the researcher determines that no new data, codes, or themes are likely to occur during the data collection (Mason, 2010; Patton, 2002).

In order to verify data saturation, the researcher sent recruitment notices to ten additional prospective teachers. From the ten recruitment notices, one participant responded and was recruited for the study. The researcher conducted the semistructured interview, observation, and document analysis as per the data collection protocol. Upon analysis of the data collected, the researcher determined that the 13th participant contributed no new data nor initial codes, thereby confirming that data saturation had been achieved after the 12th participant.

Procedures

The researcher obtained all documentation and required Institutional Review Board (IRB) authorizations prior to the start of data collection (see Appendix A). The researcher used postal mail, telephone, and e-mail inquiries to gain access into the SELPAs and selected school districts. After receiving access, the researcher conducted additional telephone and e-mail inquiries to locate individuals who were accessible, willing, and met the criteria for participation in the study. The target population consisted of special education teachers assigned to teach reading to students with disabilities. All participants reviewed and signed informed consent forms.

Data collection included a minimum of one in-depth interview with each participating special education teacher at his or her school site or at a mutually agreed-upon site. Each digitally recorded, semistructured interview lasted approximately 30 to 45 minutes. The researcher maintained a journal to record field notes and personal reflections. The researcher transcribed all interviews as quickly as possible after the interview sessions using a transcription service. In addition, the researcher observed each special education teacher in his or her classroom setting for approximately 1.0 to 1.5 hours. The researcher did not record classroom observations; instead, the researcher took field notes in a field journal.

Data files were stored as password-protected computer files in the researcher's personal home office. Data analyses began with the reading of the transcripts from the interviews, observations, and field notes. The researcher categorized significant statements made by individuals into meaningful units. Next, the researcher identified and developed the emergent patterns and themes into descriptive textual narratives. The text of the narratives consisted of the most important results and conclusions that emerged from the data.

The researcher developed tables, graphs, and charts to present the summaries of the thematic codes, field notes, and transcripts. In this dissertation, appropriate descriptions accompany all tables, graphs, and charts that represent pertinent findings. Drawing upon the data collected during observations and document analysis allowed the researcher to reflect, analyze, and interpret teachers' experiences regarding the phenomenon of teaching reading to children with disabilities.

All research participants received fictitious names, which the researcher used throughout the study and when describing the study results. During and after the study, the anonymity of participant responses remained confidential in all oral and written documentation.

Overview of Study Methods

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to uncover the deeper meanings, experiences, and interpretations of a group of special education teachers who teach reading to students with disabilities. Phenomenological research resides in finding meaning based on the lived experiences of participants, in order to understand and interpret the phenomenon (Patton, 2002; van Manen, 1990). Previous research found that special education teachers utilized instructional practices that they deemed feasible and appropriate for their students (Boardman et al., 2005). Extending upon those results, this study focused on

interpreting the special education teachers' knowledge and understanding regarding evidence-based reading instruction, as well as on exploring their beliefs and perceptions toward the implementation of such practices.

The researcher used three data collection methods for this study. The researcher utilized semistructured interviews in order to collect data that revealed the deeper perspectives and beliefs meanings of the lived experiences of special education teachers. Classroom observations and an analysis of related documents further triangulated the data collection process.

Interviews continued until the point of data saturation occurred. Data saturation was determined to occur when no new or additional dimension of the problem under study was reported by the study participants. The researcher determined that data saturation occurred after the 13th interview. The data collection period extended over four months.

A professional transcriptionist created written transcripts from the recorded interviews. The researcher provided each participant with written transcripts of the interviews by postal mail or e-mail, thereby giving each participant the opportunity to review the documents for validity and accuracy. The researcher made observational notes on an Observation Notes form (see Appendix E). In addition, as soon as possible after each interview, the researcher wrote field notes and comments. These notes consisted of the researcher's general reflections of the interview (e.g., notations representing the mood, tone, and nature of the interview). These field notes served to ensure reflexivity and control of research biases (see Appendix F).

The analyses of the data began after the first interview session. After transcription of the interview, the researcher read and reread the written transcripts. The researcher also listened to the taped interview twice, and then highlighted key phrases that repeated. Key phrases, words,

and thoughts that occurred and reoccurred throughout the tapes and the transcripts received labels as initial categories for theme development.

The researcher arranged participants' statements and references to key terms (i.e. reading instruction, beliefs, students with disabilities) as initial codes (see Appendix G) The researcher repeated the process of listening to the taped interviews, reading, and rereading the written interview, observational, and documentation data collected from each study participant. Then the researcher arranged, organized and grouped similarly coded data into categories (see Appendix H).

After an initial review of the data collection process by an external auditor, the researcher proceeded to continue the examination of data obtained from the interview transcripts, documentation analysis, observation transcripts, and field notes in order to identify broad themes. These themes represented specific categories aligned with the research questions of this study.

The Researcher's Role

The focus of this dissertation research was on understanding the personal experiences of special education teachers regarding reading practices for children with disabilities, specifically in the area of evidence-based practices. The decision to use a qualitative research design predetermined the role of the researcher in the research process. In qualitative research, humans are the instrument used to plan, observe, gather, examine, and interpret data (Stake, 2010).

At the time of this study, the primary researcher was a doctoral candidate at Liberty University. During this study, the researcher was actively involved in the entire process as the sole individual responsible for all interviews and observations. The intention was to assume the role of an outside observer, which meant refraining from participating in any classroom activities

or instruction of the students. In addition, the researcher was solely responsible for the collection and analysis of the data.

It is important to acknowledge that the researcher entered into this research study with personal philosophical assumptions and beliefs regarding the importance of reading instruction and the purpose of evidence-based reading instruction for special education students. In addition, it bears noting that the researcher maintained strong Christian values and employed a biblical worldview and interpretation of life. To deny children an opportunity to learn how to read because of the existence of a disability conflicted with the biblical belief that all children are uniquely and wonderfully made and have a purpose in life (Psalm 139:14, NKJV).

Keeping reflective journal notes can reduce bias in a qualitative study (Merriam 2009; Patton, 2002). In order to reduce potential bias, the researcher maintained a detailed written field journal. Use of a reflective journal gave the researcher a method through which to reflect on and acknowledge feelings that arose throughout the process of this study.

It is important for researchers to disclose assumptions that may occur during the course of data collection (Merriam, 2009). Several assumptions emerged in this study. First, special educators may not feel comfortable in fully disclosing aspects of their teaching practices. This means that some special educators may not provide honest and truthful responses; rather, they may attempt to provide politically correct answers.

In order to alleviate this assumption, all efforts were made to make the special education teachers feel comfortable and at ease during our conversation. The researcher accomplished this goal by employing an interviewing style that resembled a conversation between two professional educators rather than an interview for a news report. In addition, participants received an explanation of how the researcher would maintain confidentiality. The researcher also reviewed

in detail the Informed Consent Form, assuring participants they could refuse to answer any questions that made them uncomfortable and that they had the option to withdraw from the study at any time.

The researcher assumed that all the special education teachers were experienced in and embraced the importance of reading instruction. The researcher assumed that special education teachers knew the processes and components involved in reading instruction. Questions on the Demographic Survey addressed this assumption: Special education teachers reported their state-issued certifications and additional training certifications for teaching students with disabilities on the Demographic Survey.

Finally, the researcher assumed that special education teachers may have beliefs and views regarding reading instruction for students with disabilities that differed from general education teachers, administrators, federal or state legislators. This assumption may make it difficult for special educators to recognize and implement EBI practices with fidelity. Noting these assumptions prepared the researcher to anticipate, monitor, and understand their potential impact on the data collection (Merriam, 2009).

Data Collection

The data collection methods in this study were consistent with the requirements of a hermeneutic phenomenological study (Patton, 2002; van Manen, 1990). The specific methods used consisted of a demographic questionnaire, semistructured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis. The use of multiple sources of data collection formed the basis of data collection triangulation, which increased the validity and reliability of the study (Patton, 2002). All required documentation and approvals were obtained from the Liberty University Institutional Review Board prior to any data collection.

Demographic Questionnaire

The researcher used a demographic questionnaire to collect background and demographic information from each participant. The researcher collected and used these data for descriptive purposes; the researcher did not quantify or analyze these responses. The demographic questionnaire is included in Appendix B. The researcher administered the questionnaire during the process of obtaining informed consent.

Interviews

The hermeneutic interview can produce valuable material for interpreting personal experiences, idiomatic phrases and expressions, and the reconstruction of life stories (van Manen, 1984). Given that the emphasis of a phenomenological study is on understanding the meaning of participants' lived experiences, gathering data from interviews was appropriate for this study (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012; van Manen, 1984). As the human instrument in this qualitative study, the researcher was responsible for scheduling and conducting all interviews.

Prior to scheduling any interviews or observations, the researcher contacted each participant by either telephone or e-mail. During the recruitment process, the researcher discussed the nature of the study and the phenomenon of interest with each potential participant. This step was necessary in order to initiate the process of establishing rapport with each participant and move toward an integral and interactive dialogue (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012; Vandermause & Fliming, 2011).

Data collection included one 30- to 45-minute interview with each participating special education classroom teacher. Individual interviews took place with each teacher at a mutually agreed upon time and place. The researcher obtained permission from participants to conduct

follow-up telephone interviews in the event further clarification or validation was needed (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012).

Although interviews are a rich and contextual source of qualitative data, the researcher must be careful not to lead or influence responses from interview participants (Harris & Brown, 2010). In order to ensure rigor in a qualitative study and obtain reliable data to capture the actual lived experience, experts have recommended that researchers carefully align the interview questions with the theoretical framework and literature of the study (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). Accordingly, the researcher used a protocol template consisting of a script, prompts, and appropriate research references to guide the semistructured, face-to-face interview sessions. In addition, the interview protocol was aligned with the central research question, subresearch questions, and interview questions (see Appendix C). The interview questions (see Appendix D) were as follows:

1. Please describe your class (e.g., number of students, class demographics, disability groupings, etc.).
2. How long have you been a special education teacher?
3. How would you describe a typical day in your life as a special education teacher?
4. How would you define evidence-based instructional practices?
5. Do you feel educational initiatives (i.e., No Child Left Behind, evidence-based instruction, Common Core state standards) have changed the way we have implemented reading instruction for students with disabilities? Why or why not?
6. Have these or any other educational initiatives, changed your expectations and anticipated outcomes of reading proficiency for your students?

7. Describe your current feelings, perceptions, and/or beliefs about EBI reading instruction for students with disabilities.
8. Tell me about the factors or personal beliefs (if any) that influence your implementation of evidence-based reading practices in your classroom.
9. Think about one specific student that you have experienced success with during your reading instruction. Tell me how your reading instruction occurs with this student.
10. How would you describe your students' response to evidence-based reading instruction?
11. Tell me about the barriers, challenges, or issues (if any) you have faced in providing evidence-based reading instruction for your students.
12. Thank you very much for sharing your teaching experiences with me. What, if anything, have I not asked that you really wanted to share with me today?

Understanding lived experiences is the essence of a hermeneutic phenomenology study (van Manen, 1990, Patton, 2001). Interview Questions 1 and 2 gathered meaningful data in order to explicate the lived-world experiences of special education teachers who teach children with disabilities. This question was needed in order to collect descriptive data that could lead to detailed analyses of what it means to be a special education teacher responsible for reading instruction (van Manen, 1990). Extracting the personal epistemological beliefs of special education teachers was critical in order to understand and analyze the lived experiences of special education teachers (Hofer & Pintrich, 1997; Schommer, 1990). Although researchers have examined the beliefs and experiences of pre-service special education teachers and general education teachers in a variety of content area (e.g., math, science, physical education), the results from these studies may not be aligned with the lived experiences of special education

teachers who teach reading to children with disabilities (He & Levin, 2008; Temiz & Topeu, 2013; Tobin & Tippet, 2014).

Previous researchers have revealed that teachers are prone to distrust knowledge explicated by research (Boardman et al., 2005). Teachers often defer to their own personal experiences and beliefs when teaching a specific domain (Cameron & Cook, 2013; Cheng et al., 2009; Joram, 2007; Klehm, 2014). Interview Questions 3, 4, and 5 elicited the epistemological perspectives and personal beliefs from which special education teachers decide how and what instructional methods are appropriate for teaching reading to children with disabilities.

Educators know little about the instructional practices that may be beneficial for teaching reading to students with disabilities (McLeskey et al., 2012). Limited research is also available that supports the effectiveness of EBI reading practices for children with mild disabilities (NRP, 2000; U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, What Works Clearinghouse, 2015). Researchers have suggested that when teachers mistrust or are unsure of EBI, they may return to their own personal choices of instructional practices (Boardman et al., 2005). The researcher included Interview Questions 6, 7, and 8 to explore these issues.

Interview Questions 9 and 10 collected data to help illuminate how teachers provide EBI processes, accommodations, and supports in a classroom setting that may include a heterogeneous group of children with varying educational strengths and weaknesses. Federal legislation has long been in existence to ensure that children with disabilities receive a free and appropriate education (IDEA, 2004; NCLB, 2001). Federal mandates require EBI implementation for schools that receive federal funding (IDEA, 2004; NCLB, 2001). This requirement applies to students in the general education setting as well as to students in a special

education setting. In addition, schools must give students with disabilities access to the same educational content provided to their nondisabled peers (IDEA, 2004; NCLB, 2001).

Limited information is available to guide special education teachers in the use of EBI (Allor et al., 2014; Cook & Cook, 2011). Few research studies have been implemented using the standards set for EBI that address what may be effective for children with disabilities (Berkeley et al., 2010; Henley et al., 2006). Hence, the researcher developed Interview Questions 11 and 12 to explore additional reading practices perceived to be effective in the special education classroom environment.

After the researcher received official IRB approval, the researcher arranged a pilot test of the interview protocol and questions with a select group of volunteer teachers and education experts. Conducting a pilot test of the questions with educational experts and others close to the population to be studied allowed the researcher to hone interviewing skills and helped to ensure that the interview questions were clear and appropriate (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). This step in the methodology of data collection also enhanced the rigor and validity of the conclusions drawn from the lived experiences and perspectives of the research participants (Creswell, 2013; van Manen, 1990). Data collected from the pilot was not included as part of the study results.

Observations

In a qualitative study, observations provide an opportunity for the researcher to enter into and spend time in the “real” world of the study participants in order to capture data as events are happening (Durkin, 1978; van Manen, 2009). Van Manen (1990) claimed that close observations facilitates the collection of anecdotes, which researchers can then align with themes that may emerge from interviews and document analysis. In this study, the researcher conducted one observation session lasting approximately 45 minutes with each participant.

The researcher used an observation form to capture the stories and experiences of a day in the life of a special education teacher (see Appendix E). The specific purpose of the observation form was to capture information observed during the reading instructional block for each study participant. General sections of the form provided space to write descriptions of the teacher's instructional reading content, methods of instruction, organization and clarity of lessons, teaching form, and extent of student participation.

During the classroom observation, the researcher played the role of an outside observer and refrained from participating or assisting in any student instruction. The researcher did not videotape or audiotape these sessions; however, the researcher took field notes. The field notes contained descriptions and drawings of the physical setting, the people and their interactions, short notes or paraphrased comments, and conversations, and lesson activities. The researcher reviewed and transcribed the field notes in a timely manner (i.e., within 24 to 48 hours) in order to ensure accuracy of the recalled events.

Document Analyses

Collecting written documents is another way to obtain qualitative data that do not intrude upon or "alter the setting in ways that the presence of the investigator often does" (Merriam, 2009, p. 139). In other words, data gathered from written documents can be interpreted without manipulation or alteration incurred by the presence of the researcher (Merriam, 2009). Qualitative research documents can include written, visual, digital, and physical materials (Merriam, 2009).

In this study, the written documents collected from the special education teachers included written or electronic lesson plans, policy documents on EBI reading practices, written information from professional development and onsite trainings, student work samples (e.g.,

student assignments), and objects in the classroom. Other types of documents submitted included curriculum materials, worksheets, and books. The collection of documents occurred in direct alignment with the central research question and subresearch questions 1 and 2.

First, the researcher determined the authenticity and nature of the documents, as recommended by Merriam (2009). Accordingly, the researcher reviewed each document and determined whether the document contained pertinent information or insights relevant to the research study. The researcher ensured confidentiality of all study participants and students by removing any personal identification, such as name, school site, and student number. In this study, the researcher did not collect or analyze any documents related to the IEPs of students with identified disabilities that affected their learning.

Although some researchers have found that the use of documents as a method of gathering data is problematic (e.g., determining authenticity and encountering information that is not understandable or complete), documents are still useful in qualitative research (Merriam, 2009). The researcher electronically scanned and stored all relevant documents on a personal computer. The researcher read, reread, and coded these documents with the assistance of qualitative computer software (e.g. Atlas.ti). The researcher reviewed the documents to search for descriptive information that could provide a historical understanding of the phenomenon and verified emerging themes that directly connected to the research questions, classroom observations, and participants' interviews.

One potential limitation appeared during the collection of written document. Although the researcher discussed with each study participant the type of documents considered most beneficial, the researcher understood there was no way to control or access this information directly. The researcher assumed that the study participants were forthcoming in their

submission of appropriate documents. This may represent a limitation in the study design; however, the collection of written documents also provided insight into the planning and decision-making processes special education teachers' used when implementing instructional reading practices.

Data Analyses

The general process of data analyses included reading and rereading transcribed interviews, notes, and written documents collected during the study, as well as developing initial codes and categories to support the data analyses. General categories that emerged were analyzed and open coding applied with the assistance of Atlas.ti qualitative computer software. In the development of themes, the following definition was applied: "Theme is the experience of focus, of meaning, of point" (van Manen, 1990, p. 87).

First, in accordance with van Manen's (1990) data analyses approach, the researcher engaged in a holistic reading of the data. The initial stage of data analyses began with the data collected from the first participant demographic questionnaire, interview, observation, and work document. For each participant, the researcher closely read and reread each data source several times. The researcher listened to the audio recordings of the interviews multiple times. This step of reading (and rereading) of the transcripts, observation notes, documents, journal reflections, and audio recordings of the interviews allowed the researcher to become deeply immersed in the data. The researcher studied all data and carefully examined them for important or recurring patterns.

The hermeneutic circle refers to the methodological process in which the meaning of the whole text depends on understanding the individual parts of the text (Schwandt, 2007). The researcher applied this hermeneutic circle of connectivity throughout the interpretation and

analysis of the collected data. The researcher expected this process of data analyses to establish a relationship between the individual themes that appeared and thus reveal the abstract essence and meaning of the experiences of special education teachers.

The process of data connectivity within the hermeneutic circle included looking for statements, content, language, and repetitive comments or phrases that revealed the lived experiences of the participants (van Manen, 1990). The researcher used qualitative data analyses software (e.g. Atlas.ti) to capture and code field memo notes into emergent categories. As the researcher continued to collect interview and observation data, the process of looking at each text datum (i.e., the whole) as well as each statement within the text (i.e., the part) replicated the hermeneutic circle (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2002).

The researcher categorized the codes that emerged to facilitate interpretation of the phenomenon of teaching reading to children with disabilities. The researcher compiled a rich, deep, and descriptive narrative that represented the voices of the special education teachers (van Manen, 1990). According to Kinsella (2006), data analyses that lead to interpretation in a hermeneutic study “recognize the uniquely situated nature, historically and linguistically influenced, and the ambiguous nature of interpretation, and offers such for readers to engage with, or not, as they wish” (Kinsella, 2006, para. 34).

After transcribing the individual interviews and classroom observations, the researcher employed member checking. Member checking is a process that allows an opportunity for study participants to validate and correct any errors or incorrect interpretations resulting from the interviews (Merriam, 2009). The use of member checking helped to establish the validity and credibility of a research project (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2002). The researcher asked participants if the descriptive and interpretive themes represented the experiences they shared in

their interviews. The researcher also gave participants the opportunity to clarify or challenge any perceived misinterpretations.

The researcher used the feedback received from member checking to ensure that the researcher spent prolonged time and engagement in the environment in which the phenomenon occurred (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2002). The researcher incorporated any feedback received from the process of member checking into the study interpretations, themes, and analysis. This incorporation of participant feedback was consistent with a phenomenological research methodology (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2002). Exploration of the data continued until all major aspects or dimensions emerged. The researcher interwove the emergent themes into a rich, deep, and descriptive narrative that represented the voices of the special education teachers.

Trustworthiness

Qualitative research must be trustworthy and credible in order to be useful (Patton, 2002). In qualitative research, methodological triangulation can increase validity and provide a deeper source of understanding of the phenomenon (Patton, 2002). This is an important feature of qualitative research: A single method of data collection is unlikely to reveal or uncover the true essence of a phenomenon (Patton, 2002).

In order to validate the findings from this study and establish trustworthiness, the researcher employed methodological triangulation and member checking (Creswell, 2013; Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007; Patton, 2002). Methodological triangulation consisted of collecting data using different methods (semistructured interviews, document analyses, and classroom observations).

As previously described, member checking is an additional strategy used in qualitative research to increase trustworthiness, credibility, and internal validity of the research findings

(Merriam, 2009). Each study participant received his or her transcribed data collected from the semistructured interviews and responded with comments and feedback. Member checking helped validate the researcher's analysis and interpretations of participants' experiences.

Ethical Considerations

This study has the potential to contribute new information to the knowledge base regarding the perceptions of and beliefs about reading instruction for children with disabilities. As stipulated by Institutional Review Board (IRB) regulations, the researcher submitted all paperwork and obtained permission to conduct this study prior to the commencement of any data collection. The researcher took all appropriate measures to ensure that each individual associated with this research study was fully informed about the purpose, methods, and the intended uses of this research. The researcher documented informed consent and disclosed the purpose of the research, participants' role in the research, and the risks involved in participating in the research. This study presented minimal risk to participants.

The researcher assured each research participant of the confidentiality of all information received from the interviews, observations, and documents. Each individual participating in the interviews and observations received a fictitious name that was used during all aspects of this study. Further, the researcher maintained and respected confidentiality of information about study participants in all oral or written document produced at the conclusion of this study.

The researcher informed study participants that their participation was voluntary and no compensation would be forthcoming because of their involvement in this study. In addition, the researcher conveyed that the researcher was free from any conflict of interest or partiality in the outcome of this study. The researcher established audit trails at the outset; an independent analyst maintained the audit trails throughout the research study.

The researcher filed all documentation (including field notes, digital files, and transcripts of interviews) in physical folders. The researcher stored these folders in a locked file cabinet in a storage facility at the researcher's home. The researcher stored the key that linked participants' names to collected data separately in a locked file cabinet inside the researcher's personal home office. The researcher managed and analyzed the research process with the use of personal computer software (e.g. Atlas.ti). Encrypted passwords that the researcher alone maintained restricted access to these computer files.

Project management for this study included an overview of the day-to-day activities, relevant decisions made, personal notes, and any other data related to the implementation of the study (Creswell, 2013; Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007). Given that this study fulfilled the partial requirements of a doctoral degree, the researcher received additional oversight from the assigned research committee chairperson and committee members. In addition to the dissertation committee, the researcher consulted an external analyst not connected with the study. The external analyst examined the process, data, findings, and outcomes of the researcher's analysis. The researcher articulated and incorporated information and feedback received from the external analyst into the interpretations of the data.

Summary

This chapter provided the historical foundation for the hermeneutic phenomenology design used in the study. In addition, the researcher presented a rationale to support the appropriateness of this design for the research study, along with a description of data collection methods and an explanation of how the methods aligned with the research questions. The chapter included a detailed description and justification for the selection of the setting and participants. The researcher provided the procedures used for implementation, including details

regarding the recruitment of participants, data collection, data analyses, and interpretation. The chapter concluded with a discussion addressing how the researcher handled credibility, validity, trustworthiness, and ethical considerations during the research process.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The central aim of this study was to illuminate the lived experiences of special education teachers and to examine their beliefs and perceptions of evidence-based reading practices for students with disabilities. The researcher used a hermeneutic phenomenology study design. The data collection methods included semistructured interviews, observations, and document analysis. This chapter begins with a descriptive profile of the lived experiences of each participant. This is followed by a summary of data collected from participant interviews, classroom observations, and documentation analyses. The chapter concludes with the identification of themes and a discussion of the overall findings, aligned with each research question.

Participants

Thirteen special education teachers participated in the study. These special education teachers ranged in age from 25 – 70. The collective teaching experience of the study participants ranged from six years to thirty years. Eleven participants were women and two were men (See Figure 2). All of the participants held a Bachelor's degree as well as state certification to provide special education services to students with disabilities.

Jason

Jason had five years of experience working with students with disabilities. While working as a part-time, instructional aide and later as a substitute teacher, Jason completed his Bachelor's degree and a teaching certificate in special education. These credentials authorized

Jason to provide instruction and special education support to students with primarily moderate to severe disabilities in grades 1 through 12.

After obtaining his state teacher certification, Jason began his professional career as a high school special education teacher. Self-determination and the desire to help all students develop academic and functional life skills were important components of Jason's teaching philosophy. He expressed both excitement and reservation at the implementation of a new reading program recently acquired by his district.

Alisha

Alisha possessed a wealth of experience in both the general and special education classrooms as a curriculum and literacy coach and as an administrator. After leaving her previous school district, Alisha worked for several years as a learning resource representative for a major curricula distributor. When she returned to the teaching arena, she elected to work in the special education classroom. Alisha's global perspective of teaching and learning provided the pathway for her smooth transition as a resource specialist for grades 1 through 6.

Alisha admitted she struggled at the outset to keep current on the volumes of paperwork, including IEPs, parent reports, and progress monitoring data. Alisha reported she frequently took paperwork home and managed to get most of her IEP paperwork completed just within the required time parameters. The bookshelf behind her desk contained binders filled with student reports and student work samples, evidence of her continual collection and monitoring of student data. Alisha's belief that all children could learn how to read fueled her drive and commitment to provide quality instruction based on the individual needs of her students.

Rachael

Rachael conceptualized her beliefs and knowledge of reading instruction from a more traditional approach. She categorized and neatly housed her reading books in book bins according to reading levels. Her neatly organized desk was in a corner of the classroom. She arranged student desks in neat rows. Rachael's previous experience as a general education teacher accounted for the more traditional design of her classroom.

Rachael conducted computerized reading quizzes and daily reading assignments on a weekly basis. Rachael reviewed weekly reports and guided her planning and instruction for whole-group and mini lessons. The data provided the basis of daily work assignments for her instructional aides, who provided additional support and monitored student progress on IEP goals.

Danielle

Structure and daily routines were dominant in Daniele's self-contained classroom. Her daily routine poster provided the visual foundation of instruction for her fourth through sixth grade students with moderate to severe disabilities. Although Danielle shared the focus of daily instruction with several additional service providers (e.g., speech and language, adaptive physical education, occupational therapy), she was generally able to maintain a daily routine that enabled students to work on their educational and reading goals.

In Danielle's life as a special educator, people always filled her classroom. Given that her students fell within a range of disabilities from moderate to severe, her daily activities included functional and life skills training (e.g., social skills, hygiene, toileting, feeding) and academic development (e.g., story time, tracing, writing, number recognition). Danielle expressed the need to create or adapt her own materials to align with the ability levels of her

students. She indicated that her school district was in the midst of adopting a new reading curriculum for students with moderate to severe disabilities; however, she “wasn’t too impressed” with what she had seen thus far. According to Danielle, “No matter what they give me, I’ll still need to modify” (personal communication, February 23, 2016).

Inez

Inez had just over six years of teaching experience. Inez’s exuberant personality made her a perfect fit as a primary special education teacher for grades 1 through 3. In terms of her lesson planning for the week, each day contained hands-on activities and interactions, both within her classroom and within the general education population. Inez was particularly excited about her collaboration with the general education first and sixth grade classes for buddy reading.

Inez’s collaboration with the general education teachers at her school did not stop with just the reading-buddy program. She also participated on a district-appointed team charged with piloting two reading curricula being considering for adoption. As a pilot teacher, Inez had the responsibility of learning and delivering the pilot programs and evaluating which program might best fit the needs of the district.

However, Inez also considered the new curricula in light of the needs of her primary level special education students. Inez felt it was important to examine the supplemental curricula materials provided with each proposed reading program. She considered phonics and vocabulary the most essential elements of a research-based reading program.

Malcolm

Malcolm had been a special education teacher for 10 years, all in a self-contained classroom for students with emotional and behavior issues. The scope and range of ages and

academic levels limited his use of whole-group reading instruction. As a result, Malcolm typically developed reading lessons for individual students based on each student's grade level and academic capabilities.

Malcolm indicated that he was shocked but pleased when he learned earlier in the school year that the school would provide individual laptops for his students. Technology and an online curriculum made it possible to individualize language and literacy lessons that aligned with each student's academic capabilities. As a result, Malcolm found he was able to focus more time on eradicating problem behaviors with the goal of returning students to the general education environment.

Bianca

Over the past 30 years, Bianca saw many changes in the field of education and teaching. She witnessed changes in methodologies, teaching philosophies, and the wars over the value of whole language and phonics. However, her belief throughout all of these changes was that children must learn how to read from teachers.

As a young child, Bianca indicated that reading and playing teacher were her favorite pastimes. When her mother sent her outside to play, she rounded up all of her stuffed animals and seated them at the table for story time. Bianca smiled when she stated, "As a kid, no one in my family considered my idea of playing fun. Perhaps that's why my students were always stuffed animals. By the same token, no one was surprised when I became a teacher" (personal communication, February 1, 2016).

Bianca's entire teaching career involved literacy. Her life experiences included time spent at the elementary and middle school levels. She also earned additional certifications in

speech and language, literacy, administration, and special education. She earned recognition throughout her district as a knowledgeable source for reading instruction.

Not long after her retirement, Bianca recognized it was impossible for her to walk away from her role as a teacher. Working with her former district, she developed and implemented an after-school homework-intervention program. Naturally, the focus of the program's intervention was reading.

After implementing the homework-intervention program, Bianca tried again to retire. However, soon her current principal asked her to transform her after-school homework program into a reading-intervention program for struggling readers. Once again, Bianca could not say no. After Bianca developed the structure and aligned intervention strategies with the targeted first-grade curriculum, her principal and staff accepted the new reading lab. At the time of this interview, the reading lab was in the middle of its second year and educators had expanded it to include first- and second-grade struggling readers.

Bianca depended on the experience and skills of other retired teachers to help run the reading lab. Neither Bianca nor the retired teachers worked for the money. The program existed to fill a community's need. Bianca's commitment to the reading lab and literacy development supported her personal beliefs that teachers can teach and coach all students through the reading process.

Shivaun

Shivaun began her career as an instructional aide in a moderate-to-severe special education classroom. After 10 years as an instructional aide, she returned to college to obtain her teaching credential in special education. The determination to accomplish her educational goals and a drive to get things done existed throughout her life. In the midst of finishing her teacher

education course work, she found it necessary to work full-time as a substitute teacher. She successfully completed her teacher certification and worked as a special education teacher for students with moderate to severe disabilities for six years.

A typical day for Shivaun entailed arriving at her classroom an hour before school started and remaining one to two hours after students left. During school hours, she focused on following a daily schedule and worked directly with her students.

Llasmin

Llasmin possessed a wealth of information regarding literacy and reading instruction. After teaching in the elementary classroom for 11 years, she took time off to become a stay-at-home mother. Following a series of life changes, Llasmin eventually decided to return to school and focused on literacy instruction. She held a combination of positions, including her most current position as a reading specialist in a response-to-intervention program at an elementary school. At the time of this interview, she also provided consulting and professional development workshops for a local private school. In addition, she volunteered at an adult literacy program held at the local public library. Her broad range of experiences supported her belief that it is never too late to help struggling readers.

Llasmin lived through the shifting debates about what constituted best reading practices. In her efforts to understand reading instruction, Llasmin experienced the phonics versus whole-language war, implementation of accountability measures (and sanctions), various federal mandates, and a demand that all teachers be highly qualified to teach in their field, and most recently, the adoption of the Common Core State Standards.

Natalie

Natalie was a veteran teacher who began her teaching career in the general education classroom. After 10 years as an elementary general education teacher, she returned to school to earn her Master's degree and special education certification. She felt she had found her calling as a resource teacher for students with learning difficulties.

After nearly five years as a special education resource teacher, Natalie made the decision to move to another school district. Lured in part by a higher pay scale, the move also put her closer to the new home that she and her husband had recently purchased to accommodate their growing family. However, what seemed to be a good move was the worst decision of her career. Although the school assigned her to a mild-to-moderate primary classroom, she worked with the more profoundly and severely handicapped students.

Clarissa

Clarissa was a special education teacher for 18 years. At the time of this study, Clarissa worked in a primary self-contained special education classroom and as a resource specialist. Clarissa expressed strong feelings about how teaching students with disabilities had changed over the years. She enjoyed working with students with special needs and felt positive about finding ways to customize the delivery of reading instruction, so that all students could learn.

Serena

Serena demonstrated her personal qualities of motivation, mindset, and high expectations in her classroom setup and management. As a resource support teacher, she had the responsibility of supporting and developing the reading competencies of students in grades 1 through 6. Her caseload of 28 students confirmed the strength and resilience needed to meet the individual needs of each of these students.

Serena welcomed any type of help and assistance afforded to her. Serena had experience in three special education models. These models included a pull out model, a push-in model, and a universal access model. In the pull out model, special education resource teachers pull students out of their general education classroom. Reading instruction was provided in the special education resource room. The push-in model was used when the special education resource teacher provided academic support in the general education classroom. Serena also had experience in a universal access model. In this model, the special education teacher provided specialized reading intervention instruction to both general and special education students. Both general and special education students are taught in the resource room and are provided reading strategies and scaffolding tools that they can use to access the core curriculum in the general education environment.

Winnie

Winnie left her first career in the banking industry to become a special education teacher nine years ago. For nine years, she had been a special education teacher for students with high functioning autism. She earned teaching certificates in special education, cross-cultural language, and autism. Winnie also had a Master's degree in special education.

Winnie had always had a special interest in the field of autism. When she began her current teaching assignment, very few documented educational programs existed for students with high functioning autism. District leaders asked Winnie to develop a specific program for the middle school in her district. During the process of interaction and discussions with students with autism and their parents, she discovered her passion for teaching and her life calling.

Winnie developed a specialized program designed to address the specific and unique needs of middle school students diagnosed with high functioning Autism Spectrum Disorder

and/or Asperger Syndrome. Educators assign students to general education academic classes during the day. Winnie and her staff of paraprofessional aides accompanied students throughout the day. Winnie collaborated and cotaught assigned classes daily. Embedded within the program, Winnie was responsible for two periods of direct instruction to address social skills and pragmatic language development. Winnie handled behavior, work completion, and modification of assignments during the two instructional periods.

Results

The purpose of this study was to understand and interpret the beliefs and perceptions of evidence-based reading instruction as described by 13 special education teachers. The researcher implemented a hermeneutic phenomenological study that followed the six methodological features outlined by van Manen (1990). The six methodological features included:

- research on a phenomenon of interest;
- investigation of experiences as lived by individuals;
- continual reflection on the essential themes that characterized the phenomenon;
- the development of a written description of the phenomenon;
- orientation of a pedagogical relationship in context to the phenomenon; and
- an analysis of the parts and whole (van Manen, 1990).

The researcher collected data in the form of interviews, observations, and pertinent documentation. As recommended by van Manen (1990), the researcher began the analysis of the

data using a detailed reading approach. After a review of the interview transcripts, observation field notes, and submitted documents, the researcher developed an initial code list (see Appendix G). The researcher continued to read and re-read through the data, searching for sentences and sentence clusters that further illuminated the experiences of the special education teachers.

Further analysis of the data allowed the researcher resulted in the determining categories or groups that represented the sentences and sentence clusters voiced by the participants (see Appendix H). The cycle of continual analysis provided the researcher of the principal topics addressed by the participants. The responses represented were extensive and is included in Appendix I. The researcher discerned three relevant and meaningful themes that expressed the lived experiences of the 13 special education teachers.

The three themes that emerged from the data were (a) Knowledge sources, (b) Environmental diversities, and (c) Organizational constraints. These themes provided the researcher a phenomenological framework to present the findings of this study.

Interviews

Thirteen special education teachers participated in this study. The researcher and participants mutually agreed upon the individual appointment times and locations. An interview protocol allowed for a systematic interview process. This process was beneficial and insured that the voices of each special education teacher was documented. As agreed upon during the orientation and informed consent process, the researcher audiotaped all interviews and arranged for professionally written transcripts. Interviews ranged in time from 34 - 49 minutes.

The process of member checking allowed each participant the opportunity to review his or her interview transcript. The researcher provided a copy of the individual transcript to each

participant. The participants reviewed the document for accuracy and completeness. None of the participants requested any changes or corrections to the transcripts.

The hermeneutic interview provided each participant an opportunity to talk about their experiences as a special education teacher, as well as their beliefs and perceptions about evidence-based instructional reading practices. Questions 1, 2, and 3 provided each participant an opportunity to reflect on their lived experiences as a special education teacher. Participants offered various stories and vignettes to describe a typical day in their life. With the exception of Questions 7 and 9, participants spent the most time talking and discussing their daily activities.

The researcher continued the interviews with Questions 4, 5 and 6. Participants appeared to take more time to consider their response to these two questions. Some of the participants appeared to hesitate a moment before answering these questions. Participants were able to articulate clearly their understanding of evidence-based instruction as well as their feelings regarding federal and state educational initiatives.

Participants provided positive and negative responses to question seven and eight. Again, participants provided a student story that explained their feelings and beliefs regarding evidence-based reading practices for students with disabilities. Interestingly, one participant indicated that she had no beliefs.

Prior to answering question 9, most participants took a moment to select one particular student and all were able to share that student's success story. After sharing stories of success, participants appeared to use question ten to explain how one story of success was difficult to generalize for other students with disabilities. Finally, question 11 and 12 allowed participants to discuss their concerns and barriers that affected their reading instruction for students with disabilities.

All participants contributed to Questions 11 and 12; however, only one participant appeared to vent a sense of frustrations. Responses to Question 11 and 12 provided substantial data and significantly contributed to the themes developed in this study. The researcher ended the interview sessions with an opportunity for participants to add any topic or issue that they felt was relevant. Only one participant clarified a previous answer related to motivation. The remaining participants expressed that the interview seemed to be comprehensive and they had nothing further to add. Following the completion of the interview process, the researcher compiled all of the interview transcripts to analyze and code using the initial code list (see Appendix G).

Observations

Classroom observations of teachers not only provided valuable data, but also showed teaching practices in a context that allowed a better understanding of the experiences of special education teachers. This method of data collection provided an opportunity for the researcher to see and hear information that may not have clearly emerged during the semistructured interviews (Patton, 2002). The data added to the depth of knowledge of the lived experiences and beliefs of special education teachers regarding evidence-based instructional reading practices.

Jason. Jason's classroom was second in a row of four portable classrooms located at the back of the school next to the parking lot. His high school class consisted of students with moderate to severe disabilities. The classroom was standard in size and had bathroom facilities in order to accommodate the toileting and self-care needs of his students. Five rectangular tables faced the front of the classroom; assigned seating accommodated two students per table. One table accommodated one student and a 1:1 instructional aide.

Two kidney-shaped tables sat on each side of the room. These tables provided a learning environment for the instructional aides to continue small-group instruction following Jason's whole-class lesson presentation. Open bookshelves lined the perimeter of the portable and provided easy access to instructional manuals and supplies. Jason's desk was located in the corner; his desk held neat stacks of student work to review and grade.

The walls displayed student work, adorned with brightly colored borders. The classroom housed a row of four laptop computers that the students used to access learning programs and assignments. Graphic organizers stretched across the top of the walls, clearly visible at various locations throughout the classroom. One locked charging station located by the front whiteboards contained a classroom set of 10 iPads.

As the bell rang indicating the start of the passing period, students began to enter the classroom. Students immediately went to the charging station and took out their assigned iPad. Jason greeted students at the door and prompted them to get their iPads and take their seats. When the final bell rang, Jason noticed one student was missing. He delayed his classroom instruction slightly while people found the missing student and brought the student to the classroom.

Despite not having received any formal training, Jason devised a method of delivering the new reading program. Jason presented the direct instruction portion of the day's reading lesson in whole-group format. Students followed along with the reading of the story on their iPads. Jason had previously indicated that in an effort to use the class set of iPads fully as an instructional tool, he made a recording of each story.

Jason downloaded the audio recording of the story and a PDF version of the story onto the iPads. He prompted students to follow along with the story (which included visual supports)

on their iPads, while he read the story aloud. The reading curriculum also provided visual labels that reflected story features such as character and setting.

At the appropriate part of the story, Jason posted visual labels on the whiteboard and encouraged students to “follow along with me as I read, you should be looking and following along with your finger.” Throughout the lesson, Jason presented students with questions and prompts to solicit student participation and stimulate conversation. At times, he called on individual students to sustain active participation and engagement.

Although some students had difficulty remembering the multiple settings of the story, they clearly remembered the main characters, Stanley and X-Ray. Jason continued reading Chapter 3 of the story and stopped frequently to ask questions to sustain focus and understanding. This lesson continued for approximately 10 minutes.

Following the read-aloud portion of the lesson, students went either to the vocabulary and sequence station or to the retell and inferences station. Instructional aides managed these stations. The curriculum contained materials and a structured script, as well as explicit and systematic directions. This allowed the instructional aides to run each station with little to no advanced training or preparation.

The scope and sequence of the reading lesson fit perfectly within the 45-minute class period. Toward the end of the period, Jason had the students complete assigned classroom chores, which included putting away their iPads, pushing in their chairs, vacuuming the floor, and cleaning off the desks. Throughout the entire period, students were controlled as they actively participated in the small-group sessions. One student demonstrated verbal outbursts, although this behavior seemed to go unnoticed by the other students in the classroom.

At the conclusion of the observation period, Jason brought up one final thought. He felt it was important to note that his perceived success in delivering the new reading curriculum and rotational centers depended heavily on the skills of the instructional aides. He expressed his delight that his assigned aides were attentive, teachable and caught on quickly to the concepts that aides needed to present at each station. However, based on his experience, he felt that running the program efficiently was only possible with well-qualified instructional aides. He stated, “I feel lucky at the moment, but I worry what happens when one of the aides gets transferred or leaves. I haven’t had the best experiences having experienced aides” (Jason, personal communication, February 25, 2016).

Alisha. Alisha’s classroom was located at the front of the school. A bank of windows on one side of the room admitted a flow of natural light. Textbooks and classroom materials resided in a bookcase in the corner of the room. Another bookcase held a variety of books, categorized in plastic bins. Different colored labels and numbers labeled the bins.

During the small-group session, Alisha continued a previous guided lesson on reading comprehension. Four third-grade students entered the room and raced to find a place around the kidney-shaped table. After greeting and making eye contact with each student, Alisha reminded the students that for the past several sessions they had been working on understanding what they were reading.

Alisha reviewed key words from a chart she had created for this group. She pointed to the title of the chart and the group spontaneously responded with the phase words to know. Then Alisha pointed to each word and provided the following definitions:

Main Idea – The main idea is what the story is all about. Sometimes it is stated right there in the story. Other times, we have to think and figure it out.

Details – Writers use details to explain or provide evidence for their story.

Remember that word *evidence* from your class?

Connect – Sometimes we can understand a story better if we are able to make our own personal connection to the story (personal communication, February 29, 2016).

The lesson continued with the group reading a short passage about prairie dogs.

Allowing time for the students to read the passage independently, Alisha refocused the students back as a group after approximately four minutes. Then, one student volunteered to read the passage. Another student raised his hand for the second reading. Alisha led the students for a final reading of the passage in unison. Alisha followed up the readings by asking the question, about the bit idea of the passage. She charted the students' responses and encouraged students to share their thinking. The group decided which of the charted responses represented important thoughts (i.e., main ideas) and which responses explained the main idea (i.e., details).

Rachael. During this observational period, Rachael was providing RSP services in the general education classroom for a fourth-grade student. The student had been in the RSP program since the second grade, and according to Rachael, had consistently read below grade level. During this observation, Rachael worked with a small group of three students (including her student with RSP services) at a rectangular table in the far corner of the classroom.

The class was reading the book *The Indian in the Cupboard* (Banks, 1995). Students in the class sat spread out around the classroom in groups of two or three discussing the current class assignment. This assignment involved reading, discussing, and responding to chapter questions from the current chapter read aloud by the teacher. Students had their own reading journals in which they could write (or illustrate) their answers to the questions.

Rachael first reviewed the rubric with the three students and checked to make sure they understood the task. The three students immediately began talking about the book. Because the teacher had read the chapter aloud, it appeared that the students had a general idea of how the story had progressed thus far. Rachael began by asking a question about the main characters in this chapter. The group discussed this question and appeared to be able to identify the main characters.

Rachael then directed students' attention to their reading journal questions and asked who was more responsible with the magic in the book. She also asked students to cite evidence from the book to support their answer. After a brief silence, Rachael began going through the chapter. Together, they read parts of the book that helped to address the question. Although the group talked about the chapter, this question appeared to be more difficult for the students to answer.

Using a whiteboard, Rachael guided the students to formulate a response to the journal question. Students then copied the sentence into their response journals. They also drew a picture in their response journals representing their favorite parts of the chapter.

While Rachael worked with her small group, other students worked together in groups of two or three. The room echoed with chatter, and the teacher circled around to ensure students were on task or to answer any questions. The majority of the students appeared to be on task and seemed to enjoy discussing the book. However, by just observing the reading activity, it was difficult for the researcher to tell that Rachael's students current reading levels were at the middle first-grade level.

Danielle. During the observed reading lesson, Danielle focused on word reading and word recognition skills. Danielle facilitated the direct instruction portion of the lesson, and the

instructional aides helped to rotate students to several reading stations in the room. The initial direct instruction was short, lasting approximately seven to 10 minutes. Aides relocated students to another station to complete a tracing worksheet with words from the lesson. At another table, students continued practicing sounds, letters, and word recognition by playing games on the iPads. Danielle reported that the use of the iPad reinforced her lessons and provided a motivational reward for her students.

With the exception of one student, all the students were mobile enough to move between the three stations. Danielle and the instructional aides provided verbal prompts and instructions consistently. Although several of the students were nonverbal, all the students appeared to understand the routine of rotational centers. The one student in a wheelchair stayed at one station throughout the lesson.

The students all appeared to function at different levels of reading and writing. At the tracing station, some students could manipulate a pencil and trace over yellow highlighted words. Most of the students also appeared able to point and match words with pictures. During the direct lesson, Danielle frequently prompted students to remain focused and to shift their eye gaze toward the easel board.

The iPad station produced the most lively and active interactive participation from the students. Students could play selected educational activities, and they reacted positively to the songs and video presentations. One student who had higher verbal skills compared to some other students expressed his delight, using the iPad with smiles and laughter. Although he used short words and phrases in his communication with the aide, he appeared engaged in the activity and shared his delight with the instructional aide.

Inez. Students in the special education classroom exhibited a wide range of skills and deficits in their reading. In Inez's classroom, the walls showed visual supports and scaffolds used to guide reading instruction. At the front of the classroom, teacher-made graphical organizers reflected a previous class discussion on facts related to Siberian Huskies. Additional charts captured a study of pattern words, and high frequency words decorated the cabinet doors.

During this observation, Inez continued a lesson on a Siberian Husky dog's survival in a deadly blizzard. The class discussion involved the story from their social studies unit. Inez used the moment to integrate a kid-friendly discussion on courage, perseverance, and determination particularly in the midst of despair. As evidence of their active participation and interest in the discussions, the classroom behavior chart for this lesson yielded green smiley faces for all but two students. This vignette supported Inez's belief that the use of a variety of scaffolds and supports increased students' motivation for reading.

Malcolm. The portable building at the far end of the playground was Malcolm's classroom. A brightly colored curtain draped the only window in the room. Six students sat at one table. Portable room dividers segmented the back of the room, providing a private workspace for three students and their assigned 1:1 aides.

Reading instruction using computer-assisted technology contrasted sharply with instruction in a traditional classroom. At the beginning of the language arts instruction, Malcolm sat at his laptop at the front of the classroom. The interactive, computer-reading assignments presented reading concepts through animation, sounds, and short video clips. Malcolm continued the ongoing process of reviewing completed assignments and evaluating students' results from the games and activities.

Malcom determined whether the students demonstrated understanding of the presented concept and evaluated the need for additional skill practice or enhanced lessons. During this observation, Malcolm called two students to his table. After a brief conversation with the students, he seemed satisfied that they understood the concepts for their last assignments and indicated that new assignments were in their student portals.

After he increased the level of instruction, Malcolm made assignments for the upcoming week. Three of his students were not present in the classroom because the school had mainstreamed them; thus, the three students received reading instruction in the general education classroom. However, Malcolm assigned computer-reading lessons for the mainstreamed students to cover times when their behaviors prevented them from going to the general education classroom or when the students did not have any other class activities to work on.

Three students worked with their assigned instructional aides on reading worksheets. The aides led this instruction in an area separated by room dividers. During this classroom observation, the aides controlled all the students, who worked quietly with their aides.

When there was one brief outburst from the behind the portable room dividers, the instructional aide promptly escorted the student outside for a cooling-off period. The student returned shortly and continued working on his assignment. As Malcom mentioned earlier in his interview, he often did not conduct whole-group reading instruction. According to Malcolm, some days were calm and others chaotic. Malcolm likened his situation to a line from a popular movie: “Life in EDBD is like a box of chocolates. You never know what you’ll get each day” (personal communication, January 14, 2016).

Bianca. Initially, Bianca established the reading intervention lab at the request of the school principal. The principal was concerned about the number of students completing first grade who had not yet mastered basic phonemic awareness and phonics skills. As a way to help these students and ensure that they did not fall behind with their reading skills, the principal recruited Bianca out of retirement to establish a reading intervention lab.

The principal's primary objective in the second year was for the reading lab to provide support for any of the previous year's students (now second graders) who were still experiencing reading problems, as well as to continue the identification and reading intervention for current first-grade students. The educators designed the mini RTI program to target and serve all students with reading difficulties, regardless of whether the student was eligible for special education services.

Bianca's first reading lab session of the morning began at 8:30 a.m. With a quick call to the classroom, five students came running into an open area just outside of the computer room. The students took their seats around the kidney-shaped table and handed in their homework folders. Bianca praised the students for doing their reading homework and began the first activity.

The session focused on the different spelling patterns of the long sound of 'e'. Bianca explained that the pattern words were words they would find in their classroom reading books and in their reading homework. Using the whiteboard, Bianca drew columns and rows and listed several variations of the spelling pattern of long 'e'. Bianca pointed out that words such as *leaf*, *beef*, and *money* all contained the long sound of 'e'. She then challenged the students to see who could use their knowledge of the spelling pattern to read a new list of words.

In a group game (teacher versus students), each student practiced decoding a list of five words. The students received a point for every word read correctly. If the student required help, then the teacher received the point. In this friendly competition, students worked on decoding skills using the reading pattern just reviewed.

The session ended with a group reading of a booklet using the newly learned pattern words. Bianca reminded the students to read their booklet to their parents for homework. After reading the first page, Bianca encouraged the students to read the next page aloud. The group finished the pamphlet book of four pages (approximately two to three sentences per page), collected their homework, and returned to their classroom.

Bianca pointed out that each session was structured yet conducted in an upbeat manner. This allowed the group of retired teachers to run a hassle-free lab with fidelity and consistency while keeping students engaged. The sequence of the phonemic awareness and phonics skills aligned with the school's current reading curriculum, thereby providing additional support for concepts the students experienced in their classrooms. Bianca's belief that all children can learn to read was clear when she stated:

We work cooperatively and collaboratively with our classroom teachers. It's important to me that we help these young students, even if they qualify for special education services. You can call it an inclusive practice; I think it's just providing any youngster who is struggling with reading, the support to keep them from falling further behind. We can't wait for special ed services to kick in and we can't stop the support just because a kid qualifies for special ed services (personal communication, February 1, 2016).

Shivaun. Shivaun displayed a strong commitment to foster a joy of reading to her students, regardless of the levels of their disability. Despite having a less than positive

experience during the first two years of teaching, she appeared eager to talk about the current success of her reading-buddy program. The first year she tried the program, the students did not select their own books, and community grandparents served as the volunteer reading buddies. Since the volunteer grandparents had various schedules and time commitments in the classroom, fidelity and consistency became an implementation issue.

During her second year, Shivaun attempted to have third-grade general education students serve as reading buddies. Unfortunately, the third graders were too playful and immature to work with her students with disabilities. As a result, little reading occurred.

Still, Shivaun felt the reading-buddy program could be beneficial for her students. She began discussions with a sixth-grade general education teacher. The two teachers collaborated and carefully redesigned a program that fit both their needs. The general education teacher was able to do small-group lessons for her struggling students during the time her higher-level students went to Shivaun's classroom as reading buddies.

Both teachers provided initial training sessions with the potential reading buddies, which included reading strategies that worked best for this population of students. In addition, Shivaun arranged for the school librarian to help train her students how to find and check out books from the school library. According to Shivaun, her students looked forward to both their weekly visits to the school library and to reading-buddy days.

Llasmin. In conjunction with her current school, Llasmin developed a unique response-to-intervention model for reading instruction. Teachers within the school referred students who were struggling with reading to Llasmin. Llasmin then conducted an initial assessment to identify gaps in critical reading skills for which the student needed assistance. Llasmin also assessed the student's preferred learning styles and academic strengths.

After the initial assessment, Llasmin worked with the student in a 1:1 setting. For this observation period, Llasmin worked with a fourth-grade student who had difficulty with decoding and comprehension. She started the session by encouraging the student. Llasmin stated,

Think about, as you're reading, imagine that you see a word that looks familiar. But, you're not sure what it means. There are ways, we call them strategies, that you can use, which will help you figure out what the word is and then help you understand what the word means (personal communication, February 25, 2016).

Llasmin then discussed root words, prefixes, and suffixes and explained that word parts can help a student figure out many unfamiliar words. The student was attentive and responded to Llasmin's comments and questions. When asked to read three prefixes (e.g., dis- , re- , un-), the student was able to do so with some hesitation. Llasmin continued with the guided instruction by using a graphic organizer to categorize words based on prefix, suffix, and meaning.

As the lesson continued, Llasmin showed the student a list of six words and asked which of the words had prefixes or suffixes and which did not. Referring to the graphic organizer just completed, the student was able to circle the three words that had prefixes and suffixes. When asked how she knew, the student answered that she knew the answer because she was able to find the root word. Llasmin presented several additional oral examples before moving on to a worksheet.

At this point in the lesson, Llasmin asked the student to read two sentences and then answer a question. After reading the sentence, the student was able to find both the main part and the suffix in the word *respectable*. Llasmin asked the student to write a sentence using the word *respectable*. The student then wrote the words, "respectabl being nice." As Llasmin ended

the session, she asked the student to work on the unanswered parts of the worksheet in her classroom guided-reading session.

Natalie. Natalie was hesitant before the classroom observation. She was concerned that the presence of someone unknown to her students might cause some anxiety. In order to respect and honor Natalie's concerns, the researcher conducted a shortened observation (30 minutes).

The researcher spoke with Natalie prior to the observation. As part of the interview segment, Natalie provided a detailed description of her daily schedule. Natalie provided photos in advance in order for the researcher to construct a visual image of the classroom. During the observation, the researcher entered the classroom after the students had begun their daily morning routine.

Natalie had neatly arranged the classroom. There were learning areas created to support activities such as Circle Time (morning calendar and math routines), Read-Aloud (teacher and/or books read to students), and independent learning (centers arranged to address individual learning goals).

The researcher observed a short interactive reading lesson. The researcher saw that the students had limited attention spans. Natalie read aloud a short story using gestures and varied vocal expressions. She maintained eye contact with students and paused at moments to ask questions. Several of the students noticed when Natalie changed her voice to match the characters and laughed.

As the students began to exhibit signs of restlessness, Natalie signaled to the instructional aides to begin the individual rotation centers. One student worked at a table with a 1:1 aide. Instructional aides managed all the other centers. Natalie rotated from station to station, interacting and conversing with the students at each station. Although no physical outbursts

from students occurred, the researcher realized that Natalie had purposefully designed the pace of the class to keep all the students actively engaged.

Clarissa. Clarissa had 18 years of experience as a special education teacher. She arranged her classroom in a traditional format with two rows of desks facing the whiteboard, a small round table in the back of the room, and the teacher's desk in the corner. Primary colors decorated the walls, and Clarissa displayed student work prominently.

As the students entered the room after breakfast, they put away their jackets and backpacks before heading to their seats. Clarissa reminded the students to begin copying the word study pattern from the board. The word pattern that the students were studying for the day was '-an'.

As the students settled down, Clarissa began the phonics lesson. She reviewed the pattern sound and then modeled how adding different sounds at the beginning of the pattern made a new word. One student raised his hand to add another word that he knew with the same pattern. Clarissa directed the students to finish the word patterns on the board.

Clarissa walked around and observed students as they worked. Although a few students appeared to work independently, most of the students needed prompting. As she walked through the room, Clarissa stopped and tapped a student who had her head down and was fast asleep. Clarissa sighed and stated that this was an everyday occurrence. Clarissa indicated that despite the fact that the student needed individualized toileting assistance and frequent naps throughout the day, the district considered a mild-to-moderate classroom the least restrictive environment.

Clarissa signaled to the students to prepare for reading groups. Clarissa met with the early emergent readers and worked on phonemic awareness and phonics skills worksheets. Her

instructional aide helped the higher-abled students to read a second-grade passage from the district curriculum.

After each group had finished their reading activities, Clarissa allowed students to play a popular reading game on the classroom computers. Students who needed additional assistance or who had not finished their worksheets remained at the group tables for individualized assistance. The entire lesson lasted approximately 30 minutes. According to Clarissa, this observation represented a typical day in her classroom.

Serena. Serena had her classroom set up to orchestrate the many reading activities that occurred throughout the day. Serena used the computers arranged in a row along the back wall to implement a reading intervention program; whole-group instruction took place in the two rows of desks at the front of the room. Serena and the instructional aide used small-group areas in two areas of the room.

Serena typically provided guided reading instruction for RSP students during the school's universal access time. During this universal access time, RSP students received frontloaded appropriate vocabulary and background information to facilitate their participation in the reading lessons given later by the general education teacher. Serena worked on key vocabulary words with a small group of students at one table. They discussed definitions of key words and used a graphic organizer to write down the definitions.

In addition, Serena guided the students to write their own sentences with each word. Serena used modified worksheets provided by the curriculum publisher and graphic organizers to conduct the vocabulary instruction. Vocabulary frames posted on the wall corresponded to the activity, and Serena referred to the worksheet during the course of the instruction. As universal

access time ended, students gathered their belongings and prepared to return to their general education classrooms.

Winnie. Before the researcher observed Winnie's middle school classroom (grades 6 through 8) for students with high functioning autism, Winnie expressed excitement at sharing the success of her program. The researcher waited outside the classroom with seven students for Winnie to arrive. One student quietly approached and stated in a small but practical voice that Miss Winnie was in the office and she would be back soon. The researcher thanked the student and expressed interest in visiting with the class.

As Winnie arrived, the students all turned to greet her. They entered the classroom and quickly took their seats. The students were on their best behavior because it was iPad day at the school. Two days during the week, the teachers and students used iPads to deliver and receive instruction. However, before Winnie's students could receive their iPads, the students needed to demonstrate their ability to engage in meaningful social conversation, which included delivering and accepting compliments.

During this short mini-lesson, Winnie led the students in a reflective activity designed to develop social and communication skills. The class of nine boys contained students diagnosed with high functioning autism. The district programs for students with high functioning autism required that reading skills be within two years of the student's grade level. Winnie emphasized supporting the social and emotional learning within the general education classroom. Therefore, with the exception of first period and sixth period, all of Winnie's students were fully included in the general education environment.

Following the social skills lesson, students gathered their belongings and iPads to head out for their first-period class. Winnie indicated that during the four periods of general education

instruction, she and the instructional aides rotated among the classrooms to offer support for all students, not just the students in her classroom. In addition, Winnie cotaught daily in the classrooms. On the day of this observation, she cotaught a reading lesson in the content area of health science.

Her coteacher, Mr. Dureseo (a pseudonym), began the classroom conversation on the benefits of using the iPad movie application in health science. The teachers gave the students approximately five minutes to explore their iPads and find a source or example of documenting health concerns. All of the students, including Winnie's student Enrique (a pseudonym), quickly and quietly began accessing their iPads. Winnie selected one student to lead the class in the guiding questions and objectives listed on the whiteboard. Mr. Dureseo then selected Enrique to lead the classroom discussion on the varied uses of the iPad for documenting health issues.

Next, the teachers directed the students to the health science website previously assigned for homework. The teachers directed the students to read the content material and respond with an appropriate blog in Google Docs. Winnie and Mr. Dureseo circulated around the room, helping individual students access the website and testing their comprehension and understanding of the content material. Although they allowed students to collaborate and discuss this project with their classmates, Enrique elected to work alone.

Winnie made a note of Enrique's decision to work alone, although she later commented that he might have felt overwhelmed by the social interaction, given that he had led the class in their opening discussion. However, she later stated that collaborative and group work were areas of concern with her students. Therefore, she typically provided additional skill lessons on collaborative reading and sharing skills during the first and/or last periods with her entire class.

Practicing and gaining proficiency in this area helped her students to integrate seamlessly into the general education-learning environment.

At the sound of the bell, Winnie departed to another classroom to support another one of her students. She arranged her weekly schedule so that she cotaught one class every day for one week. This required her to maintain continued contact with each teacher and to arrange appropriate time to collaborate for the coteaching sessions.

Teachers agreed on and arranged the coteaching schedules at the beginning of the school year, arranging classes and teachers who represented a good match for her students. Although it took some time for both Winnie and her colleagues to embrace the coteaching arrangements, after nine years, most of the teachers welcomed the collaborative arrangement.

Winnie conducted all her reading instruction lessons in specific content-specific areas; however, she purposely avoided being the lead teacher in the math and science courses. Her avoidance was not attributable to her inability to teach these subjects; rather, her experiences had shown her that it was less confusing for all students to have only one teacher primarily delivering the main lesson. Consequently, she often addressed gaps in understanding with students in small groups in the math and science courses.

Documentation Analyses

Examining written documents in a qualitative research study is a way to obtain data that do not intrude upon or “alter the setting in ways that the presence of the investigator often does” (Merriam, 2009, p. 139). Essentially, data gathered from written documents can be interpreted without manipulation or alteration incurred by the presence of the researcher. Documents collected for qualitative research can include written, visual, digital, and physical materials (Merriam, 2009).

In this study, the researcher collected written documents from each special education teacher. The researcher reviewed the documents received to determine their authenticity, as recommended by Merriam (2009). The researcher determined that the documents submitted by the participants were authentic, contained pertinent information relevant to this study, and therefore were appropriate for eliciting meaning and understanding about the lived experiences of special education teachers in the course of teaching reading instruction.

The researcher reviewed the documents further to ensure confidentiality of the study participants, school sites, and school districts. The researcher removed any identifying information such as name, school site, and student number. The researcher collected or reviewed no documents related to the Individual Education Plan (IEP) used for students with identified disabilities. Table 2 summarizes the documents collected from each study participant.

Table 2 *Documents Submitted by Participants*

	Books, Articles & Research Literature	Professional Development and Training Documents	District Issued Materials	Classroom Related Documents
Participant 1		x	x	
Participant 2		x	x	x
Participant 3			x	x
Participant 4		x	x	
Participant 5		xx	x	
Participant 6		x	x	x
Participant 7		x	x	
Participant 8	x		x	
Participant 9			x	
Participant 10		x	x	
Participant 11	x			
Participant 12		x	x	
Participant 13		x	x	x

The researcher collected two documents in the books, articles, and research literature category. One participant provided the 2008 article that provided advice on how to establish a reading buddy program. She had obtained the article several years prior in a teacher education class, and she retrieved the document after encountering problems with her initial attempts in implementing a reading-buddy program. According to the participant, the article identified key steps and strategies to help refocus her program. Another participant contributed a 1979 guide for guide of available reading and assessment tests for teachers. The text provided an overview of selecting and evaluating various tests intended to guide reading instruction. As part of her

role as a reading interventionist, it was important for this participant to determine not only what skills students needed, but also what reading skills students had already learned.

Participants provided documents that related to professional development training and workshops. These documents included PowerPoint notes, workshop handouts, and materials related to balanced literacy, Thinking Maps (Alper, Williams, & Hyerle, 2012), academic vocabulary instruction, reading/writers writing workshops, and explicit direct instruction. Eight participants submitted documents in the professional development training area.

Seven participants offered data regarding a program called Thinking Maps. The Thinking Maps program includes a set of eight graphic organizers designed to correspond with specific thinking processes (Alper, Williams, & Hyerle, 2012). The designers of these maps used them as an instructional strategy for all academic content areas. The maps encompassed a common visual language that supported various learning styles (Alper, Williams, & Hyerle, 2012). Teachers trained in this model program have reported using Thinking Maps in all academic learning areas, including reading instruction and comprehension (Alper, Williams, & Hyerle, 2012).

One participant submitted the following data sources: (a) a document from a Thinking Maps workshop and (b) a document from a professional development workshop entitled Evidence-Based Principles to Guide English Language Development in the Common Core Standards Era. Although the workshop focused on English language development, the participant indicated that strategies effective for English language learners were often effective for students with learning disabilities. This participant posted many of the sentence frames taken from this workshop in the classroom.

Eleven participants allowed the researcher to examine district-issued textbooks and curricula. These documents included curricula guides, supplement materials, planning documents, and lesson plan templates. The immediate availability of textbooks and district-issued curriculum may have been attributable to state mandates. Specifically, because of a state class-action case, all students, including English language learners and students with disabilities, were required to have access to grade-level textbooks and curricula materials.

Only one participant did not have textbooks and curricula materials directly issued to her by the district. This was because as a reading intervention teacher, the students she worked with typically brought their district-issued textbooks to their sessions. In addition, she could access the classroom teacher's books if needed.

Three participants submitted documents they created related to their specific classrooms. These documents included a lesson-planning document they used to plan rotational centers following the whole-group reading instruction. The teachers used these documents to guide and instruct the instructional aides who were responsible for facilitating the rotational centers.

Two participants submitted documents they had created to form and track small-group instruction. One participant used her document to track attendance for the reading lab program. Another participant used her document to record students' progress data. The data collected from this document supported reports of students' academic progress at IEP meetings.

In order to analyze and interpret the essence and meaning of the submitted documents, the researcher categorized each documents into four groups (a) books, articles, and research literature; (b) professional development and training documents; (c) district-issued materials (e.g., curriculum materials, announcements); and (d) classroom-related documents (e.g., lesson plans, progress monitoring reports). These four document groups aligned with the central

research question and subresearch questions 1 and 2 of this study. The researcher analyzed the documents by considering the type of document, the date of the document, the source of the document (i.e. district provided, workshop provided), the audience for whom the document was written, and the context of the document in reading instruction and evidence-based practices. The researcher continued the analyses by coding each document and the data were merged into the emerging themes of the study. The data from these documents represented participants' perceived source of knowledge of evidence-based reading instruction.

The first category of documents represented any books, articles, or research literature presented by the participants. The two documents in this category included an article published in 2008 and a practical guide for reading tests was published in 1979. Although the topics of both documents were relevant to reading instruction, the researcher determined that the publication dates were very dated and did not indicated the incorporation of evidence-based instruction. The researcher coded these items as indicative of teachers' preferred practices and professional development training.

The second category of documents represented documents related to Professional Development and Training. Eight participants submitted documents falling within this category. Seven of the documents in this category reflected training on the Thinking Maps Program. The participants obtained these documents from professional development workshops presented outside of their school district.

However, the researcher noted that each participant's school district paid for each participants' registration. The researcher coded these documents as professional development training and district reading curriculum and representative of the participants' school district as a direct source of EBI knowledge. One participant submitted notes from an English development

workshop. The title of this workshop indicated that the principles presented were evidence-based practices. The researcher did not evaluate the quality of the documents and coded the document as EBI Knowledge and Skills.

The third category of documents represented documents related to materials and curriculum distributed by the individual school districts. This category captured the district adopted curriculum, which included textbooks, instructional workbooks, and supplement worksheets. The researcher interpreted this category to represent a source of reading instruction. The researcher examined documents in this category from eleven participants.

The fourth category of documents represented documents related to documents created and/or modified by the special education teachers for use in their individual classrooms. The special education teachers created these documents for the purpose of small group and lesson planning, attendance documentation, IEP documentation. The researcher coded these documents as representative of planning for small and individualized instruction, teaching done at students' instructional levels, and monitoring of IEP goals.

Themes

The collection of data from the 13 participants included interviews, classroom observations and document analyses. The researcher began the development of themes by organizing data from the interviews, observations, and document analyses using charts and matrices. The researcher scanned the charts and matrices into the computer and used the computer-assisted software program Atlas.ti to search for patterns of words and phrases. These patterns of words and phrases were used to create an initial code list (see Appendix G). Using a constant comparison process, the researcher placed related words and phrases into related

categories. The categories were further synthesized and evolved into distinctive themes and defined as (a) Knowledge sources, (b) Environmental diversities, and (c) Organizational constraints. (see Appendix H). The matrices used in the development of the three themes are reported in Appendix I.

During the analytical process, the researcher read and re-read each document in order to synthesize the initial codes, meaningful categories and themes. This process ultimately resulted in the emergence of three themes. These three essential themes provided an appropriate framework for the researcher to understand special education teachers' beliefs and experiences using evidence-based reading instruction. The enumeration of the occurrences of open codes as related to the emergence of the three themes is located in Table 3.

Open Codes	Themes	Appearance Across Data Collection Sets
Reading Instructional Strategies Training & Development EBI Knowledge & Skills Effectiveness of EBI	Knowledge Sources	218
Multiple Academic Needs Variety of Learning Styles Multiple Grade Levels Mixed Classroom Class Combos Functional Needs of Students Unique Student Needs Diverse Disabilities Student Behavior Issues	Environmental Diversities	142
Limited Time (i.e. to read research, to teach, to do paperwork) Lack of curriculum	Organizational Constraints	88

Table 3: *Enumeration of Open Code Appearance Across Data Set as Related to Themes*

Theme 1. Each of the 13 participants believed they utilized instructional reading practices that were best suited to meet the needs of the individual students and improve the reading outcomes of their students. The special education teachers referenced these practices as evidence-based instructional reading practices. The special education teachers consistently voiced their own personal definitions of evidence-based reading practices. They had difficulty citing sources to support their definitions of the term.

There was one participant who was unsure of what type of research supported EBI practices, another participant who believed that EBI was a curriculum used in combination with individual teacher strategies and materials, and yet a third participant felt there was not one

definition of EBI, because EBI varied based on each individual student's needs. Malcolm expressed a more sophisticated definition:

I believe that evidence-based instructional reading practices is a teaching strategy—or maybe a series of strategies—that have been: (a) statistically proven to improve reading skills, and (b) uniformly agreed upon amongst most teachers as instruction that when taught to a wide range of young readers is successful (personal communication January 14, 2016).

Participants shared the following statements, which reflected their personal knowledge and definitions of defined evidence-based reading practices:

- “Evidence-based practices allow for the flexibility and differentiation of good instruction” (Alisha, personal communication, February 29, 2016).
- “There are many great evidence-based practices for reading; however, many do not align with the needs of students with disabilities” (Bianca, personal communication, February 1, 2016).
- “Evidence-based? Sure, I’ll try those first, but it really comes down to my students’ specific needs, I do what I feel will work” (Shivaun, personal communication, February 23, 2016).
- “The need to teach functional and adaptive skills may take precedent over the typical evidence-based reading practices” (Danielle, February 23, 2016).
- “Evidence-based instruction practices vary with each child and with the level of cognitive disability” (Jason, personal communication, February 25, 2016).

- “Evidence-based instruction would work, if there were an appropriate reading curriculum for students with disabilities” (Natalie, personal communication, January 19, 2016).
- “Even with evidence-based instruction, I still need to make modifications for my students” (Shivaun, personal communication, February 23, 2016),
- “What works for one student with autism, may not work for another student with autism” (Winnie, personal communication, April 19, 2016).
- “Evidence-based instruction is not a magic wand” (Llasmin, personal communication, February 25, 2016).

Theme 2. Participants reported similar beliefs that class composition (e.g., number of students, number of grade levels, and range of disabilities) had an impact on implementing reading instruction. When asked to describe the makeup of their current classes, similarities among the 13 participants emerged. All the participants believed the best strategies for reading instruction should address the individualized needs and academic gaps of each student. However, they also indicated the difficulty and challenges in the implementation of reading instruction with varying class sizes and varied disability groupings.

All 13 participants believed they played a significant role in the education of students with disabilities. In addition, they all believed evidence-based instruction really worked, and in time, students could improve their academic and reading skills. Participants noted hard work and constant reflection on each student’s individualized need was the dominant personal factor needed by special education teachers. Inez’s comments best summarized the personal factors special educators must exhibit during the course of reading instruction:

It is hard work to implement these practices in class. I have to truly sit back and examine, what approach am I to utilize. How am I to present a lesson to give my students an opportunity to learn what the general population is learning, just in a more simplified fashion (personal communication, January 26, 2016).

Additional personal factors and beliefs that surfaced from this group of special educators included determination and persistence to provide quality reading instruction for their students. Each of the participants vocalized the belief that being a special educator required a great deal of patience and understanding of the unique needs of each of their students. In essence, this group of teachers knew they had made a difference in the lives of students with disabilities. For example, Alisha stated: "I've seen students make growth. I've found over time, students really do remember what they read and understand what they read. You can see them really start enjoying reading. They can improve their reading skills (personal communication, February 29, 2016).

Theme 3. The special education teachers in this sample held the belief that appropriate curricula and training were necessary components for the successful implementation of evidence-based reading instruction for students with disabilities. Ten participants indicated they had experienced challenges finding appropriate instructional materials to meet the specific needs of their students. Alisha summarized the challenge of finding appropriate curricula and materials for reading instruction:

Many times, there's not enough materials, so we as teachers, we buy our own materials. And materials can be expensive. But, that's the give and take. You know, for wanting somebody to read, sometimes we have to pay for it, using our own money (personal communication, February 29, 2016),

Danielle commented regarding the lack of curricula for reading instruction. She stated, “The barriers I have been faced with [are] the lack of curriculum for students with severe disabilities. This has been a big issue that I believe many special education teachers face in this district” (personal communication, February 23, 2016).

Clarissa also addressed the lack of curricula for reading instruction. Clarissa explained the consequences of the lack of appropriate curriculum:

The majority of my students in class have very short attention spans, and it is hard for them to retain information. The very few who are active participants are able to repeat information back, but the next day they have to be retaught the information again. Even if I use evidence-based instruction, I just don’t have the leveled books and materials to support that amount of re-teaching (personal communication, January 12, 2016).

Participants identified additional challenges and barriers that affected the implementation of evidence-based reading instruction. For example, not keeping pace with the instructional pace of general education teachers was a common challenge for the participants who taught in self-contained classrooms or resource rooms. Eight participants reported an inability to keep up with the general educational pacing guides for reading instruction. Not being able to keep up with the general education pacing meant the special education teachers were unable to share or participate in meaningful collaborations with their general education peers. Rachael explained:

So, I do a lot of the close reading and we take notes for each paragraph. I realized by the time, the time was up, it was already 45 minutes by the time we read, took our notes on each paragraph, discussed a paragraph, write. Because there’s a lot of assumptions made. That’s also my greatest challenge. Assumptions made, you know, that the students know what a paragraph is and we can go right into the questions, and they know the answers.

At the end of our session, I realized that we had only answered two questions (personal communication, January 26, 2016).

Natalie voiced similar concerns regarding keeping pace in the reading curriculum with her general education peers:

I'm expected to do the same things in my classroom as in the general education class, and I still have to expose my students to the same curriculum, which is more prepping for the different grade levels and IEP goals. And yet, I am evaluated on the same basis as the general education teachers (personal communication, January 19, 2016).

All 13 participants felt that the class composition had a significant impact on their implementation of evidence-based instructional practices. These teachers noted that factors such as class size, multiple grade levels, and disability groupings presented challenges in the planning and delivery of evidence-based reading instruction. Clarissa clarified her thoughts and beliefs on this theme:

A major challenge I have is that some students in my class are confused because of the rigor of the reading strategies. Some of the students try to embrace it while other ignore the teaching. And I then have students who cry because it is too hard, or ones that get easily distracted with any little thing. It is all very frustrating with the multiple grades (personal communication, January 12, 2016).

Inez also commented that having a wide range of disabilities in one classroom affected reading instruction:

Sometimes when I'm teaching reading, whether it's the reading comprehension, we get that, you know, the disability part, where they're not getting it. It's the comprehending, they're not sure what I'm asking, even though I've already just modified the lesson. I'm

finding that with certain disability groups, especially with my groups with ID and autism (personal communication, January 26, 2016).

Finally, Malcom expressed the following regarding the lack of appropriate curricula materials and support:

I've had challenges finding appropriate instruction for all the ages I have. It seems as if student academic progress has taken a back seat to behavior issues I deal with, and until recently, I've had a hard time getting the administrative support I need regarding curriculum (personal communication, January 14, 2016),

Research Questions

Central Research Question. The central research question guiding this study was “What are the lived experiences and instructional intricacies of a specific group of special education teachers using evidence-based instructional practices when teaching reading to students with disabilities?” The data from this study indicated that special education teachers provided reading instruction for students with a wide range of disabilities. The student population included multiple grade levels. Special education teachers also reported the varying reading levels of students in their classroom.

Given that the nature of each student's disability varied, special education teachers provided highly individualized reading instruction. Bernice stated, “It's like there really isn't one definition for evidence-based reading practices. It's really, what does the student need” (personal communication, February 1, 2016). This sentiment was echoed by the majority of the special education teachers.

Collectively, special education teachers described their experience of teaching reading to students with disabilities as hard and difficult, especially when students with multiple needs were

grouped together. Natalie explained that her classroom consisted of students with disabilities that ranged from mild to severe disabilities. Natalie stated that it was difficult to meet her students need since she did not have curriculum or sensory materials for her students with moderate autism. In these cases, special education teachers believed it was difficult to provide reading instruction, let alone evidence-based reading instruction in their classrooms.

The sense of frustration and the difficulty special education teachers felt when planning reading instruction for multiple grade levels was generalized by Malcolm;

“I plan lessons for different learning groups, as the scope of ages/levels disallows for whole group instruction. I align lessons according not only to grade levels, but to academic capabilities as well. In other words, chronological age doesn’t match cognitive levels in most cases. A sixth grader may have the reading ability of a second grader, and a third grader may have the reading ability of a fifth grader (personal communication, January 14, 2016).

The special education teachers shared the complex nature of teaching students with disabilities. They were reflective of their teaching practices and naturally incorporated strategies that guided their students to become better readers. All of the special education teachers emphasized the core elements of reading instruction that included phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension. Shivaun described her experiences using evidence-based reading practices:

I usually use a variety of methods and materials that I apply differently for each student according to their needs. What usually works for one student it doesn’t work for another one, but for sure the one thing that I apply for all of them regarding their disabilities is to

always keep trying, never giving up, and keep looking for other methods that might help them to learn to read (personal communication, February 23, 2016).

Subresearch Question 1. The first research question was “What themes emerged from the voices of special education teachers when describing their perceptions and beliefs towards evidence-based instructional reading practices?” The three themes that emerged were (a) Knowledge sources, (b) Environmental diversities, and (c) Organizational constraints.

Special education teachers’ responses to subresearch question one significantly contributed to the development of Theme 1. Theme 1, knowledge sources, was the most dominant of the three themes. The special education teachers overwhelming suggested by their interview responses that their school districts were the primary source of knowledge for evidence-based reading instruction.

Special education teachers provided documents and materials received from workshops and trainings on reading instruction conducted by sources outside of their school district. Again, special education teachers considered the strategies and training received from these workshops represented evidence-based reading instruction. Classroom observations revealed evidence in the form of graphic organizers that guided phonics, reading comprehension, and vocabulary development. The special education teachers expressed their belief that these items were all indicative of evidence-based reading instruction.

Environmental diversities was the second theme that emerged from data collected from subresearch question one. Special education teachers reported that their classroom consisted of multiple grade levels, a wide range of reading levels, and students who qualified for special education under various categories. They responded that the diversity in the classroom often required the use of ability grouping for reading instruction and in some cases, students who

required individualized assistance received reading instruction by an instructional aide. The majority of the special education teachers described classroom management of diverse classrooms as challenging and reported that diverse classrooms affected their ability to deliver evidence-based reading practices. The special education teachers expressed that the diverse classroom influenced the expected rigor, depth of knowledge, and reading outcomes expected by state and federal mandates. The special education teachers also reported that over time, students were able to demonstrate improvements in their reading skills.

Subresearch question one also provided data for the development of Theme 3, identified by the researcher as organizational constraints. Special education teachers overwhelming perceived the lack of appropriate curriculum and materials as a barrier to evidence-based reading instruction. Barriers to the implementation of evidence-based reading instruction included limited teaching time, limited access to research evidence-based reading practices and lack of appropriately leveled curriculum.

Subresearch Question 2. Subresearch Question 2 was “How do special education teachers describe personal factors and beliefs that shape their day-to-day decision-making regarding evidence-based instructional practices used to teach reading?”

Participants reported similar beliefs that class composition (e.g., number of students, number of grade levels, and range of disabilities) had an impact on implementing reading instruction. When asked to describe the makeup of their current classes, similarities among the 13 participants emerged. All the participants believed the best strategies for reading instruction should address the individualized needs and academic gaps of each student. However, they also indicated the difficulty and challenges in the implementation of reading instruction with varying class sizes and varied disability groupings.

All 13 participants believed they played a significant role in the education of students with disabilities. In addition, they all believed evidence-based instruction really worked, and in time, students could improve their academic and reading skills. Participants noted hard work and constant reflection on each student's individualized need was the dominant personal factor needed by special education teachers. Inez's comments best summarized the personal factors special educators must exhibit during the course of reading instruction:

It is hard work to implement these practices in class. I have to truly sit back and examine, what approach am I to utilize. How am I to present a lesson to give my students an opportunity to learn what the general population is learning, just in a more simplified fashion (personal communication, January 26, 2016).

Additional personal factors and beliefs that surfaced from this group of special educators included determination and persistence to provide quality reading instruction for their students. Each of the participants vocalized the belief that being a special educator required a great deal of patience and understanding of the unique needs of each of their students. In essence, this group of teachers knew they had made a difference in the lives of students with disabilities. For example, Alisha stated: "I've seen students make growth. I've found over time, students really do remember what they read and understand what they read. You can see them really start enjoying reading. They can improve their reading skills" (personal communication, February 29, 2016).

Subresearch Question 3. The third research question was "What meanings or understandings do special education teachers voice towards their preferred practices and/or evidence-based strategies for teaching reading?" The discussions and conversations with the 13 participants indicated that special education teachers understood the power and benefits of both

differential instruction and individualized reading instruction. As participants told their stories of success with students during reading instruction, each conveyed a belief and understanding of the need to develop functional reading skills for all students.

These special education teachers fully realized that children learned to read using a variety of strategies and individualized practices. They expressed their preferred instructional practices as systematic and daily methods focused on students' strengths, weaknesses, and IEP goals for reading development. Participants also expressed the need for daily, explicit, and direct instruction complemented with frequent progress monitoring. Essentially, participants indicated that the pathway to success in literacy included an assessment of the student's skills and reading behaviors, development of a plan of instruction to fill the deficiency gap, the creation of goals, and lessons delivered daily in an explicit manner.

Subresearch Question 4. Research Question 4 was "How do special education teachers describe the perceived benefits and/or effectiveness, if any, from the implementation of evidence-based instructional reading practices?" Two participants indicated that two key benefits of using evidence-based practices in an RTI model were the early detection of reading difficulties and the ability to address the specific needs of their students. However, simply implementing evidence-based practices did not equate to improved reading skills. For these two participants, the daily implementation of strategies and the implementation of data collection and progress monitoring contributed to positive student outcomes.

Another common sentiment expressed by all participants was that the acquisition of reading skills for students with disabilities was a very slow process, and therefore, they found it difficult to gauge the effectiveness of evidence-based reading practices for their students with disabilities. Danielle concisely summarized this belief: "Everything happens in very small steps.

It takes a lot of time, a lot of repetition, and a lot of patience. Sometimes it's hard because you may not see progress for a few years" (personal communication, February 23, 2016).

All the participants expressed the belief that even with the use of specific strategies, 1:1 instruction, and targeted reading instruction, the reading outcomes for their students' progress may not significantly improve. Serena summarized this belief:

I've tried different strategies, the evidence-based strategies—segmenting, blending, phoneme isolation, and building up that phonemic awareness. When we're working with words and then they still aren't, they're still not giving it back to me. They're not retaining it, they're not producing it. So, while I have the expectation that all my students can learn to read, like I said, don't get discouraged if you have maybe a few who just are not seeming to make that progress that you want. Yes, I have seen it (personal communication, January 19, 2016).

Subresearch Question 5. Research Question 5 was "How do special education teachers describe professional development, training, challenges, or barriers, if any needed to enhance evidence-based reading instruction for students with disabilities?" All 13 participants indicated the need to modify, recreate, or supplement curricula. Often teachers did not have the books and instructional materials to maintain a practice over the course of three years, which was the average time each student spent in their classroom. Thus, the amount of preparation and planning time needed to differentiate curricula was considered a constraint in the implementation of evidence-based reading practices.

Seven of the 13 participants indicated the absence of support from their site administrator or special education administrators as a barrier to implementation of EBI practices. In this area, lack of support ranged from lack of resources, excessive paperwork, and inconsistent support

with behaviors issues. Of interest, although most participants felt included with their general education peers in professional development and training opportunities, they felt these opportunities did not address how implementation of the training might occur in the special education environment. In other words, the information typically received in professional development trainings was appropriate for implementation in a general education environment, but not in a special education environment. The remaining six participants indicated that the support from their administrators was a positive factor, and administrators granted flexibility to implement new learning practices in their classrooms.

Summary

This chapter provided a profile of the special education teachers who participated in this study as well as of the data collected from semistructured interviews, classroom observations, and related documents. Through a continual comparison among the three sources of data collected, a pattern of words and phrases led to the emergence of three themes.

Three themes emerged (a) Knowledge sources, (b) Environmental diversities, and (c) Organizational constraints. The chapter concluded with a description of the three themes and a summary of the overall findings in the context of the central research question and research questions. The findings revealed that special education teachers knew about, implemented, and valued evidence-based practices as a part of their reading instruction process, but still depended on their own experiences, knowledge, and practices when differentiating reading instruction for students with disabilities. Class composition significantly affected their ability to implement evidence-based instructional reading practices, as did having access the appropriate leveled books and curricula.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overview

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to identify and uncover the beliefs and perceptions expressed by special education teachers regarding the use of evidence-based reading practices. This final chapter provides a summary of the findings, a discussion of the findings in the context of current literature and theory, a description of methodological and practical implications, and discussion of the study limitations. The chapter concludes with recommendations for future research.

Summary of Findings

Data collected from semistructured interviews, classroom observations, and document analyses provided insight into the beliefs, perceptions, and instructional practices of special education teachers. All the participants entered into conversations with the researcher willingly and without reservation. Overall, participants spoke openly and freely about their experiences and beliefs.

The classroom observations occurred across various special education settings (e.g., self-contained classroom, resource room, response-to-intervention, and reading lab) and revealed a group of persistent teachers dedicated to their mission of providing effective reading practices for their students. The researcher observed all 13 teachers teaching essential components of reading instruction, as identified in the National Reading Panel report (National Reading Panel, 2000). As evidenced by observations of their classroom environments and by student participation, this type of instruction appeared to occur on a consistent basis.

Central Research Question

The central research question guiding the study was “What are the lived experiences and instructional intricacies of a specific group of special education teachers using evidence-based instructional practices when teaching reading to students with disabilities?”

Influenced by federal mandates (e.g., NCLB, IDEIA), special education teachers are expected to focus on the use of evidence-based instructional practices in order to improve the academic reading performance of students with disabilities. Although initial research has been conducted to identify and define evidence-based specifically in the area of special education practices (Dixon et al., 2014; Torres, Farley, & Cook, 2014), few researchers have considered the perspectives of special education teachers.

In this study, the researcher sought to solicit the beliefs and perspectives of a specific group of special education teachers who in response to federal and educational initiatives were required to implement evidence-based reading instruction. Many research studies have addressed the utilization (or lack thereof) of evidence-based instructional reading practices for students with disabilities (Allor et al., 2010; Bentum & Aaron, 2003; Berkeley et al., 2010; Burns & Ysseldyke, 2009; Cook & Cook, 2011; Cook et al., 2014; Dingle et al., 2011; Fuchs et al., 1989; Joseph & Eveleigh, 2011; Henley et al., 2006; Kim et al., 2012; Kretlow & Helf, 2013; Torres, Farley, & Cook, 2014). Far fewer qualitative studies have been conducted regarding the beliefs and perceptions of special education teachers in implementing such practices (Algozzine et al., 1988; Anderson et al., 2010; Boardman et al., 2005; Kilanowski-Press et al., 2010; Klehm, 2014; Kretlow & Helf, 2013).

Shealey, McHatton, and Farmer (2009) discussed the importance of including the voices of special educators regarding changes resulting from school education reforms and legislation.

Shealey et al. indicated that special educators believed leaders pressured them to spend additional time teaching and facilitating learning in the general education setting, to become knowledgeable about research-based strategies, and to increase student performance on state and district assessments. Although special educators were not necessarily opposed to these changes, some felt that policymakers and school administrators make many of these decisions and changes without direct input from special educators (Shealey et al., 2009).

Subresearch Question 1

The first research question was “What themes emerged from the voices of special education teachers when describing their perceptions and beliefs towards evidence-based instructional reading practices?” The researcher compiled data from interviews, observation, and documentation analyses from 13 participants. All participants were responsible for delivering reading instruction for students with disabilities. Three themes emerged from the voices of this group of special educators (a) Knowledge sources, (b) Environmental diversities, and (c) Organizational constraints.

With three to over 30 years of teaching experience, this specific group of educators set out each day with one common goal: to move children closer to becoming independent and functional readers. At times, it appeared during classroom observations these special education teachers were making up for the effective instruction in reading skills students had missed in earlier years. Other times, these teachers attempted to understand the gaps that needed filling because of the effects of students’ disabilities. Teachers paid less attention to the classification of an intervention as *evidence-based*; instead, they emphasized finding strategies that might work for each child.

Participants expressed a shared belief that one size did not fit all—in fact, one size did not fit most. Rather, one size might fit just one student. All 13 participants voiced comments and responses that led to the interpretation and identification of three significant themes.

Subresearch Question 2

The second research question was “How do special education teachers describe personal factors and beliefs that shape their day-to-day decision-making regarding evidence-based instructional practices used to teach reading?”

Data collected from participants indicated that special education teachers faced unique challenges each day, challenges that set them apart from other education teachers. Special education teachers reported that each teaching year began with high expectations for academic growth in reading for all of their students. The special education teachers in this study were serious about their job of teaching students with disabilities to read and truly believed that the majority of their students had the ability to learn to read. The teachers readily accepted that each of the students in their classroom had unique abilities, skills, and challenges that affected their ability to achieve academic growth in reading.

However, each day events unrelated to reading occurred to interrupt their plans to deliver critical elements of reading instruction. Frequent interruptions occurred related to behavior issues, IEP meetings, or collaboration with additional service providers. As witnessed in two separate instances, teachers interrupted classroom instruction to look for missing students. Nonetheless, each special education teacher expressed dedication and passion to provide high quality grade-level instruction in all academic areas, especially in literacy.

Although eager to learn new teaching methods and strategies, the majority of these special education teachers were disappointed at the assumption that effective strategies for

struggling students were sufficient and generalizable for students with varying social, physical, and learning disabilities. These special education teachers pointed out their years of experience and reflected upon their past successes as their roadmaps. As one special education teacher stated, when faced with a student who seemed to make only minimum growth each year, “You just keep trying something else; you don’t give up” (Inez, personal communication, January 26, 2016).

Despite their steadfast dedication, many of the special education teachers expressed concern about the trend of increasing accountability and the push to raise academic outcomes for students with disabilities. Paramount to their concerns was the belief that they did not have exposure to quality instructional models specific to the various levels of disabilities represented in their classrooms. Always playing the role of the advocate for their students, this group of special education teachers worked hard to acquire books, materials, supplies, and appropriate curricula to meet the needs of the students.

Special education teachers’ continual desire for knowledge emerged from their independent work research and educational training, above the basic requirements for state certification. They knew about, understood, and applied reading instruction that represented the finding of the National Reading Panel (2000). They were able to speak intelligently about the need to sustain consistent and intense instruction in order to produce significant reading gains, and they believed that all children could learn how to read.

Subresearch Question 3

The third research question was “What meanings or understandings do special education teachers voice towards their preferred practices and/or evidence-based strategies for teaching reading?” As their stories of success with a student during reading instruction unfolded, the

researcher realized these teachers had an inner sense and understanding of the need to develop functional reading skills for all students. The special education teachers acknowledged that children learned to read using a variety of strategies and individualized practices. A common phrase stated by many was one size did not fit everyone, nor did one size fit most. In their world of special education instruction, one size might fit just one student. Although their collective and preferred instructional practices varied, the teachers agreed on the need for consistent and daily application focused on addressing gaps and deficiencies in students' functional reading skills.

Subresearch Question 4

The fourth research question was "How do special education teachers describe the perceived benefits and/or effectiveness, if any, from the implementation of evidence-based instructional reading practices?" Although these special education teachers generally acknowledged academic growth occurred when evidence-based reading practices were used, they also noted that some EBI practices had a minimal effect and at times left students with disabilities confused, conflicted, and frustrated with the process of learning to read. Teachers clearly felt inclined to explore new paths and methodologies based on their own personal beliefs and experiences versus simply teaching reading as stipulated in their teacher's manual or district-adopted textbooks. Once again, their mission was to find what worked best for their students given the nature of students' disabilities.

Conversely, the two special education teachers who provided reading instruction in a reading lab and/or a response-to-intervention environment appeared confident in the benefit of providing reading instruction within a precise and consistent learning structure. The students knew and expected certain routines. Of interest, these two participants also had more years of teaching experience and university training supporting these beliefs. These individuals worked

diligently at fusing their own personal knowledge within an instructional structure that encompassed struggling readers with and without disabilities.

Special education teachers tend to hold strongly to their own personal beliefs of successful instructional methods based on past success and professional training (Boardman et al., 2005). The findings in this study showed that teachers used a mixed and varied approach to reading instruction in their classrooms. Special education teachers concurred that the acquisition of reading skills for students with disabilities was a very slow process, which made it difficult to see the true benefits of using of evidence-based reading instruction.

Subresearch Question 5

The fifth research question was “How do special education teachers describe professional development, training, challenges, or barriers, if any needed to enhance evidence-based reading instruction for students with disabilities?” Participants agreed that appropriate curricula, instructional materials, and training were necessary components for the successful implementation of evidence-based reading instruction for students with disabilities. The teachers frequently faced challenges in finding appropriate instructional materials given the varied needs of their students. Almost by necessity, teachers admitted to using their own personal funds to supplement any district-provided materials. Teachers spent a significant amount of time reviewing materials for appropriateness and modifying or recreating curricula materials.

The special education teachers noted class composition and administrator support were major challenges. They expressed the belief that factors such as class size, multiple grade levels, and varied ages and disabilities had a significant impact on the successful implementation of reading instruction. The teachers noted specific examples regarding the complexity of teaching in classrooms with a range of grade levels and disabilities. Special education teachers described

trying to teach reading when several students had IEP goals to have texts read aloud, another student needed visual support, and another needed visual sign language assistance. During these moments when it seemed impossible to implement EBI with fidelity, special education teachers made decisions based on their own repertoire of instructional experiences and preferred practices.

Discussion

The purpose of this section is to discuss the empirical and theoretical literature that guided this study. In this section, the researcher reflects upon and integrates the empirical findings in relationship to the epistemological theory of knowledge and Bandura's (2001) social cognitive theory.

Federal Legislation

The United States education system has played a historical role in addressing the quality of educational opportunities for all students. The Department of Education and other federal agencies have enacted legislation addressing the improvement of education (*IDEA*, 2004; *NCLB*, 2001). The most recent addition to the list of federal legislation is The Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 (Public Law 94-142, 1975; *IDEA*, 2004).

One common theme of these initiatives has been the improvement of educational and academic outcomes for all students. The Department of Education has emphasized in each of these acts of legislation the accountability and improvement of academic outcomes for students with disabilities (Public Law 94-142, 1975; *IDEA*, 2004). The Department of Education established the What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) as a conduit to review and provide resources in the identification of scientifically-based instructional practices (U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, 2015). However, only

recently has the website begun to include reading interventions focused on evidence-based instructional reading practices for students with disabilities.

Defining EBI

The term *evidence-based practices* has become popular in the field of education, particularly in reference to curricula development and instructional practices. Despite its current popularity, there is no universal agreement as to the term's definition. One group of researchers offered the following definition: "Evidence-based practices (EBP) are shown by high-quality research to meaningfully improve student outcomes" (Torres et al., 2014, p. 64).

Earlier researchers defined evidence-based practice as a practice "supported by empirical research and professional wisdom" (Burns & Ysseldyke, 2009, p. 3). Yet another report produced under a U.S. Department of Education contract offered the Reading Excellence Act definition for evidence-based reading instruction:

"Evidence-based" refers to practices that have been shown to be successful in improving reading achievement. The success of these practices is demonstrated in two ways: by research-study data collected according to rigorous design and by consensus among expert practitioners who monitor outcomes as part of their practice. These results - whether scientific data or expert consensus - must be valid and reliable and come from a variety of sources. (Bell & Dolainski, 2012, p. 3)

The findings in the current study corroborated previous research concerns regarding the lack of a universal or agreed-upon definition for the term *evidence-based practices*. Although the authors of the previously mentioned studies found that special education teachers understood that EBI implied instructional practices shown to be effective in improving reading instruction,

they also used terms such as *scientifically-based*, *research-based*, and *best practices* synonymously (Bell & Dolainski, 2012; Burns & Ysseldyke, 2009; Torres et al., 2014).

The findings of this study corroborated previous research concerns regarding the lack of a universal or agreed upon definition for the term evidence-based practices. Each of the special education teachers in this study expressed that the term EBI referred to instructional practices shown to be effective in improving reading instruction. However, there appeared to be little understanding of the type and quality of research required in order to consider a practice as evidence-based. Only two participants in the current study were able to connect the quality of research design and effect size to evaluate the effectiveness of instructional strategies.

The nebulous definitions associated with evidence-based instruction are understandable given the limited number of research studies conducted in the context of special education teaching practices (Burns & Ysseldyke, 2009; Cook & Cook, 2011; Cook et al., 2014). The findings from this study support the need for professional development and training. This training is needed in order for special educators to learn how to access, interpret, and implement research findings related to evidence-based practices (Freeman & Sugai, 2013).

Epistemological Theory of Knowledge

The framework for this study included the epistemological theory of knowledge (e.g., personal epistemological beliefs and the social cognitive theory, which involves the contribution of self-efficacy and motivation (Bandura, 1989, 2001). Epistemology refers to the study of knowledge and justified beliefs (Hofer & Pintrich, 1997). At the core of personal epistemology is the understanding of how people acquire knowledge and the convergence of knowledge and personal beliefs (Hofer & Pintrich, 1997).

Data from this study revealed various methods by which participants reported the acquisition of evidence-based knowledge and understanding of EBI reading practices. The majority of the participants cited the Internet as their primary source for gaining information about evidence-based reading practices and materials. They also acquired knowledge through district-sponsored professional development sessions, external workshops, and state certification courses taken at the university level. In addition, participants mentioned their own self-initiated acquisition of such knowledge, obtained by reading trade books, accessing research articles, and participating in professional learning community book clubs.

Overall, the special education teachers voiced a similar sentiment regarding the sources of their knowledge in teaching reading to students with disabilities. They also used the terms research-based and scientifically-based interchangeably. The special education teachers also were unable to discuss specific research studies that supported their decisions to use specific reading strategies. These findings corroborate research conducted by Maggioni and Parkinson (2008).

The perceptions of the special education teachers in this study align with the research findings of Maggioni and Parkinson (2008). Maggioni & Parkinson (2008) found that the conceptualization of learning was constructed by an individual's understanding of their world. As related to this study, the teachers noted that the ideas used to describe the epistemic beliefs within which teachers operate were extremely complex. Maggioni and Parkinson (2008) compared experts' conceptualization of learning with a conceptualization of learning constructed by an understanding of the world. This perspective was relevant to the findings in this study given that special education teachers conceptualized reading in their classrooms through their understanding of the world of disabilities.

Perceptions and Beliefs Related to Self-Efficacy

The special education teachers in this study believed that they possessed the experience, skills, and knowledge to teach the important components of reading instruction. This belief is supported by data collected from each special education teacher in this study as they identified and described the process used to achieve reading success with current and past students. This further supported each special education teachers' decisions of instructional practices based on what has worked, even if the practices were not deemed evidence-based.

The data also revealed another important common denominator among these educators. The special education teachers in this study believed that the use of explicit and direct instruction directly contributed to the development of successful reading skills for students with disabilities. This finding corroborates previous researchers who stipulated the importance of consistent, explicit, and direct reading instruction in order to develop reading skills for students with disabilities (Allor, Mathes, Roberts, Jones, & Champlin, 2010).

Effective reading programs typically include ongoing or consistent monitoring of progress monitoring in conjunction with explicit and direct instruction (Archer & Hughes, 2011). Each of the special education teachers collected and utilized informal and formal assessments to drive their reading instruction. Special education teachers indicated the belief that progress monitoring was an essential tool in determining which instructional tools and practices to implement for reading instruction. The teachers also indicated that the usage of progress monitoring data also supported the implementation and monitoring of a student's IEP goal. These findings are well supported in academic literature and research (Behrmann & Souvignier, 2013; Thornbald & Christ, 2014).

The special education teachers in this study were able to identify the major components of reading instruction stipulate in the National Reading Panel. The National Reading Panel report identified five critical components of reading instruction, which included phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and text comprehension (National Reading Panel, 2000). The researcher observed three of these components: phonemic awareness, phonics, and fluency during the reading instruction observations. Text comprehension, while discussed by participants in the interview sessions, was most prominent in the reading lab and response to intervention reading approaches.

Special education teachers also believed that they possessed the ability to access resources to develop effective instructional interventions related to individualized needs of their students. However, the special education teachers were not as confident, nor did they portray a sense of self-efficacy in teaching special education students outside of the scope of their certification. This was particularly true for the participants who were certified to teach in a mild to moderate special education classroom. These participants did indicate concerns in implementing reading instruction for students with more moderate to severe disabilities.

Findings in this study also highlighted the use of a reading lab and response to intervention model, direct instruction of self-monitoring strategies to promote students' reading comprehension and vocabulary development. The self-monitoring and self-correcting strategies observed by the special education teachers in the reading lab and response to intervention environment are supported by literature and research (Lichtinger & Kaplan, 2015; Nelson & Manset-Williamson, 2006). The research synthesis conducted by Kim and colleagues (Kim, Linan-Thompson, & Misquitta, 2012) reported that self-monitoring and self-correcting strategies were critical and important factors in developing effective reading comprehension skills.

While the special education teachers in this study expressed concerns over the amount of time needed for students with disabilities to benefit from EBI reading practices, less reservations or doubts were voiced whether students with disabilities had the capacity to learn to read. They understood that their job included and a high sense of self-efficacy belief and perseverance for teaching students.

Perceptions and Beliefs Related to Social Cognitive Theory

Based on over 24,217 words and phrases derived by interviews and observations collected by the researcher, this group of special educators approached their instructional teaching practices from a constructivist view of learning as explicated by Bandura (2001):

A functional consciousness involves purposive accessing and deliberative processing of information for selecting, constructing, regulating, and evaluating courses of action. This is achieved through intentional mobilization and productive use of semantic and pragmatic representations of activities, goals, and other future events (p. 3).

The findings of this study demonstrated that this group of special education teachers selected their instructional reading practices with intentionality, forethought, and self-reactiveness.

Intentionality, forethought and self-reactiveness are core features of human agency as defined by Bandura (2001). According to Bandura (2001), intentionality refers to acts that are undertaken intentionally and based on the likelihood of actions that may occur at a future point in time.

The special education teachers in this study viewed their preferred teaching practices as intentional and effective. They believed that their preferred teaching practices would produce positive academic outcomes for students. As further explained by Bandura (2001), outcomes are the consequences of actions and concerns on definite plans. The special education teachers in this study corroborated this understanding in that they designed and placed into action specific

plans and learning activities designed to meet the needs of their students. However, Bandura (2001) warns:

To add a further functional dimension to intention, most human pursuits involve other participating agents. Such joint activities require commitment to a shared intention and coordination of interdependent plans of action. The challenge in collaborative activities is to meld diverse self-interests in the service of common goals and intentions collectively pursued in concert. (p. 7).

A broad interpretation of the findings from this study support special education teachers' adoption of a constructivist view of teaching and learning. Special education teachers strove to engage, support, and understand the unique learning abilities of their students. In addition, special education teachers focused on student-centered learning in order to “generate and validate knowledge, and underscore the personal relevance of the topics investigated (Maggioni & Parkinson, 2008, p. 451).

Implications

The purpose of this study was to identify and uncover the beliefs and perceptions expressed by special education teachers regarding the use of evidence-based reading practices. The implications of this study are framed by three major instructional design characteristics that underline constructivist-learning classrooms: analysis, development, and multiple perspectives (Jaraguirgu & Symeou, 2005).

Analyses

Special education teachers in this study articulated their commitment and motivation to improve the reading abilities of students with disabilities. They believed their students learned best by direct instruction within small groups that targeted their specific areas of reading needs.

While they attempted to incorporate EBI practices during reading instruction, special education teachers recognized that there was little guidance on the definition and implementation of EBI for students with disabilities. As a result, curriculum, materials, and instructional tools often needed modification to order to meet the specific needs of their students and special educators heavily relied on their past experiences and success to guide their reading instruction.

This study affirmed the importance of providing special education teachers appropriate professional development, curriculum and materials aligned to accommodate the diverse environment of the special education classroom. From this perspective, lower reading scores by students with disabilities are indicative of the lack of quality resources, rather than the lack of quality of instruction received in special education environments (e.g. RTI, inclusive, self-contained classroom). By failing to provide appropriate resources (as opposed to the modification of resources used in the general education classrooms), special education teachers are likely to continue to rely on their experiences, or on trial and error practices to teach reading to students with disabilities.

Development

Multiple grade levels and multiple cognitive abilities have the potential to coexist in an instructional learning environment that is student-centered and anchored by cognitive and authentic tasks (Jaraguirgu & Symeou, 2005). This type of learning environment, while still based upon EBI practices, would allow special education teachers to support student-centered learning, with scaffolding and authentic tasks based on situated cognition.

Special education teachers should be encouraged to become actively involved in the design and development of content-knowledge curriculum that integrates technology and provides differential instruction that meet the needs of students with disabilities. The use of

technology in the special education classroom presents an opportunity for special educators to address challenges of a diverse group of learners and differential instruction (Dixon et al., 2014; Ertmer & Ottenbreit-Leftwich, 2010). Classroom computers, mobile devices, and online curriculum are suggested resources and may enable special educators to teach struggling readers, with and without disabilities, in an environment where content knowledge, various skills, and differential instruction co-exist.

The data from this also study suggests the need for software programs and educational platforms sensitive to the cognitive and developmental needs of students with disabilities. It is important that online curriculum and software programs be aligned with the general education academic content and materials. While special education teachers currently struggle to deliver academic instruction for multiple grade levels, technology is one way to equalize and provide access to core curriculum for special education classrooms with diverse learners.

Multiple Perspectives

Learning for students with disabilities should be situated in real-world contexts and reflect strategies that are implement from multiple perspectives and alternative views (Jaraguirgu & Symeou, 2005). Special educators should be included in a RTI environment that focus on the needs of all struggling readers, not just students with disabilities (Damore & Murray, 2009; Hall & Mahoney, 2013; Lane, Pullen, Hudson & Konold, 2009; Mitchell & Deshler, 2011). This study highlighted several special education teachers who were influential in teaching within an RTI framework, developing an intervention reading lab, and providing real time support and professional development inside the special education classroom. These special education teachers demonstrated the skills to collaborate with general education students and intelligently discuss best practices for students with disabilities.

The data in this study demonstrated that special education teachers perceived their instruction in a reading lab or in a RTI model, met the specific needs of students with disabilities. They also articulated their success in providing systematic reading intervention for as struggling students without a documentation disability. While their primary task was to provide instructional level support in the areas of phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency and comprehension, they also monitored progress, collaborated with classroom teachers in the development of student goals and utilized student data to evaluate and communicate the effectiveness of their instruction.

The special education teachers in this study, who implemented reading instruction to students within a reading lab or RTI, were able to provide EBI with consistency and fidelity. From the perspectives of these special education teachers, their administrators considered them as specialists in the area of reading instruction and fully utilized their skills to benefit all struggling readers. The data from this study suggest administrators and policy makers carefully consider the role of the special education teacher in a RTI environment. If the population of special educators is similar to the special education teachers in this study, this may indicate a trend in utilizing the expertise and experiences of special educator teachers within a schoolwide tiered systems for reading instruction.

Limitations

Qualitative researchers must remember that all research studies have limitations (Creswell, 2013). Limitations are influences that cannot be control or manipulated by the researcher (Creswell, 2013). Subsequently, there were two general limitations noted in this study.

One limitation of this study was the location of implementation. This study was conducted in one specific geographic area in the state of California. The perceptions and beliefs of special education teachers in other geographic regions in California may be different compared to the special education teachers in this study. Implementation and administrator support for EBI practices may also vary based on student populations (i.e. socioeconomic, second language learners, rural locations) in different geographic regions.

Special education teachers' perspectives about evidence-based practices were self-reported. An additional limitation may potentially since the researcher relied on participants to be truthful and honest in their interview responses. However, it should be noted that the study participants appeared to answer all questions presented by the researcher open and honestly.

Recommendations for Future Research

This research study was implemented to understand the lived experiences of special education teachers and garner data related to their beliefs and perceptions of evidence-based instructional reading practices. Based on the data collected, there are several recommendations for future studies. Continued research is needed to address special education teachers' beliefs and implementation of EBI effective instructional practices.

Researchers are encouraged to use a mixed methods design to examine the quality and quantity of reading instruction provided for students with disabilities. This would include studies combining quantitative data regarding total amount, percentage, and frequency of reading instruction in special education learning environments along with qualitative data such as teacher observations and interviews. The combined data from quantitative and qualitative research may provide additional insight on the quality and effectiveness of instructional reading practices for

students with disabilities. This information would be valuable for teacher education programs as they revise and update their curriculum to train future special education teachers.

A stronger research base focused on successful implementation of EBI practices by special educators is also warranted. Research in this area may validate special education teachers' knowledge and experiences in teaching content subjects for students with disabilities. Longitudinal studies conducted over an extended period may be convincing enough for special education teachers to change their personal beliefs and practices. The development and sharing of practical solutions and applications addressed in such studies may provide special education teachers with a variety of evidence-based strategies and resources to use for their diverse student population.

The findings of this study illuminated the challenges of special education teachers' access to books and curriculum that aligned with struggling and below level readers. On-going professional development and training may be beneficial in the development and use of technology to deliver curriculum and instruction for students with a wide range of abilities and academic needs. Research studies utilizing qualitative case studies focused on technology in the special education learning environment is one suggestion.

The results of this study suggest that special education teachers possess the knowledge and expertise to address struggling readers, with or without disabilities. With the expansion of RTI learning environments, researchers are encouraged to focus on the collaborative roles of general education teachers, special education teachers, and professional development providers. Future qualitative research projects could be valuable for university and teacher education programs as they explore the changing roles of special education teachers in a RTI environment.

This type of collaboration may help to bridge the research to practice gap in addressing the needs of all struggling readers.

Summary

This study highlighted the lived experiences of special education teachers who provided reading instruction for students with disabilities. This group of special educators discussed their beliefs, perceptions, and knowledge regarding EBI, as well as their experiences of teaching reading to students with disabilities. The researcher examined special educators' beliefs, perceptions, and knowledge about EBI were through the theoretical framework of social constructivism and self-efficacy.

Special education teachers echoed issues and concerns regarding the use evidence-based research to guide instructional practices in their classrooms. The special education teachers reflected on whether their personal preferences for instructional reading practices were scientifically or research based. Ultimately, special education teachers revealed varying definitions and understandings of evidence-based reading practices to support their preferred instructional reading practices.

Special education teachers also voiced their concerns regarding the wide range of abilities, disabilities and academic needs of the students in their classroom. They expressed feelings of frustrations in their attempts to provide high quality reading instruction for a diverse group of students. This group of teachers also expressed their views regarding expectations to provide access to the general education curriculum, increase academic reading skills, and modify instruction to meet the individual needs of each student.

Finally, this group of special educators provided insight and examples of organizational constraints that interfered with providing effective reading instruction for students with

disabilities. Appropriate leveled curriculum and the need professional development geared specifically for special education teachers were expressed as a critical need. This study also highlighted the vast experiences of special educators and their successes in teaching reading to students with disabilities.

The real issue at hand is not where a student with disability receives services, rather, the manner and accommodations that allow students with disabilities to learn. This is an area where continued collaboration is needed between special education and policy makers. Nonetheless, the rich descriptive findings and data provided revealed in this study are meaningful in informing future policies reforms and teacher preparation programs special education teachers.

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APPENDIX A:
CONSENT FORM

The Institutional Review Board at
Liberty University has approved
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12/28/15 to 12/27/16

Special Education Teachers' Beliefs and Perceptions of Evidence-Based Reading Instruction
Loretta J. Tatum
Liberty University
School of Education

You are invited to be in a research study of special education teachers' beliefs and perceptions about evidence-based reading instruction. You were selected as a possible participant because of your current teaching assignment in a special education setting. I ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Loretta Tatum, a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is to identify and uncover the beliefs and perceptions expressed by special education teachers regarding the use of evidence-based reading practices. The aim of this study is to open up possibilities and understand effective teaching practices for teaching reading to children with disabilities.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:

- 1.) Complete a Teacher Demographics Questionnaire consisting of seven questions. It is anticipated that the questionnaire will take approximately 5 – 10 minutes to complete.
- 2.) Participate in one interview expected to last approximately 30 – 45 minutes. This interview will be audio-recorded.
- 3.) Participate in one classroom observation during reading instruction for approximately 1 – 1 ½ hours.
- 4.) If available, provide written documents you may have received regarding the planning, instruction or training of evidence-based reading practices (i.e. lesson plans, curriculum guidelines, professional development documents).
- 5.) Review and check the accuracy of the information resulting from the audio-recorded interview and the classroom observation (15 – 20 minutes).

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Liberty University has approved
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Risks and Benefits of being in the Study:

The risks involved in this study are no more than the participant would encounter in everyday life. It is not likely that there will be any serious harms or discomforts associated with the interviews or observations. However, you may find some questions uncomfortable to answer. You do not need to answer questions that make you feel uncomfortable or that you do not want to answer.

It is unlikely that there will be any direct benefits to your participation. However, by better understanding how special education teachers feel and utilize evidence-based teaching methods, researchers, key stakeholders, and concerned individuals may become more aware of effective instructional practices for teaching reading to students with disabilities.

Compensation:

You will not receive any monetary compensation for participation in this study.

Confidentiality:

The records of this study will be kept private. Each participant will be assigned fictitious names that will be used in describing all aspects of this study. In any sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely and only I (the researcher) will have access to the records.

I will take the following steps to protect your privacy. The data collected during the interview and observation will be kept confidential. The data will be stored as computer files in my (the researcher's) personal home office, accessible by data-encrypted passwords known only to me. The data will be kept for three (3) years as required by the IRB office of Liberty University. All written data will be shredded at the end of the required three (3) years.

The audiotaped data will be transcribed by a professional transcription service. Prior to receiving the audio tapes, the transcription service will provide me (the researcher) a signed letter of their intent to maintain confidentiality of any and all information transcribed from the audio tapes. Audio tapes will be erased once I (the researcher) have verified the accuracy of the transcription.

While I will know what data belongs to each study participant, any information that I put in my report that could identify you will not be published or shared beyond the research team.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

The Institutional Review Board at
 Liberty University has approved
 This document for use from
 12/28/15 to 12/27/16

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

How to Withdraw from the Study:

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address or phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher conducting this study is **Loretta J. Tatum**. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at [REDACTED]. You may also contact the research's faculty advisor, [REDACTED].

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the [REDACTED].

Please notify the researcher if you would like a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

(NOTE: DO NOT AGREE TO PARTICIPATE UNLESS IRB APPROVAL INFORMATION WITH CURRENT DATES HAS BEEN ADDED TO THIS DOCUMENT.)

☐ The researcher has my permission to audio-record me as part of my participation in this study.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Investigator: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX B:
TEACHER DEMOGRAPHICS QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Gender _____ Male _____ Female _____ Decline to state
2. Age _____ _____ Decline to state
3. Race / Ethnicity (Please check all that apply)

_____ American Indian	_____ Asian
_____ African American	_____ Caucasian
_____ Native Hawaiian or	_____ Other (Please specify:
Other Pacific Islander	_____)
4. Highest Level of Degree

_____ B.A. / B.S.	_____ Master Degree
_____ Post	_____ Doctorate Degree
_____ Other (Please specify: _____)	
5. Credential Type and Authorizations (Select all that apply):

_____ SDC Mild to Moderate
_____ RSP- Resource Support
_____ SDC Moderate to Severe (SH)
_____ SDC Moderate to Severe (ED)
_____ CLAD Designation
_____ Autism Authorization
_____ Reading Certification

_____ Special Education Reading Certification

_____ Other (Please specify: _____)

6. Type of Special Education Classroom

_____ SDC – M/M Grades Preschool - Kindergarten

_____ SDC – M/M - Please indicate grade levels _____

_____ SDC – SH – Please indicate grade levels _____

_____ SDC – Other (please specify): _____

_____ RSP Resource Classroom

_____ General Education Co-teaching Classroom

_____ Response-to-Intervention Delivery Model

7. Number of Years Teaching: _____

APPENDIX C:

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Researcher's Opening Statement:

Thank you for taking the time to meet with me today. My purpose and goal for our time together is to understand how special education teachers experience the practice of evidence-based instruction in their everyday work lives when teaching reading. Please share with me as much as you can about your experiences with evidence-based reading practices in your classroom and with your students.

Central Research Question	Alignment to Interview Questions	Alignment to Theoretical Framework
What are the lived experiences and instructional intricacies of a specific group of special education teachers using evidence-based instructional practices when teaching reading to students with disabilities?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Please describe your class (e.g. number of students, class demographics, disability groupings).). 2. How long have you been a special education teacher? 3. How would you describe a typical day in your life as a special education teacher? (Interview question 3) <p>Probe: You mentioned</p> <p>Probe: Can you tell me more about?</p> <p>Probe: Describe the focus of your reading instruction for this past week?</p> <p>Probe: Is that typical or atypical? Why or why not?</p> <p>Probe: Approximately how much time to you spend planning reading instruction lessons for your class?</p> <p>Probe: How does planning for evidence-based (EBI) reading instruction take place?</p>	van Manen (1990)

Research Questions	Alignment to Interview Questions	Alignment to Theoretical Framework
1. What themes emerge from the voices of special education teachers when describing their perceptions and beliefs towards evidence-based instructional reading practices?	<p>4. How would you define evidence-based instructional reading practices?</p> <p>Probe: How would you define evidence-based instruction as it relates to your teaching experiences in reading to students with disabilities?</p> <p>Probe: What does evidence-based instructional reading practice look like in your classroom?</p> <p>Probe: Has EBI always been a part of teaching reading for students with disabilities?</p> <p>5. Do you feel educational initiatives (i.e. No Child Left Behind, Evidence-based Instruction, Common Core State Standards) have changed the way we have implemented reading instruction for students with disabilities? Why or why not?</p> <p>6. Have these, or any other educational initiatives changed your expectations and anticipated outcomes of reading proficiency for your students?</p> <p>Probe: To what degree, if any, have your expectations of students with disabilities changed regarding reading instruction?</p> <p>Probe: Have any of these changes affected how you interact with your students? Other teachers? Parents?</p> <p>7. Describe your current feelings, perceptions and/or beliefs about EBI reading instruction for students with disabilities.</p>	<p>Bandura (1989, 1991)</p> <p>Hofer & Pintrich (1997)</p> <p>van Manen (1990, 1991)</p>
2. How do special education teachers describe personal factors	<p>8. Tell me about the factors or personal beliefs (if any) that influence your implementation of evidence-based reading practices within your classroom?</p>	<p>van Manen (1990)</p> <p>Hofer & Pintrich (1997)</p>

Research Questions	Alignment to Interview Questions	Alignment to Theoretical Framework
and beliefs, if any that shape their day-to-day decision-making regarding evidence-based instructional practices utilized to teach reading?	<p>Probe: Please explain what it means when you say....</p> <p>Probe: What do you perceive as being needed in your school in order to support your decision to implement evidence-based instructional (EBI) reading instruction?</p> <p>Probe: What level or priority do EBI reading practices take when you plan for and make decisions for your weekly reading lessons?</p> <p>Probe: How does the leadership in your school district support your beliefs and practices of reading instruction?</p> <p>Probe: You mentioned</p> <p>Probe: How do you decide?</p> <p>Probe: Do you collaborate regularly with a grade level team or another individual for reading instruction? What takes place in your collaborative, planning meetings?</p> <p>Probe: What are typical activities in your weekly reading lessons?</p>	Schommer (1990)

Research Questions	Alignment to Interview Questions	Alignment to Theoretical Framework
3. What meanings or understandings do special education teachers voice towards their preferred practices and/or evidence-based strategies for teaching reading?	<p>9. Think about one specific student that you have experienced success with during your reading instruction. Tell me how your reading instruction occurs with this student.</p> <p>Probe: If given the choice between an EBI reading practice and a preferred practice, which would you chose? Why?</p> <p>Probe: How do you think EBI instructional reading practices have impacted reading instruction for this student? For other students?</p>	<p>Bandura (1989, 1991)</p> <p>Hofer & Pintrich (1997)</p> <p>Schommer (1990)</p> <p>van Manen (1990, 1991)</p>
4. How do special education teachers describe the perceived benefits and/or effectiveness, if any, from the implementation of evidence-based instructional reading practices?	<p>10. How would you describe your students' responses to evidence-based reading instruction?</p> <p>Probe: When are evidence-based reading practices useful and when are they not?</p> <p>Probe: What accommodations or supports do you use to support EBI reading instruction in your classroom?</p> <p>Probe: Can you tell me about a time when a specific EBI strategy or accommodation was beneficial in improving reading for a specific student and/or a specific group of students?</p>	<p>(Bandura, 1989, 1991)</p>
5. How do special education teachers describe professional development, training, challenges, or barriers, if any needed to enhance evidence-based	<p>11. Tell me about the barriers, challenges, or issues (if any) you have experienced as you select and use EBI reading instruction for your students?</p> <p>Probe: How do you learn about new instructional strategies for reading? What is your source of knowledge for learning about EBI reading practices?</p>	<p>Hofer & Pintrich (1997)</p> <p>van Manen (1990, 1991)</p>

Research Questions	Alignment to Interview Questions	Alignment to Theoretical Framework
reading instruction for students with disabilities?	<p>Probe: What structures and/or conditions are needed in order to make EBI reading practices happen in your classroom?</p> <p>Probe: What would be your response to the following statement? Excellent classroom reading teachers understand reading development and believe that all children can learn and be taught how to read.</p> <p>12. Thank you very much for sharing your experiences with me.</p> <p>Probe: What, if anything, have I not asked you that you really wanted to share with me today?</p>	

APPENDIX D:
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Please describe your class (e.g. number of students, class demographics, disability groupings, etc.).
2. How long have you been a special education teacher?
3. How would you describe a typical day in your life as a special education teacher?

This question will solicit information in understanding the experiences of special education teachers who teach reading to children with disabilities.
4. How would you define evidence-based instructional reading practices?
5. Do you feel educational initiatives (i.e. No Child Left Behind, Evidence-based Instruction, Common Core State Standards) have changed the way we have implemented reading instruction for students with disabilities? Why or why not?
6. Have these, or any other educational initiatives changed your expectations and anticipated outcomes of reading proficiency for your students?
7. Describe your current feelings, perceptions and/or beliefs about EBI reading instruction for students with disabilities?
8. Tell me about the personal factors or personal beliefs (if any) that influence your implementation of evidence-based reading practices?
9. Think about one specific student that you have experienced success with during your reading instruction. Tell me how your reading instruction occurs with this student?
10. How would you describe your students' response to evidence-based reading instruction?

11. Tell me about the barriers, challenges, or issues, (if any) you have faced in providing EBI reading instruction for your students?
12. Thank you very much for sharing your teaching experiences with me. Thank you very much for sharing your experiences with me. What, if anything, have I not asked that you really wanted to share with me today?

APPENDIX E:
OBSERVATION FIELD NOTES TEMPLATE

Reading content instruction	Observations	Curriculum and/or strategies observed
Phonemic Awareness	<input type="checkbox"/> Whole Group <input type="checkbox"/> Small Group <input type="checkbox"/> 1:1 <input type="checkbox"/> Other	
Word Study	<input type="checkbox"/> Whole Group <input type="checkbox"/> Small Group <input type="checkbox"/> 1:1 <input type="checkbox"/> Other	
Fluency	<input type="checkbox"/> Whole Group <input type="checkbox"/> Small Group <input type="checkbox"/> 1:1 <input type="checkbox"/> Other	
Vocabulary Development	<input type="checkbox"/> Whole Group <input type="checkbox"/> Small Group <input type="checkbox"/> 1:1 <input type="checkbox"/> Other	
Comprehension	<input type="checkbox"/> Whole Group <input type="checkbox"/> Small Group <input type="checkbox"/> 1:1 <input type="checkbox"/> Other	
Setting		
Atmosphere		
Pictures		
Audio		
Analytical Comments:		

APPENDIX F:

EXAMPLE OF TRANSCRIBED FIELD NOTES

Transcribed Field Note

01/19/16

P5

Details	Reflection
Interview scheduled for 1:30 pm	On time! Very professional. Toured room which was very neat and organized.
Introductions:	Consent process went smoothly. She was able to describe her class, her teaching style, etc. Very articulate! Easy to converse with, felt like a conversation (as opposed to ask and answer interview).
Discussion	EBI – she appeared to think carefully before answering the questions. Made me think she was truly being reflective and honest with her response. She paused and thought carefully at the question – if all children could be taught how to read. She eventually answered yes, but qualified her response as to how it may not occur and look like we (teachers?) expect. Hinted at the influence of cognitive levels.
Observation:	Not scheduled at the same time. Scheduled for later next week. I think this gives me another perspective and point of view. Overall, really good interview

APPENDIX G:
INITIAL OPEN CODE LIST

Initial Open Code List

- Classroom composition
 - Multiple disabilities
 - Emotional & behavior issues
 - Classroom management
 - Reading Levels - At Grade, Below Grade,
 - Whole class/Large group instruction
 - Small group instruction
 - Pairs instruction
 - Individualized Instruction
 - No direct student contact
 - Self-help skills
 - Cognitive impairments
 - Core reading content
 - District reading curriculum
 - Modified instructional curriculum
 - Student assessment (informal)
 - Student assessment (progress monitoring)
 - Key instructional activities
 - IEP goal related
 - Reading components (Phonemic Awareness, Phonics, Vocabulary, Fluency, Comprehension)
 - Teaching done at students' instructional levels
 - Collaboration with general education teachers,
 - Collaboration with instructional aides
 - Integration of technology
 - Materials & curriculum
 - Professional development training
 - Administrator support/guidance
 - Special Education District guidelines
 - Other activities (not otherwise specified)
-

Note: Initial codes used across all data sets.

**APPENDIX H:
CODES TO CATEGORIES LIST**

Codes	Categories	Themes
Reading components Phonics Vocabulary Fluency Comprehension Phonemic awareness Use of graphic organizers Teaching done at students' instructional levels	Knowledge of Reading Practices IEP Goals Attitudes & Beliefs Teachers' Experiences EBI	Knowledge Sources

Codes	Categories	Themes
Classroom Size	Classroom Composition	Environmental Diversities
Teaching Self-help Skills	Functional/Life Skills Instruction	
Multiple disabilities	Teachers' time	
Emotional & behavior issues		
Classroom Organization		
Cognitive impairments		

Codes	Categories	Themes
Collaboration with general education teachers Collaboration with instructional aides Materials & curriculum Professional Development Administrator/District Support Special Education District Guidelines	Time Curriculum & Materials Materials & Curriculum Professional Development Student Assessments District/Federal Mandates	Organizational Constraints

APPENDIX I:
MATRICES OF PARTICIPANTS RESPONSES

Category: Classroom composition Functional Skills Instruction, Teachers' time	Interview Question #1 – Describe your class?													Occurrences 65	CRQ (65) Theme 2 (65)
	Participants														
	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11	12	13		
Number of students	18	10	20	12	28	10	9	10	9	12	9	22	9		
Autism	X	X		X	X	X			X	X	X	X	X	10	
Intellectual disabilities (ID)	X	X		X		X	X	X	X	X				8	
Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD)	X			X	X	X				X	X	X		7	
Other Health Impairments (OHI)	X	X		X		X	X	X	X					7	
Multiple Disabilities/ Other		X				X				X				3	
ADHD							X							1	
Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD)							X			X				2	
Speech & Language (SLI)	x	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X		10	

Category: Knowledge of Reading Practices, Teachers’ expectations, IEP Goals	Interview Question # 3 How would you describe a typical day ...													Occurrences 66	CRQ (66) Theme 1(39) Theme 2(19) Theme 3(8)		
	Participants																
	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11	12	13				
Includes core content areas: reading, PE, social studies, science art, ELD, math, counting, IEP Goals, art		x		x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	10			
Students come during RTI time, different grade levels	x		x		x						x	x	x	6			
Work on phonics and basic reading skills, vocabulary, sight words, close reading, reading inventory, placement testing, instructional level reading, fluency	x	x	x	x	x			x	x	x	x			9			
Reading buddies	x							x						2			

Plan lessons for different learning groups	x		x	x	x	x	x	x			x		x	9	
Manage behavior issues as they occur,	x				x	x	x			x			x	6	
Collaborate with general ed teachers	x		x	x	x						x		x	6	
Non-stop					x	x				x				3	
Manage behaviors, verbal prompts		x			x				x	x			x	5	
Self-help skills (i.e. toileting, language skills, social skills, PECS)		x		x		x	x		x	x	x	x		8	
Technology – use of iPads						x		x	x				x	4	

Interview Question # 2			Contributes to CRQ Theme 2		
Participant	Grade Level	Instructional Setting	Age	Years of Experience	Gender
1	2-6	Resource Support	49	21	F
2	9-12	Self-Contained Classroom Moderate/Severe	35	3	M
3	2-3	Response To Intervention – Reading Lab	63	30	F
4	1-3	Self-Contained Classroom Mild/Moderate	35	6	F
5	1-6	Resource Support	32	10	F
6	2-4	Self-Contained Classroom Mild/Moderate	42	18	F
7	1-6	Self-Contained Classroom Emotional/Behavioral	38	10	M
8	4-6	Self-Contained Classroom Moderate/Severe	43	6	F
9	1-3	Self-Contained Classroom Moderate/Severe	41	14	F
10	1-3	Self-Contained Classroom Mild/Moderate	28	10 (GE) 5 (SPED)	F
11	1-12	Response to Intervention	53	15	F
12	1-6	Resource Support	30	8	F
13	6-8	Specialized Program – High Functioning Autism	49	9.5	F

Category Knowledge of Reading Practices, EBI	Interview Question #4 How would you define evidence-based instructional reading practices?														Contributes to SRQ1(61) Theme 1(61)	
	Participants														61	
	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11	12	13			
Based on research shown to be effective		X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	11		
Based on statistical research							X				X			2		
Based on work of respected professionals in the industry	X	X		X			X							4		
Strategies presented in conferences that practicing teachers have found to be effective	X				X	X								3		
Direct instruction	X	X	X	X	X	X								6		
Teaching done at the students’ instructional level/individual teaching strategies		X	X	X	X	X	X	X				X	X	8		
Small group instruction	X		X		X									3		
Materials and curriculum shown to benefit students	X	X	X					X						4		
Uniformly agreed upon by teachers							X							1		
Not always applicable to	X					X	X			X	X	X	X	13		

Category: Teachers' Experience Attitudes & Beliefs District/ Federal Mandates	Interview Question #5 Have educational initiatives changed...														
	Participants													Occurrences 13	Contributed to Theme 1 (13) Theme 3 (24)
	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11	12	13		
Yes				X		X				X		X		4	
No	X	X	X		X		X	X			X		X	8	
Not Sure									X					1	

Category/Comments Attitudes & Beliefs Teachers' Experiences EBI	Interview Question #7 Feelings, perceptions, beliefs of EBI															Contributed to SRQ1 (91) Theme 1 (91)
	Participants															
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	Occurrences 91		
Takes time to implement				X	X	X				X			X	5		
Varies with each student	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	13		
Needs appropriate materials/ curriculum to implement		X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		10		
Must combine EBI with good teaching/teacher input/based on previous experience, use what works for my students	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	13		
Flexible enough to allow for good teaching	X													1		
Takes teacher persistence				X					X					2		
Must modify	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	13		
Takes away from functional, daily, life skills learning						X		X	X					3		
Challenging						X				X				2		
Need to reteach	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	12		
Students do not retained/sustained				X		X								2		
Requires support of administrators	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	13		
Memory deficits (prevents learning)				X		X								2		

Category/Comments :	Interview Question # 8 Tell me about the personal factors or personal beliefs (if any) that influence your implementation of evidence-based reading practices.													Contributes to: SRQ2 (19)	
	Participants													Occurrences (56)	
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	Themes	
Hard work	X	X	X	X	X	X		X		X		X	X	12	
Requires self-reflection			X	X				X			X		X	5	
I believe it works	X		X											2	
The most successful evidence-based reading practices are those that appeal to a wide variety of learners							X							1	
Huge challenge						X				X				2	
Requires support from administrators and leadership	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	13	
No guidelines from leadership	x					X				X				3	
All children who have the cognitive level to read, can learn to read words on paper	X													1	
Children who do have the cognitive level to read, can still learn to read, just more of a pictorial, functional type of literacy	X													1	
I believe I can make a difference	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	12	
No personal beliefs									X					1	
Philosophical belief, you have to get to know the student to know what they can do (relationship-building)				X										1	
May not be effective for all students with disabilities										X				1	
Reading is important enough that as a profession, teachers have to care... personal determination										X	X			2	

Category/Comments :	Interview Question # 9 Think about one specific student that you have experienced success.....													Occurrences 60	Contributed to Theme 1 (14) Theme 2 (42) Theme 3 (4)		
	Participants																
	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11	12	13				
Worked with student for consecutive years				X				X	X		X		X	5			
Student showed lack of motivation - Retained/lack of motivation	X			X		X	X							4			
Tried many different approaches	X			X	X	X		X	X		X			7			
Used what I thought would work	X			X	X	X		X	X	X	X			8			
Worked every day on reading components 1:1	X							X	X					3			
Lots of reading practice	X			X				X	X			X	X	6			
Required extended time	X			X	X	X		X	X				X	7			
Had to fill lots of gaps	X			X	X				X			X		5			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Used computer program / technology w/ short videos, cartoon, characters, sound effects iPads 							X		X					2			
Used technology							X						X	2			
Used repetitive lessons						X		X	X					3			
Explain process, set goals with students	X													1			
Parents were highly involved								X						1			
Basic needs need to be met first before you can be successful with academics					X				X		X			4			
They appreciate the attention and they know you care. It’s about developing that bond – that relationship- and then they start to respond.											X		X	2			

Category:	Interview Question # 10 How would you describe your students' response to evidence-based reading instruction?													Occ12urren es	Contributed to Research Question 4
	Participants														
	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11	12	13		
They can learn to be responsive if they know what they have to think about, do, and learn during the process	X											X		2	
It's not always about reading. Students respond to instruction when we are able to address the student's behavior, if that's what's interfering with learning							X							1	
They display short attention spans, may retain one day and forget the next day						X								1	Theme 2
They respond to praise, encouragement (i.e. stickers, high fives) and some need straight talk.				X										1	Theme 2
Positive growth and support from principal and teachers					X									1	Theme 2
They like the iPads. Plus, it's different for them.		X												1	Theme 3
Everything happens in very small steps									X		X			2	Theme 2
Varies for each group of children according to the severity of their disabilities.								X						2	Theme 2
Varies with the use of programs								X							
No response										X				1	

Category:	Interview Question # 11 Barriers, challenges or issues faced in implementation..													Occurrences 26	Contributed to SRQ5 Theme 2 Theme 3		
	Participants																
	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11	12	13				
Effects of disability/range of disability types				X		X					X			3	Theme 2		
Students don’t respond to modifications				X		X								2	Theme 2		
Not enough materials Lack of district provided curriculum/instruction	X						X		X	X	X			5	Theme 3		
Need to purchase materials out of pocket	X													2	Theme 3		
Finding/being provided appropriate instructional materials	X						X				X			3	Theme 3		
Multiple grade level instruction	X					X	X				X			4	Theme 2		
Quality of instructional assistants/aides							X							1	Theme 3		
Rigor is challenging for students/ students become confused						X							X	2	Theme 2		
Students who require 1:1 assistance, when only 1 aide assigned to classroom						X								1	Theme 2		
Loss of instructional time due to <ul style="list-style-type: none">Severe behaviorsdynamics of classroom and teaching changes based on severe				X		X	X	X		X				5	Theme 3		

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> behavior issues • Movement of instructional aides 																
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of parent support • Families/parents who are illiterate • Irregular attendance 						X		X							2	Theme 3
Lack of training		X										X			2	Theme 3
Time for planning and program maintenance			X								X	X			3	Theme 3
Pacing of instruction with General Ed					X										1	Theme 3
Lack of administrative support										X					1	Theme 3
Wait and see												X			1	Theme 3

APPENDIX: J

DATA COLLECTION CODING

Category: Classroom composition , Functional Skills Instruction, Teachers’ time	Interview Question #1 – Describe your class?													Occurrences 65	CRQ (65) Theme 2 (65)
	Participants														
	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11	12	13		
Number of students	18	10	20	12	28	10	9	10	9	12	9	22	9		CRQ Theme 2
Autism	x	x		x	x	x			x	x	x	x	x	10	CRQ Theme 2
Intellectual disabilities (ID)	x	x		x		x	x	x	x	x				8	CRQ Theme 2
Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD)	x			x	x	x				x	x	x		7	CRQ Theme 2
Other Health Impairments (OHI)	x	x		x		x	x	x	x					7	CRQ Theme 2
Multiple Disabilities/ Other		x				x				x				3	CRQ Theme 2
ADHD							x							1	CRQ Theme 2
Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD)							x			x				2	CRQ Theme 2
Speech & Language (SLI)	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x		10	CRQ Theme 2

Interview Question # 2			Contributes to CRQ Theme 2		
Participant	Grade Level	Instructional Setting	Age	Years of Experience	Gender
1	2-6	Resource Support	49	21	F
2	9-12	Self-Contained Classroom Moderate/Severe	35	3	M
3	2-3	Response To Intervention – Reading Lab	63	30	F
4	1-3	Self-Contained Classroom Mild/Moderate	35	6	F
5	1-6	Resource Support	32	10	F
6	2-4	Self-Contained Classroom Mild/Moderate	42	18	F
7	1-6	Self-Contained Classroom Emotional/Behavioral	38	10	M
8	4-6	Self-Contained Classroom Moderate/Severe	43	6	F
9	1-3	Self-Contained Classroom Moderate/Severe	41	14	F
10	1-3	Self-Contained Classroom Mild/Moderate	48	10 (GE) 5 (SPED) 15 Total	F
11	1-12	Response to Intervention	53	15	F
12	1-6	Resource Support	30	8	F
13	6-8	Specialized Program – High Functioning Autism	49	9.5	F

Category: Knowledge of Reading Practices, Teachers’ expectations, IEP Goals	Interview Question # 3 How would you describe a typical day ...													Occurrences 66	CRQ (66) Theme 1(39) Theme 2(19) Theme 3(8)
	Participants														
	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11	12	13		
Includes core content areas: reading, PE, social studies, science art, ELD, math, counting, IEP Goals, art		x		x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	10	CRQ Theme 1
Students come during RTI time, different grade levels	x		x		x						x	x	x	6	CRQ Theme 1
Work on phonics and basic reading skills, vocabulary, sight words, close reading, reading inventory, placement testing, instructional level reading, fluency	x	x	x	x	x			x	x	x	x			9	CRQ Theme 1
Reading buddies	x							x						2	CRQ Theme 1

Plan lessons for different learning groups	x		x	x	x	x	x	x			x		x	9	CRQ Theme 1
Manage behavior issues as they occur,	x				x	x	x			x			x	6	CRQ Theme 2
Collaborate with general ed teachers	x		x	x	x						x		x	6	CRQ Theme 3
Non-stop					x	x				x				3	CRQ Theme 1
Manage behaviors, verbal prompts		x			x				x	x			x	5	Theme 2
Self-help skills (i.e. toileting, language skills, social skills, PECS)		x		x		x	x		x	x	x	x		8	Theme 2
Technology – use of iPads						x		x	x				x	4	

Category Knowledge of Reading Practices, EBI	Interview Question #4 How would you define evidence-based instructional reading practices?													Contributes to SRQ1(61) Theme 1(61)	
	Participants													61	
	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11	12	13		
Based on research shown to be effective		X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	11	Theme 1
Based on statistical research							X				X			2	Theme 1
Based on work of respected professionals in the industry	X	X		X			X							4	Theme 1
Strategies presented in conferences that practicing teachers have found to be effective	X				X	X								3	
Direct instruction	X	X	X	X	X	X								6	Theme 1
Teaching done at the students' instructional level/individual teaching strategies		X	X	X	X	X	X	X				X	X	8	
Small group instruction	X		X		X									3	
Materials and curriculum shown to benefit students	X	X	X					X						4	
Uniformly agreed upon by teachers							X							1	Theme 1
Not always applicable to	X					X	X			X	X	X	X	13	Theme 1

students w/ disabilities															
May not always work with students with disabilities		X	X	X	X		X	X							
	What does EBI look like in your classroom? (Probe)														
Reading instructional texts, phonics, phonemic awareness, vocabulary, word study, comprehension	x			X		X								3	SRQ1 Theme 1

Category: Teachers' Experience Attitudes & Beliefs District/ Federal Mandates	Interview Question #5 Have educational initiatives changed...														
	Participants													Occurrences 13	Contributed to Theme 1 (13) Theme 3 (24)
	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11	12	13		
Yes				X		X				X		X		4	Theme 1 Theme 3
No	X	X	X		X		X	X			X		X	8	Theme 1 Theme 3
Not Sure									X					1	Theme 1 Theme 3

	Interview Question #7 Feelings, perceptions, beliefs of EBI															Contributed to SRQ1 (91) Theme 1 (91)
	Participants															
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	Occurrences 91		
Takes time to implement				X	X	X				X			X	5		SRQ1 Theme 3
Varies with each student	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	13		SRQ1 Theme 2
Needs appropriate materials/ curriculum to implement		X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		10		SRQ1 Theme 1
Must combine EBI with good teaching/teacher input/based on previous experience, use what works for my students	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	13		SRQ1 Theme 1
Flexible enough to allow for good teaching	X													1		SRQ1 Theme 1
Takes teacher persistence				X					X					2		SRQ1
Must modify	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	13		SRQ1 Theme 2
Takes away from functional, daily, life skills learning						X		X	X					3		SRQ1 Theme 1
Challenging						X				X				2		SRQ1 Theme 2
Need to reteach	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	12		SRQ1 Theme 2
Students do not retained/sustained				X		X								2		SRQ1 Theme 1
Requires support of administrators	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	13		SRQ1 Theme 3
Memory deficits (prevents learning)				X		X								2		SRQ1 Theme 2

	Interview Question # 8 Tell me about the personal factors or personal beliefs (if any) that influence your implementation of evidence-based reading practices.													Contributes to: SRQ2 (19)	
	Participants													Occurrences (56)	
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	Themes	
Hard work	X	X	X	X	X	X		X		X		X	X	12	
Requires self-reflection			X	X				X			X		X	5	
I believe it works	X		X											2	
The most successful evidence-based reading practices are those that appeal to a wide variety of learners							X							1	
Huge challenge						X				X				2	
Requires support from administrators and leadership	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	13	
No guidelines from leadership	x					X				X				3	
All children who have the cognitive level to read, can learn to read words on paper	X													1	
Children who do have the cognitive level to read, can still learn to read, just more of a pictorial, functional type of literacy	X													1	
I believe I can make a difference	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	12	
No personal beliefs									X					1	
Philosophical belief, you have to get to know the student to know what they can do (relationship-building)				X										1	
May not be effective for all students with disabilities										X				1	
Reading is important enough that as a profession, teachers have to care... personal determination										X	X			2	

	Interview Question # 9 Think about one specific student that you have experienced success.....													Occurrences 60	Contributed to Theme 1 (14) Theme 2 (42) Theme 3 (4)
	Participants														
	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11	12	13		
Worked with student for consecutive years				X				X	X		X		X	5	Theme 2
Student showed lack of motivation - Retained/lack of motivation	X			X		X	X							4	Theme 2
Tried many different approaches	X			X	X	X		X	X		X			7	Theme 2
Used what I thought would work	X			X	X	X		X	X	X	X			8	Theme 1
Worked every day on reading components 1:1	X							X	X					3	Theme 2
Lots of reading practice	X			X				X	X			X	X	6	Theme 2
Required extended time	X			X	X	X		X	X				X	7	Theme 2
Had to fill lots of gaps	X			X	X				X			X		5	Theme 2
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Used computer program / technology w/ short videos, cartoon, characters, sound effectsiPads							X		X					2	Theme 3
Used technology							X						X	2	Theme 3
Used repetitive lessons						X		X	X					3	Theme 2
Explain process, set goals with students	X													1	Theme 2
Parents were highly involved								X						1	Theme 2
Basic needs need to be met first before you can be successful with academics					X				X		X			4	Theme 1
They appreciate the attention and they know you care. It’s about developing that bond – that relationship- and then they start to respond.											X		X	2	Theme 1

	Interview Question # 10 How would you describe your students' response to evidence-based reading instruction?													Occ12urren es	Contributed to Research Question 4
	Participants														
	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11	12	13		
They can learn to be responsive if they know what they have to think about, do, and learn during the process	X											X		2	Theme 1
It's not always about reading. Students respond to instruction when we are able to address the student's behavior, if that's what's interfering with learning							X							1	Theme 2
They display short attention spans, may retain one day and forget the next day						X								1	Theme 2
They respond to praise, encouragement (i.e. stickers, high fives) and some need straight talk.				X										1	Theme 2
Positive growth and support from principal and teachers					X									1	Theme 2
They like the iPads. Plus, it's different for them.		X												1	Theme 3
Everything happens in very small steps									X		X			2	Theme 2
Varies for each group of children according to the severity of their disabilities.							X							2	Theme 2
Varies with the use of programs							X								
No response										X				1	

	Interview Question # 11 Barriers, challenges or issues faced in implementation..													Occurrences 26	Contributed to SRQ5 Theme 2 Theme 3		
	Participants																
	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11	12	13				
Effects of disability/range of disability types				X		X					X			3	Theme 2		
Students don’t respond to modifications				X		X								2	Theme 2		
Not enough materials Lack of district provided curriculum/instruction	X						X		X	X	X			5	Theme 3		
Need to purchase materials out of pocket	X													2	Theme 3		
Finding/being provided appropriate instructional materials	X						X				X			3	Theme 3		
Multiple grade level instruction	X					X	X				X			4	Theme 2		
Quality of instructional assistants/aides							X							1	Theme 3		
Rigor is challenging for students/ students become confused						X							X	2	Theme 2		
Students who require 1:1 assistance, when only 1 aide assigned to classroom						X								1	Theme 2		
Loss of instructional time due to <ul style="list-style-type: none">Severe behaviorsdynamics of classroom and teaching changes based on severe				X		X	X	X		X				5	Theme 3		

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> behavior issues • Movement of instructional aides 																
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of parent support • Families/parents who are illiterate • Irregular attendance 						X		X							2	Theme 3
Lack of training		X										X			2	Theme 3
Time for planning and program maintenance			X								X	X			3	Theme 3
Pacing of instruction with General Ed					X										1	Theme 3
Lack of administrative support										X					1	Theme 3
Wait and see												X			1	Theme 3